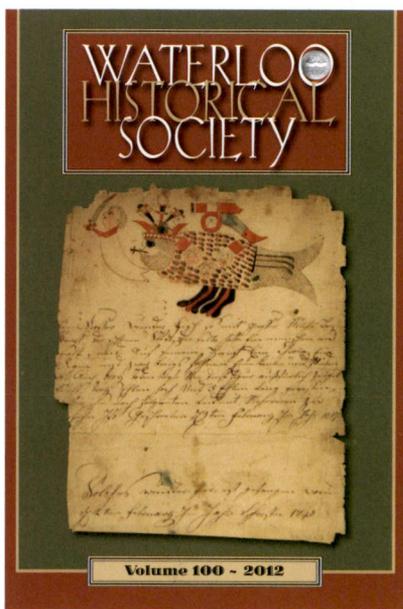


# WATERLOO HISTORICAL SOCIETY



**Volume 100 ~ 2012**



*Joseph Schneider Haus National Historic Site,  
operated by the Regional Municipality of Waterloo*



Front Cover:

Originally created in Pennsylvania, this remarkable *Wunder-Fisch* document travelled north to Waterloo Township with the Clemens family in 1825. Researcher Reginald Good has placed the document from the Joseph Schneider Haus and Museum collection within the context of other known *Wunder-Fisch* manuscripts. See *The Pennsylvania-German Wunder-Fisch (Marvel-Fish) Manuscript* on page 229.

WATERLOO  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**Volume 100 • 2012**

# WATERLOO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Volume 100 – 2012



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# THREE RING CIRCUS OF DEATH

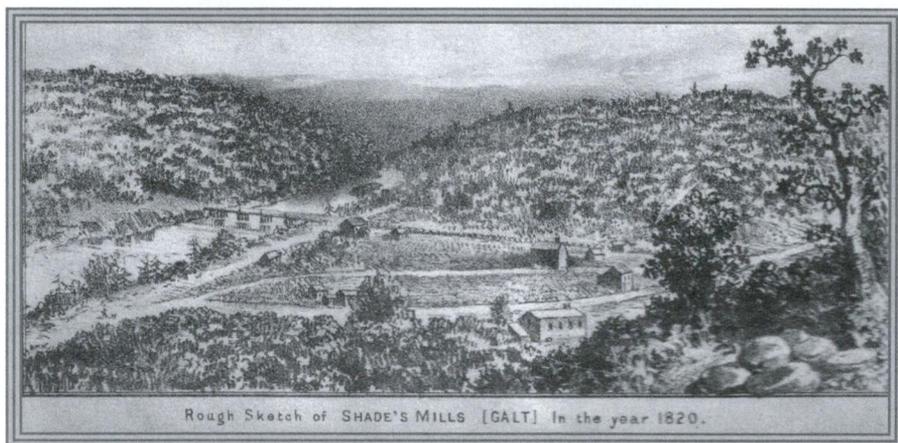
by Bob Burt

Bob Burt is a Cambridge resident with an interest in local history. Until 2007, he was employed as a reporter specializing in environmental issues at the *Waterloo Region Record*.

This article is followed by two associated papers, one attempting to list the 1834 victims and another profiling the 1832 Bridgeport cholera deaths.

## Cholera in Galt in 1834

The 1834 cholera outbreak remains one of the saddest and most trying periods in the history of Galt. It started with a travelling circus coming to town and ended in death for about one-fifth of the community's residents and many others in the surrounding area. It was the local punctuation mark to an epidemic that had run rampant in North America for several years.



Rough Sketch of SHADE'S MILLS [GALT] in the year 1820.

from James Young, *Reminiscences of the Early History of Galt*, 1880

Between his first visit to the Grand River in 1816 and 1820 [which this sketch portrays] Absalom Shade had erected a bridge across the river; a store and house; a sawmill and grist mill; as well as a distillery. For the next 14 years, Shade continued constructing buildings and attracting others to the village. By the time the cholera epidemic hit, the renamed Galt had approximately 250 inhabitants.

Historian Geoffrey Hayes, in his *Waterloo County: An Illustrated History* notes that:

In 1834, Galt had a population of 250 in a township with about 4,177 people. In addition to its mills and taverns, it boasted a school, a frame Presbyterian church, even a debating society. Occasionally, travelling shows came to town. In July, 1834, a circus arrived, and drew the curious from as far as Waterloo, Woolwich and Wilmot [townships].<sup>1</sup>

Even before the set up, there were rumors about a circus worker having cholera, one of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century's most feared diseases.<sup>2</sup>

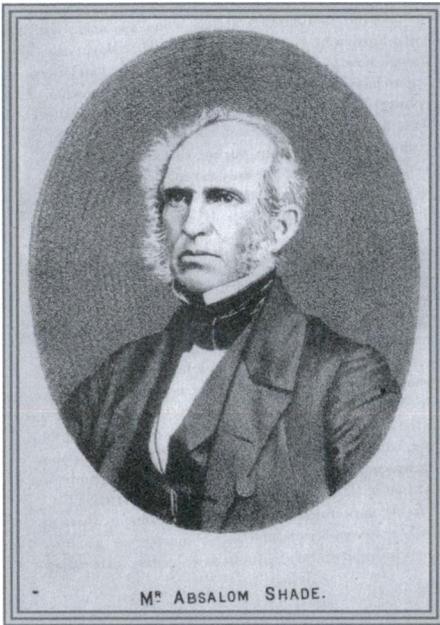
Cholera had appeared in North America at least two years earlier, in all likelihood carried by British and European immigrants travelling in overcrowded ships which docked at many ports along the eastern seaboard. When suspicions were raised in Galt in late July 1834, Dr Robert Miller promptly verified cholera and people began living in terror as the disease spread throughout the area.<sup>3</sup>

Miller, Galt's only fully-trained physician at the time, had come to Canada from Ayrshire, Scotland in 1832.<sup>4</sup> He arrived in Quebec (gaining first-hand knowledge of cholera during the outbreak there) and moved to Galt the same year. As the disease took root in Galt two years later, the new Presbyterian church became a makeshift hospital; there Miller ordered that the victims' clothes be burned.<sup>5</sup> Among others who helped Miller in the summer of 1834 were Dr McQuarrie who rushed to Galt to lend a hand and Dr John Scott, a recent arrival from Roxboroughshire, Scotland, who had first set foot in Galt only ten days earlier. Dedicated work during the crisis quickly earned Scott a strong reputation as a courageous medical man.<sup>6</sup>

The disease spread rapidly, leaving many dead in its wake and disrupting commerce and everyday life.

Before the arrival of the circus and the deadly disease, there had been a growing sense of promise and optimism among the residents of Galt, mostly Scottish folk who had emigrated within the previous five years. Many of the early settlers owned only an axe when they arrived to take up farming. With much hard work they managed to plant new crops and construct new buildings.<sup>7</sup> Their first endeavors were, generally, to plant a few acres of wheat and erect a house or shanty. There wasn't much in the way of entertainment or shows, so the forthcoming 1834 arrival of the circus was, at first, exciting news for people in Galt as well as those in villages and farms for miles around.<sup>8</sup>

July 28 that year turned out to be an extremely hot day and when the menagerie of wild animals arrived they and their dens were filthy.<sup>9</sup> The resulting foul odors detracted from the enjoyment of the exhibition; that, plus the persistent rumors about one of the circus workers having cholera caused some residents to encourage the cancellation of the show. They took their concerns to Absalom Shade, the only magistrate representing the village within Gore District.<sup>10</sup> Shade listened, but questioned his authority to cancel the show and noted that even if he had such authority, he was reluctant to deprive the citizens of the entertainment and the village of the money and prestige the circus would bring.<sup>11</sup> He soon regretted that decision.



Born in Pennsylvania, Absalom Shade (1793-1862) was the most prominent official in Galt when the 1834 cholera outbreak occurred. He was as powerless as anyone to stem the epidemic.

