



HERITAGE CORNER



St. Clair Township summer joy, past and present, could be found in the water

Copy developed by Bonnie Stevenson with files from history buff and Beacon correspondent Allan Anderson

The joy of cool summer swims in the St. Clair River and other lovely swimming holes throughout the former Sombra and Moore Townships figures prominently in the memories of most life-long residents.

Historian Allan Anderson says it was almost an expected rite of spring for young people who lived along or near the St. Clair River in the 40s, 50s, and 60s to take their first plunge of the summer in the river by the May 24 weekend. "It was one of the greatest social aspects of summertime, followed closely by baseball and softball," said Mr. Anderson. "Each of the communities along the river had its own special swimming places. There were no lifeguards and, usually, no parents attending even though kids from eight to 18 might be swimming at any particular spot at the same time. Play, safety, and good behaviour seemed to be naturally organized...a common activity at each site was often diving for pop bottles or playing games."

To facilitate access to the water, Mr. Anderson says people who lived along the river often had "learning docks" they generously allowed the children to use. "It was a right of passage to be able to swim, with parents' permission, at a deep water swimming holed," he added.

In Corunna, the gravel dock at the foot of

Ferry Dock Hill offered deep water for diving and a perfect point of entry for those who fancied a lazy ride down the river in an inner tube. The ride could terminate at any one of several beaches at the west end of the town's streets. The brave ones would swim over to the ferry dock at Stag Island.

Kids from Courtright found an ideal platform for strategic entry into the river at the old customs house at the ferry dock. Adventurous souls would swim to the sand bar opposite St. Clair, Michigan. In the 60s, when the water was especially low, the sand bar was almost like a beach. Today, swimmers use the newer shoreline dock at Courtright Park.

Of course, Sombra's ferry dock, affectionately known as "The Guv", provided an extra special site for local water babies. There were two catwalks leading out along the causeway that set the perfect scene for kids who played games swimming between the two docks. The more daring swimmers would swim out where the ferry lands or make distance swims to Dalgety's boathouse. "The catwalks were removed in the 70s," said Mr. Anderson. "Due to government regulations, there is now no swimming or fishing on the government dock. There is no (public) swimming site at all in Sombra."

Further south, the government dock in Port Lambton, just south of the Canada Customs building, was a local swimming spot. "The government dock was a long walkway stretching to channel bank...there was a nice platform with a roof that covered half of it," said Mr. Anderson. "Adventurous swimmers would climb up onto the roof and perform high diving tricks. Over time, it deteriorated and was taken down, but a few years ago, the Sombra Optimist Club spearheaded the rebuilding of the dock and today, it is again a popular swimming site."

And let's not forget the small beaches that grace the parks along the river road. They were the place to go for a weekday picnic and they are still an important part of summer for many residents and visitors alike.

Mr. Anderson notes that, although there are still swimming spots in St. Clair Township's riverfront communities, they aren't the focal point they once were. Many homes have private pools or docks, and the thought of letting your eight-year-old go down to the river for an unsupervised swim is enough to give any parent nightmares. "Mooretown Sports Complex offers an outstanding swimming program that many of the children participate in," he said.



Stag Island daredevils try a high dive in their Victorian Era Speedos.

Three great local books now available at the Sombra Museum

Whether you love reading tales of Sombra farm life, reminiscing about life in a one-room schoolhouse, or taking time to remember and appreciate the sacrifices made by hundreds of men from Sombra and Moore Township in the horrific, brutal conditions posed by World War I, the Sombra Museum had just the book for you.

Sombra Farms, Number Two has something of interest to all as it features 14 stories and many photos that illustrate the area's rich agricultural and rural heritage.

Thornhurst School - A Bygone Era by Margaret Devin will be available

beginning Aug. 2. This heartwarming volume describes life at a local one-room schoolhouse that still stands along Highway 40 in Sombra Township.

And in *St. Clair's Allies In Arms: The Men of Sombra and Moore Townships in WWI*, the names of 500 local men, 40 of whom paid the ultimate price for their service, along with local women who served as nurses, are listed. Stories of their struggles, along with background on the Lambton 149, the local recruitment battalion, are included. This volume is now available in paperback form at the Sombra Museum, Moore Museum and the Book Keeper in Sarnia.

27th Annual Downriver Craft Sale coming to Moore Museum

The 27th Annual Downriver Craft Sale will be at the Moore Museum on Sunday, Sept. 20 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Shoppers flock to this event every year to peruse the wide selection of items on sale. These include jewellery, garden whimsies, homemade preserves, handmade knit and sewn goods, handmade goats' milk soap, pottery, and much more. Admission is \$2 per adult and children under age 13 are admitted free when accompanied by an adult. Craftspeople wishing to sell their creations at this popular event can contact the Moore Museum at 519-867-2020 to request a registration package. A registration form may also be downloaded online at: www.mooremuseum.ca/event/downriver-craft-sale.

VOLUNTEERS are always welcome at the Moore Museum, 519-867-2020, and Sombra Museum, 519-892-3982 (seasonal). A lot of opportunities are available, from helping with major projects to staffing the special events that take place. Call to find out how you can help and make new friends, too.