

## HERITAGE CORNER

### STORYBOARDS REVEAL RAILWAY HERITAGE IN EARLY ST. CLAIR TOWNSHIP

While railway service is now the domain of freight carriers in St. Clair Township, it was once the main source of long-distance travel. The railway opened up vast regions of new territory and wherever a station was built, the commercial and residential fortunes of tiny pioneer enclaves became thriving communities.

This is the way in which the former Moore and Sombra Townships, now known collectively as St. Clair Township, flourished during the 1800s.

The Canada Southern Railway's significant contribution to the development of the township is now the subject of two new Heritage St. Clair Committee (HSCC) storyboards, which were unveiled on June 22. They have been erected in Brigden and Courtright on the site of the train stations that once serviced the Canada Southern Railway line.

During the unveiling, Mayor Steve Arnold commended the Heritage St. Clair Committee for its hard work and commitment to the preservation of local history. "We appreciate the work of the committee," he said. "It's exciting to be able to share this history with the community."

HSCC Chair Dave Pattenden says member Leo Griffiths spearheaded the railway project with the help of fellow member Bob Goodearle. "Leo worked for CN and he's a real railway enthusiast," he said. "We had fleshed out the idea a few years ago...Leo offered to work on the storyboards and Bob offered to work with him." The men spent six months researching the information at the Lambton Room (archives) and in consultation with Tom Walters, the manager of the train room at the Moore Museum, before the board designs were roughed out. "They put together a rough idea for the storyboards and then Paul and Jan Smith put more artistry and flare into them," said Mr. Pattenden.

Reviews by the committee and St. Clair Township Council completed the process and suitable locations were found to place them on township property.

The railway was built as the result of an effort to find a shorter route between New York and Chicago. The Erie and Niagara Railroad made a deal with the CSR to build a line from St. Thomas on its main line to Courtright, where it would connect with a



Unveiling the new Courtright storyboard for the Canada Southern Railway station are, from left: Paul and Jan Smith, HSCC members; St. Clair Township Councillors Bill Myers and Pat Brown; HSCC Chair David Pattenden; Councillor Tracy Kingston; HSCC member Leo Griffiths; Councillor Rose Atkins; HSCC member Bob Nicol; St. Clair Township Deputy Mayor Steve Miller; HSCC member Dave Taylor; and Mayor Steve Arnold.

ferry to the U.S. The project was abandoned but the line continued to provide transportation for 87 years, moving passengers and freight such as lumber, sugar beets, and oil. "There was a time when you could get on the train at Courtright and go all the way to New York City," said Mr. Pattenden during the unveiling of the Courtright storyboard.

As the years passed, the communities that had grown in anticipation of the New York to Chicago line began to fail. The last train pulled out of the Brigden station on May 2, 1960, and several people who attended the unveiling of the plaques on June 22 recalled watching it go. During the unveiling of the Brigden storyboard, resident Myrna Hyatt read a poem called *Brigden*. The poem, written by Myrna's relative Grace Lester, recalls the heady days of the railway line and town that thrived because of train.

Information such as this can be found on the new storyboards, which are both outfitted with a QR marker that can be scanned with a smart phone to gather further information. Photos from the railway era are also on display.

The railway storyboards are just the latest historical markers that have been developed by the HSCC. Mr. Pattenden says a few years ago, the committee developed a list of local people and subjects of historical interest they would like to bring to the public's attention. Since then, storyboards for historically significant people such as Dr. Maude Menten, one of the first women in Canada to become a physician and who went on to make several significant medical discoveries, and significant places like Baby Point, have been developed and installed throughout the township.

