

THE UPDATE

York Pioneer and Historical Society

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Sharon Temple - 'Celebrating Hope: A Night of Illumination'

On Friday, September 10th, 2021, the Sharon Temple National Historic Site and Museum will present: 'Celebrating Hope: A Night of Illumination.'

Admission: \$15 to view the event on-screen outdoors; \$35 to view the event indoors (masks required; limited to 100 people). Once inside the event, guests will have access to purchase food and drinks from food trucks, and a pig-roast. Live music will feature Glenn Marais, the Fockler's, and Christopher Dallow. For details, see: www.sharontemple.ca/events

Visit CNE Heritage At Home!

While the grounds may be closed for 2021, visitors can explore the past 100 years of CNE Heritage through the following link:

<http://www.cneheritage.com/>

The CNE and YPHS have been faithful partners since the very first Industrial Exhibition in 1879. The YPHS encourages all members to demonstrate our support for the CNE through this season's virtual features online!



*Above: Spring at Scadding Cabin, May 2021.
Photo: Gerry Lee*

2021 SCADDING CABIN VOLUNTEERS - PAST & PRESENT

As the State of Emergency measures remain in effect across the Province of Ontario, we invite all volunteers to share their stories. See pages 2 and 11.

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REPORT FROM THE TREASURER

As reported in our Letter to Donors dated January 20, 2021, your Board of Directors learned from the Canada Revenue Agency that our charitable status had been revoked as of January 11, 2020. Your Board took urgent action to investigate and determined that the root cause was twofold (a) a missing charitable return from 2016 and (b) registered letters sent from the CRA to notify the Board from that time were never received. No notification appeared in our CRA account, or on any other correspondence from the CRA.

We are pleased to report that the situation has been rectified and our charitable status has been **restored retroactively to January 11, 2020**. As of July 29, 2021, income tax receipts for the 2020 tax year have been sent out by email to all donors with an active email address. In parallel, hard copies of receipts will be sent by regular mail to those without an active email address and should arrive to by early August.

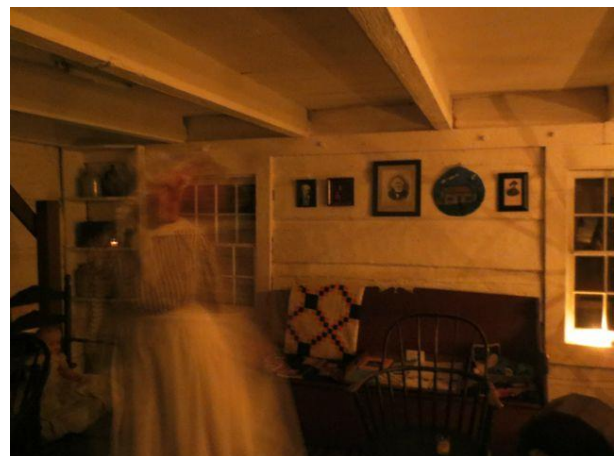
If for any reason, donors have not received their 2020 income tax receipt by September 30, 2021, please do contact your treasurer at yorkpioneers@gmail.com and we will gladly make arrangements to send you another copy.

Your Board deeply regrets the delays and disruptions this matter has caused for our donors and we appreciate our donors' patience as we worked as quickly and diligently as possible to bring this matter to closure. Rest assured that income tax receipts for donations made in the 2021 tax year will be sent to donors in February 2022 as per the normal course of business.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON UPCOMING EVENTS

Unfortunately at the time of this publication, safety measures with regards to large public gatherings remain in effect across Toronto and most of Ontario in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. On July 14, 2021, the Royal Winter Fair announced its cancellation for this coming November, and as reported in The Update in June, the CNE is also cancelled for the second straight year this summer. Based on these announcements, it is our *expectation* (though **not** confirmed by the time of writing) that in all likelihood, the *Ghost Walk* will not take place this year.

The YPHS values the health & safety of all of our volunteers and members and will always respect and follow the directives of public health authorities. While it is impossible to forecast what the state of the pandemic will be in the coming months, volunteers are also encouraged to listen to the advice of public authorities, exercise their best judgment, and to reach out to the YPHS as the dates for the *Ghost Walk* approach in October.



Above: Ruth Cameron as a ghostly apparition, October 2019. Photo: LouLou Downtown.

