

## HERITAGE CORNER

### Community builder George Stewart leaves lasting legacy

George Stewart was born in West Calder, near Edinburgh, Scotland on April 7, 1825, one of two children born to John and Mary (Gowans) Stewart. John Stewart died in 1828 and a few years later Mary Stewart married James Nesbitt. George's formal schooling ended at the age of 9 when in 1834 his step-father decided to move with his wife and step-children to Canada.

Eight weeks aboard the sailing ship *Margaret Bogle* brought the family to Quebec and on to Ontario. The family first settled along Bear Creek in Moore Township but soon relocated to the riverfront along the St. Clair River. George worked alongside his step-father to clear their land for farming.

At the age of 18, George left home to make his own mark on the world. He signed on as cook on the lake vessel *Athol*. Seventeen years of sailing saw him rise through the ranks. He served as mate of the steamer *Benjamin Franklin* and the *Huron*. The passengers of the *Huron* presented him with a spy glass as a memento of the voyage on one trip in 1854.

At Port Sarnia, on Jan. 25, 1856, George Stewart married Miss Jean Gibb, who's name appears as Jane on the marriage certificate, but all other records indicate Jean.

The Stewarts had nine children: Margaret, Mary, John James (who died in infancy), John James Stewart (2), Jessie, Eliza Jane, Robert Gibb, Agnes Isabella, and Annie Laurie.

Annie Laurie married John James and they were the parents of Stewart James, who became a world-renowned magician who lived in obscurity most of his life even though he gained world-wide notoriety as the greatest inventor of tricks and puzzles of his time.

In 1859, George gave up life on the lakes for life along the river. He bought large parcels of land around Courtright and began a cord wood business that thrived over the next fifteen years. George also built a planing mill in Courtright, manufacturing and selling lumber. Bringing together his two careers, he also owned and operated a vessel to carry the lumber to various ports. Disasters brought these businesses to an end, however, when his ship was wrecked on Georgian Bay and his mill burned down after being struck by lightning. George retired to manage his 700 acres of farm land, which made him the largest individual taxpayer in Moore Township at the time. All of the land was rented out for cultivation.

In 1866, George Stewart's military career began in response to the Fenian Raids. He served as lieutenant of a cavalry troop of 70 men stationed at Mooretown to guard the river from Sarnia to Sombra. This service, and similar service in 1870, earned him a Fenian Raid medal. He rose to the rank of major and, in 1894, he was retired by the Dominion government with the title of Lieutenant-Colonel. In 1902 he received a gold medal that had been ordered by the late Queen Victoria for all officers with over 25 years

of service in the colonial auxiliary forces. George Stewart was also very active in community life. He served on the Council of Moore Township, as well as on Lambton County Council. He was a member of both the Masonic Lodge and of the I.O.O.F. Lodge. As a member of lodges in Michigan, he also organized the Masonic Lodge in Mooretown, which later re-located to Courtright.

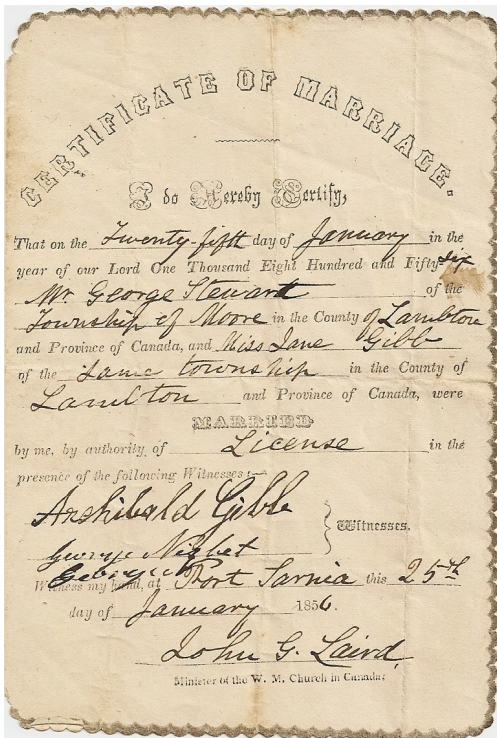
When the Presbyterians in Courtright, who had previously worshipped at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Mooretown, decided they wanted a church in Courtright, George was instrumental in establishing the new church. As donor of half the cost of the new building and donor of the needed lumber from his mill, the new church was named Stewart Presbyterian in his honour. The church was officially opened in 1892 and his wife, Jean Stewart, lived to celebrate the occasion with him before she preceded him in death on March 23, 1895.

Lt.-Col. George Stewart lived to the age of 87, passing away on Feb. 6, 1912. Jean and George are both buried in Moore Union Cemetery, Mooretown.

-Photos and content courtesy of Laurie Mason, curator, Moore Museum



Lt. Col. George Stewart



## MORE HERITAGE CORNER

### Celebrating the Women of Sarnia-Lambton



Lambton County's eight museums that comprise Heritage Sarnia-Lambton will host a new virtual Heritage Hour on Thursday, March 10 at 7 p.m. The panel presentation, *Celebrating the Women of Sarnia-Lambton*, will acknowledge the incredible contributions women have made to our community since it began. This free virtual event is being presented just two days after International Women's Day. "Women have played very influential roles in Sarnia-Lambton over the years and we look forward to sharing stories of great significance," said Dana Thorne, Curator/Supervisor, Lambton Heritage Museum. Museum

representatives from across Lambton County include: Dana Thorne; Laurie Mason (Moore Museum); Kaitlyn Shepley (Sombra Museum); Erin Dee-Richard (Oil Museum of Canada); Nicole Azsalos (Lambton County Archives); David McLean (Forest Museum); and local history expert Greg Stott (University College of the North). **See page 19** Above: Taking a break from daily chores, two women take time out to do a little fishing.

*Lambton Heritage Museum photo*

The International Women's Day breakfast will be held on March 8. See page 17 for more information.

## Knowledgeable candidates needed for upcoming municipal election

As the 2022 municipal election approaches, some community-minded St. Clair Township citizens will choose to run for council. The new council, like those that have gone before, will be required to build upon a legacy that began almost 200 years ago.

Moore began on New Year's Day in 1840, when a group of settlers met to elect the first municipal officers. The assessment roll included 138 ratepayers with taxes ranging from 50 cents to \$1.50 for every 100 acres owned.

Sombra became a township unto itself in 1826, when records showed 64 ratepayers and taxes of £12 16s (12 pounds sixteen shillings) collected that year.

The days of foot paths and dusty trails, water wells and outdoor plumbing left councils free to address basic

issues for the survival of their communities. The job of running a municipality required basic decisions.

In 2022, councils are faced with complicated financial responsibilities and sometimes harrowing decisions, property disputes, and decisions that affect whole communities. It's a demanding position and councillors must understand it thoroughly in order to properly execute their duty.

To help prospective candidates understand what it means to be a member of municipal council, two special virtual sessions are planned for May 2 at 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. **See "Running for a seat on council?" on page 3 to find out how to obtain the information you will need to make your decision.**

## Newly updated Heritage St. Clair page features map showing historic plaques and storyboards situated throughout the township

Heritage St. Clair has updated its page on the St. Clair Township website, and one of the features now on view St. Clair Township's Historic Points of Interest map. This interactive map points out the locations of these colourful and educational installations and includes photographs of them so you'll be sure not to miss them. Here's a link you can use to go directly to St. Clair Township's Historical Points of Interest page:

<http://stclairtownship.ca/st-clair-townships-historical-points-of-interest/>