The Heritage St. Clair Committee always welcomes new members. Anyone with a passion for history and a desire to find out more about the community they call home can contact the committee through its email: [secretaryheritagestclair@gmail.com](mailto:secretaryheritagestclair@gmail.com) For information about the work of the committee, go online to: [stclairtownship.ca/heritage](http://stclairtownship.ca/heritage)



On hand for the unveiling of the Brigden storyboard were, from left: HSCC member Bob Nicol; Deputy Mayor Steve Miller; HSCC member Dave Taylor; Councillors Tracy Kingston and Rose Atkins; HSCC member Leo Griffiths; Councillor Bill Myers; HSCC members Murray McAllister and Jan Smith; Mayor Steve Arnold; HSCC Chair David Pattenden; and HSCC member Paul Smith.

## MORE HERITAGE CORNER

### Moore Museum membership has perks

The Moore Museum offers memberships that can open the doors to many heritage opportunities throughout Lambton County.

Purchasing a membership offers you and your family discounted rates at other museums in the county. A membership of \$20 per single or \$30 per family, HST included, has many benefits, including:

- ◆ Free admission to Moore Museum (not including events or programs)
- ◆ Half-price admission to the Model Train event (July 14) as well as free admission to the Downriver Craft and Gift Sale (Sept. 15)
- ◆ Free admission (not including events or programs) to other participating museums: Lambton Heritage Museum; Oil Museum of Canada; Lambton County Archives; Sombra Museum;

Forest Museum; Plympton-Wyoming Museum; and Arkona Lions Museum.

◆ A copy of each issue of The Sampler newsletter that give you the latest information about what is happening at your community museums (by email or Canada Post if you wish).

Through your purchase of a membership, you are helping to preserve your community's past, supporting the development and provision of intriguing exhibits and programs that connect people to local heritage.

For more information, or to purchase a membership, please visit Moore Museum from Friday through Tuesday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., or call 519-867-2020, or obtain it through the Contact Us page at [www.mooremuseum.ca](http://www.mooremuseum.ca)



### Moore Museum train event

The Moore Museum Train Event on July 14 saw great attendance and gave young visitors like Michael Barry, 4, and his sister, Gracie, 2, a chance to run a train by themselves. The children, who were visiting their grandparents, Brenda and Rob Atmore of Brigden, eventually worked out their disagreement over who would be the first one to play engineer.

### Historical village tour in Sombra

The Sombra Museum will host *Sombra Shadows and Spirits: A Historical Village Tour* on Saturday, Sept. 21. Guided tours will start at the museum at 2:30 p.m., 4:30 p.m., and 6:30 p.m. and attendees will be shuttled to each site on the two kilometre route via "people movers" courtesy of the Brigden Fair.

At the conclusion of the tour, guests will be invited to spend time at the Sombra Community Hall to enjoy snacks, a penny sale, activities, and entertainment. The museum's new 2020 calendar and tickets for a beautiful pink, green and cream-coloured butterfly motif quilt, made by the Port Lambton Loose Knots quilting group, will be available as well.

Tour tickets are \$20 for adults, \$5 for children under 12, and free for preschool children. They are available at the Sombra Museum or online at:

[sombrashadowsandspiritstour.square.site](http://sombrashadowsandspiritstour.square.site)

Volunteers are being sought to help with this event. Anyone interested in helping visitors "Visit the past and feel the presence" can call the Sombra Museum at 519-892-3982 or drop in during summer hours every day from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and Sept. 1 to 30, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.



### Spooky experiences wanted

Have you had any spooky/paranormal experiences in the Village of Sombra? The Sombra Museum is seeking information about "happenings" in the houses, businesses and other buildings there. Anyone with stories to share can come into the museum, call at 519-892-3982, email [sombramuseum@hotmail.com](mailto:sombramuseum@hotmail.com) or contact us on social media at [facebook.com/SombraMuseum](https://www.facebook.com/SombraMuseum) or [sombmuseum.webs.com](http://sombmuseum.webs.com)

### Attention Moore Museum

#### Downriver Craft Sale vendors

Vendor packages have been issued for the Downriver Craft Sale at the Moore Museum. Vendors who are on the mailing list and who have not received their packages are asked to call the Moore Museum at 519-867-2020.