

# Waterloo Historical Society Newsletter



Summer 2025

Sophia Grande-Lawlor, Editor



## Public Meeting

All are welcome. No admission charge.

**Tuesday, 24 June 2025**

**Doors open at 6:30; 7:15 presentation**

Nancy Saunders Maitland will be the speaker at our next public meeting on June 24, 2025 at the Linwood Community Centre, 5279 Ament Road, Linwood, ON. Nancy was the curator of the Wellesley Township Heritage and Historical Society from 2010-2023.

She will speak about the history of Wellesley Township and how it is reflected in records and objects the WTHHS collection.

For more information contact [rychmills@golden.net](mailto:rychmills@golden.net) or 519.742.4990

whs.ca

## Have news to share?

Send the newsletter committee updates to

**[whs1912newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:whs1912newsletter@gmail.com)**

Deadline for Fall 2025 newsletter Friday, August 29, 2025.



# Mark your calendar

## More 2025 Public Meetings

This year's public meetings will be held on two Tuesday evenings and two Saturday afternoons.

All WHS meetings are free; members and non-members are invited. The WHS Book Table will be open at all meetings. Keep an eye on [www.whs.ca](http://www.whs.ca) for further details. As well, reminder e-mails will be sent out.

**Tuesday, September 9, 2025:** Attendees will gather at the Maryhill Community Centre. Elysia DeLaurentis has put together a dynamic feature called "Rough Justice in 19th Century Ontario." Members may renew their WHS annual dues with the membership committee as well. Doors open 6:30, program at 7:15.

**Saturday, November 15, 2025:** To wrap up the meetings for 2025, November 15 will be the WHS annual general meeting.

Full details will be sent by email to all members a few days before the meeting.

For more information on these WHS meetings, check [www.whs.ca](http://www.whs.ca) or contact [rychmills@golden.net](mailto:rychmills@golden.net)

We acknowledge that the land on which we meet are the lands traditionally used by the Haudenosaunee, Anishnaabeg, and Neutral peoples. We also acknowledge the enduring presence and deep traditional knowledge, laws, and philosophies of the Indigenous people with whom we share this land today. We are all treaty people with a responsibility to honour all our relations.



# WHS Plaques Committee

## Plans Unveiling of 24th Plaque

Submitted by Sandra Parks

With its first plaque unveiling in 1925, the Waterloo Historical Society Plaques Committee is now planning the début of its 24<sup>th</sup> plaque - the Idylwild Park Interpretive Plaque.

Those first 23 were bronze plaques, a very durable material with a few drawbacks: text is limited to no more than 100 words, which makes them more commemorative memorials than educational tools, and they are prone to vandalism and theft for the value of the metal to an unscrupulous foundry.

The Idylwild Park panel is the first full-colour illustrated storyboard or interpretive plaque unveiled by the WHS, perhaps a sign of things to come. It recalls the history of the former Idylwild Park on Cambridge's Mill Run Trail, complete with colour images supplied by our own Ray Ruddy.

### Idylwild Park: poem in the wilds

Idylwild Park, on the Speed River in what is now Cambridge, attracted people from across Southwestern Ontario via the Grand Trunk Railway and the Galt, Preston & Hespeler (GP&H) electric railway. It was located in what was then Waterloo Township, just north of where the MacDonald-Cartier Freeway (Hwy 401) crosses the river today.

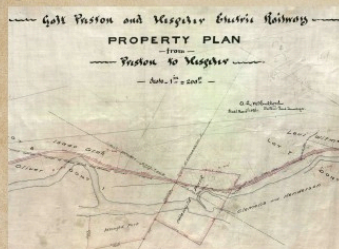
The GP&H "followed a course very close to the banks of the Speed River, entering a wooded area with tall elms, maples and evergreens — a perfect setting for one of the most popular playground, picnic and recreational areas in the district," wrote Oliver Kummer in the 1970 Waterloo Historical Society annual volume. He concluded the meaning of the park's name was a "poem in the wilds."

The 10-acre Idylwild lasted for just 20 years and then it was gone, a victim of the First World War and the rise in popularity of the automobile and other more urban parks.

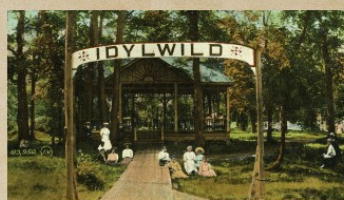
#### HISTORY

By 1896, the GP&H carried up to 35,000 passengers and 1,000 tons of freight each month, more than enough to pay operating costs. Like every other electric interurban railway, it had a park along its lines that could only be reached by its passengers, a way to stimulate weekend rail travel.

