

BRUCE BULLETIN

THE BRUCE COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

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Please visit our Bruce County Genealogical Society Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1244653066363730>

and our Bruce County Genealogical Society page:

<https://brucecountygenealogicalsociety.ca/>

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I came across a quote recently that put a huge smile on my face, especially as we prepare for our next event, that being the July Cemetery Walk n' Talk in Mildmay. It read; "You know you're a genealogist if the highlight of your last trip was to a cemetery." That would be me!

Highlights do not end there, for me. I bet you feel the same way. I am sure we share the same love of museums, archives full of history, churches, old books and publications, photographs depicting life when an ice box was the only way to keep food cold, centuries old homes with a story to tell and winding paths leading to what might have been an ancestor's favourite pub.

So, when you cannot find anyone who is as thrilled as you about cemeteries, reach out to a fellow genealogist, who cannot wait to hear about what you have just discovered on a headstone or two.

Wishing you all the best,

Glenys

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BCGS EVENTS

August In Person Event

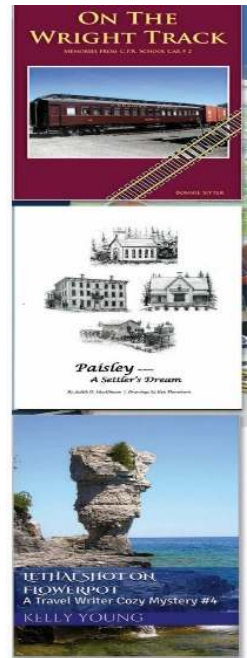
Local Authors Night with Wine and Cheese

Date: August 8

Time: 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Join authors Bonnie Sitter, Judy MacKinnon, and Kelly Young as they share the insights and inspirations behind their works about Northern Ontario's school railcar program, the history of Paisley, and the Travel Writer mystery series set in Bruce County. This lively wine and cheese reception is hosted by the Bruce County Genealogical Society and the Bruce County Historical Society at the Bruce County Museum & Cultural Centre.

FREE Admission. Limited seating. Cash Bar will be available.



September Webinar with Tammy Tipler-Priolo

Date: September 11, 2023

Time: 7pm

"The Native Connection"



TAMMY TIPLER-PRIOLO
THE ANCESTOR INVESTIGATOR

Tammy has spent many years researching her own native ancestry and has helped many clients try to navigate the membership requirements for the Algonquins of Ontario, Metis Nation of Ontario, and other native groups. Tammy is a traditional drummer/singer, pipe carrier/prayer as well as so much more. She believes her journey in life is to help people learn to heal themselves using genealogy as one part of her method.

Tammy will discuss:

1. Some native teachings
2. History
3. Research Approach / Records
4. Memberships

Please join us for a very interesting and informative webinar.

Email: BCGSWebinars@gmail.com

Or Click on the link below: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_0o-Vbu7ST7eMlonw_wDUlq

JESSIE MACPHERSON : FROM ESKDALE TO JAIL
By Krista Keller, Archival Assistant BCM&CC

In 2022 the Bruce County Museum & Cultural Centre received a donation of materials about the life, education, and notable career of Jessie Macpherson. Born in Bruce County, Macpherson went on to complete her post-secondary education in Toronto and then embarked on a unique and lengthy career that spanned almost five decades, three provinces, and two countries.

Jessie Macpherson was born on July 31, 1900 in Kincardine Township to John and Catherine (MacKinnon) Macpherson. She was raised on Lot 18, Concession 12, Kincardine Township and was the second youngest of six children. One of her siblings included Private Stuart McPherson (Macpherson) who served with the 160th Battalion, D Company and 1st Battalion during the First World War.

Jessie Macpherson first attended school at U.S.S. No. 3 Kincardine-Bruce (Eskdale) and later attended Kincardine High School. After secondary school she went to the University of Toronto where she graduated from the Department of Social Service with a certificate in Social Work on May 14, 1920.

Jessie Macpherson first worked as a social worker in Chicago, Illinois. While much of her time spent there is unknown, she received a diploma in stenography from the Gregg School on June 27, 1925. Macpherson stayed in Chicago for seven years and eventually returned to Ontario. On the newly released 1931 census Jessie Macpherson is listed as living in Tiverton with her Aunt Mary and Uncle Angus Macpherson with no recorded occupation. It was presumably sometime after the 1931 census that Jessie began working for the Children's Aid Society in Perth, Ontario. According to her obituary, her tenure with Children's Aid spanned a decade. In an article published about Macpherson in *The Leader-Post* (Regina), her early to mid-career accomplishments also included working in Hamilton and Toronto.

