

**50th Anniversary Speech presented on October 29, 2022,
in the Community Room of the Harrow and Colchester South Arena**

I am Lorrie Stephenson; president of HEIRS and I would like to begin by inviting Carrie Ann Peters of the Caldwell Nation to share a smudging or blessing.

BLESSING

Carrie Ann Peters spoke to the crowd, explaining the smudging ceremony. She then smudged the entire room, including anyone who was interested in partaking of the smudge.

Thank you, Carrie Ann.

Mayor-elect, Sherry Bondy then came to the front and spoke to the crowd, welcoming them and sharing with everyone that she plans to assist HEIRS in finding a space that will best contain our collection.

Speech begins...

Thank you for coming today as we celebrate 50 years of HEIRS not only as a place to research local family and history, but as participant and supporter within the historical community, advocate for heritage buildings and cemeteries, and resource for local authors. We also are here to honour those founding members who established HEIRS, along with the directors and volunteers whose commitment has kept HEIRS going for 50 years. So, to do that, I would like to take a quick jaunt back in time. Pause...

1971 was a groovy time in Canadian history. ...Fast forward to 50 years later - 2021 was not so groovy.

PICs OF GROOVY 1971 things displayed on presentation.

Back in 1971 Pierre Trudeau married Margaret Sinclair... you may recall where we are in that part of the story. Guy Lafleur was drafted into the NHL; the counterculture of the sixty's was fading but the fashions were not.

Edith Woodbridge's daughter, Marjorie recalls that in the 'seventy's there was a feeling of life changing rapidly, which created a sense of urgency to capture memories of what had formed and shaped us.

The early HEIRS founders realized that there was a generation of people in the community who were a wealth of information about their families, schools, churches, and clubs. They saw the need to collect and save these valuable oral and physical records before they disappeared.

HEIRS was the brainchild of Gladys Golden. During 1967, there was a resurrection of historic Canadian pieces in the shop windows of Harrow's Main Street. Recalled Peggy Golden, Gladys' daughter. Interest in our area's rich past was awakened and Gladys Golden decided to keep the enthusiasm for her community history alive. She posted an ad in the newspaper and in May of 1971, in her Colchester South home, HEIRS was formed. Peggy remembers her mom thinking of the name. Harrow Early Immigrant Research Society because Gladys loved acronyms.

Marjorie Woodbridge remembered her mom with Gladys Golden and others as they were contemplating forming HEIRS. On May 2, 1971, it became a reality when Gladys Golden gathered a group of about thirty people at her house for a presentation with David Botsford.

Mr. Botsford was the first curator of Fort Malden National Historic Site and in 1978 would be awarded Member of the Order of Canada for his many contributions throughout the historical community. In the 1971 meeting, Mr. Botsford inspired and directed the group at Gladys Golden's home, on forming their own historical society. The Amherstburg historic societies continued to play a large part in the development of HEIRS throughout the years.

The group was ambitious and worked on incorporating with non-profit status from the government. Within the first year our constitution was adopted, and HEIRS was registered as a charitable organization, had joined the Essex County Historical Society, and had forty-five active members.

The early members had a variety of special interests. Gladys was greatly interested in antiques, while Edith Woodbridge had vast knowledge and collection of genealogy of area families. Gerald Pouget, a founding member of HEIRS, was a history teacher at Harrow District High school and by February of 1972 he had already begun inviting Harrow High Grade 13 history students to present papers on local topics to HEIRS members. In time, students would be awarded the David Botsford Memorial Scholarship based on these presentations. Gerald Pouget was President of HEIRS from 1997-2005

By the summer of 1973, the student operated in cooperation with HEIRS as a local study group under an Opportunities for Youth Grant. With Mr. Pouget's guidance of these students a part of HEIRS original collection of materials formed. Alan Burke was head of the Opportunities for Youth Program and over the years, under the name Essex County in Review, he, and his wife Sandra, researched several collections that can be found in the HEIRS files. Another of the students that operated under this student grant, Susan Reese Kennedy, now volunteers her time and knowledge of local history at HEIRS on Monday nights. Researchers are welcome to join us.