THE SAMUEL MERCER HOMESTEAD

By Katherine Williams

In 1972, when former EHS president Mary Magill lived in a townhouse opposite an impressive century home standing high on a mature corner lot, and shared by a huge black walnut tree, she was not much interested in Canadiana. But she noticed a “*For Sale*” sign posted on the lawn of 72 Old Burnhamthorpe Road, and jumped at the chance to become its owner, eventually successfully combining the “old” features of the home while adding some “modern” conveniences. She soon became involved in the history of the home with all its historical elements. In particular, she researched the story of the original owners, Samuel and Ann Mercer by contacting Mercer descendents using reference library resources and poring over archival documents. Eventually Magill compiled a prolific scrapbook – complete with newspaper clippings; early family photos; photocopies of surveyors’ maps, tax assessments, and census reports; relevant correspondence and even wallpaper fabric swatches – pertaining to the pioneering couple.

The historical roots of Samuel Mercer’s family in both the City of Toronto and Etobicoke began in the 1790s. The Mercers arrived from the United States through Niagara, as United Empire Loyalists. Samuel’s father, Thomas Mercer Sr. settled in Hogg’s Hollow on present day Yonge Street, while his brother Levi settled in Etobicoke. One sister Sarah, married John Ashbridge of Ashbridge’s Bay; another sister named Ann, married Seneca Ketchem, the brother of early temperance leader, Jesse Ketchem.

“Samuel Mercer traces his ancestry back to William of Orange, (King William III of England) and to a castle in Ireland where Samuel’s grandfather was born. He was supposed to be Lord Mercer, “ Mary revealed in an interview published in a local Etobicoke newspaper.

Samuel married Ann Anderson, daughter of another prominent Loyalist family. The newlyweds moved to Etobicoke in 1811, where they purchased 540 acres of land on the Sixth Line Plank Road (now Burhamthorpe Road) and Old Burnhamthorpe Road for roughly two and half pounds per acre. There they built their handsome red brick, two-storey home, flanked by willow trees, between 1815 and 1820. The foundation of the house is of fieldstone, almost three feet thick, while the bricks laid in Flemish bond – an expensive method of construction at the time – were hand-made from the creek bed to the east of the house. No detail was overlooked in this impressive Georgian-style home with the characteristic centre hall plan: four fireplaces; double-hung windows with sashes resting on wooden lugsills; and wide pine plank floorboards representative of early Ontario houses. The massive wooden front door was carved into six panels. The original roof was painstakingly handmade from tin.

Mary explained, “The house was built professionally sometime before 1830 by builders and craftsmen from England. The Mercers probably built a log house on the property to live in before the brick house was built. There were two one-storey log houses built on the land, each occupied by a son and his family. These smaller houses have since been demolished.” The site where the *Seneca (Mercer)*

Ketchem House once stood (northwest corner of Melbert and Old Burhamthorpe Road) was sold to the Bell Telephone Company of Canada.

Over the years Mercer House has served as a farmhouse, and a hideout for soldiers during the war. The house was thought by some to have been used as a “halfway house” (a place where potential stagecoach passengers would overnight while travelling the Toronto-Hamilton journey) based on the floor plan, which featured a sitting room on either side of the centre hall, each with a large fireplace. An extensive cooking fireplace with a heavy crane and many hooks was put to use in the kitchen. Some feel there were a great many meals prepared in this hearth – more than the average family would need, and perhaps geared for numerous visitors. The front upstairs rooms originally housed one large room divided in the middle by folding ballroom doors, which could be opened up for a large meeting or a dance.

The late B. Napier Simpson, a restoration architect employed by the Magills, was intrigued with the general layout of the house, which he felt might not have always solely represented the needs of a single family. He viewed the wide open space upstairs with the twelve foot high folding doors, as an indication that the room might have been divided into two rooms to accommodate additional hotel guests. However, these theories, promoting the house as a small working inn, have never been proven.



Above: The Mercer House. Photo: Katherine Williams.

Samuel and Ann Mercer had 11 children, but two died in infancy. These two are buried in Dixon Union Cemetery at Dixie Road. Ann experienced further hardship when Samuel died a decade after they moved into their “custom built” house, leaving her as a young widow faced with raising a family of nine children on her own. Samuel’s will decreed that the farm should remain with his wife provided that she did not remarry. Ann never remarried and spent a further 52 years in her home until she died at age 90 in 1882. A few years later the property passed out of the hands of the Mercer family. Later the farm was owned by at least two other Etobicoke pioneer families – the Sheans and the Lavers.