In February 1946, she started working at the newly opened Family Service Association branch in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan as the inaugural Director. Macpherson was in this position for nearly two years before she accepted her longest and most prominent role as the Superintendent of the Gaol for Women in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba in early 1948.

The Gaol in Portage La Prairie opened in 1896 and initially served as a building to house men awaiting trial. After several other uses, the building eventually became a women's prison in 1945. Macpherson became the Gaol's first woman Superintendent. Royal Burritt, the Gaoler for the Eastern Judicial District of Manitoba, stated that the Superintendent, "[...] should be a woman of intelligence with a background in public service. A person possessing administrative ability, able and willing to assume all the responsibilities such an appointment involves." It is clear why Jessie Macpherson successfully secured this position.

Jessie Macpherson's role was to oversee most of the operations and administrative decisions of the Gaol. Throughout her tenure she prioritized the maintenance of the building and the management of the staff and the people who were incarcerated. Macpherson valued obedience, etiquette, discipline, good



A2022.014.077 Jessie Macpherson at U.S.S. No. 3 Bruce-Kincardine (Eskdale) in 1907

hygiene, religious training, recreation, domestic responsibilities, and clean and bright spaces, as opposed to traditional penal goals of punishment and deterrence. She also believed that the needs of every person who was incarcerated were unique, and that reform or rehabilitation should be tailored to the individual. Macpherson personally met with every woman upon their arrival to determine what those needs were. Under Macpherson's management, all staff including herself had respectful and frequent interactions with the women.

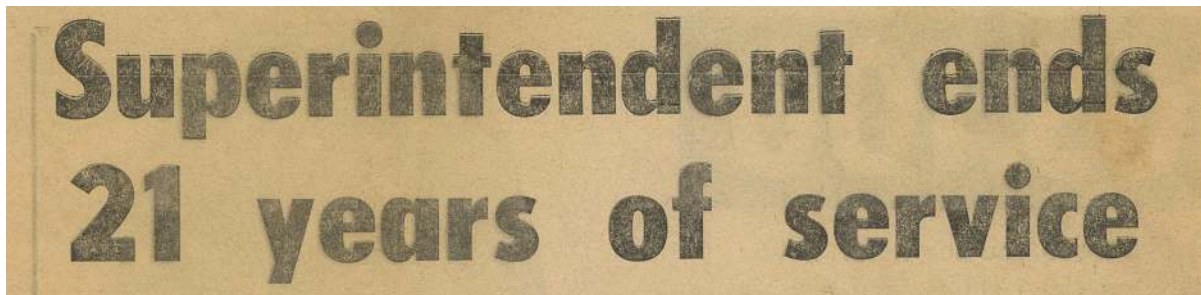
Throughout her career Macpherson was an advocate for her work at Women's Gaol and her views about the penal system. She wrote several reports and articles, and spoke at several gatherings and conferences. Some of the groups she spoke in front of included Magistrate's Conferences, Manitoba School, and the Catholic Women's League.

On December 16, 1966, she received an interdepartmental memorandum from Ray Slough, the Director of Corrections at the province of Manitoba that reads, "[...] I would like to take this opportunity to let you know that I always think of your work with a sense of gratitude. I trust that you will see your way clear to stay with us for several years to come. I say this knowing that it is going to be most difficult to find anyone who will bring the standard of effectiveness to the work that you have done."

Furthermore, on November 4, 1968, Jessie received a letter from a past incarcerated person, Rose, and her partner. The letter describes the changes they have made to their lives since being out of jail and even requested Jessie to be Godmother to their child and to walk Rose down the aisle at their upcoming wedding ceremony!



A2022.014.024 Jessie Macpherson [1948]



A2022.014.038-006 Unknown Clipping [1969]

In 1969, after twenty-one years at the Portage La Prairie Goal, then known as the Manitoba Correctional Institution, Jessie Macpherson retired. At the time of her retirement, she reflected on her career by stating "I feel there is more human interest in the work I have been doing than in any other field. After having been in the work, I would find any other less challenging." During her career she clipped many newspaper articles regarding the prison systems throughout Canada and even kept the published classified ad seeking an individual to fill her position upon retirement.