*from James Young, Reminiscences of the Early History of Galt, 1880*

Cholera began spreading through the village with a vengeance, killing at least 20 per cent of the population. While Galt's citizens were at the centre of the epidemic, large numbers from as far away as Branchton village to the south and Waterloo Township to the

north plus nearby townships such as Woolwich, Blenheim, Puslinch, Beverly and Wilmot either died or became ill.

The cholera outbreak of 1834 changed the course of history in Galt and area, not only by the lives that were cut short but, for many of those who survived, growing up without parents or family who had succumbed to the disease.<sup>12</sup>

## The Cholera Epidemic Spreads in 1834

Ten-year-old Moses Springer's parents died of cholera at Blair, leaving him and his 10 brothers and sisters orphans.<sup>13</sup> The disease continued to spread, and among the victims was Bishop Benjamin Eby's first wife, Mary Brubacher (1789–August 18, 1834), a Berlin resident who died three weeks after the Galt outbreak.<sup>14</sup> Another prominent early Berlin family suffered losses as well: Frederick Gaukel's second wife, Maria Roschang, and his son Henry / Heinrich from his first marriage, perished from what was described as "Asiatic Cholera."<sup>15</sup> Numerous other area residents died from cholera but no accurate figure has ever been tabulated. Isaac Horst, in his book *Up the Conestogo*, lists an even dozen from places as varied as Kossuth, Breslau, Blenheim and Preston.<sup>16</sup> Many members of the Mennonite community in Waterloo Township were among those who died during a three-week period in July and August. Families were so fearful that they did not go out and one important Mennonite tradition was even set aside for a while.<sup>17</sup>

Funerals were usually arranged by neighbours and friends, but the community was so demoralized by the cholera that, as Deacon Abraham L. Clemens wrote to his brother in Chester County in 1836, "the neighbours did not go out to assist one another as in any other disease so there was no funeral held."<sup>18</sup>

In Wilmot Township, cholera killed Josiah Cushman who had just taken up the water rights on the Nith River at the site of the future New Hamburg.<sup>19</sup> He, his wife, his daughter and baby were among those in the tiny community who were felled by cholera in 1834. Cushman had recently moved from York (Toronto) to Galt, purchased the land and water rights from Absalom Shade and established the first mill in New Hamburg just months before the outbreak.<sup>20</sup>

A 1908 account in the *Berlin News Record* sets the scene in New Hamburg:

The first settlers appeared to have located in this part of the world some time prior to 1834. They were English and German and numbered some fifty souls. About this time, the first notable event in the life of the village occurred when the great cholera scourge swept nearly all these pioneers into the great beyond. This was 1834 and their unmarked graves are said to be located a short distance south of East and West streets under Wilmot Street.<sup>21</sup>

An unaccredited quote in Paul Knowles' *A History of New Hamburg* details the aftermath of the cholera deaths in that tiny community:

Many a narrative has been told by those who outlived that trial, of the industries all standing idle for want of men to man them; of the grist mill silent for want of a miller; of people long in want of flour and no one to start the mill; of farmers coming in and starting the water wheels themselves.<sup>22</sup>

The 1834 cholera outbreak was, as noted earlier, hard on the heels of another major epidemic over the previous two years.

## 1832 Cholera Outbreak

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While cholera was rampant in Lower Canada in 1832, a pair of English families, the Woolners and the Howletts from Suffolk, England, contracted the disease, possibly in Hamilton, Upper Canada and several perished upon arrival in the Bridgeport area.<sup>23</sup> There they visited relatives, the Noah Hembling family, who had settled just outside the village in 1831. A number of the adults, along with several children, died. The remaining youngsters, including six Hemblings and six Woolners between the ages of two and fourteen, were adopted by Mennonite households in the district and assimilated into communities in Waterloo and Woolwich Townships.

In his book *Our Todays and Yesterdays*, Andrew Taylor also refers to that earlier 1832 cholera outbreak by quoting a letter written by Galt businessman John Telfer on August 28, 1832:

I suppose the colera is the ocasion of your not coming in at this time as it has put a great stop to business in this country. The marchents has got no goods up yet, only those that got their spring goods early. It is very bad in York [Toronto]. It was bad in Hamilton and still some of it yet, and Dundas, and Flambrow. Some deaths has taken place in Beverly and one in Dumfries, but it has put such a terror in people's minds that they dare not go to Dundas; but by appearance it will rage through the province.<sup>24</sup>

Telfer's prediction of the disease raging through the province certainly came true over the succeeding two years.

Hamilton, a leading port of entry to the western part of Upper Canada, also played a role in nearby Guelph's only recorded 1832 cholera death. David Stirton's research, written by Kate Conway and published in the *Guelph Mercury* in 1889 told the tale. Already resident in the village, the Gillis family was awaiting the arrival of Henderson relatives from Scotland. "In the expected party were the father, two brothers and a sister-in-law of Mrs. Gillis. The father and one brother died [of cholera] on the way." The two survivors struggled to Hamilton, stowed their baggage and trekked on to Guelph. Two men, one being another Henderson brother of Mrs Gillis and the other her nephew, Donald Gillis, then travelled to Hamilton to retrieve the new arrivals' goods which included clothing of the dead men. "The Brock Road was frequently almost impassable, and in going over one long crossway a box fell from the wagon and burst open. It must have contained some of the cholera-infected clothing." Donald Gillis helped his uncle to repack the spilled articles. They reached the Gillis home in Guelph but by two o'clock in the morning the young man felt ill and was dead by ten that same morning. Fortunately, this was Guelph's sole cholera death in 1832.<sup>25</sup>

Another contemporary account of the havoc cholera triggered that year in Upper Canada comes from the letters of Captain William Gilkison. Historian and author John Connon calls Gilkison "the founder of Elora" but he was also a cousin to John Galt and friend of William Dickson. Connon makes a case that much of what John Galt learned about Upper Canada came from Gilkison. In his narrative, *Elora*, Connon prints a number of cholera excerpts from Gilkison's 1832 diary.<sup>26</sup>

June 20, 1832. Niagara. Yesterday a man died in a vessel at the wharf and the usual contradictory medical opinion is given of the case having been Colera. I think of leaving this place when Daniel arrives but I do not know where to steer to avoid the coming pestilence. The minds of the people are wonderfully agitated by it.

July 7, 1832. Brantford. We hear of Colera in Lower Canada where its effects have been dreadful. In one 24 hours there were 149 deaths.

July 13, 1832. Ancaster. We have heard of 2 cases of Colera in London, and both fatal.

August 1, 1832. Niagara. There were several deaths from Colera at Hamilton while I was there. Indeed this disease is now universal over Upper and Lower Canada as well as the State of New York.

August 11, 1832. Niagara. Several cases of Colera have been in the neighborhood – generally fatal. Few people come to gaze at the stupendous falls – Colera is the terror of the spot.<sup>27</sup>

Gilkison has numerous other entries utilizing phrases such as “Colera is everywhere destroying mankind,” and “The disease continues its tremendous conflict with frail humanity.” Gilkison died at age 56 in April 1833, but not of cholera. His diaries reflect what must have been the dread every person in that era felt – and this was in 1832. A much more horrific epidemic for Galt and surrounding townships was to come along in just two years.