Through an *Ontario Heritage Foundation* grant, the Magills meticulously restored Mercer House, before eventually selling it. Over the years, three well known specialty architects – the late B. Napier Simpson, C. Blakeway Millar and Spencer Higgins have accepted the challenge of historically preserving the period house. The upstairs “ballroom” was converted to five bedrooms. The spacious “12 over 12” window panes measure “knee-high to ceiling”. An addition known as the “Great Room”, was designed by Millar to resemble a driving shed, complete with a cathedral style cedar beam and glass ceiling. The room’s unique floor is made of riverbed flagstone originally taken from the Etobicoke Creek.

Wall coverings throughout the home have been carefully selected to reflect a classic style while maintaining historical authenticity. Other improvements made to the house include handwoven drugget carpeting and marbled painted floors. The original “summer kitchen” fireplace displays utensils and wainscotting from the historic Jefferson House in Mississauga; the focal point of the living room (parlour) is a handsome hearth and antique Niagara black walnut mantle. Cedar shingles now line the roof.

Featured in periodicals such as “*Century Home Magazine*”, the Samuel Mercer House is reputed to be the oldest privately-owned home in the GTA (Etobicoke Century Home – Circa 1820). This historic gem (72 Old Burnhamthorpe Road) is located at the corner of Elmcrest Road and Old Burnhamthorpe Road.

THE DAY THE CABIN ROCKED TO FAMILIAR TUNES

By David Raymont

During the 2015 CNE season, I invited Toronto flute player Jamie Thompson to perform at Scadding Cabin and to talk to visitors about the kind of music that would have been played in the Town of York in the early 1800s.

Thompson is a founder of The Junction Trio and the Urban Flute Ensemble, and is a certified flute instructor.

Prior to his visit, I asked Thompson if he would play two transcriptions of popular songs made by Ely Playter, the son of George Playter, one of the first settlers of the Town of York. The songs are found in the Ely Playter diary at the Archives of Ontario and were likely written down around 1815.

Following a presentation to visitors at the door of the cabin, Thompson went inside to test the acoustics. One of Thompson's hobbies is playing flute in unique places, and at one time he hosted a website, "The Urban Flute Project" where he would post recordings of playing in surprising venues such as Maple Leaf Gardens, the washroom of an airliner in flight or a city ravine.

The cabin took well to Thompson's playing, and, being a small space and made of wood, seemed to vibrate like the body of a guitar.

A sentimental person may have wondered if some of the older logs would have recalled the melodies from Ely Playter's transcriptions.

Between 1796 and 1820, Playter's elder brother John occupied the cabin and it is possible that Ely may have visited and played these melodies. Like Thompson, Ely Playter played the flute.

Thanks to Jamie Thompson, the cabin got to dance again to the songs of its youth. And those of us who were there that day shared in its joy.

THE MUSIC OF ELY PLAYTER

One of the gems of Toronto history is the diary kept by Ely Playter between 1801 and 1843. Playter lived from 1776 to 1858 and was a farmer, lumberman, part-owner of a tavern, militia officer and a member of the Upper Canada Assembly. His diary can be found at the Archives of Ontario.

Tucked into the diary between entries for 1815 and 1820 are a few pages of music. Like many musicians of the time, Ely Playter wrote down the words to different songs, leaving contemporary researchers to guess at the musical accompaniment.

But in two cases, he wrote out the melody line. Ely Playter played flute, so a melody was all he needed to play. The melody line can also be used by a fiddle player.