Macpherson relocated back to Kincardine after her retirement and lived at 998 Princes Street. She became a member of Knox Presbyterian Church in Kincardine and a member of the of the Bruce County Historical Society. She spent her retirement traveling, playing scrabble, reciting poetry, baking, spending

time with family, and participating in church activities. She also continued to deliver speeches to local groups. Jessie Macpherson passed away at the University Hospital in London, Ontario on October 13, 1977, and is buried in Tiverton Cemetery beside her siblings Alexander, Neil and nephews Eoin and Angus.

Throughout her career Jessie Macpherson advocated for the conditions and support of an institution many will never experience. She made fundamental and long-lasting changes to the Gaol for Women in Portage La Prairie and presumably to those who were under her supervision. Throughout her career and beyond, it was clear she was passionate for the people, places, and systems she believed in.



https://cemetery.canadagenweb.org/person-search-details/?wpda_search_column_ID=2701253

Learn more about Jessie Macpherson here:

<https://brucemuseum.pastperfectonline.com/archive/C4328B98-31C6-45D5-8FE4-261267762492>

If you have records about a trailblazing woman in your family, please consider donating them to the Archives at the Bruce County Museum & Cultural Centre. Contact us at archives@brucecounty.on.ca or 226-909-2890 to make an appointment.

Sources:

Jessie Macpherson fonds, Bruce County Museum & Cultural Centre

Singleton, Wendy A. *Beyond the Attic Door : a Feminist Social History of Imprisonment at the Portage Gaol from 1945 to 1970*. Thesis (M.A.)--University of Manitoba, Fall 2001., 2001.

Irish Coffin Ships Part 2 - The Famine: It was a Disaster Waiting to Happen

The following article is by our member Joan MacDougall's husband, Dave MacDougall

A big Thank You to Dave for providing me with lots of articles that I use in our BCGS Bulletins.

Part 1 is available. Please email

lolly.fullerton@gmail.com

for a copy of the May Bulletin 2023.



Irish Coffin Ships by Dave MacDougall

Part Two

Death toll

Statistics for July, 1847, indicate the horrors that the emigrants endured.

Ten vessels arrived in Quebec that month. Of the 4,427 Irish immigrants that had started their journeys from either Cork or Liverpool, 804 had died on the passage while 847 were sick on arrival.



On August 4, 1847, *The Toronto Globe* reported on the arrival of emigrant ships: “The *Virginus* from Liverpool, with 496 passengers, lost 158 by death, nearly one third of the whole and she had 180 sick; above one half of the whole will never see their home in the New World.”

On the *Erin's Queen*, out of a passenger list of 517, 45 passengers had died. Since the relatives would not touch the dead, the captain had to bribe the crew with a sovereign for each body that they dragged out of the hold. A further 91 died in quarantine.

These two ships along with the *Naomi* (**78 deaths at sea and 118 in quarantine, a total of 196 deaths out of 334 passengers- 60%**) and the *John Munn* (**59 deaths at sea and 129 in quarantine – a total of 288 out of 452 passengers – 68%**) were used to transport 982 of Major Denis Mahon's tenants to Canada. In retaliation for the enormous death toll, Major Mahon was assassinated on November 2, 1847.

By the end of 1847, 200 immigration ships had made the crossing. Of 98,105 passengers (of whom 60,000 were Irish), 5293 died at sea, 8072 died at Grosse Isle and Quebec, 7,000 in and around Montreal or in ports further west. In total, then, at least 20,365 people perished.

Since few of the English, Scottish or German emigrants died, the death toll among the Irish was probably **thirty percent!**

Irish Coffin Ships by Dave MacDougall

Part Two

The Grosse Island Quarantine Station

The quarantine station had been established on Grosse Island in 1832 in response to news of the cholera outbreaks in Britain and France. It was a small island, thirty miles east of Quebec City.

The plan

Upon arrival in the Saint Lawrence River, ships were to be inspected for disease and any sick passengers were to be removed to the quarantine hospital.