To the south of Galt and Dumfries Township was Brant County and while the area is outside the purview of this essay, it is worth noting that a number of residents of that county perished from cholera in 1832. Probably the most prominent was John Brant (Ahyonwaeghs, 1794-1832), youngest son of Joseph Brant and Catharine Croghan Brant (more properly Thayendanegea and Adonwentishon).<sup>28</sup>

## James Young's Account of Galt's 1834 Cholera Outbreak

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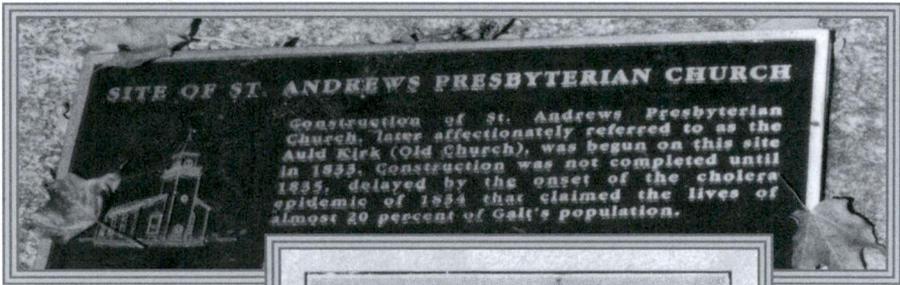
Describing 1834, James Young provides a dramatic account of the crisis in Galt:

The exhibition [i.e., the circus] took place on Monday, and by Wednesday night and Thursday, the cholera was raging with almost unparalleled malignity and fatality. The harrowing scenes which occurred can never be erased from the memories of those who passed through them. The agony of the stricken, the swiftness of death, the rude board coffins and the hasty burials – in some cases within a few minutes after the last breath was drawn – turned the recently hopeful village into a very charnel-house, from which many fled in despair, whilst all but a few were paralysed with fear.<sup>29</sup>

Dr Miller, who had experienced that earlier 1832 epidemic in Montreal where he saw 100 people die of cholera every day, noted later that he had never seen a place the size of Galt suffer so much as he did in 1834.<sup>30</sup>

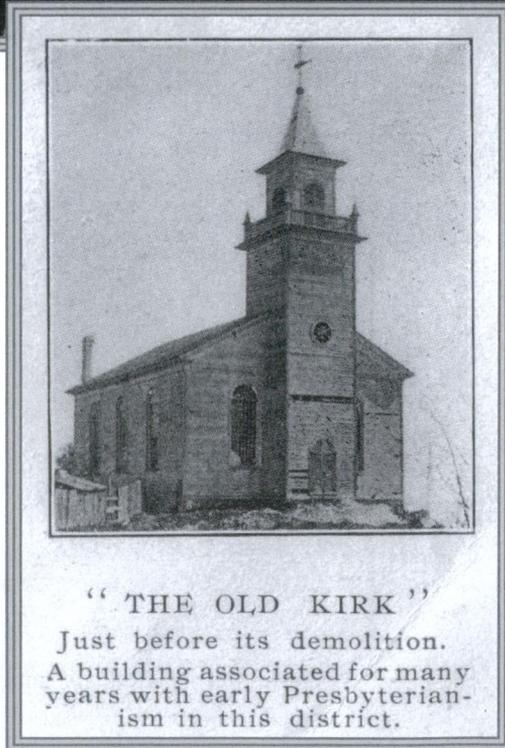
At one point there were six victims' bodies in a local hotel. These included the owner Andrew Simpson and his niece; Milo, "an aged Negro" who was the hotel stableman; and several hotel occupants.<sup>31</sup> Fear was spreading rapidly through the village.

An eyewitness account offered by Alex Burnett, and also recorded in Young's book, noted "thirty-five unceremonious burials...in the short space of thirty-six hours!"<sup>32</sup> Burnett was a local cobbler and became known as a fearless debater while providing local support for responsible government and the reform efforts of William Lyon Mackenzie.<sup>33</sup> "It was not uncommon to meet persons before dinner and learn they were buried before night," Burnett wrote, noting that some villagers feared going to bed at night because waking in the morning could not be taken for granted.<sup>34</sup>



A plaque on Landsdowne Avenue in Galt / Cambridge details the "auld kirk's" history and notes the connection between the now demolished St Andrew's Presbyterian Church and the cholera epidemic.

**(Color Plate 3)**



(Above) rynch mills / (Below) from Picturesque and Industrial Galt, published in 1902 by Jaffray Brothers

Death came so rapidly that the newly built Associate Synod of North America (Presbyterian) church on Wellington Street was stripped of its wooden benches which were then broken down and the boards used to build coffins.<sup>35</sup> The corpses were quickly buried in the village's cemeteries and the church itself was converted into a "hospital" where people were treated for the disease.<sup>36</sup> The cholera outbreak is mentioned on a plaque standing on Lansdowne Avenue in Cambridge-Galt in 2011. It notes that construction at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, or the Auld Kirk as it would become known had started in 1833 but completion was delayed until 1835 due to the onset of the cholera epidemic.<sup>37</sup>

Because of the outbreak, Galt's growth suffered a severe setback and it would be some months before the village started to recover.<sup>38</sup>

Development did pick up during the years between 1834 and 1837 as prosperity returned to the area and new – mainly Scottish – settlers arrived. The grist mills built along the Grand River were soon milling wheat from dozens of miles around; the road to Dundas was macadamized, increasing business between the two centres; daily coaches ran between Galt, Preston, Dundas and Guelph.<sup>39</sup> The village, however, wasn't without challenges. Not long after Galt was free of cholera, there was a fire on the main street which destroyed the hotel and a store.<sup>40</sup> While it was never confirmed, there was some suggestion the burning had something to do with the fear about cholera re-establishing itself with the return of hot weather.<sup>41</sup>

## Cholera in 2011

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Although cholera is present on all inhabited continents, it is no longer a public health concern in Canada, and most developed countries, largely because of the improvements and massive investment in water treatment facilities. However, it remains a major problem in poorer countries such as Haiti and Somalia which have been devastated by natural disasters: in fact, both suffered cholera outbreaks in 2011. Generally, it is most likely to be found in countries that cannot make the large investments in infrastructure required to ensure adequate supplies of safe drinking water.<sup>42</sup>

The disease is transmitted by feces in water and can be spread by ingesting contaminated food or water or using contaminated water in food production. Water can be contaminated at source, during transportation or during storage at home.

Cholera cannot be transmitted through the air, a fact that makes the rapid growth of the disease in the 1834 outbreak surprising. At this point in time, one can only guess why it spread so quickly. Theories include: (a) food or

water being consumed during funeral ceremonies after having been handled by family members who had come into contact with a corpse; (b) poor sanitation standards meaning that outhouses were often close to water sources thus spreading the disease into drinking water; (c) through the contamination of doctors' and others' hands attempting to treat the initial victims.

Waterloo Region's medical officer of Health, Dr Liana Nolan noted that cholera can persist in water for a long time and multiply in moist leftover food. It can thrive in beverages with contaminated ice and it can be spread during food production or if food is handled by soiled hands.

A report on the British Broadcasting Corporation's website on August 25, 2011 claimed that the cholera pandemic which had spread over the past few decades had a single source, the Bay of Bengal region. Genome sequencing allowed researchers to track all world-wide samples of cholera strains to large river deltas in that area. In the modern world it can be spread quickly by passengers on long-distance airplane flights. "Many people can have cholera with no symptoms so they transmit it without realising," said Dr Nick Thomson of Cambridge University's Sanger Institute.<sup>43</sup>

Ironically, according to the World Health Organization, the most effective preventative and treatment for cholera at the time was literally right on Galt's doorstep: fresh drinking water. Cholera now is a relatively easy-to-treat disease.

The prompt administration of oral rehydration salts to replace lost fluids nearly always results in cure. In especially severe cases, intravenous administration of fluids may be required to save the patient's life. Left untreated, however, cholera can kill quickly following the onset of symptoms. This can happen at a speed that has incited fear and paralyzed commerce throughout history. Although such reactions are no longer justified, cholera continues to be perceived by many as a deadly and highly contagious threat that can spread through international trade in food.<sup>44</sup>

## Notes

1. Geoffrey Hayes, *Waterloo County: An Illustrated History*, (Kitchener: Waterloo Historical Society, 1997), p. 14. Hayes' number of 250 for Galt's 1834 population means that perhaps 50 people from the village died in the outbreak. An unknown number from outlying townships can be added to the Galt total. It is not beyond belief that upwards of 100 victims died. Verifiable numbers, however, are much lower; see the associated essay, "Cholera's 1834 Victims," following this article.
2. The *Canadian-Oxford Dictionary*, 1998 edition, defines cholera as "an infectious and often fatal disease of the small intestine caused by the bacterium *vibrio cholerae* resulting in severe vomiting and diarrhea."
3. Hayes, p. 14. Robert Miller (c1805-1895) received his degree as Master of Surgery in 1832 at the University of Glasgow; took a degree as MD in 1850 from the

University of New York. Miller died in London, England as a member of the Royal College of Physicians.

