

## HERITAGE CORNER



### Duthil Days: Memories of My Hometown

By G. Wayne Brown

*Editor's note: We're honoured to bring our readers a first-hand account of life in one of St. Clair Township's early hamlets. Duthil is now just a name on a sign and a church marker at the intersection of Holt Line and Duthil Road, but this summer in The Beacon, the hamlet will be brought to life through the memories of one of its former residents. Enjoy this first installment of Duthil Days: Memories of My Hometown.*

#### The origin of the Duthil name

As a youth growing up in Duthil, in the former Sombra Township, I never really gave a lot of thought about how the name was derived. It wasn't until the advent of the computer and the World Wide Web that I was able to answer that question.

It was then I learned my childhood hometown got its name from a small village in the Scottish Highlands which dates back before 1640 AD. Duthil was also the name of the parish, which contained the hamlet itself and was quite small compared to other local parishes. In 1640 AD, Parish Duthil merged with Parish Rothiemurcas to form an area 14 miles long and 10 miles wide, and the combined population grew to about 1,100 inhabitants.

Today, Duthil is part of the town of Tain, referenced as a street name, a leisure centre, and in several other locations. The town is located in the Inverness shire of the Scottish Highlands where the A938 road it intersects road B9007 near Carrbridge. The Duthil Old Parish Church still stands and its burial grounds contain many memorials to members of Clan Grant.

The name *Duthil* may be a tribute to St. Duthac, a native Scot who became the patron saint of Duthil. Educated in Ireland, he was known as the Chief Confessor of Scotland and Ireland, and he is said to have worked many miracles. Exhumed about 200 years after his death, his body was found to be uncorrupted. His saint's day feast is still celebrated annually on March 8. Today, there is a 146 km. pilgrimage named in his honour (called St. Duthac's Way or *The Way of St. Andrew's*) that can be taken from Aberdeen to St. Andrews.

#### Sombra Township

Duthil, Ontario was settled in the early 19th century. The War of 1812 was over and the British victory allowed many United Empire Loyalists to relocate in Upper Canada, or what was then called the Western District. During the 1820 survey of the area, the Lt. Gov. of Upper Canada, Sir Peregrine Maitland, who had developed a love of the Spanish people during his service in the Peninsula War, named it *Sombra*, the Spanish word for shade or shadow, and Sombra Township came into being. But when settlers arrived in 1822, they saw a dark, damp, swampy area overgrown with huge, mature trees; not an enticing sight for habitation. The area proved quite inaccessible for land travel since it was the drainage area for the Black and Bear Creek watershed into the North Sydenham River.

Consequently, surveyors had to cross these rivers every time a concession line was established. Ferries were used instead of bridges to traverse these water

barriers; bridges wouldn't be constructed until as late as the mid-twentieth century. No wonder it took so much longer to develop this area!

Between 1820 and 1850 many emigrants left the United Kingdom to look for a better life amid new opportunities in Upper Canada. Some of the earliest settlers to arrive in the Duthill area in 1840 were of Scottish descent, represented by family surnames such as Reid, Grant, Hay, and Tulloch. As well, a severe potato famine caused a large number of Irish families, fearing starvation, to leave their country during this same time period.

Word of mouth spread stories of the grandeur of Canada which people could not resist, especially because land was selling for \$10 to \$15 per acre, but not all immigrants came directly to Sombra Township. My great, great, grandparents, William Brown and his wife Agnes, first settled in the Madoc area just north of Belleville before moving to the Township of Sombra in time to be included in the 1860 census. Pioneers such as these laboured through the many challenges of road building and one of the few assets the environment afforded them was the flat topography. This allowed, for the most part, a grid system of straight-line roads to criss-cross through the dense forests and township bogs.

Many small hamlets sprung up where the roads intersected. A hamlet usually consisted of a church, a school, a store, and in due time, a cemetery.

Some of the hamlets I remember include: Beaver Meadow, Bethel, Bradshaw, Busyville, Charlemont, East and West Becher, Terminus, Thornyhurst, Unionville, Uttoxeter, and Wilkesport. Duthil, my hometown for eight years, became an official hamlet in 1906.

#### Downtown Duthil

At one time it had been suggested that the school be moved from the south up to the main intersection and that a saloon should be built on the diagonally-opposite corner. There would thus be a store fronting a church and a school fronting a saloon, or as someone else put it - "...provision, religion, education, and damnation all in one place!"