The Reality

Unfortunately, the plan collapsed under the sheer weight of numbers. In the spring of 1847, shipload after shipload of fevered Irish arrived, quickly overwhelming the small medical inspection facility, which only had 200 beds. By June, 40 vessels containing **14,000 Irish immigrants** waited in a queue extending two miles down the St. Lawrence.

It took up to five days to see a doctor, many of whom were becoming ill themselves from contact with the typhus-infected passengers.

By the summer, the line of ships had grown several miles long. A fifteen-day general quarantine was then imposed for all of the waiting ships. Many healthy people, who were well at the start of the quarantine period died because they were forced to remain in their lice-infested holds.

As the sickness spread, the desperate crews, under cover of darkness, rowed boatloads of sick people ashore and left them on the beach of Grosse Island where they were left to crawl to the hospital. Many simply died along the roadsides.



The makeshift hospitals, badly understaffed and unsanitary, simply became places to die, with corpses piled "like cordwood" in nearby mass graves.

Three thousand people, primarily Irish, died on Grosse Isle, ***although some 5,000 are buried there.*** The discrepancy is explained by the fact that once the ships entered the St. Lawrence, they ceased the practice of at-sea burials and resorted to stacking the dead in the ships' holds for later burial on Grosse Island.

Irish Coffin Ships *by Dave MacDougall*

Part Two

Once the fifteen-day quarantine period expired, those that appeared to be healthy were allowed to disembark for Montreal and points west. Unfortunately, they were often carrying the disease with them!



In Canada, from 1847 to 1848, the typhus epidemic killed more than 20,000 people, mainly Irish immigrants.

Dave MacDougall



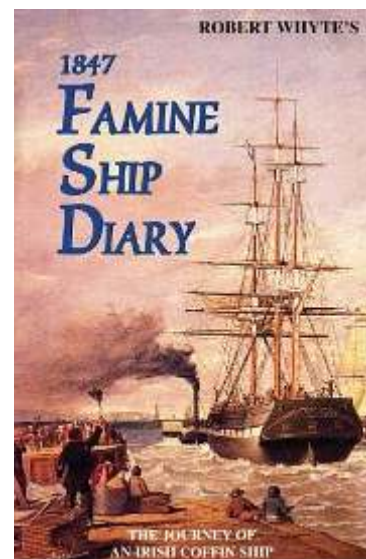
Typhus was transmitted from person to person by body lice. Humans become infected by rubbing or scratching the lice feces into their skin or into their mucous membranes. The mortality rate was fifty to seventy – five percent.

To read an authentic diary of a voyage on an Irish Coffin Ship;

1. Type in Google Books
2. Click on “Google Books”
3. New Window: Type in, “Robert Whyte’s 1847 Famine Ship Diary: the Journey of an Irish Coffin Ship” then click on search

New window: the cover of the book is displayed. To read the text, simply scroll down from the illustration.

4. **Don’t click on the “go” at the left)**



A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY by Sylvia Hasbury "YOU CAN SEE IT FROM SPACE"

Manitoulin Island is the largest island in the world in a freshwater lake. It is located close to the north end of Lake Huron opposite the American state of Michigan where the Great Lakes of Huron, Michigan and Superior meet. This area is known to sailors as the north channel.

Geologically, the island is part of the Niagara Escarpment. Composed of 2,765 sq. km. the island is only fertile in spots. Europeans who farmed these spots also relied on animals such as turkeys, sheep and cattle to supplement their income.

Logging dates from the 1860's as does commercial fishing for whitefish and trout. When Bruce County furniture factories began to run short of lumber, they purchased lumber from Manitoulin.



What can you see from space, you ask????

You can see the "Soo Quarry" as it was known in the 1950's, as the Stone Quarry or the Ryan and Haney Quarry as it was known at the turn of the last century(1900s) when it was operated by Hugh Ryan and Michael Haney.

Located in Dawson Township, in the District of Manitoulin Hugh Ryan patented this land, from the crown, comprised of Lots 19, 20 and 21, three hundred acres in total on July 14,1892. He had immigrated from County Limerick to Lower Canada in 1832. In her book *The South Quarry's Contribution to Canadian History*, by Shirley Hoskins describes Ryan as "First and foremost a railway man."

He and his brother John founded the firm of H&J Ryan in 1856 to construct part of the Brockville to Ottawa railway between the towns of Smiths Falls and Perth as well constructing other Maritime railways. Ryan's younger brother Peter and a nephew named William Doheny worked on these projects as well.