James Young, *Reminiscences of the History of Galt and the Settlement of Dumfries in the Province of Ontario*, (Toronto: Hunter, Rose and Company, 1880), pp. 93-107. Young was born in Galt the year after the cholera outbreak. His book, first published in 1880, relied heavily on his years of experience as a newspaper reporter in the village and on interviews with surviving pioneers from the Galt area. It is essential reading for an understanding not only of the cholera incident but of all early Galt history. Many unaccredited facts in this essay had their source in Young. Also see: Jim Quantrell, *Cambridge Mosaic, An Inquiry into Who's Who in the History of Cambridge*, (Cambridge: The City of Cambridge, 1998), pp. 234-235. This essay contains detailed information on James Young himself.

4. Miller had been preceded as a doctor in Galt by Elam Stimson (1792-1869). Gaining his medical degree in New Hampshire in 1819, Stimson set up practice at Galt in 1824 and remained until 1831 when he moved to London, Ontario. In a pamphlet titled *The cholera beacon, being a treatise on the epidemic cholera as it appeared in Upper Canada in 1832-34*, published in Dundas in 1835, Stimson laid out his thoughts on the causes of cholera "...some Atmospheric Impurity and the Proximate Cause an Imperfection in the Performance of the Chemical Functions of the Lungs." His treatment? "Massive doses of calomel [mercury and chlorine compound] with ginger tea and alcohol, and copious bleeding of the patient." The author of Stimson's life in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, C. M. Godfrey, notes, perhaps somewhat facetiously, that "...many of Stimson's patients, including his wife and a son, died." From [www.biographi.ca](http://www.biographi.ca). Search Stimson, Elam (as at August 3, 2011).
5. Quantrell, p. 146.
6. *Ibid.* For more on Scott, see W.V. Uttley, *A History of Kitchener, Ontario*, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press reissue, 1975), p. 40 et al as indexed. Also see Young, p.105. John Scott moved to nearby Berlin in 1835 and established himself as a prominent member of the community. In 1852, he was instrumental in having Berlin named county seat for the new County of Waterloo of which he was named warden. When Berlin became a village in 1854 he was the first elected reeve. He died two years later.
7. Young, pp. 97-98.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Kenneth McLaughlin, *Cambridge: The Making of a Canadian City*, (Burlington: Windsor Publications, 1987), pp. 58-60. McLaughlin tracks the relentless path of cholera in Upper and Lower Canada. At least a thousand Quebecers died in 1832 and 1833. In mid-July 1834, Ottawa and Prescott reported cases. July 18, Brockville. July 21, Cornwall. July 26, Kingston. July 27, Toronto and Hamilton. July 28, Galt, Waterloo and Dumfries. From this it is obvious that there was much more to the cholera epidemic than a circus appearance. Galt and area would probably have been infected in any case but the circus has been assigned the specific blame by history.
10. Young, p. 98. Absalom Shade (1793-1862) was, along with William Dickson, one of the most important men in the early history and development of Galt. Also see Quantrell, pp. 187-189.
11. Young, p. 99.
12. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moses\\_Springer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moses_Springer) (as at August 2011).

13. Janet Seally, *Profiles from the past, Faces from the future: Waterloo 150*, (Waterloo, Waterloo Public Library, 2007), p. 9. Moses Springer went on to become one of the founding fathers of Waterloo, the first reeve of the village in 1857 and the first mayor of the town in 1876. Springer had been born on a farm near Blair and after his parents died, Mennonite bishop Joseph Hagey of Hespeler took him in. His formal schooling was limited but William Collins provided him with lessons. Springer had successful careers as a teacher, merchant and community leader. Among other things, Springer started a German-language newspaper in Waterloo called *Der Canadische Bauernfreund* in 1854. He died in 1898.
14. Ezra E. Eby, *A Biographical History of Waterloo Township, Volume I*, (Berlin, Ontario: privately published, 1895), p. 550. Also see subsequent editions by Joseph Meyer Snyder, 1931, and Eldon Weber, 1971.
15. Jacob Stroh, "Frederick Gaukel," *Waterloo Historical Society*, Volume 16, (1928), p. 86. The author was a grandson to Frederick Gaukel and goes on to note the "double-headstone in the East End Mennonite Cemetery in Kitchener" which marked the twin cholera deaths of his grandmother and uncle.
16. Isaac Horst, *Up the Conestogo*, (Mount Forest: privately printed, 1979), pp. 415-416.
17. Elizabeth Bloomfield, *Waterloo Township through Two Centuries*, (Kitchener: Waterloo Historical Society, 2006), p. 117.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Hayes, p. 14.
20. Paul Knowles, *A History of New Hamburg*, (New Hamburg: English Garden Publishers, 2002), p. 27. Also see Marie Voisin, *William Scott and His Extended Family*, (New Hamburg: privately published, 2009), p.10.
21. Knowles, p.27. This *Berlin News Record* quote is in Knowles but without a date. Also see Ernst Ritz, *New Hamburg as it Really Was*, (New Hamburg: Ritz Printing, 2003), p. 6.
22. Knowles, p. 28. The account of the state of New Hamburg in 1834 could be misinterpreted a bit here. That year, according to Marie Voisin (note 20 above, p. 10), in her comprehensive study of the founding of New Hamburg, the hamlet consisted of little except a grouping of huts, cabins and outbuildings rather than any substantial industrial structures. Still, the loss of the mill owner was devastating. Voisin says Cushman built and operated a sawmill and that William Scott erected the community's first grist mill 1848. Knowles (note 20 above, p. 27) says Cushman built a grist mill. Ritz (note 21 above, p. 4) states Cushman built both.
23. Bloomfield, p. 117. Also see an essay on these 1832 deaths which follows this current article.
24. Andrew W. Taylor, *Our Todays and Yesterdays*, (Galt: Municipality of North Dumfries, 1970), p. 35. All spelling and grammar are as in the original.
25. Kate Conway, "Pioneer Days in Wellington," *Guelph Mercury*, March to November 1889. As shown at [www.clarksoftomfad.ca/CholeraScareof1834.htm](http://www.clarksoftomfad.ca/CholeraScareof1834.htm) (as at August 19, 2011). Stirton (1816-1908) was elected reeve of Puslinch Township (1853-1857), then became a member of the Province of Canada Legislative Assembly (1858-1867), and of the House of Commons in Ottawa (1867-1876.) He was also a long-time (1876-1904) postmaster in Guelph.
26. John Connon, *Elora: The Early History of Elora and Vicinity*, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1975), p. 51. Diary spellings and grammar are reproduced as in the original.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 178-180.
28. By age 38, when he died, Brant had already fought bravely in the War of 1812, most notably at the Battle for Queenston Heights; served in the British Indian department in Upper Canada; travelled to England to argue for land ownership in the upper Grand River; and had become the first native elected to the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada. See his listing in Wikipedia at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Brant\\_\(Mohawk\\_chief\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Brant_(Mohawk_chief)) (as at August 21, 2011).
29. Young, p. 99.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
33. Quantrell, p. 22.
34. Young, p. 102. The full text of Burnett's eyewitness letter is printed in a brief essay on cholera victims following this article.
35. Rosemary Ambrose, *Waterloo County Churches*, (Kitchener: Waterloo-Wellington Branch: Ontario Genealogical Society, 1993), p. 14. This is First United Church, located at 15 Wellington Street, Cambridge but the 2011 structure was erected in 1863.
36. The statement should not mislead the modern reader! There was *no* effective treatment for cholera in 1834. Germ theory was still four decades away. All this "hospital" could do was provide a resting place, water and comforting words. Young, on page 106, notes that the most common "remedy" was brandy to which certain drugs were added to augment its fiery "healing" qualities.
37. From a plaque in St Andrews Park on Lansdowne Avenue in Cambridge / Galt. Construction of the church started in 1833 and was delayed with the cholera outbreak the following year. Information about the plaque can be found at [www.waynecook.com/waterloo.html](http://www.waynecook.com/waterloo.html) which is a website about historical plaques of Waterloo County. The plaque was erected by the City of Cambridge. Also see Ambrose, p. 16. There is also an informal article on the St Andrews plaque by James Ellsworth at [www.cambridgenow.ca/newsarchives/archivedetails.cfm?id=123](http://www.cambridgenow.ca/newsarchives/archivedetails.cfm?id=123) (as at August 3, 2011).
38. Young, p. 107.
39. McLaughlin, pp. 33-35.
40. Young, p. 108.
41. *Ibid.* Also see Jim Quantrell, *A Part of Our Past – Essays on Cambridge's History*, (Cambridge: City of Cambridge Archives, 2000), pp. 151-154. The author tells an interesting story of the cholera's effect 50 years later. A man named David MacGeorge is remembered because of his dedicated work at Tassie's School / Galt Collegiate Institute. Before that, he had been hired in 1883 to move bodies from their original resting places to Mount View Cemetery. His new wife was fearful that there might still be some cholera bacteria present and convinced him to leave the job. He became caretaker at the school and worked there from 1884 until retiring in the First World War era.
42. Interview via e-mail with Liana Nolan, Medical Officer of Health for Waterloo Region, December 22, 2010.
43. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-14664450](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-14664450) (as at August 26, 2011).
44. <http://www.who.int/topics/cholera/treatment/en/index.html> (as at July 6, 2011).

