



# Historically Speaking

The Newsletter of the Cobourg and  
District Historical Society

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## ***May Alderville Bus Tour***

Our Spring excursion, a bus tour to Alderville, is on Tuesday, May 29. Led by Band Councilor Dave Mowat the tour will include an overview of Mississauga Ojibway history, visits to several historical sites, the Black Oak Savannah and Tallgrass Prairie, **picnic lunch** and rides on the *ca* 1906 Roseneath Carousel. There will be a brief stop for shopping at Smoke's Art Gallery.

The bus will leave the commuter parking lot at the corner of Division Street and Highway 401 at 8:30am. There are still a few tickets available from Judith Goulin at (905) 372-7684 or email to [jgoulin@hotmail.com](mailto:jgoulin@hotmail.com). Tickets are \$35 and delivery can be arranged. Bring a friend or your entire family!

## Our last meeting

Our last meeting was the CDHS Annual General Meeting. Members had the opportunity to approve the minutes of the previous meeting, nominate and vote on a slate of officers for the 2012-2013 fiscal year, approve proposed changes to the Society's constitution and other administrative matters.

The business meeting was followed by a number of brief but fascinating presentations of various historical artifacts including a christening gown, books, prints, unusual porcelins and items recovered from various archaeological sites.



# In the Clouds – Burning Red Cloud Cemetery

**Judith Goulin and Elaine Rostetter-Saunders**

Recently two CDHS members went to a place that has human history, built heritage and natural history all in one place -- Red Cloud Cemetery. Located just north and east of Castleton on Red Cloud School Road, the cemetery is practically the only evidence left of a Quaker settlement there.

In the mid-1800s it was a thriving but tiny community with houses, sawmill, school, barns, stocked ponds and a cemetery. Apart from the cemetery, very little built heritage is left on the site. After the demise of the Quakers, the cemetery continued to be used by others until 1940.

One of the families who buried their dead there after the Quaker period was that of well-known Cobourg artist and historian Barry King. A family stone bears witness to his maternal great-grandparents' lives and their tragic loss of four young children, three of whom died of diphtheria in 1900. Barry now lives on ancestral property in Castleton.



Not only is this cemetery significant as a record of the history of the Red Cloud settlement but also because within its fence it contains history of another kind, natural history. Within its two acres is a tallgrass prairie. Because the Quakers had set this area aside to bury their dead, core samples have proven that it has never been ploughed. Thus the cemetery provides a snapshot of what the land looked like originally. It retains fine examples of prairie habitat with several grass species over two metres high, growing along with plants like New Jersey Tea, bearberry, butterfly milkweed, wild bergamot, black-eyed Susan, sky blue aster and the rare prairie buttercup.

Grasslands once extended over much of southern Ontario. When the first men arrived in the Rice Lake area, they would have looked out over a vast expanse of grassland. The Alderville Reserve is proud of their well-managed Black Oak Savannah

Tallgrass Prairie. Within the city of Windsor is another well-preserved tallgrass prairie at Ojibway Park and Nature Centre.

In recent years many nature groups have banded together under the umbrella of the Rice Lake Plains Initiative in order to restore some of these tallgrass prairies that are part of our natural history.

Historically, the Ojibway First Nation called Rice Lake *pem e dash Dakota*, which translates as lake of the burning plains. This is a reference to the native practice of burning these grasslands in the spring, in order to burn off the previous year's leaf litter to promote the growth of prairie plants; and to attract game that would come to feed on the tender young shoots. This process, now called a prescribed burn, continues today within the fenced boundary of Red Cloud Cemetery.

But I knew none of this history when I listened to a message on my phone in late April. Judith Goulin told me in an excited voice, “They are burning Red Cloud Cemetery tomorrow. Want to go?” I had no idea where the Red Cloud Cemetery was, nor did I know why *they* would want to burn it. Nevertheless my curiosity was up, so I phoned Judith and said : “Count me in. It sounds like an adventure.”

Next morning Judith and I headed out, rubber boots in one hand and warm jackets and snacks in the other. We felt ready for a day under blue skies and sunshine. Judith knew right where she was going as we zigzagged roads north of Castleton to arrive at Red Cloud Cemetery Road. By the time we arrived at our destination Judith had armed me with information on the history of the cemetery, her connection to Ed Heuvel, project manager, and the restorative purpose of burning the tallgrass prairie.

We pulled into the cemetery parking lot and were greeted by Ed and his very capable teenage daughters, Cecilia and Bridget, who were able to sneak a day from school to assist with this important event. We were joined shortly by volunteers Bill Newell and Barry King. The rest of the burn team would be made up of Cramahé Fire Chief Brandon Northrup and firefighters with two fire trucks.



Excitement was in the air as brooms were pulled from vehicles and wind direction was checked. Bill has much experience with controlled burns and carried his own water pack on his back with a spray hose. Although Judith and I thought we were invited there to observe, we were soon made part of the burn team. What excitement as we were handed our own equipment -- brooms! Judith and I looked at each other, shrugged and smiled as we tried to guess what our tasks would be.

Ed explained that a warm season tallgrass prairie needs to be burned periodically to remove growth from past years. Red Cloud is burned every three or four years. When the burn happens all plant material is transformed to ash composed of phosphate and nitrogen, rains help to spread these nutrients into the soil. The burn will slow growth of the cold-season grasses giving an advantage to the native tall grasses to grow in the hot conditions.

