

HERITAGE CORNER

Baseball exhibit at Sombra Museum presenting a few mysteries



Some local baseball artifacts currently being collected for the Sombra Museum's upcoming baseball exhibit this summer lack identification information.

Left: An example of one unidentified team photo. Other unidentified photos include a Courtright Women's team and another Wilkesport team photo.

Below: Some of the other items that have been contributed for the exhibit include a number of photos, some with identification, as well as a pair of vintage cleats, and a red leather Wilkesport Warriors championship jacket from 1964. There is also a story of an incredible 8th inning comeback executed by Wilkesport during a game in 1967.

If you think you can help identify some of the teams or individuals in these photos, please contact the Sombra Museum at 519-892-3982 or email: sombmuseum@hotmail.com. A time will be arranged for you to view the unmarked photographs.

Tombstones a valuable source of information for seeker of the past

When most people drive by a cemetery, they give little thought to the wealth of information that resides there hidden in plain sight.

One person who sees the true nature of a cemetery is Sombra resident Catherine Bouman. About 25 years ago, she began volunteering with the Sombra Museum and became interested in genealogy. She quickly discovered there wasn't a great interest in the field and took up the search for the stories of the area's early residents.

"I started going through old documents, minutes books from the township, and census records," she said. "I looked through the citizen files, took the names of all the citizens, and worked to get more of their history and background." She says Ancestry.ca was a great help in her search.



Catherine Bouman

After investigating some of the names for a while, she came to an astounding conclusion. "I found they were all connected in some way," she said.

The first project she undertook concerned the residents who fought in World War I. "I wasn't so much into the artifacts as their history," she said. She was able to talk to some of the descendants of these people



and was met with varying degrees of cooperation. "Some people are very forthcoming with their family histories and some are less cooperative."

One project that yielded a remarkable outcome came about as the result of a simple stroll with her dog. "I'd walk the dog through Branton-Cundick Park and I wondered about the people buried in the little cemetery there," she said. "I started to research the families and *Ancestry* led me to an American family."

At that time, the old tombstones, which had fallen down through the years, had been set in a line and ce-

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Tombstones speak to us from across the ages

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mented together as a project of the local Women's Institute. But by the time Catherine finished her project, she discovered that the two families buried in the tiny cemetery, The Rattrays and the Cattanachs, emigrated from Scotland and had played an important part in the development of early Sombra.

For Catherine, the quest to reveal the stories of the township's early residents is an enjoyable game. "It's my own personal curiosity of people's lives," she said. "Anybody who does genealogy understands it's like a puzzle with pieces. You almost become part of the family."

Her investigations have given Catherine a special empathy for the women of the day. "To me, the women were amazing," she said. "Their every day life was so difficult." She recalls seeing rows of tombstones indicating the death of infants, children and parents from the same family who had perished around the same time from disease or disaster. "Death wasn't any easier to accept, but it had to be accepted (because their survival depended on putting aside personal cares and concentrating on the many important daily tasks)."

The careful observer can deduce much by reading the tombstones while walking through a cemetery. "Most of the stones in the Rattray/Cattanach cemetery have a short poem on them

telling you if the person buried there was a mother, father, husband or wife," said Catherine. At other times, some of the information is missing. "On many of the older stones a birth date wasn't given but their age at death was...I have found that many times, dates on tombstones and dates from birth records, census records (and other sources) do not always match."

Engraved symbols are often present on tombstones, indicating affiliations, feelings, or sentiments. "Weeping willows are the emblem of human sorrow...two hands clasped may indicate a male and female together in death as in life, or eternal devotion, and an open Bible is a symbol of wisdom and resurrection." Other stones may carry club symbols indicating the place where group members such as a Mason or Knights of Columbus member is interred.

Religion, cause of death, military service, and a woman's maiden name may all offer leads that can be followed to new leads or solid information.

For Catherine, this challenging form of sleuthing paid off when she got to introduce the American descendants of one of the families buried in the Rattray/Cattanach cemetery to their ancestors. When she contacted them, they were thrilled to come to Canada to attend the consecration of a new group tombstone that bears the name of all the family members buried there.

Sombra Museum still seeking baseball memorabilia

The great response to requests for local baseball stories, photos, memorabilia, and artefacts like baseball bats, gloves, pre-1970 girls/women's baseball uniforms and trophies has been continuing, but there is still a need for items and stories from the Wilkesport, Becher, Duthil and Sombra areas, including the Sombra Blue Denims and Wilkesport Tigers. Sombra Museum curator Kailyn Shepley says written accounts of great coaches or players, records broken, memorable games, historic teams or moments, and families who have played through multiple generations are still being sought. This memorabilia is taken on loan for the 2018 season, and photos and documents can be scanned and returned promptly. If you have any local baseball memorabilia or stories, please call 519-892-3982 or email: sombramuseum@hotmail.com

The staff and volunteers of the Sombra Museum are now preparing the items for the new exhibit, which explores the history of St. Clair Township baseball.

The museum opens May 24 weekend.

Moore Museum range light gets complete overhaul

Volunteers at the Moore Museum have spent some cold winter Tuesdays out around the towering range light getting it ready for opening day on the May 24 weekend. The grand old structure received an outside facelift using a new prefinished pine board replica product that is guaranteed for 15-20 years. The original wood on the structure was not solid enough to refinish, but the new boards, which are affixed to strapping over the old boards, allowed the volunteers to keep the inside of the range light in its original state. A new wood plank floor has been put down and visitors will be allowed to step inside the range light to check out a display of photos documenting the days when the grand old light guided shipping along the river. See page 7 for a look at the new range light exterior.



Volunteers Dave Pattenden (on steps) and Dave Beer take measurements before adding railing supports.

Bonnie Stevenson photo

Heritage St. Clair seeking old photographs of St. Clair Township's past

Heritage St. Clair is seeking the help of township residents to gather old photographs (over 20 years old - the older, the better) depicting St. Clair Township (and former Moore and Sombra Townships) from the past.

Your photos will be scanned and displayed on the Heritage St. Clair website for everyone to enjoy.

To make it easy for you to contribute your photos, the group will be setting up scanning sites in three township locations throughout the month of April. Your precious photographs will be scanned and documented while you are present and then returned to you. And if you don't want to keep them, Heritage St. Clair will help you find a new home for them, possibly at the Moore or Sombra Museums.

Scanning will be done at the following sites:

- ◆ Wilkesport Community Centre, Saturday, April 14 from 10 a.m. to noon
- ◆ Port Lambton Library, Saturday, April 21 from 10 a.m. to noon
- ◆ Corunna Library, Saturday, April 28 from 10 a.m. to noon

This is a perfect opportunity for you and your family to get out the old photo albums and loose photos in boxes or stashed in

drawers, and spend time together revisiting your own personal history. Examples of photos being sought include: schools, houses, farms, barns, cottages, docks, boathouses, stores, businesses, ships and boats (large and small), lodges, community events, picnics, villages (past and present).

For more information, contact Heritage St. Clair by email: secretaryheritagestclair@gmail.com. Or visit the St. Clair Township site: www.stclairtownship.ca under the "Residents" or "Recreation" tab to find Heritage St. Clair. Or call Ian at 519-864-1119 or Dave at 519-862-3797.



Still need volunteer hours?

Hey, students! Do you have enough volunteer hours to graduate this year or are you looking for opportunities to begin building up those hours? Many organizations in St. Clair Township offer opportunities for you to get those hours while learning more about your community. Here are a few of them: Moore Agricultural Society (Brigden Fair); Optimist Clubs; Moore and Sombra Museums; and local food banks.