From the beginning HEIRS held monthly meetings for the public. There were always interesting topics and speakers with stories relevant to our local history. Melvin T (Mac) Simpson was one of the first presenters at HEIRS, in 1972, as he worked diligently to establish the Museum of Black History, which 50 years later we know as the Freedom Museum, in Amherstburg. HEIRS continues to hold meetings and reviewing the possibility of occasional on-line meetings.

Peggy Golden remembers that in the early 1970's there was interest in the research of historic buildings and the society had its eye on the old Gordon E. Fox home near Oxley, known today as John R. Park Homestead. It was built in the 1830's and had recently been purchased by the provincial department of lands and forests and Gladys Golden believed it would be a good place to house the HEIRS collection. In January of 1972 Gladys Golden and Edith Woodbridge met with representatives from the Ministry of Lands and Forests regarding the preservation of Gordon E Fox home which was built by John R Park. In January of 1977 Ron Tiessen, historian in charge of architectural restoration for ERCA was residing at the Homestead. Heirs provided advisory and practical assistance to ERCA for the furnishing and operation of JRP. Gladys Golden coordinated the working and staffing for John R Park, and it officially opened for public viewing in November of 1977. HEIRS continued to support the improvement of JRP.

Gladys Golden was incredibly involved with John R. Park Homestead and often volunteered there. Gladys' daughter Peggy recalls, "my mother was a collector of antiques and when there was an auction at the Fox house (before it was John R. Park Homestead), my mother attended and purchased some things. Later when John R. Park Homestead was being outfitted, my mother donated some items back. My brother likes to tell the story of how mom took the clothes out of his dresser while he was at school and then donated the tiger-eye maple dresser! She also donated the Black walnut ladies' boot jack that is in the front hallway at the Homestead." It is with this dedication and persistence that Gladys Golden and the first Board of HEIRS were able to assist in the preservation of John R. Park Homestead, which has become a vibrant hub of activity all year long. To honour their efforts, John R Park Homestead has joined with HEIRS to purchase a Red Oak tree, which was chosen by the family of Gladys Golden. The tree will be planted and dedicated to Gladys Golden and the first board of HEIRS on November 17th at 3:00 pm at John R Park Homestead. If anyone would like to attend, please let us know in advance.

The HEIRS library is the product of 50 years of dedication. In 1972, as HEIRS' collections increased, Marion McCormick was appointed librarian at HEIRS. She had extensive library science training and welcomed books, local records, and pictures for safekeeping at HEIRS. Around 1986 a library committee was formed with Janet Woodbridge and Janet Ferguson. Janet Woodbridge visited and consulted with Guelph & Windsor Public Libraries on best practices for historical collections and began using those methods at HEIRS. Janet Ferguson invested countless hours indexing all of the collections, making for a much more useable research library. In 1999 Pauline Baldwin accepted a position as director of HEIRS and joined the library committee. She has been a steadfast source of local history and research for over 20 years. Pauline is an encyclopedia of local history, although she would be too humble to admit it. Although she has retired from the board of HEIRS in June of this year, she continues to help out in the background as she trains the next generation of librarians. Her daughter Jackie Baldwin, Susan Reese Kennedy, and myself.

In March of 1988, the HEIRS library was officially named the Gladys M Golden Heritage Resource Centre. The plaque still hangs in tribute, in our Resource Centre. That same year the Harrow Chamber of Commerce requested a representative from HEIRS to assist in enhancing tourism by publicizing our heritage.

At HEIRS we are grateful that over the years we have been the recipient of grants from municipal, provincial, and federal government, as well as a grant from the Trillium Foundation in 2008. These grants have allowed us to keep up to date on resource library equipment and hire to students to assist with maintaining the collections.

