

Vol. 7 – September 2023



HEIRS

Harrow Early Immigrant Research Society

n e w s l e t t e r



Autumn's approach...



We're not perfect... we're PastPerfect!

- by Laurie Brett, HEIRS member

Thanks to the dedication of our 2023 summer students – Ryan Kuzniar and Tristan Cullum – HEIRS now has a digital catalogue for most of its printed materials. HEIRS employed these two students through a Canada Summer Jobs grant. A sincere thanks to our board member Bonnie Storey and volunteer Laurie Brett, who dedicated their summer to mentoring these students.

In June 2023, the board of directors approved a proposal to build a digital catalogue using PastPerfect, a web-based service designed specifically for museums, archives, and historical collections. Laurie Brett, a former librarian and HEIRS member, directed the project which involved accessioning, cataloguing, and classifying 1,027 individual items using the Library of Congress subject heading & Dewey Decimal classification systems already in place. **Laurie's summary of this activity follows.** - Lorrie Stephenson

What benefits will HEIRS attain from the PastPerfect project?

After nine weeks of hard work, HEIRS now has a digital catalogue that accurately reflects the content of the library collection. Built in a web-based environment, the catalogue offers far greater search capabilities than the old index card catalogue. Importantly it is now hosted in a secure environment to safeguard catalogue data from 'disappearing' or getting refiled incorrectly.

In addition, most materials that share a common theme will now appear on the shelves together, allowing users to browse more efficiently. Our summer students added signage to specific parts of the collection for ease of access. They also wrote book recommendations for specific subjects that interested them.

You'll find these suggestions printed on catalogue cards near the books they recommend, as well as Tristan's review of one of his favourites in this issue.

Before their work term concluded, Ryan and Tristan contributed a new volume to the HEIRS library collection. Together they indexed 'The Anguish of War: War Dead of Windsor and Essex County' by Gene Lotz. This 2-volume collection contains all Windsor & Essex County soldiers killed in uniform from the Boer War to Afghanistan.

Indexing allows members to easily search specific names. The index sits beside the two-book set, at call number 940.4 Lot.

Photo: Juniper Books



In addition to working on the new catalogue, the students scanned newspapers and various clippings, cleaned up computer files, wrote a new library research guide for use by volunteers & members, and drafted a set of instructions on how to use the overhead scanner. As well, they pulled together content for potential HEIRS Facebook posts. As history majors, the students were extremely well-suited to contribute to HEIRS in meaningful ways. **Thank you guys for giving more than 100% this summer.**

One final note about PastPerfect. This web-based service is powerful enough to manage book collections, objects, photographs, and archival materials. During the next phase of the project, board members Kat Bezaire & Jacqueline Baldwin will begin building a catalogue of local photographs, and will train our volunteers to help members take advantage of these valuable new collections.

We encourage you to drop by this Fall to use the new catalogue, and to access the summer students' other work.



Generous Estate Donation...

- by Lorrie Stephenson

HEIRS recently received a collection of items, including a map of Lake Erie, subdivision plan of Baldwin Beach, and a George Eede McLean & Agnes Affleck family tree. The collection came from the estate of Fred and Erna Baldwin, and was donated by their daughter, Kathy Baldwin Johrendt.



Kathy Baldwin Johrendt (left), and HEIRS director Jacqueline Baldwin hold their family tree, dating back to 1865.

Yes - we're interested!

Have photos, documents or other items needing a secure home? Genealogical or historical records? How about items that you feel should be scanned for our permanent files?

Just call or email our office and tell us what you have. Our contact info is on page 10 of this newsletter.

Looking for a page-turner?

HEIRS has in its collection historian Fred Anderson's *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766*.

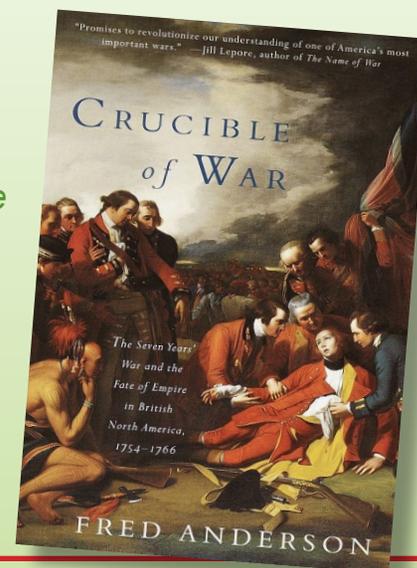
It's an excellent book covering, in detail, the history and aftermath of the Seven Years' War in North America.