Ryan formed a partnership to operate the Soo Quarry with another Irishman named Michael John Haney. Born in Galway 1854, he was 7 years old when he moved to New York State with his family. At 18 years old Ryan met Haney in 1866 while both were working on the Canadian Pacific Railway (C.P.R).

Canada in the 1800s was known as a place where a young man could start at the bottom and work his way up to the top, making friends and important contacts along the way. One of the most important contacts was Conservative Prime Minister John A. Macdonald and his National Policy to form a Canadian Confederation from the Maritimes East to the Western Sea. While best known for railways, this policy also included the building of new canals and enlarging existing Canals such as the Rideau, and other locks along the St. Lawrence River.

Coupled with the U.S.A.'s policy of Manifest Destiny plus their purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867, increased the urgency to turn Canada into a viable political entity so it would not be annexed to the U.S.A.

In 1869 the Conservative government of Macdonald purchased Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company. This

area became what we now know as Manitoba including the Red River Valley area. Governments surveyors were sent to survey the land owned by Metis people who inhabited the area near today's City of Winnipeg. The Metis were unhappy about the Ontario system of surveying their land into squares. They had already surveyed their land by the French-Canadian method of long narrow lots used along the St. Lawrence River in Quebec.

The long lots gave each farm access to the river and kept farmhouses close together for defence and companionship between people. In addition to the numerous small villages created, people did not have to travel so far to schools and churches especially in the cold winter months.

In response to the Metis mounting an organized protest under the leadership of Louis Riel, the Canadian government sent two steamers, the Algoma and the Chicora loaded with troops and all their necessary equipment to support the work of the government surveyors. At this time, in the spring of 1870 it was still necessary to travel through U.S. waters to get to the Canadian west because the Canadian trans-continental Railway had yet to be completed.



Company coat of arms -
Wikipedia

As the Algoma navigated its way through the American lock at Sault Ste. Marie, a stark contrast unfolded for the Chicora. Denied access to the lock, the vessel fell victim to a long-standing Civil War agreement between Canada and the U.S.A. This historical accord stipulated that any ships carrying hostile troops or war materials were strictly prohibited from entering American waters. The authorities held firm in their belief that the Chicora, having been transformed into a British vessel, had once ferried hostile British troops who had instigated trade blockades during the Civil War. Consequently, the crew faced the arduous task of unloading the Chicora and transferring its contents across a grueling mile-long fur brigade portage on the Canadian side of the St. Mary's River. A journey marked by hardship and determination awaited them as they tackled the unforgiving terrain, all while the Algoma continued its onward voyage through the lock with ease.

The North West Company decided to construct a lock and canal at Sault Ste. Marie in Canada in 1797. Just large enough for 26–33-foot canoes used in fur trading Business. During the War of 1812 between the United States and Britain, the Americans destroyed it.

On July 17, 1895, an impressive total of 119 vessels made their way through the recently built American lock, after waiting in queues for an average of five hours. Fortunately, during the same season, a Canadian Lock that had been under construction since 1888 finally opened. This new lock measured 900 feet by 60 feet and had a depth of 22 feet, making it capable of accommodating even larger ships than the American lock. As a result, it helped alleviate the pressure on the U.S. side of the waterway.

Ryan and Co. won the contract from the Canadian Government to construct the Canadian Lock at Sault Ste Marie in 1888. Michael Haney, known as a “hands on contractor,” was given the job of main contractor to organize workers and resources. He lived on site at the canal for four years.

Author Pierre Burton described Haney as impetuous and derisive of red tape. Perhaps what we would call today a ‘mover and shaker’.

In a report from the Ontario Bureau of Mines for 1891, it is mentioned that Hugh Ryan and Co., the contractors for the Sault Ste. Marie canal, extracted significant quantities of limestone from two locations: White's Quarry on the Detroit River in the township of Anderdon Township near Amherstburg and from a quarry on Manitoulin Island. The limestone from White's Quarry was obtained in large blocks and transported by vessels to the Sault, where it underwent cutting to meet specific size requirements. On the other hand, the limestone from Manitoulin Island, while not as suitable for dimension purposes as that from the Anderdon Quarry, was primarily utilized as rubble. During the previous year, approximately seventy workers were employed at White's Quarry by Messrs. Ryan and Co., and fifty workers were engaged at Manitoulin Island.