It took years of arduous work, through volunteer hours and with grants that allowed for student summer employment for our collection to be organized and catalogue in the format that we are still using today. Currently, there is a need for a system that can catalogue digitized files as we move to digital format from paper records. Not only will this protect the continuation of these records, but it will also allow them to be shared more easily with researchers AROUND THE WORLD.

By the early 1990's the directors of HEIRS saw the need to put the history that had been collected over the last 20 years into written form. This began the making of the book 'Harrow and Colchester South, 1792-1992'. HEIRS volunteers spent two years reaching out to the community, seeking records, pictures, and memories. A community group of seniors took over the mammoth project, using HEIRS office. When the Book, as it was referred to, was completed over 1200 copies were sold in the first month. Of the 2306 books printed 981 were presold. This information filled book is still sought after today and HEIRS has made reproductions of the book which we have available for purchase.

Dr Robert and Marion McCormick were founding members of HEIRS. Marion served in several rolls on the executive- among them was the roles of first Librarian and recording secretary, and Robert assisted with research for the Harrow Colchester South 1792-1992 book.

Past Director, Alan Buchanan put a lot of demanding work into the development of the book. Alan also led a group called Project Preservation in which information was collected from seniors and youth who recalled stories of the past. If anyone is interested in sharing their stories, please take a Project Preservation form home and return it to HEIRS with your information.

In 1975 the work on the History of John Alexander Quick was underway and Patricia Smith of Highland Michigan began corresponding with HEIRS regarding Quick family information. It would take over 12 years of researching and collecting to put together the book on the History of the John Alexander Quick family as new sources of information continued to pour in. The collaboration between Dorothy LaMarsh Zak, of Berkley, MI, Dr. Stuart M. Quick, of Toronto, and Patricia Smith, of MI was so large that reproducing it in book form was too expensive. It has been put on USB and with the generous permission of the three collaborators, is available for purchase through HEIRS, with all proceeds donated in support of HEIRS activities.

In 1981 the Harrow Rail station was under threat of demolition. Amherstburg Historic Sites Committee offered research to HEIRS and Pierre Burton was asking public support for Heritage Canada as they petitioned the government to educate people to preserve what they can of yesterdays architecture. The directors of heirs worked towards establishing a Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee (LACAC) which would be responsible to the town councils in advising them of buildings of note in the area. The Amherstburg Historical society, which later evolved into the Marsh collection, counselled HEIRS directors on how to form a Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee (LACAC) to preserve heritage buildings.

This Committee would eventually become what we know today as the Essex Heritage Committee. Jackie Baldwin, a director, is the representative for HEIRS.

Although the Harrow Rail Station was not able to be saved, the fight to preserve it was the catalyst that made HEIRS and other local historical groups realize the need for communication between groups so that in the future they can work together to save buildings before they are destroyed.

The railway line that went past the Harrow Rail Station was built by Hiram Walker in 1882, and extended all the way to Kingsville, and later Leamington in 1889. In 1994, with the railway lines now abandoned, HEIRS supported efforts to have the government donate the abandoned railway lines to the Essex Region Conservation Authority. The donated lands were set aside for re-forestation. Chrysler Canada then gave a considerable donation to ERCA to convert the rail line to a bike trail which is known today as the Chrysler Greenway.

In 1989 Edith Woodbridge learned of the destruction of several marble stones at Christ Church Cemetery in Colchester. Edith raised the flag and the local movement to preserve historic cemeteries began.

Marion McCormick (past director/secretary) at HEIRS & Beth (McCormick) Karrow, with Edith Woodbridge of course, were the driving force behind the Oct 20, 2003, rededication of the McCormick Cemetery site, two hundred years to the day pioneer Alexander McCormick died. Because of the prime supporters that ensured Alexander's burial site was improved, would be well-kept, and the site memorialized and recognized by the provincial government as a site of 'historical importance'. The stone wall was paid for and was made on the request of Beth's father, Dr. Norman A. McCormick. It had a white chain that ran from the short pole around the entire cemetery.