# CHOLERA'S 1834 VICTIMS AND ACCOUNTS

by rych mills

This follow-up article to Bob Burt's study of the cholera epidemic will consist of four chapters.

1) **The Victims.** Who were these people struggling almost alone against the outbreak? How many actually died? Few names – and only vague numbers – have surfaced through the intervening 175-plus years. The most commonly used phrase is "...one-fifth of Galt's population" and to that is usually appended something such as "...and some from the surrounding area." A breakdown by geography will help understand the diffusion of the cholera.

2) **Contemporary Accounts** of the 1834 epidemic and medicine's awareness of cholera at that time are rare but two will give the reader an insight into the horror of cholera. The 1834 outbreak was the first major medical disaster to strike in the future Waterloo County. As described in Bob Burt's preceding study of the epidemic, medicine of the day had little perception of, or defence against, this terrible disease. An excerpt from an 1835 medical account of cholera reveals medicine's lack of understanding its causes.

3) **Newspaper Reports.** There were no newspapers yet established in the area of the future Waterloo County so that source for names and numbers does not exist. However, more distant communities did have daily or weekly papers and from Toronto, Kingston and Montreal come accounts of the Galt outbreak.

4) **The Cholera Broadside** outlines how a modern public historian has attempted to capture those midsummer days of disease in 1834 Galt.

## 1) The Victims

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No comprehensive list of victims of 1834 can ever be completed at this late date but from various publications mentioning the cholera epidemic, the following register can be compiled. Governmental bodies that would soon require registration of all deaths were not yet fully in place in Gore District in which the local townships around Galt were included.

[Full bibliographical references to all sources mentioned in the following study of the victims are found in the endnotes of Bob Burt's preceding article.]

## A) Galt proper

Any reading of this era must begin with James Young's comprehensive 1880 book (reprinted by the Galt Public Library in the 1960s) *Reminiscences of the Early History of Galt and the Settlement of Dumfries*. All later local history books and articles have leaned heavily on Young's cholera chapter which takes up pages 97 through 107. Occupying several pages is a remarkable letter written in August 1834 by Alexander Burnett, a prominent early citizen of Galt. It is reprinted later in this article. His narrative of the cholera calamity is spellbinding and does give some numbers but unfortunately provides no victims' names.

*Young, pp. 101-103.* These details are taken from Burnett's lengthy letter: "July 30, 1834: Five persons died by sunset. July 31, 1834: Nine victims before sunrise. By sunrise, 35 burials including those from both the village and outlying "suburbs." August 1, 1834: Fewer dead. August 2, 3, 4 1834: From the villagers, 33 had perished." [It is unclear whether Burnett intended to have these 33 from the village include those already listed dead in the previous few days.]

*Young, pp. 104-107.* These deaths in Galt are extracted from Young's vividly descriptive text: "Milo, hotel hostler; Andrew Simpson, hotel owner, Simpson's niece; two or three others in the hotel; Marshall, a cooper who attended the hotel dead." James Young also gives details about a specific burial of four men at "...the eastern end of the stone bridge on the macadamized road, north of the town...two of those buried were [brothers] named Lambertson and Vincent and among those who took part in the burial was Alonzo Bliss." Young ends his laconic record of this burial with: "On returning home, Bliss said to his wife, 'If cholera is catching, I will take it.' This prediction, alas, proved too true. The next morning he was dead."<sup>1</sup> Jim Quantrell, in his 1998 publication, *Cambridge Mosaic*, notes on page 16 that Alonzo Bliss was a chair maker with a factory along Mill Creek. This would place him close to the burial site noted by Young above.

*Young, p. 104.* In a footnote, Young lists the following victims' names, recalled in the late 1870s by people still living who remembered the outbreak four decades earlier: "Mrs James K. Andrews; Harriet Rich, Joseph Aussam, James Maxwell, a clerk at Fergus and Andrew's store; Dorothy Marshall; Andrew Simpson and niece; Alonzo Bliss; Mrs Archibald Hunter; Macgregor, Hunter's apprentice; the brothers Lambertson; Thomas Keachie; William Shepherd, wife and son; Daniel Forbes; one Vincent; a little daughter of H.G. Barlow; J. Willits; Milo, the colored hostler; and Marshall, the cooper."

Another valuable resource is Ezra Eby's *A Biographical History of Waterloo Township and other Townships of the County*, (1895). Previously, a detailed reading of the thick volumes would have been necessary to extract the cholera deaths but the information's inclusion in the Waterloo Region Generations (WRG)

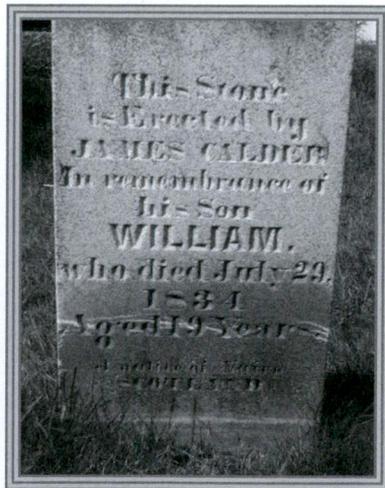
database (<http://generations.regionofwaterloo.ca>) much simplifies the process. This source also lists a number of Galt residents who perished in 1834 from cholera. Many of those shown in the WRG database in August 2012 had also been taken from James Young's 1880 book noted earlier. Young had relied on people's memories to compile a short list of cholera deaths so few specific details of these victims were printed in his book.

**B) Dumfries<sup>2</sup>**

*Young, pp. 104.* His endnote, referred to above, also lists Alexander Simpson, three of his family and his brother-in-law, all of Branchton, in Dumfries Township.

Andrew Taylor's *Our Todays and Yesterdays* (1970), p. 35 places William Shepherd, who was also noted in Young's Galt list above, as being a carpenter living in Dumfries Township. Taylor shows a Mr Davis of Dumfries Township dying of cholera. The Joseph Aussam in Young's Galt list is also a Dumfries Township resident according to Taylor.