In 1893 in response to the increasing sizes of ships, particularly lake freighters the dimensions and design of the Sault Canal was subject to changes and improvements. In the summer 1891 Ryan changed plans from puddle walls and substituted limestone retaining walls laid in cement.

Wikipedia describes “Puddling” as a lining for the bottom of the canal to prevent the water from leaking out through the

underlying soil. To make puddle, clay or heavy loam is chopped with a spade and mixed with water to a plastic state. Coarse sand or grit can be added to discourage moles or water voles tunnelling in it. The puddle has to be kept wet. This clay is laid down with a tool called a "punner or a pun". Another way of stomping down the puddle was to drive a herd of cattle through the canal.

On September 24, 1894 water was let into the canal.

In September 1895, the "Soo" Ship Canal achieved several groundbreaking feats, positioning it as a pioneer in modern canal engineering. It proudly introduced the world's inaugural electrically powered lock, boasting unparalleled efficiency. Furthermore, this remarkable North American canal also held the distinction of being the world's longest lock and the first to be entirely illuminated with electric lighting, an impressive display of technological advancement.

In its heyday, this exceptional lock held the title of the busiest worldwide, handling an unprecedented amount of maritime traffic. An astonishing milestone was reached in 1913 when it set a then-record by facilitating the passage of an astounding 4.7 million tons of freight. This achievement even surpassed the renowned Suez Canal in terms of cargo volume, solidifying its significance in the realm of global trade and transportation.

Ryan and Haney, the contractors, successfully finished the project within the scheduled timeframe and allocated budget.

Here is an image of the Sault Locks and the Ship Canal.



Sources for the Canal at Sault St. Marie

1. The South Shore Quarry's Contribution to Canadian History by Shirley Hoskins, Jan Joyce, Published by Friesen Press Suite 300- 852 Fort St., Victoria B.C. V8W 1H8, Published May 2014.
2. Manitoulin Island, Article by Daniel Francis, Published Online March 17, 2011 by The Canadian Encyclopedia.
3. Canal Terminology such as Puddling and Canal Prism Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia.
4. How the Soo Locks were Made by Bernie Arbic and Nancy Steinhaus, Published in the Lake Superior Magazine, July 27, 2015. <https://www.lakesuperior.com/the-lake/maritime/how-the-soo-locks-were-made/>
5. Technology in Transition: The 'Soo' Ship Canal, 1889-1985 (Studies in Archaeology, Architecture, and History) Paperback – January 1, 1989 by Robert W. Passfield

My Kerrstory - the search for the parents of Samuel Part ONE

by Jan Briggs-McGowan jansgenes@gmail.com

For ten years I had been looking without success for the ancestors of Samuel Kerr. Family lore had his father's name also Samuel, and the Irish naming patternⁱ suggested his mother may have been named Isabella. But it seemed like Samuel and his wife Margaret Earl had been dropped by the stork as fully-formed married adults, with the birth of their eldest daughter, Ann, on 26 Dec 1843 in East Flamborough Township, Wentworth County. Their next daughter, my 2x great grandmother Bella (Isabella) was born in 1845 in Waterdown, which is also in East Flamborough. Naturally, I turned to the **1851 East Flamborough** census only to find the nominal census was missing.

From a BIFHSGOⁱⁱ webinar presented by Ken McKinlay, I knew how to search the agricultural census using Ancestry. **Search** (the dropdown menu), **Census & Voter List**. Then on the right: **narrow to**, Canadian Census Collection, and then scroll down to select **1851** Census. Enter just the last name and the township. Use the **keyword** Agricultural and tick the **Exact** box.

I did try other spellings of Kerr, but found no Samuel Kerr, likely because he was a tailor and not a farmer. However, there were three other Kerr I made note of: Hamilton Kerr 100 acres Conc 7 Lot 3, Christopher Kerr 50 acres on Conc 10 Lot 4 which was shared with 3 men with the last name HUNT, and Robert Kerr 100 acres on Conc 12 lot 11.