Idylwild Park opened in 1895, accessed every 15 to 30 minutes during operating hours. Park goers were given ribbons that identified them as patrons, just 5¢ from Preston and 10¢ from Galt. The park catered to families, private parties and annual group picnics. "It was not at all uncommon for the railway to shunt in from Preston Junction a train load of picnickers from as far away as Hamilton bringing hundreds to enjoy the great out-of-doors in the wilds of Idylwild," explained Kummer.



1896 plan of Idylwild Park by land surveyor A.L. McCulloch.



Entry gate to Idylwild Park.

#### AMENITIES

Idylwild encompassed lands on both banks of the Speed, as well as a large island in between. Two wooden footbridges crossed the island, plus one across the river.

The larger of the two pavilions, 50 by 50', could hold 100 dancers or more. As evening approached, "myriads of colored electric lights burst here and there through the deep shadows of the trees and frame the pavilion."

A refreshment booth and store provided soft drinks, ice cream and "free hot water," recalled Kummer. "No doubt some did bring along something stronger than pop."

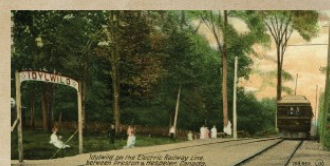
Natural pathways allowed strolls through the woods. Boardwalks, horseshoe pits, tree swings, a dock and boats were among the amenities. East of the picnic grounds was a five-acre athletic field for ball games, tennis, races and other sports.

"The Speed River at that period was still clean and offered wading for the kiddies," noted Kummer, "and [opportunities for] those who cared to try their luck at fishing."

Though parents didn't have to worry about poison ivy, Idylwild was nicknamed "Mosquito Park" as that insect thrived in the surrounding wetlands.



Cover art of the 'Along the Line of the Galt, Preston & Hespeler Electric Ry.' brochure, c1897. All images are from Ray Ruddy's extensive collection of Preston and area memorabilia.



Electric rail car at entry gate to Idylwild Park.

#### ELECTRIC RAILWAY

Electric power made street railways viable from 1885. One of the earliest interurban electric trains in Canada, the Galt & Preston Street Railway, became operational July 26, 1894, with Hespeler added in 1896.

As demand for holiday excursions grew, the electric railway was instrumental in the growth of the tourist trade in Preston. There, mineral springs offered purported health benefits and resort hotels such as the Kress and Del Monte provided luxurious accommodation. The streetcars themselves were described by a local newspaper, "after the most modern style ... The seats are finely upholstered, beveled glass windows decorate the ends and the car contains four electric heaters ... Incandescent electric lights, with very pretty globes, hang from the ceiling, and the car has a seating capacity for about 30 passengers."

The GP&H merged with the Preston & Berlin Street Railway in 1908 and in 1914 was incorporated as the Grand River Railway.

#### DEMISE OF THE PARK

In 1917, Idylwild Park was closed permanently, several factors leading to its demise: spring flooding, growing popularity of the automobile, the First World War took staff for more important duties, and the establishment of Riverside Park in nearby Preston.

Most of the Hespeler branch tracks were moved away from the river in 1918 due to flooding. The land continued to be used unofficially for picnics into the 1940s, just a short hike from Speedville Road.

#### PRESENT DAY

Today, much of what was once provided by the private sector is now part of municipal infrastructure. Part of the site, along the southern bank of the Speed River, is now Grand River Conservation Authority lands. The City of Cambridge's Mill Run Trail passes through, making use of the dismantled railbed.

The landscape of the site has grown over, eroded or been developed. Gates, pavilions, bridges and other structures are no longer present. The mosquitoes, however, remain.



Picnic goes enjoy Idylwild Park, c1910, photo taken by Wilson of Galt.

Erected by the Waterloo Historical Society ([www.whs.ca](http://www.whs.ca)) in 2024 with the co-operation of the City of Cambridge and the Grande River Conservation Authority.



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As the plaque location is along the Mill Run Trail, one kilometre in from the trailhead at Beaverdale Road, the Plaques Committee feel the site is not very accessible to many of our WHS members. They have chosen a limited unveiling on July 8 with WHS Board members and representatives from the City of Cambridge and the Grand River Conservation Authority. If you would still like to attend the unveiling, please contact Sandra Parks at [sparksresearch7@gmail.com](mailto:sparksresearch7@gmail.com) and I will send you an invitation and directions.