Judith and I were escorted to the far side of the cemetery and were given strict instructions about where to stand, what to do and who we were to stand by as we worked. Our jobs would be to use

the brooms we had been given and “brush the edge of the flames back into the fire”. ‘Okay’ we both nodded as we split into two groups.

Soon the two fire trucks arrived and this is when Judith and I began to learn new words. Words like *backburn*, *fuel*, *barrier*, *wet-line* and *flare-up*. We were told to watch for a *flare-up* and if it happens to head to the *safety zone*. A *plan* for burning was made by the Fire Chief, Ed and Bill. The firemen stressed that it was important for all to listen and be familiar with the plan. It would take into consideration the wind speed, direction, fuel and the number of people attending. We were told to watch the *behavior of the fire*, the way it reacts to influences such as fuel, wind and topography and be ready to act fast if our plan was changed!



The event started with a *backburn* set as a precautionary fire downwind of what would be the main fire. Bridget used a rake to drag the fire along the fence line through the *fuel*, which was the grass. The fire department had already wet down the area outside of the fence including the fence posts. Bill followed the *backburn* with his water pack, making sure the fire did not go out of the fence. The plan was to set a fire upwind of the *backburn* to burn towards the burnt area. But as we had been told, *the behavior of the fire* can change, and it did! In a wink of an eye, the wind changed direction and the fire started moving quickly towards us. Our turn to move fast towards the fence and over we went! Everyone was safe and sound. We watched as the fire engulfed the cemetery. Flames were high and smoke was thick, as Ed and Bill constantly checked where everyone was.

Now it was time for Judith and I to begin our work. We took up our brooms and began to sweep the edge of the fire into the already burnt area. We worked hard and swept hard. We were constantly monitored by Bridget, Ed and Bill who reminded us to sweep towards the fire and to step away from it when it flared up. We had a bucket of water at hand to put our brooms in, as they continually caught fire. This was a busy time for us. The fire department continued to spray the perimeter while Ed surveyed constantly what was happening.

Within a short time the grasses were all burnt. The fire had moved so fast and was so hot that there was no damage to the tombstones. The black oaks were charred at the bottom of their trunks, but we understood this is good for regrowth. The pine trees were also charred but Bill explained that they are not concerned if they are damaged as they are not native to the cemetery. Judith and I did learn that: 'where there's smoke there's fire', as the fire department would stay another two hours after we all left to make sure all areas that were smoldering were wetted down and out.



June will be the time when the Red Cloud Tallgrass Prairie grows again. Go for a visit and look for big bluestem, Indian grass and slender wheat grass and many wildflowers species that you have never seen before. Your trip will be worth the country drive to enjoy a bit of history and enjoy the native grasses and wildflowers.

As for me, well, I will wait for my next call from Judith and see what the adventure will be.

## Membership Matters

### ***Membership renewals***

The time for annual membership renewal is here. To coincide with our fiscal year, the membership year ends March 31. The winners of the surprise draw for early renewal were: Ruth Bennett and Harold Bowman.

### ***CDHS Officers***

Officers for the 2012-2013 term were elected at the CDHS Annual General Meeting in April. I would like to welcome Alison, Leona, Carla and Marilyn to our Executive. Contact information for all members of the Executive is on the last page of this newsletter.

## Notes and Notices

### ***JAG Memorial***

There will be a memorial service for Major-General Henry Smith at the Heritage Cemetery (corner of Ontario and Huycke Streets) at 11:30am on Thursday, May 31. Smith was Canada's first Judge Advocate General.

### ***A Spirit Walk***

*A Spirit Walk* commemorates Pickering's role in the 1837 Rebellion. It will be presented at the Pickering Museum Village on the evenings of September 14, 15, 21 and 22. Tickets are \$16.50. The CDHS Programme Committee is prepared to arrange tickets and car-pooling. We will distribute further details later.

### ***Corktown Man***

A dramatic and entertaining story of hardship and survival, of love lost and found during the early days of Cobourg and Canada, enlivened with traditional music and song will be presented at the Park Theatre, 60 King Street East, Cobourg at 7:30pm on May 16. The events is free but due to limited seating tickets are required. Free tickets are available from Paper Lace, 18 King St West and Dressler House, 212 King St West.

### **Queen Marie**

This summer 4th Line Theatre, in its twenty-first season, brings history to life on the outdoor barnyard stages of the rustic fifth generation Winslow Farm in Millbrook, ON. Founded in 1992 by Artistic Director Robert Winslow, this unique theatre celebrates the region's history by telling local and Canadian stories that educate and entertain the audience.

This summer 4th Line Theatre will present two world premieres. Opening July 3rd is Queen Marie, a musical comedy based on the life of Cobourg-born Marie Dressler. Dressler was one of the greatest and best loved stars of Hollywood and won the Academy Award for Best Actress in 1931. She was considered the toast of Vaudeville and one of the greatest comedienne of her generation. At her peak Dressler was the highest paid actor in Hollywood earning more than Greta Garbo or Shirley Temple.

Queen Marie runs from July 3rd to August 4th. For more information or to purchase tickets visit [www.4thlinetheatre.on.ca](http://www.4thlinetheatre.on.ca) or call 705-932-4445 or 1-800-814-0055.

### **CDHS Executive for 2012 – 2013**

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