By the **1861** census Samuel and the family were enumerated in village of Eden Mills, Nassagaweya Twp, Halton County. He was age 48, Wesleyan, living in 1 storey log house on 1 acre, with Margaret and children New Connexion: Hannah, William, John, Margaret and Mary (daughters Ann and Isabella were working nearby), with 1 horse and 1 cow worth \$44. I made note of the neighbour Allan Ramsay who I discovered lived on Conc 2 Lot 25. I also went back to **1851 Nassagaweya** Agricultural Census to search (unsuccessfully) just in case Samuel had moved there between 1845 and 1851.



This picture was likely taken for the 1864 marriage of Ann to Richard FURNEAUX, or the marriage of Bella to Robert STRACHAN on 10 April 1866. You can see his twisted feet and tripod crutches. The family story was that he became crippled after running behind his father as he plowed the fields. As a tailor he could sew with white thread on a black garment and none of the stitches would show.

I tracked Samuel and Margaret, all the children and their descendants (and even the neighbours!) hoping, in vain, to discover the parents of Samuel. All records showed Samuel was born in Ireland, but I couldn't even confirm his birth year or the year of emigration. In the 1861 Nassagaweya Twp census, his age was 48 (born 1813). In the 1871 Onondaga Twp census, his age was 57 (born 1814). In the 1881 Ancaster Twp census, his age was 70 (born 1811). He died in Brantford 12

Nov 1888 and according to his death record - informant son William, he was 79 years old (born 1809).

Could there be a hint revealed by tracing the parents of his wife Margaret Earl? Stay tuned for the next stage!

ⁱ <https://youririshheritage.com/lessons/irish-naming-patterns/>

ⁱⁱ British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa

Huron OGS Branch

They invite us to all their meetings but at the August meeting, our member Deb McAuslan, Chair of Huron Branch, is presenting!

How did they get here? – based on the Diary of George Laird

Have you wondered what it was like to cross the Atlantic Ocean to Canada? How did your ancestor travel to SW Ontario and Huron County? Learn about one family's experience and **how others told their stories to help paint the picture for your family.**

Please join us on Wednesday, Aug 2nd at 7:30 p.m. EDT

Pre- register for this Zoom webinar at

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZUudu6qqzMvHtYJx4o2bzu7q-a7Ugb7iMXi>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.



How did they get here?
based on the diary of
George Laird

Deb & Bill McAuslan

Wednesday, Aug 2nd
at 7:30 p.m.

In person – 110 North St, Goderich, ON
Or via Zoom (see link on our webpage or
Facebook site)

Ontario
Ancestors
The Ontario Genealogical Society

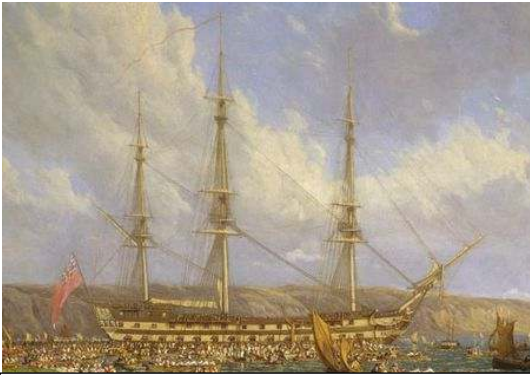
Huron County
Branch

USING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO WRITE AN ANCESTOR'S STORY

By Lolly Fullerton

I read an article about AI and genealogy so I decided to try it. My son is working for an AI company so he recommended <https://openai.com/chatgpt> I created a free account and tried ChatGPT. I requested a biography about Thomas Henson, copied his timeline off ancestry and pasted it in the request. Here's the biography Artificial Intelligence wrote!

Thomas Henson, also known as Thomas Hanson, was born on December 23, 1798, in Potterspur, Northamptonshire, England. He was the eldest son in a family of six siblings. His brothers Joseph, William, James, and John, as well as his sisters Elizabeth, Hannah, and Mary, filled their home with the joy of a large family. *(No knowledge of this)*



Bellephron – Prison Hulk

At the age of 17, Thomas found himself facing a grave situation. On July 24, 1816, he was sentenced to death for committing a burglary. However, fate intervened, and his sentence was commuted. Thomas relocated to Woolwich, London, and started a new chapter in his life. *(Put on the Bellephron a prison hulk)*

In 1817, Thomas became a father when his son Peter Henson was born in Potterspur. Shortly after, Thomas made the decision to transport himself to Australia. *(Not his decision)* On July 24, 1817, he departed from Woolwich on the ship Bellephron (wrong ship name), bound for New South Wales. After a long journey, Thomas arrived in Australia on November 22, 1817.