Watch for details of the unveiling of the Idylwild Park plaque in the next newsletter.

# Hole in the Ground

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*Submitted by Jon Fear*

Sometimes even a hole in the ground can offer us both some local history and a good story.

That's the case for the site of an 18-storey residential project currently under construction along Weber Street East in Kitchener, directly opposite Sunnyside Public School at 1042 Weber St. E.

For more than 60 years the site at Weber and Dellroy Avenue has included a gaping hole, dug in the early 1960s when concrete footings for a proposed Lord Kitchener motor hotel were put in place. The project was later abandoned and subsequent attempts to develop the site, which had earlier held St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church, also fell through. Decades passed, but the hole remained.





Savic Homes of Kitchener is now in the process of building the tower plus an attached four-storey podium along Weber Street. Together they will hold 238 rental suites. Also on the site is an existing six-storey apartment building at 15 Dellroy, the one part of the 1960s proposal that did get built.

The Lord Kitchener hotel was a project spearheaded by a local developer, Gustav Ruder of Ruder Construction, who in 1964 told the Kitchener-Waterloo Record (today's Waterloo Region Record) his three-storey hotel would include a swimming pool, health centre, dining room, ballroom and Japanese garden. A statue of Lord Kitchener, the British military hero for whom the City of Kitchener is named, was to stand near the entrance. For several years the abandoned hotel plan was a news story regularly updated in the pages of the Record, where the property was described in the early 1970s as a “glaring eyesore” and a “grossly deteriorated” development site. Eventually the concrete footings were removed or buried for safety reasons.

To be fair to Ruder, the geography of the Sunnyside area began to change dramatically not long after he acquired the corner site in 1962. At the time, Weber Street was only starting to be extended east into that section of the city. The hotel project was intended to front on King Street East. But when plans for a new Highway 8 entrance leading to the downtown were announced -- a sunken controlled-access expressway to be built in a



concrete channel far below the level of King Street East -- the hotel idea no longer made sense. Motorists speeding along the lower Highway 8 might look up and spot a hotel, but in those days there was no GPS to help them actually get there.

Since then, of course, most of the King Street East roadway in this area has disappeared and Weber Street East has been extended through the Sunnyside neighbourhood and beyond to become the major four-lane arterial road it is today. Also long gone are many former King Street East businesses in the area, including a Dairy Queen outlet that was just west of the Ruder

Construction site.

When St. Luke's opened in 1941, it stood at King Street East and Delmonte Avenue in the former Waterloo Township. But in 1952 Kitchener expanded to bring that part of the township within its boundaries. It also changed the name of Delmonte Avenue to Dellroy Avenue.

After selling its property to Ruder, St. Luke's built a larger church building at 317 Franklin St. N., near Sunnyside Home. It opened in 1963. The history section of the church's website has a wonderful photo showing its former church building at King and Delmonte.

The story doesn't end there. A Record story in December of 1962 described how the old St. Luke's was taken apart "beam by beam and pew by pew" by Ruder Construction and carried across the city to be rebuilt on Fischer Drive as St. George's Anglican Church, now St. George's of Forest Hill Anglican Church at 321 Fischer-Hallman Rd., Kitchener. The St. George's website notes that the St. Luke's parts, including some memorial windows, are preserved in the chapel, narthex and church offices, all found in the older section of today's church.



The KW Record April 6, 1973



# News

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## Wilmot Heritage Day

*Submitted by Sophia Grande-Lawlor, photographs by Harold Russell*

Another successful Heritage Day was carried out on April 26th in New Dundee. Rescheduled due to weather, the event had a great turnout. Kristen Hahn delivered a great talk on the upcoming five volume series *The Historic Buildings of New Hamburg: Writing the Genealogy of a Town*, and exhibitors impressed attendees and each other with excellent displays and information. Thank you to Harold Russell for great photographs of the day!



## Wellesley Township Heritage and Historical Society

*Submitted by Nancy Maitland*

I am thrilled to introduce our new curator to you! Sophia Grande-Lawlor comes to us with a Masters degree in Library and Information Science from Western University. She has worked as Assistant Archivist at the Wellington County Museum and Archives. Since being hired as our curator she has accepted a new role as Archives Associate in the Wilfrid Laurier Archives and Special Collections. Sophia is already active in her role with us and attended the Council meeting on March 25. I know she will be helpful with Historical Room activities and outreach as well as our built heritage endeavours.



## Newsletter

Consider switching to email for faster, eco-friendly news updates! Send an email to **[whs1912newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:whs1912newsletter@gmail.com)** if you are interested in switching to the e-newsletter.