Marie Voisin in *William Scott and his Extended Family* (2009), p. 127 says the two circus men who supposedly brought the cholera epidemic to Galt were buried atop a hill in Dumfries Township behind the home which in 2012 is #1379 Highway 24 South.<sup>3</sup>



Warren Stauch

At the busy corner of Regional Roads 97 and 47 lies Cedar Creek Cemetery, one of the region's oldest. Two of the best-preserved original grave markers of 1834 cholera victims stand facing east just a few metres from the road. (Top): IN MEMORY OF / ROBERT MARSHALL / WHO DIED / July 28, 1834, / AGED / 49 YEARS. / Native of Co. Roxburghshire / Scotland (Bottom): This Stone / is Erected by / JAMES CALDER / In remembrance of / his son / WILLIAM. / who died July 29, / 1834 / Aged 19 Years. / A native of Nairn / SCOTLAND

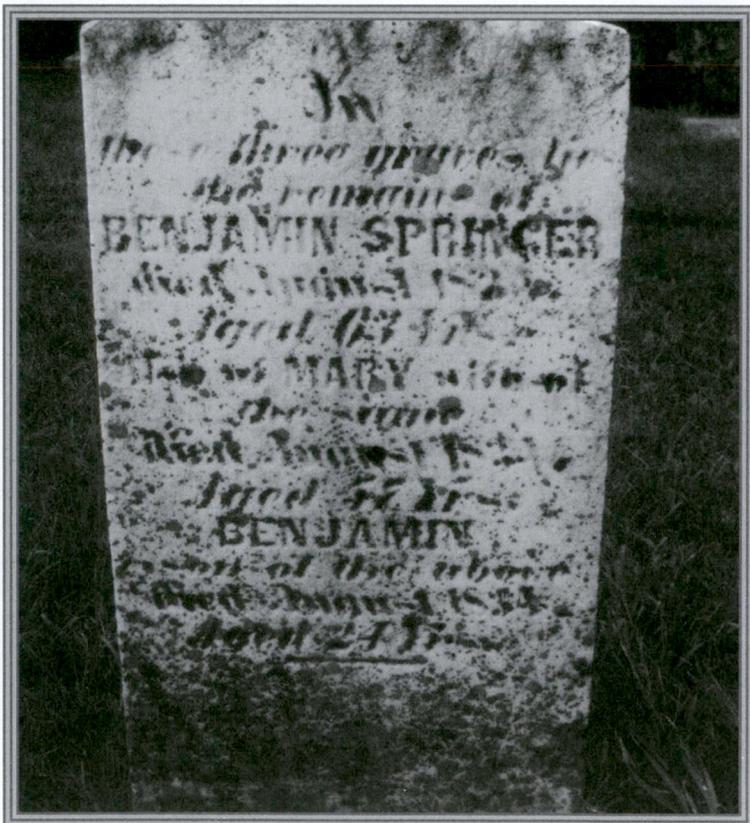
Sprinkled in cemeteries throughout and around Waterloo Region are hard-to-read but not mute grave markers that still speak to the 1834 epidemic's consequences. Over these four pages, WHS member Sherwood Hagey has captured a few of the remaining visual reminders of the cholera outbreak.

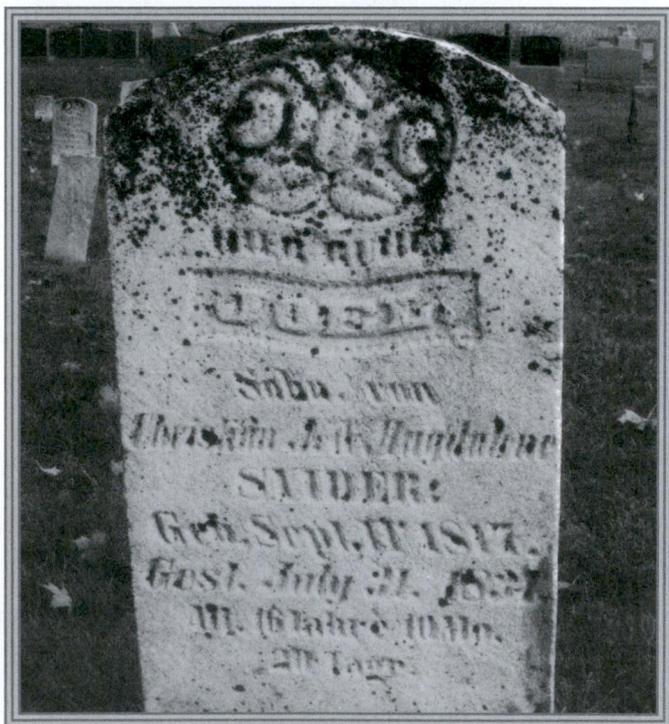
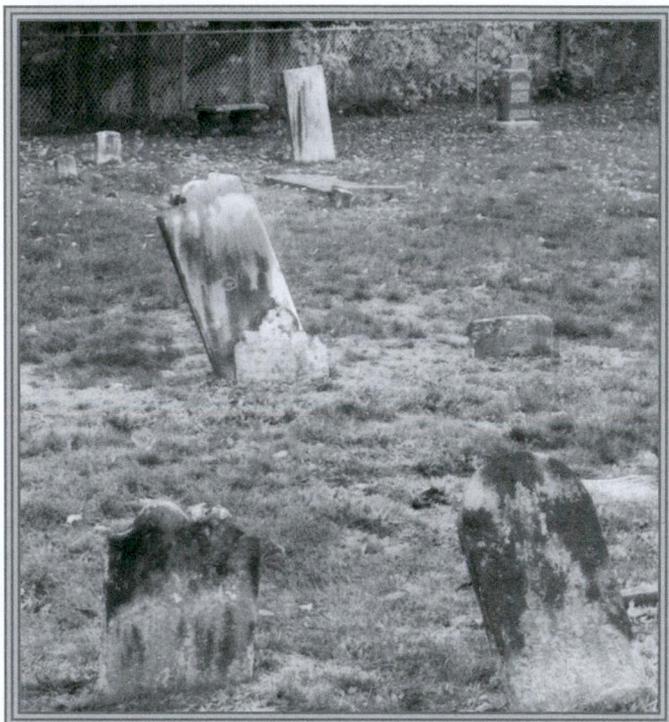
(Below): Blenheim Mennonite Cemetery lies just outside Waterloo Region on Concession 14 of Blandford-Blenheim Township and contains this testimonial to the events of mid-summer 1834:

In / these three graves lie / the remains of / BENJAMIN SPRINGER / died August 1834 / Aged 63 Yrs / also of MARY wife of / the same / Died August 1834 / Aged 57 Yrs / BENJAMIN / son of the above / died August 1834 / Aged 24 Yrs

(Next page, top): With burials as early as 1804, Old Blair Memorial Cemetery, Ashton Street, Blair / Cambridge is reputed to be the oldest in Waterloo Region. In the foreground of this photograph is the marker for Elizabeth Rosenberger Bricker: In memory / of Elizabeth Bricker / was born / April the 4th 1806 / and died August / the 2th [sic] 1834 / aged 28 years 3 months and 28 days

(Next page, bottom): Bloomingdale Mennonite Cemetery on Snyder's Flats Road in Bloomingdale was once known as Snyder / Schneider Mennonite Cemetery and it is where Joel Snider was laid to rest after the cholera struck. Hier Ruhe / JOEL / Sohn. Von Christian J. & Magdalane / SNIDER: / Geb. Sept. 11. 1817 / Gest. July 31, 1834 / Alt. 16 Jahre 10 Mo. / 20 Tage