Rick McCormick, HEIRS newsletter editor wrote on the McCormick Family Cemetery Website that 'in August 2019, I contracted a history student to photograph the cemetery for use on this website. Once I saw how very weathered the marker signage had become over the past 17 years, I researched how to get it replaced.

After searching for the right group, organization, or historical society, I eventually found Shelley Brown (Deputy Clerk for the Town of Essex). The town's website stated they were responsible for the upkeep of many cemeteries in the region, including the McCormick site, so I knew I had finally found the right folks. Once connected with Shelley, things progressed rapidly & within 3 months, a design I provided was produced, the pole and frame were reinforced and installed, November 20, 2020.

Thanks to Richard Beausoleil (Manager, Capital Works & Infrastructure) for coordinating installation of the sign & pole. '

Throughout the years the newsletters gave a descriptive insight into what was going on at HEIRS and surrounding area. Different directors wrote for and assembled them. Edith Woodbridge was in charge of putting the newsletter together before she retired in 2012. When Rick McCormick heard that Edith was retiring, he volunteered from afar to design a newsletter with a fresh style. With the blessing of Richard Herniman and Ted Steele, Rick created template for them to review. From there a friendship began between Rick and Ted who have worked together on the newsletter ever since. One of the perks of HEIRS is that the people you meet when you volunteer become good friends.

From the first HEIRS meeting in 1971 until she resigned from the Board of Directors in 2012 and even afterwards, Edith Woodbridge has made many significant contributions to HEIRS and the community. She kept the group moving ahead with new ways to be of service to the local community. Her knowledge of local history is incredible and for years she published a Question Box section in the local paper. She answered questions from people all over North America. Not only did she assist people in finding the missing pieces of their own family history, but she also connected researchers who had similar interests, with each other so that they could work together and share their finds.

In 1998 Edith was honoured by the Township of Essex in its Heritage Community Recognition Program.

In 2009, Edith along with Gerald Pouget received the Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award for Lifetime Achievement. Acknowledging over 25 years towards heritage preservation.

Edith has family here today and I would like to ask you to pass a message along to her from all of us. Thank you, Edith.

There have been many directors over the years who have made significant contributions to HEIRS and the community. I wish I could give them all their proper dues.

Covid took its toll on everyone around the world. In 2020 the board of HEIRS were additionally heartbroken by the loss of two essential members of our executive. Our president Richard Herniman and our Secretary Kathy Langlois. Richard Herniman had been President of HEIRS since 2011 and it is fitting that he would present the last meeting to be held, in February of 2020, before covid restrictions fell in place. Kathy Langlois had been secretary of HEIRS since 2005 and was dedicated to her position. As we move forward, we will remember them and their important roles at HEIRS.

The isolation and restrictions of the pandemic made it clear that the collection that has been accumulating for 50 years needs to be made accessible online. In 2021 we lost our dedicated volunteer Jeff Wood, who was digitizing our collections.

Over the last couple of years HEIRS has been blessed by the outreach from other societies. As we contended with rebuilding our board and how we function within the community, the directors of the Ontario Genealogical Society, without hesitation, stepped up to offer assistance. They advised us on purchasing a new archival scanner to digitize our collection and with updating our website, and always make themselves available for guidance.

The United Empire Loyalists Bicentennial Branch generously gifted HEIRS with \$500 towards celebrating our 50th Anniversary today.

Over the years the directors and members of HEIRS were active amongst the other Historical Societies, coordinating meetings and field trips in Canada and the U.S. Promoting each others' endeavours and keeping in communication is important and although the last few years have limited our contact we intend to continue on with this tradition.

Our job as directors on the board of HEIRS is to preserve and protect the collections that have been assembled over the last 50 years and to make those records accessible to the community. That is the least we can do. But we are not satisfied with that, and we see many possibilities of how we can make an impact within our community, and we have set goals.