The Seven Years' War (also called the French and Indian War) of 1756–1763 was, as many may know, a watershed moment in the history of North America, and in 'Crucible of War' Anderson does the conflict ample justice. The book covers the political and military history of the war, but Anderson also situates the conflict within the context of the subsequent – and in many ways consequent – American Revolution.

To me, the military campaigns of the Seven Years' War documented in the book made for particularly interesting reading due to their setting – the wilderness of the Anglo-French colonial frontier, not yet settled by Europeans beyond a few scattered military outposts and trading posts. I found myself making ample use of the detailed maps the book provides as I followed these expeditions into the frontier.

Overall, it's a work that is both comprehensive and as readable as a book of this nature can safely be. I heartily recommend it to those looking to learn more about the Seven Years' War, the lead-up to the American Revolution, or the military geography of colonial North America more generally.

- Tristan Cullum
Summer Student, HEIRS





Q & A with... Jean Rae Baxter

- by Lorrie Stephenson, President, HEIRS

I recently chatted with our September 21st meeting presenter, Jean Rae Baxter, about her research and approach to writing her new historical fiction novel 'Battle on the Ice'.

This Q & A will provide some of the background decisions made while writing her wonderful story. Books for purchase & signing will be available at our meeting. Our meeting is open to the public.

Q. You've written several historical fiction novels from a Canadian perspective. What inspired you to write about this particular topic?

A. My purpose always, is to tell Canada's story from a Canadian point of view. But in the case of 'Battle on the Ice', I had a personal interest as well because my own ancestors were involved in the historical events that are at the centre of this work. At the time of the Patriot Rebellion, my great-great-great-grandfather, George Fox, lived on Pelee Island. So did his brothers John and Henry Fox. None of them supported the rebellion. All three suffered substantial loss at the hands of the American invaders.

There was yet another brother, Jacob Fox, who lived on the mainland, in Gosfield Township, near the small hamlet of Albertville, on the north shore of Lake Erie, near present-day Kingsville. Thereby hangs another part of my tale, because Jacob Fox was on the other side.

Thus, it became a conflict of loyalties when Jacob tried to reconcile his active support for the invasion of Pelee Island with his genuine concern for his brothers and their families living there.

This was a story I wanted to tell. I started my research for 'Battle on the Ice' back in 2015. It took a long time to gather all the pieces together and resolve this issue in my own mind, as well as in the pages of my book.

Q. When the story opens, Dory is a destitute farm boy in the Niagara region looking for work when he learns about the rebellion led by William Lyon Mackenzie against the Family Compact. It was enjoyable to read a good story while learning historic details about this Canadian event and its secret underground network of members of the 'Hunter's Lodge'. What was your favourite part of the book to write?

A. I certainly enjoyed dramatizing actual historical events, such as the blazing ship Caroline drifting down the Niagara River in the middle of the night. But it was the creation of the people in the book that I enjoyed most. By making them vivid, I made the story come to life in my own mind. Some of the people in 'Battle on the Ice' were historic figures; such as William McCormick, his mother Elizabeth and Jacob Fox and his brother George.

I drew carefully on what I knew about them, portraying them as accurately as I could. For 'real' people that I knew little about, I used my imagination. Anna Fox is one example. Jacob Fox did indeed have a daughter named Anna and in 1838 she was exactly the age that she is in the book. I gave her a personality so attractive that Dory, who is entirely fictitious, couldn't help falling in love with her. I enjoyed portraying all the characters: Dory, his lovely horse Labelle, and even the despicable Peter Dash.

Q. How much of the Dory Dickson and Peter Dash characters were based on actual historical figures?

A. These characters are entirely fictitious.

Q&A with Jean Rae Baxter... cont'd

Q. What advice would you give to someone considering writing an historical fiction novel?

A. First, I would advise them to do their research. It must be meticulous. When it comes to accuracy about historical events, that is obvious. It is also true for details of time and place. Let me give an example. At one point in 'Battle on the Ice', a young woman, Miranda, announces that she is going to Morpeth to post a letter.

Did Morpeth have a post office in 1838?

It would not be difficult to learn whether Toronto had a post office in 1838. The Ontario Archives has that information for Toronto, but none for a little village like Morpeth.

It took me half a day to locate the website of the Morpeth Heritage Club, with all the old stories there recorded in The Farmhouse Chronicles. Yes, there was indeed a Morpeth Post Office, established by Postmaster Jacob Wheatley in 1831. And so it was safe for me to let Miranda walk to Morpeth in 1838 to mail her letter.

Second, I would explain the paradox that lies at the heart of historical fiction. For me, the purpose of historical fiction is to honour our past. But to honour our past, we must be true to it. How can the writer do this by means of made-up stories? That is the question.

The answer lies in the use of significant historical events to trigger the plot. Then your story shows people reacting to and being affected by those events.