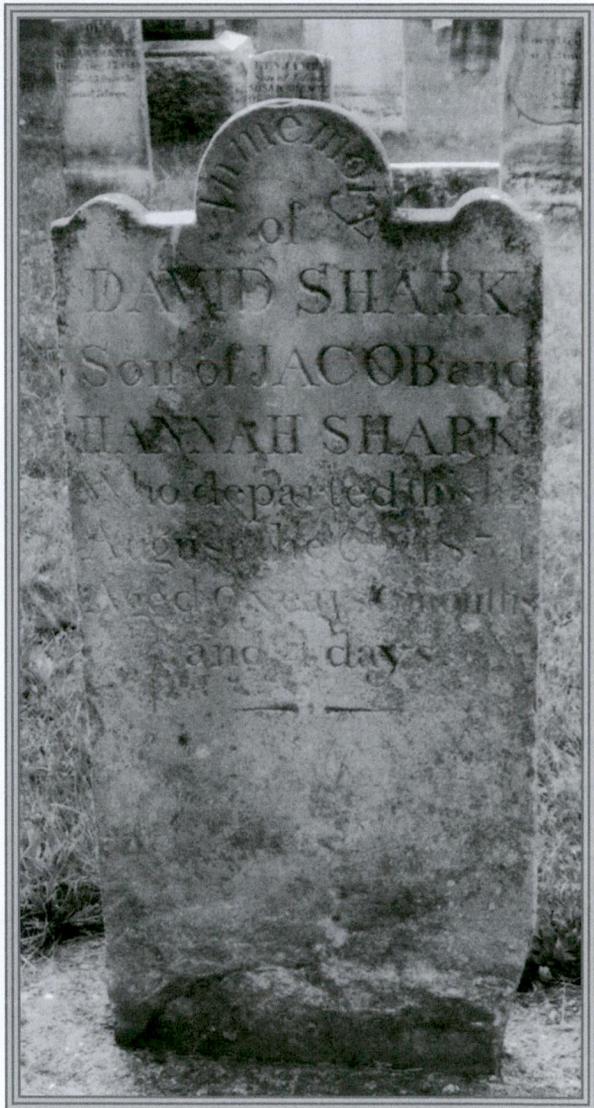


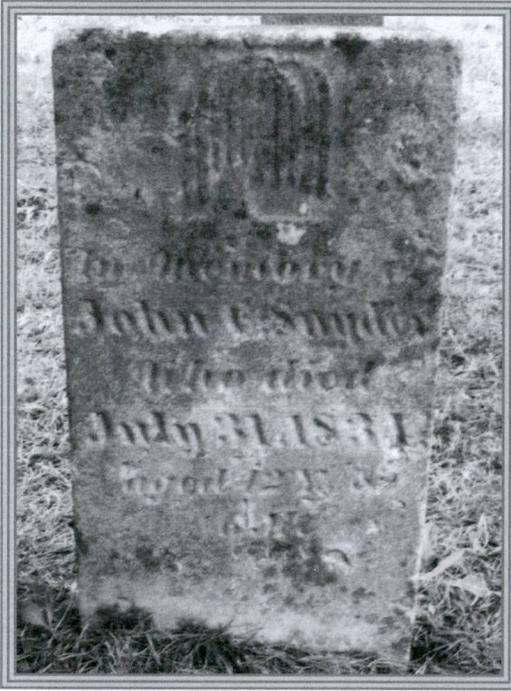


At Cressman's / Breslau Mennonite Cemetery on Woolwich Street in Breslau, the two earliest grave markers are those of a father and son, both cholera victims. A memorial stone notes Jacob Sherk's date along with his wife Hannah's 1874 death but his actual 1834 marker is seen just to the left and it is marked simply J. S. / 1834.

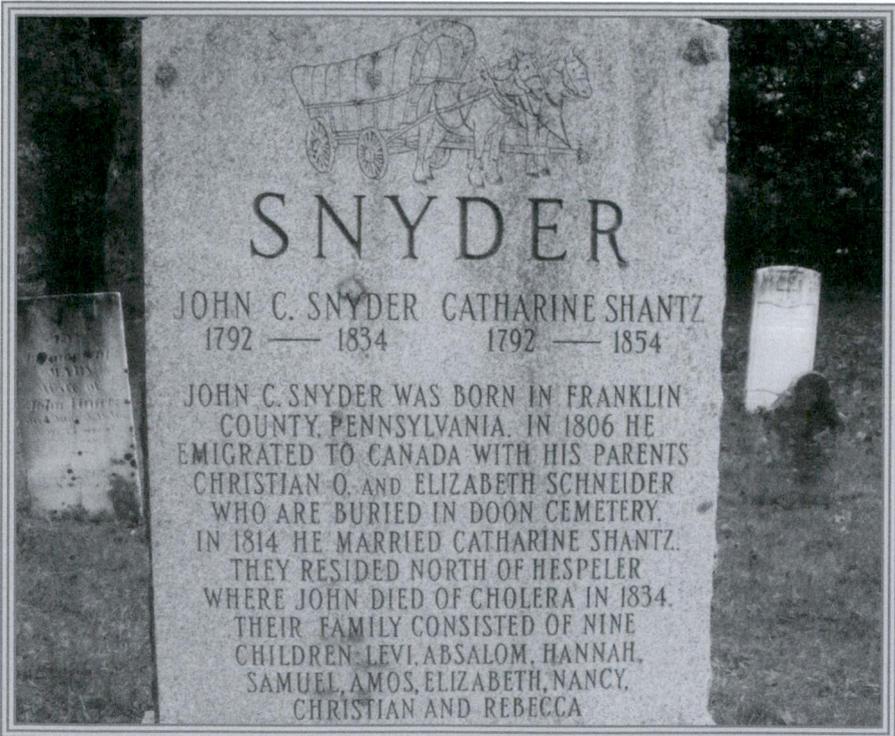
The modern stone reads: SHERK / JACOB / BORN AUGUST 18, 1795 / FRANKLIN CO. PENNA / DIED OF CHOLERA / AUGUST 6, 1834 / HUSBAND OF / HANNAH BECHTEL / 1799 — 1874 / SON OF 1800 / WATERLOO CO. PIONEERS / JOSEPH AND ELIZABETH SHERK.

Three to the right of the modern memorial is their son David's original marker (detail right). Like other early immigrant surnames, Sherk underwent several spelling variations: In memory / of / DAVID SHARK / Son of JACOB and / HANNAH SHARK / Who departed this life / August the 6th 1834 / Aged 9 years 9 months / and 4 days.





Twenty years after Wanner Mennonite Cemetery (in 2012 on Maple Grove Road west of Hespeler / Cambridge) had its first burial, it received its first cholera victim: In Memory of / John C. Snyder / who died / July 31, 1834 / aged 42 Y. & / 6 Mo. In 1982, family descendants erected a memorial to John and his wife Catharine Shantz. It provided more details of their lives under an engraving of a Conestoga wagon similar to one which would have been beside the teenaged John as the family trekked north from Pennsylvania to the banks of the Grand River near Bloomingdale.



JOHN C. SNYDER CATHARINE SHANTZ  
1792 — 1834 1792 — 1854

JOHN C. SNYDER WAS BORN IN FRANKLIN COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA. IN 1806 HE EMIGRATED TO CANADA WITH HIS PARENTS CHRISTIAN O. AND ELIZABETH SCHNEIDER WHO ARE BURIED IN DOON CEMETERY. IN 1814 HE MARRIED CATHARINE SHANTZ. THEY RESIDED NORTH OF HESPELER WHERE JOHN DIED OF CHOLERA IN 1834. THEIR FAMILY CONSISTED OF NINE CHILDREN- LEVI, ABSALOM, HANNAH, SAMUEL, AMOS, ELIZABETH, NANCY, CHRISTIAN AND REBECCA

The WRG website shows that in Cedar Creek cemetery in Dumfries Township, 20-year-old William Calder of Nairnshire, Scotland, found peace after cholera took his life on July 29, 1834. He was one of the first to die.<sup>4</sup>

There may be another pair of cholera victims buried at Cedar Creek although their names do not appear on the interment list of that cemetery which has been prepared by the Waterloo Region Branch, Ontario Genealogical Society. Robert and Elspeth/Euphon (Hogg) Dalgleish, both about 60, of Selkirkshire, Scotland, arrived in Dumfries Township shortly before the outbreak and reportedly died of cholera a few days later.<sup>5</sup> Another grave marker in Cedar Creek shows a Robert Marshall dying July 28, 1834. He may be the Marshall listed in James Young's footnote referred to earlier.