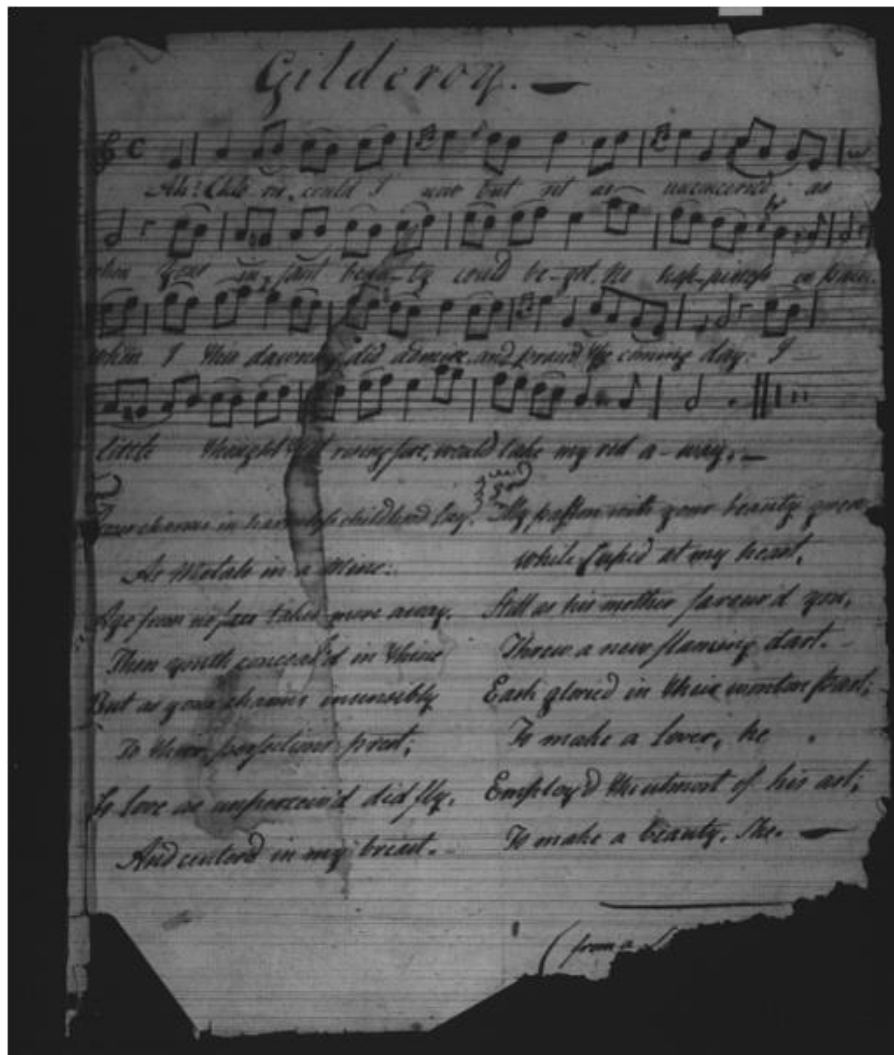
Here's an example of one of the songs from the diary. It is likely called "Gilderoy" likely because it uses the melody of an old Scottish song of that name. Fans of old-timey music will recognize the melody is similar to the Irish tune "Star of the County Down."

Like many performers of the time, Playter puts a different text to the melody, in this case a poem by British poet Sir Charles Sedley, "Song (from the mulberry garden.)"

Perhaps, he wrote this down from a collection of Scottish folk tunes arranged by the Austrian composer Franz Haydn in the 1790s for the Edinburgh publisher William Whyte.

Playter had recorded his source for the tune, but the reference is lost as the paper he used crumbled with age.

Despite this loss, we are fortunate that we can listen to and play the music he and his friends enjoyed.



The Tinsmith – Part Five

It's been nineteen months since I became the Regimental Tinsmith and I can't really complain. Food, clothing, a warm, dry place to live and a regular pay packet – what more could I ask for. Or so I thought. It is April 1866 and the Americans have stopped fighting amongst themselves. Things here are going well. At least until the Sergeant-Major came into the shop to announce that the Regiment will be moving out on a march to Fort George where we will receive further orders. We couldn't get anything further from him but a corporal had overheard that we were heading west to someplace called Ridgeway because of the Fenians.

Ah great, the Fenians. The Fenians were a group of Irish expatriates who fought in the American Civil War and believed by seizing the Canadas, they could force England into pulling out of Ireland and granting her independence. They had been pestering us like mosquitoes on a hot July evening for the past couple of years. And now they were supposedly massing in the west for a huge invasion and we were going to be sent out west to repel them back across the border. As soon as I heard this, I headed straight to the Lieutenant's quarters to remind him that I had been told that I would not see any battles. The conversation went pretty much the way I figured it would. I had two days to take Chestnut up to the MacNamara's farm and return. I could take the apprentices, an army wagon and a horse with me. Then I was told that I would love Fort George. The next morning dawned bright and a little cool for the trip up Cruikshanks Lane to the farm. As we pulled into the driveway, Mr. and Mrs. MacNamara came out to greet us. As vaguely as I could, I explained the reason for my visit. MacNamara tried to talk me out of giving him Chestnut but I told him that there was a chance that I would not be coming back and I wanted to make sure my horse would be looked after and safe. They finally agreed but only on the condition that I come and get her when I got back. I said that was ok with me and took her to the barn to unsaddle her. I brushed her down, fed her an apple and turned to leave. Who says a soldier can't cry. While walking back to the wagon I managed to compose myself and also noticed several boxes and a small barrel had been loaded onto the wagon during my absence. Quietly I asked what all this was. Zeke and Caleb (the apprentices) piped up that the MacNamaras very kindly gave us some preserves, a couple of used quilts and a small barrel cider to take back to the fort with us. We had a quick drink with the couple, thanked them profusely for the goods and set out for the fort.