'Gone with the Wind' made the reader experience the end of a culture and the anguish of those living through the experience.

'A Farewell to Arms' made the effects of war painfully palpable.

These are examples of the best kind of historical fiction, where fictitious characters drive the plot, yet actual events and historical figures are accurately presented.

Thanks Jean, we're looking forward to hosting you in September! - Lorrie

September 21st Meeting: 1:30PM

(Harrow-Colchester Arena Community Meeting Room)

Join us on a special date this month, when we welcome fellow HEIRS member, author Jean Rae Baxter!

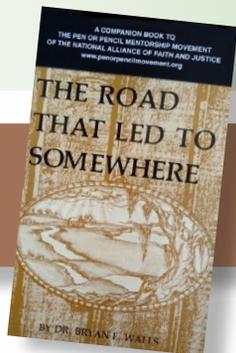
Jean will present a select reading from her new book 'Battle on the Ice'. It's now available for sale – why not get a copy to read, prior to the meeting?

Have your questions answered following her presentation, or have your copy signed personally to you, or as a gift for a friend.

See you there!

The Public is Welcome to Attend





The Road that Led to Somewhere...

- by Lorrie Stephenson

John Freeman Walls Museum

For the second summer in a row, friends of HEIRS went on a field trip to a local historical site.

This year's outing led our group of 12 youths and adults to the John Freeman Walls Historic Site & Underground Railroad Museum in Lakeshore. Originally, the 20-acre museum property was purchased from the Refugee Home Society in 1846 by John Freeman Walls after his escape from slavery in North Carolina. John built the home which still stands, and it was a terminal on the Underground Railroad and the first meeting location of the Puce Baptist Church.

When we arrived, our group was welcomed by Dr. Bryan Walls, founder and co-curator of the museum.



The John Freeman Walls house, in which they raised 9 children.

Dr. Walls, a descendant of John Freeman Walls & his wife Jane, has received many awards and honours and is dedicated to promoting the importance of equal sisterhood and brotherhood of mankind. Dr. Walls shared photos and stories of visitors from over the years, including Mrs. Rosa Parks who visited every year for 14 years, teaching her 'Pathways to Freedom' program.

This tour itself reconstructed the journey from Africa to America and eventually, Canada. Our tour guides brought us from one 'station' to the next, describing the route that was taken by Freedom Seekers.

With terminology such as 'underground railroad', 'conductor', 'passengers' and 'station', those who aren't familiar with this history could be easily confused about the Underground Railroad. Of course this was just the point, as these terms were used to disguise the true purpose of assisting Freedom Seekers from the United States to Canada.

The majority of the tour was outdoors & as we walked through bush in a re-creation of a 'run for freedom', the recorded sound of barking dogs behind us evoked the terror that Freedom Seekers must have felt.

Along the tour we stopped at the Walls family cemetery, the amphitheatre that is used for worship, and then finally the original home built by John Freeman Walls in 1846.

At the end of the tour, we once again met up with Dr. Walls and were able to purchase copies of his book, 'The Road That Led To Somewhere' which he kindly signed. The book tells the story of John Freeman Walls and his wife Jane, and their quest for freedom. Their descendants continue to run the museum so that younger generations may learn this history. **All of us were grateful to be a part of this experience.**

The Road that Led to Somewhere... cont'd



Above: The wooden signs display the names of black settlements in Southern Ontario

Top left: Descendant, Dr. Bryan Walls

Centre left: The Walls Historical Cemetery

Bottom left: Our tour group pay their respects at the family cemetery during their visit

Left: Amphitheatre where Rosa Parks came to preach and worship



Not once, not twice, but 3 times...

- by Lorrie Stephenson

Storm of the Century? (more like storms of the century).

Three damaging storms came within one month, in Harrow, Colchester and the surrounding area. Many thought that the storm that ripped through Colchester South on July 26th of this year was a tornado, but Northern Ontario storm trackers classified it as a downburst.

Across the region, many trees and telephone poles were downed, crops and houses were damaged – but luckily, no one was badly hurt. Skip ahead one month to August 23rd and another devastating storm rumbled through Essex County all night long.

Then, as people worked on recovering from the massive damages of that day, the area was drenched once again the next night.

Roads were flooded, as were basements, fields, and properties. Property damage was staggering and many houses had furniture, carpets, and household items destroyed and later placed at the road for garbage pick up.

At this time the amount of rain has not been determined. As we continue the clean up, I'm reminded that these storms are not unprecedented and thought to take a look back at the storm of July 20th, 1989 and the iconic photos of folks canoeing down the streets of Harrow.