**This concludes the first installment of Duthil Days: Memories of My Hometown. Be sure not to miss the May issue of the Beacon for a glimpse of the author's school days that is sure to bring a smile to your face.**

#### Author's note

*If there is anything that can be considered even remotely positive about COVID-19 it would be, at least for some of us, an opportunity to do some things that might be normally have been put off. In my case, the pandemic has given me time to recount and share some of the many impressions and experiences that came my way during the twenty-some years that I called Duthil home. Of course, as I skip back over several decades of time to recall these memories, time has a way of distorting accuracy a bit so my apologies to those of you who may remember things differently.*

G.W.Brown

### Find The Beacon online during the pandemic

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## MORE HERITAGE CORNER

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# Looking back in time: Brigden's history-in-the-making



Above: This world-weary partial page of the *Brigden Progress* is all that remains of the news of November 4, 1914. Chances are this newspaper held reports of the smoldering conflict across the Atlantic as World War I broke into flames and the conflict in far away places like Ypres, Gallipoli, Verdun, and the Somme became the topic of conversation at the local barbershop, the general store, and in homes throughout the town. But we will never know what opinions were voiced by the townsfolk; what fears spread among the population as soldiers went off to fight; or maybe how the community could support the cause that was so far away because no newspaper accounts have survived.

Historian Ian Mason says "This is an extremely rare newspaper. W.J. Brownlee published the *Brigden Progress* until the office and all back issues of the newspaper were destroyed by fire in 1919." Mr. Brownlee later became the clerk of Moore Township and his son, John Edward Brownlee, served as the fifth premier of Alberta.

Anyone with copies of old community newspapers is invited to contact the Moore or Sombra Museum or The St. Clair Township Beacon at: [beacon@stclairtownship.ca](mailto:beacon@stclairtownship.ca). Please share the past.

Photo and information by Ian Mason

## Sombra Museum seeks information/photos of COVID era

The Sombra Museum is collecting pandemic stories, photos, videos, art work, etc. (family friendly) from St. Clair Township residents to help record and preserve memories of the COVID experience for future generations.; day-to-day memories of life in Sombra, Wilkesport, Port Lambton, Mooretown, Lambton County, Canada, and elsewhere in the world.

Information we hope you will share includes:

- \* Shopping conditions and how they changed over time.
- \* Adapting to working at home, and any challenges or creative solutions that were needed.
- \* Financial challenges.
- \* Feelings caused by the outbreak and thoughts about social distancing.
- \* Keeping children/adults occupied during self-isolation.
- \* New or newly rediscovered hobbies or crafts you did
- \* Stories from workers on the front lines/staffing essential services.
- \* Struggles of family/friends infected with the virus.
- \* Stories of everyday heroes, i.e. people helping neighbours/ people accepting inconveniences for the greater good.
- \* How daily life and routines have changed.
- \* For those who lived through the Depression, World War II, etc., are there similarities to those experiences?
- How social media and technology is impacting life in social isolation (using technology for the first time, using it differently).

Submissions can be sent by email to:

[sombramuseum@hotmail.com](mailto:sombramuseum@hotmail.com) with the subject line "COVID-19 History Snapshot".

## Moore Museum Volunteer Service Awards

The 2020 Ontario Volunteer Service Awards were delayed by the pandemic, but the Moore Museum is now pleased to announce that eight of its dedicated volunteers have been honoured by the Ontario Honours and Awards Secretariat for long-term service.

At the awards ceremony on Feb. 17, 2021, in recognition of the valuable contributions these honourees have made to the Moore Museum, the 2020 awards were presented to:

James Townsend-20 years  
Dave Beer-10 years  
Dan Hayward-10 years  
Dave Taylor-10 years  
John Richardson-5 years  
Cathy Seward-5 years  
Olivia Griffiths-youth  
Carson Westfall-youth



## STILL MORE HERITAGE CORNER

### Moore Museum still seeking information about Moore Twp. schools



Moore Museum is still accepting information for a virtual exhibit for our website. It will feature brief histories and photos of the schools in the former Moore Township prior to centralization in 1963. There were 19 school sections in Moore, four of which were union schools - two shared with Sombra Township and two with Sarnia Township. The map, shown above, indicates the location of these schools.

If you have information on the history of any of these schools, or photos (or scans of photos) that you would be willing to share with us, we'd love to hear from you. We would appreciate details about any school in the township, but especially School Sections #6, #13 and #19 Moore, as our research files contain some information for most of the school sections in the township, but we have no information at all for those three. Information can be sent to [lmason@stclairtownship.ca](mailto:lmason@stclairtownship.ca). We look forward to hearing from you and thank you to those who have already shared their information with us.

#### Connect with Moore Museum

We want to hear from you. Please follow the link on the home page of [www.mooremuseum.ca](http://www.mooremuseum.ca) to our online survey. We very much appreciate input from our community and, as a thanks for your assistance, survey respondents will be entered in a draw (to be held on November 13, 2020) to win a 2021 family membership and \$25 gift shop gift certificate. In addition to our website and our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/mooremuseum](https://www.facebook.com/mooremuseum), we are now also on Instagram @mooremuseum so you can watch for news from Moore Museum.

~Laurie Mason, curator, Moore Museum