Things were pretty peaceful until we got to just north of Toll Road when I felt something was amiss. I told the boys to load their muskets and be ready for my orders. Just then I caught sight of some movement to the right and ordered the boys into the back of the wagon and to stay low. At the same time I pulled my pistol free and laid it on the seat. Another hundred yards went by when the first shot rang out. The order was to fire to the left and ten yards ahead of us. The boys fired and we were greeted with a yelp as they had hit one of them. As they reloaded I saw one come from the right. Just as I brought my pistol round to fire his shot caught the top of my shoulder. By the time we made it through the ambush two of the attackers lay dead and the third had been wounded. As for us the only thing hurting on the boys was their mouths from grinning so much from being in a fire fight. I was the only casualty. We came across the local patrol at the crossroads and told them what had happened. They made double time to the site.

Upon arriving at the fort, I went to see the surgeon and the boys went unload the wagon and secure the horses. As I left the doctor the Captain yelled for me to explain what happened. After giving him my report, he sent me to begin packing for the trip.

Barry Mapes, Esq., Tinsmith



From Wikipedia: A tinsmith, sometimes known as a whitesmith, tinner, tinker, tinman, or tinplate worker is a person who makes and repairs things made of tin or other light metals. By extension it can also refer to the person who deals in tinware, or tin plate. Tinsmith was a common occupation in pre-industrial times.

York Pioneer member Barry Mapes is a volunteer at the Tollkeeper's Cottage and your YPHS Representative at the CNEA. He has been learning about tinsmithing.

AT SEVENTEEN

I met terror
ascending and descending Jacob's Ladder,
and while cleaning on the second floor
I was in purgatory--
a bit of a mystery really,
as I vacillate from atheist to agnostic
to Quaker --
depending on the day and on circumstance --
what tragedy has befallen the innocent,
or which miracle has occurred
and given a smidgen of hope.

I may have prayed
as I climbed and descended,
my feet on the edges of the narrow stairs,
hands gripping tightly the railing,
breath held as I stared into the spaces
between steps --
looking across until I could not help myself
from looking down
toward the floor where the Children of Peace
once worshipped so long ago.

As I looked across the top of the Ark
which I had not seen from that vantage point before,
I tell you now,
it was not an ethereal experience by any means,
but rather a test of my mettle
that I continued to ascend
to the second storey,
where the scent of ancient flaking paint
and abundant dust greeted me,
where I cleaned dutifully for the choristers
(who would sing like birds)
until my descent to terra firma --
my preferred station from that day forward,
though the earth be uncertain,
its inhabitants both kind and cruel.

Jennifer Frankum



Above: Jacob's Ladder with the York Pioneer and York County Museum exhibit in background.

Photo: Sharon Temple Museum Society (STMS), 997. 20.11, C. McFadden, date c. 1951.

In Memoriam

Kulli Milles, a life member of the York Pioneers and Friend of the Tollkeeper's Cottage, died July 1, 2021 at age 85. A "perpetual student" who was instrumental in advocating for the preservation of the Tollkeeper's Cottage as a heritage building:

<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/thestar/obituary.aspx?n=kulli-milles&pid=199481514&fhid=17733>

Edward John Rowell Jackman, died June 18, 2021 at age 81, survived by Martha. A distinguished historian who was active in many societies:

<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/thestar/obituary.aspx?n=edward-john-rowell-jackman&pid=199127693&fhid=9911>

The York Pioneer & Historical Society offers our condolences to families of Kulli and Edward.

SCADDING CABIN VOLUNTEERS - PAST & PRESENT

Everyone looks forward to our summers working at the Cabin. Health measures this year have again kept the doors and windows closed. However, Kayoko continues to maintain the garden and Fred has seen to additional repairs.

Can the rest of us continue to use this unexpected free time to do some reminiscing, with a pen? Can you share a short story of the interesting memories you have enjoyed at the Cabin? Perhaps recalling who or what inspired your participation?

Our visitors always have the most surprising information to enrich our experience. So often visitors compare Cabin life with their own, when growing up in various locations around the world!

Please everyone, tell about the fun of your summers at Scadding Cabin. These stories will be another treat waiting for us when we reopen in 2022.

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