Thomas settled in Bringelly, New South Wales, and established his residence there in 1824. In 1826, he entered into marriage with Esther Collins in Parramatta. They went on to have several children, including Thomas Hanson, Joseph Hanson, and John James Hanson.

Over the years, Thomas moved to different locations within New South Wales, including Upp Minto and Cobbitty. In 1830, he remarried, this time to Esther Collins, in Cobbitty. They continued to build their family and their life together.

Tragedy struck in 1852 when Thomas's eldest son, Peter Henson, passed away in Brooklyn, New York, at the age of 35. The loss of Peter was a devastating blow for the family *(unlikely)*. The following year, Thomas experienced another loss when his mother, Mary Ann Tapp, passed away in Potterspur, England. Thomas's journey came to an end on December 24, 1870, when he passed away in Gundagai, New South Wales, at the age of 72. He was laid to rest in Gundagai, where he was buried.

Thomas Henson, or Thomas Hanson as he was sometimes known, lived a life marked by challenges, resilience, and new beginnings. From his early struggles and brushes with the law to his eventual settlement in Australia and the establishment of his family, he left behind a legacy of perseverance and strength. His story serves as a reminder of the human capacity for redemption and the ability to forge a new path, even in the face of adversity.

*Thomas Henson is my 2nd great grandfather proven by DNA. Peter Henson, his son, was born in Potterspurty while Thomas was on the Prison Hulk. I have no idea what Peter's life was like – did he know what happened to his father? All I know is that Peter became a builder in London England, had a family and moved to New York City. He died shortly after arriving and my great grandfather returned to London.

Below are four facts which I need to incorporate into the story to give more history of the time.

1. "The year 1816 is known as the Year Without a Summer. The impoverished especially suffered during this time. Low temperatures and heavy rains resulted in failed harvests in [Great Britain and Ireland](#)." (Wikipedia)
2. Prison Hulks were "decommissioned warships anchored in the mud off Woolwich. They were dark, damp and verminous and few prisoners managed to escape." (Wikipedia)
3. <https://oldbritishnews.com/> is where I was able to ask for newspaper clippings about Thomas Henson.
4. https://www.fresettlerorfelon.com/convict_ship_larkins_1817.htm This site told of Thomas Henson's trip to Australia.

CROWN SIDE.

The following prisoners took their trials on Tuesday and Wednesday:—

William Beckingham Masien, charged with burglary in the dwelling-house of Elizabeth Gadbury and Mary Seller, in the night of the 4th March, at West Wycombe.—*Guilty, Death.*

John Costar, charged with having, in the night of the 4th March, burglariously entered the dwelling-house of Elizabeth Gadbury, and carried off goods of the value of 30l.—*Guilty, Death.*

Thomas Raisin, charged with having murdered Elizabeth York, of Shabington Wood, by cutting her throat, on the 13th March.—*Guilty, Death.*

Thomas Henson, charged with burglariously entering the dwelling-house of Richard Longman, of Stony Stratford, and stealing therein.—*Guilty, Death.*

William Frankling, charged on the oath of Ann Heather, with having, on the 21st of April, at the parish of Little Marlow, assaulted and ravished the said Ann Heather.—*Death.*

William Hawkins, charged on oath of Sarah Beauchamp, with having committed a rape on her.—*Death.*

John Theed, charged with having, in the night of the 12th of June, set fire to the barn and pig-stye of Edmund Essex, of the parish of Hitchenden.—*Death.*

Thomas Alderman and Joseph Cooper, charged with stealing one wether sheep, the property of J. and W. Robinson, of Winslow.—*Death.*

Thomas Jackson, charged with having stolen two hides, value 40s. out of the drying shed of John Wagstaff, at Olney.—*Death.*

Thomas Thorp, charged with burglariously entering the dwelling-house of W. Franklin, at Iver, and taking away Bank-notes and other articles.—*Death.*

I need to add more information to the story, but I am so very pleased with Artificial Intelligence getting me started on this task.

If you are interested in knowing more about Artificial Intelligence and Genealogy, watch Amy Crowe Johnson short video on the subject: <https://youtu.be/LnBKjprPTPo>

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