The diverse collection at HEIRS has been a source for many researchers and authors who have had to come here to access our collections. Unfortunately, not everyone is lucky enough to live in our town so getting these records digitized, catalogued and online is a priority. Our first step towards this goal was the purchase of an archival scanner in 2021, which we did with the advice from the Ontario Genealogical Society and a provincial Heritage Organization Development Grant. We will need to catalogue the collections, the same way the students and librarians did 25 years ago. Except this time, it would be digital and will be done when we are able to purchase proper archiving software. This is an important task that can be done in small sections over time. If anyone is interested in learning about digitizing or cataloguing, please let us know.

Once the collections have been digitized and catalogued, they can be made available online on the HEIRS website. In order to do this our website needs some tweaking to make it more user friendly. We are in the planning stages and will soon be meeting with local web designers "Media Addict" to discuss this.

HEIRS began as a hobby club and remains a very social organization. If you stop into the resource centre, you are likely to find members researching and exchanging ideas in a friendly atmosphere. We would like to expand this fellowship with the community. Some of the ideas we've been mulling over are workshops for all ages (archiving, writers, knitting,

research nights, and more), Trivia night at the Bearded Dog, and a Youth Group where students can learn about local history while having fun - making a time capsule, recording their own current history, games, genealogy researching and more.

Back in the eighty's Edith Woodbridge decided that the focus of research had largely been on pioneers, and it was time to expand research to other immigrants. Some information had been collected; however, it is time to delve deeper. In the near future we would like to develop a Multicultural committee to research and celebrate diverse cultures in our community- including those still to arrive here. We are an expanding community and when people understand each other, coexisting is much more harmonious. If anyone has an interest in being part of a Multicultural Committee, please contact HEIRS.

Our heritage defines us. It is our anchor. Preserving stories, family trees, buildings and outdated contraptions helps us to remember where we came from and what we have learned. Not only are we researching history, but we are living it and our goal is to continue recording it. We invite you to join us in doing that. It does not take a degree in history to volunteer at HEIRS. Everyone brings their own skillset and that is what has always made HEIRS work. If you are someone who is interested in serving your community there are many ways you can volunteer - research, digitizing our historic collection, outreach, fundraising, social media, and more - we welcome you to join us. If you can spare an hour or two, during the week take a minute to fill out one of the Volunteer Forms at the HEIRS table and we can contact you to discuss possibilities. We would also like to encourage youth to volunteer and earn their community hours. And while they are helping to preserve history, they will also be the people who will. Because as anyone who has been around long enough knows, these are the good ol' days.

We are grateful to the United Empire Loyalists Bicentennial Branch for their monetary gift towards today's 50th Anniversary celebration.

CTMHV, CALDWELL NATIONS, FORT MALDEN, FREEDOM MUSEUM, HERITAGE COLCHESTER, JOHN R PARK HOMESTEAD, NEW CANAAN PRESS, MARSH COLLECTION, OGS, UEL executive and the UEL bicentennial branch.

The Town of Essex and the arena staff who are continuously accommodating and generous.

The Harrow News for ongoing support of HEIRS and the community and sharing their newspapers in the HEIRS collection.

Shelby Wye, for her support of HEIRS and talents as reporter for the Harrow News, sharing the good that happens in our community.

John and Ann brush for Hospitality and for always stepping in to offer assistance.

Lorri Curtis for creating and donating our 50th Anniversary cake.

and photo backdrop

And Les Hodgkins, for his years of keeping our technical equipment running smoothly, keeping everyone in line, and keeping the cookie jar full.

Presentations

Lorne Smith of the Harrow Rotary presented HEIRS with a cheque for \$500.

Mayor Richard Meloche came to the front to speak, presented Lorrie Stephenson with award for 50 Years of Service for the Town of Essex. Richard Meloche and Lorrie Stephenson then cut the cake together and distributed pieces to guests.