# North Dumfries Historical Preservation Society holds inaugural Annual General Meeting

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*Submitted by Irene Schmidt-Adeney*

The North Dumfries Historical Preservation Society (NDHPS) held its first Annual General Meeting since becoming incorporated under the Ontario Historical Society last year. The meeting was held on Tuesday, May 6<sup>th</sup> at Abe Erb in Ayr and led by Chair David Pyper who welcomed about 20 members and guests.

Pyper gave a report on the activities of the past year that included publishing a historical calendar for the Ayr200 celebrations. The calendar raised over \$5,000 for the NDHPS. A quarterly newsletter was launched with two issues be published to date. The office was open and the collection available to the public on the second and fourth Wednesday mornings of the month.



Lifetime Members, from left Pat Radke and Irene Schmidt Adeney receive certificates from Chair David Pyper.

“One major hurdle completed this year was the renewal of our Memorandum of Understanding with the Township of North Dumfries, which will guide and direct our mutual responsibilities and commitments over the next three years,” said Pyper. Pyper said that steps have been taken to consider moving the archives and the NDHPS collection into the Ayr Library. He said one of this year’s goals is to increase engagement with the members and the public.

This year’s major fundraiser will be a reprinting *Our Today’s and Yesterdays* written by Andrew Taylor. It is a history book of Ayr and North Dumfries that was last published in the 1970s.

Treasurer Kim Bonney-Hopps reported a bank balance of \$20,582.04 as of March 31, 2025, which is the year end for the NDHPS.

Nominations for the Board of Directors were accepted by the membership with the following members: Chair David Pyper, Vice-Chair Irene Schmidt-Adeney, Treasurer Kim Bonney-Hopps, Directors John Gillespie, Pat Radke, Ron Sage, Jeff Stager, and Gord Taylor. The position of secretary has not been filled, and there is room on the board for an additional director.



David Pyper (left) and guest speaker Rych Mills (right) holding a section of a Tremaine Map, dating back to the 1800s.

Pyper circulated a list of volunteer positions currently available. The jobs range from digitizing archives, special events committee, audio transcribing, written transcribing, webmaster, and cover design for the reprinting of *Our Today's and Yesterdays*. The list is also available by emailing [ndhistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:ndhistoricalsociety@gmail.com).

Pat Radke and Irene Schmidt-Adeney were presented with certificates to mark a NDHPS lifetime membership. Lifetime memberships are available for a one-time payment of \$200.

Vice-chair Irene Schmidt-Adeney introduced guest speaker Rych Mills. Mills has written several local history books, including *Flash from the Past*, which is a compilation of articles from

his feature of the same name published most Saturdays in *The Record*. Mills is on the Waterloo Historical Society Board of Directors, Kitchener's Victoria Park Historical Committee, and has lectured and made presentations on a wide variety of local topics at the University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University, and numerous public venues.

Mills spoke about his connections to North Dumfries through his ancestors, the Gress family.

The NDHPS meets on the fourth Monday of the month, between September and June, at 12:30 p.m. The meetings are held in the portable located at the North Dumfries Community Complex west parking lot.

For more information email [ndhistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:ndhistoricalsociety@gmail.com).

# Who we are and how to reach us

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**Email** [whs@whs.ca](mailto:whs@whs.ca)

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**Facebook**

[www.facebook.com/waterloohs](http://www.facebook.com/waterloohs)

**Instagram**

[@waterloohistoricalsociety](https://www.instagram.com/waterloohistoricalsociety)

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Harold Russell  
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Rosanne Atwater-Hallatt,  
Nancy Maitland  
Wilmot Township: Patty  
Clarke  
Woolwich Township:  
Marion Roes, Diane  
Strickler

**Archives**

[gsr@kpl.org](mailto:gsr@kpl.org) for questions about the WHS archives and if you have items to donate. Please note, donations are currently paused.

**Book Table**

To donate or to buy books, come to our meetings and / or see [www.whs.ca/booktable/](http://www.whs.ca/booktable/)

**Membership**

Membership take place from October 1 to September 30. See membership forms and benefits at [whs.ca/membership](http://whs.ca/membership).

Thank you for supporting WHS with your memberships, patronages and donations.

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Newsletter Comments, questions and submissions may be sent to the editor, Sophia Grande-Lawlor.

*Thank you for help with and distribution of this issue to Sandra Parks, Jon Fear,*

*Mary Anne Banks, and rych mills.*