At least 500 homes from Windsor to Leamington were under water as a record-breaking 264.2 mm of rain fell on the Harrow area this time. Trees, telephone poles, roads, train tracks, and even a house in Colchester were toppled. The Windsor Star called the 1989 event, the “storm of the century” **As folks once again were canoeing through town, I'd like to think that our new storm of the century is well behind us, with sunny skies ahead.**

Below Left. Colchester home plunged into a ravine (July 1989)

Below Right: Strong winds toppled trees in Harrow (August 2023).

Bottom: Canoe rescue in Harrow following the 1989 storm.



Schooling as it Used to Was'...

- by Ted Steele, HEIRS Member



As a former teacher, by mid-August I was ready to start teaching again... it was what I did. I enjoyed it, and did my best to instill a love of learning in my students by making learning fun – though it was not always possible.

Things were so different in the 'old days'. The 'job' of teacher was difficult. Rules were demanding, and cooperation from students was not easily achieved. Students were often children of farmers, & were needed at home in Springtime to help with planting, then again in the Fall to bring in the harvest. This narrowed their learning opportunities greatly, but was unavoidable back then. The goal for the girls was to acquire skills to run a home and family, the 'most likely role in their future'. The boys needed reading, writing & basic arithmetic to be successful as farmers. Other pursuits were deemed frills and were not emphasized in the classrooms.

The usual class rules in the past...

1. No looking out the door or windows; there will only be distractions there.
2. Follow the Golden Rule: do unto others as you wish them to do unto you.
3. Female students are to conduct themselves as ladies, and the male students as gentlemen. Good manners will be expected.
4. Our school day begins at 8 AM and continues until 4 PM. Our time is precious.
5. Students are not allowed out of their seats.
6. Good posture is to be assumed by all students.
7. When you wish to speak, raise your hand and wait to be recognized. Then stand beside your desk before speaking.

8. Proper language is to be used at all times.

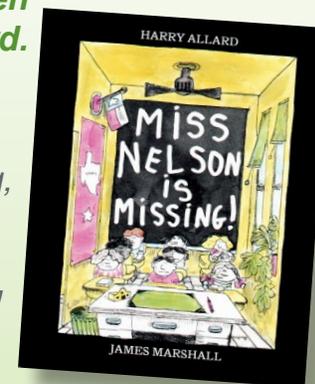
9. When there is a need to use the rest rooms, you can only say "May I be excused?" The teacher does not like the words "toilet" or "bathroom" or "outhouse".

10. Directions are only given once; listen to instructions carefully.

Such rigid standards – with the long walk to school and home again, in all sorts of weather each day, along with primitive supplies and cold drafty classrooms – made education unpleasant. Add to this, that teachers were poorly paid and usually overworked. It should be noted that many teachers were women (and not allowed to be married), and thus were smaller and less physically imposing, than some of their students. This forced them to some degree, to be strict disciplinarians in order to maintain classroom control. I am sure some of the farm boys in their classrooms were big, strong, and really wanted to be almost anywhere else.

A great book to read to your grandchildren is "Miss Nelson is Missing" by Harry Allard.

The first of 3 in his series, it tells of a class of problem kids and a sweet young teacher named Miss Nelson. One day she is missing, and an ugly woman in an ugly black dress is the substitute. She's horrible and eventually the kids want Miss Nelson back – and quick! You will find it becomes a favourite for you and the grandkids!



I once read it to a group of seniors with a reputation for 'being difficult' – on my first day with them. They loved being read to & enjoyed the story on their own level. The seniors said at the end, "We get it. You will be the kind of teacher with us that our behaviour deserves". Success... with fun too! **I had four really good days with that group – despite their reputation.**

CONTACTS

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Lorrie Stephenson, lorrie67@gmail.com

Vice-President

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Membership

\$30 CDN/U.S. per person or couple. Memberships run **May 1st - April 30th** annually.

Please provide phone, postal address, email & family names you are researching.

Payments

E-transfer payments & donations to HEIRS? Send to: heirsont@gmail.com

Make cheques payable to HEIRS, 243 McAfee St., PO Box 53, Harrow ON, Canada N0R 1G0

NOTE: Members may research for free. Non-members using research library \$10 per visit (+ photocopy fees)

Newsletters & Meetings

HEIRS newsletter is published 9 times/year: colour digital version by email or B&W print version by regular post.

Meetings held on the 4th Thursday of the month, September to June, (July, August & December excepted).

Resource Centre: **NEW HOURS**

Tuesdays 10AM-3PM AND 5:30PM-8PM | Thursdays 10AM-3PM | Saturdays 10AM-3PM

Resource Centre RE-OPENS: Monday Sept. 11th

519 738-3700

heirsont@gmail.com

www.HEIRS.ca