In Isaac Horst's *Up the Conestogo* (1970), pp. 415-416, the author mentions the Rosenberger family. Father Jacob, mother Polly (Detweiler) and sons Henry, 23, and Joseph, 19, lived in Beverly Township just east of Dumfries. The four died and are buried in that township. Daughter Elizabeth, 28, had earlier married John Bricker and lived near Roseville where she passed away. She is buried in Blair cemetery which, in 1834, was part of Waterloo Township.

*Kate Conway*. In her articles on the life of Township of Puslinch pioneer politician David Stirton, Conway writes that although many people from Puslinch – adjacent to, and north of, Dumfries – had visited the ill-fated circus at Galt, the disease “broke out in one family only.” Two members of the Smith family were subsequently “buried on top of the hill on the leading road from Mr Stirton's old neighborhood [Puslinch] to Hespeler.”<sup>6</sup>

### C) Wilmot Township

A close reading of Eby's book via the WRG site reveals the cruel effect cholera had on Wilmot Township. George Reinhart and a male named Hailer, both aged 24, were two victims. Michael Ruby, 37, his wife Barbara (Kochersperger), 38, and son Michael,<sup>7</sup> all died of cholera in Wilmot Township in August 1834 as did Margaret Wolfe and an infant daughter. A male of unknown age, Jacob Smith, was another Wilmot victim. A cholera death at Mannheim in Wilmot Township was Catharine Latschaw, age 33. The Springer family, mentioned in Bob Burt's preceding article, lost Benjamin Sr, aged 64; wife Mary Rykeman, 58; and their son Benjamin Jr, 25.<sup>8</sup> All three are buried at Blenheim Mennonite cemetery just south of New Dundee. Likewise, a father and son both named Abraham Janzen were buried there after dying of cholera.

Isaac Horst, in *Up the Conestogo* pp. 415-416, also shows those two; Abraham Janzen Sr and his son Abraham aged 25.

Author Marie Voisin, on page ten of her book on William Scott noted above, tells of the cholera deaths of Josiah Cushman, 52, his second wife, Catherine (Whitmore) (born c1786), their infant son Joseph William Cushman and a married daughter from his first marriage, Elizabeth Amelia Cushman Cowlam, 21, plus several others in (the later named village of) New Hamburg.<sup>9</sup>

#### D) Waterloo Township

Geoffrey Hayes' *Waterloo County: An Illustrated History* (1997), pp. 14-15 lists the previously mentioned Branchton quartet and the Cushman death in New Hamburg. He also notes the cholera death of Bishop Benjamin Eby's first wife, Mary, in Berlin.

Elizabeth Bloomfield shows on page 117 in *Waterloo Township through Two Centuries* (1995) several victims including John C. Snyder in southeast Waterloo Township near Kossuth. He was a son of Christian Schneider and Elizabeth (Erb) Schneider of Doon and died of cholera on July 31, 1834. A relative of his, Joel Snider, was descended from Jacob "Yoch" Schneider of Bloomingdale and he caught cholera and perished at age 17. Jacob Sherk and his young son David perished east of Berlin near the Grand River. Bloomfield also lists Mary Eby who was born Maria Brubacher in Pennsylvania, married Benjamin Eby and died late in the outbreak on August 18, 1834. She was buried at First Mennonite Cemetery on King Street East in Berlin. Frederick Gaukel's second wife Maria died of cholera in Berlin as did Gaukel's son from his first marriage, Heinrich, aged 21. He, too, was buried at First Mennonite Cemetery. These names would all seem to be extracted from Ezra Eby's book.

Added to the previously noted victims in Berlin are 23-year old Margaret Koser; an infant, Isaac Hoffman; and a male named Reynolds. Two males whose first names are not known, 24-year-old Eydt and 34-year-old Klein, both of Waterloo Township, were claimed by cholera in August 1834. Also listed by Bloomfield are Barbara Wismer, 42, and husband Henry Schlichter, 45. They both died near Preston on August 10 and 11, 1834. Also in Bloomfield's roster of cholera losses were two Sherks. Jacob was just 39 while his son David was not yet 10 years old. They are both buried in the Breslau Mennonite / Cressman's Cemetery in Breslau. Jacob was the son of two of the first pioneers in Waterloo County, Joseph and Elizabeth Sherk.

E) Wellesley Township was not organized until the mid-1840s and even though there were already settlers on the lands, there is no indication any visited Galt in 1834 and contracted cholera.



*Sherwood Hagey*

Three cholera victims were buried in Bishop Benjamin Eby's Berlin cemetery which later became Kitchener's First Mennonite Cemetery on King Street East. Bishop Eby would have known the first two people, Maria Gaukel and Heinrich Gaukel. Maria was his friend Frederick Gaukel's second wife and Heinrich was the 20-year-old son from Frederick's first marriage.

The twin Gaukel stone's two joined panels read: Maria Gaukel / zweit Ehefrau von / Friedrich Gaugel [sic] starb. 4 Aug. 1834 / Alt. 33 Jahre 8 M. / 24 Tage and Heinrich Gaukel / Sohn von / Friedrich Gaukel / starb. 4 Aug. 1834 / Alt. 20 Jahre 8 M. / 18 Tage.



Sherwood Hagey

Two weeks later, with the outbreak seemingly over, Benjamin Eby suffered even more when his own wife Maria became one of the final 1834 cholera victims.

The remarkably well-preserved Eby marker says: Hier / Ruhen die Gebeine / von / Maria Eby / Ehefrau von Benjamin Eby / Sie wurde geboren den / 18ten August 1789 / Und ist gestorben den / 18ten August 1834 / in einem Alter von / 45 Jahre und 12 Tage.

There is some confusion in the engraved wording. Maria's (née Brubacher) birthdate should read 6ten August 1789. Bishop Eby and she had been married for 27 years; he lived for another 19 years and did not remarry.

F) **Woolwich Township**, formed in 1816 along with Waterloo and Dumfries Townships, had a number of settlers by 1834 but no record exists to show any died of cholera.

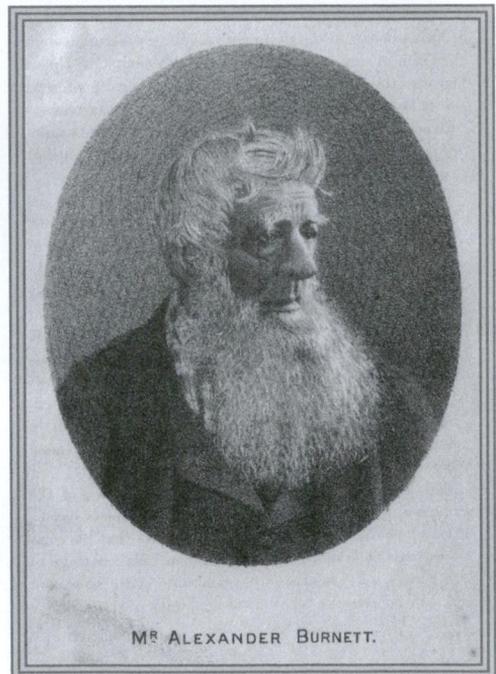
The Waterloo Historical Society would welcome any other names or news about the 1832-1834 cholera outbreaks in this area. Please contact the editor.

## 2) Contemporary Accounts

### A) Alexander Burnett's Cholera Letter

Noted near the beginning of this chapter is the lengthy letter written by Alexander Burnett which was quoted at length in James Young's book *Reminiscences of Galt*. Published in 1880, *Reminiscences* is noteworthy on many levels and Young's fondness for his friend Alexander Burnett shines through the pages. In the Waterloo Historical Society's 1995 annual volume (number 83) John Hagopian profiled Burnett in depth, recognising his numerous attributes. The article, "A Proverbial Radical Cobbler," focuses on the prominent and important role Burnett played in Galt's Reform politics movement of the 1830s through 1850s. Only in passing does Hagopian mention Burnett's "harrowing description of Galt's cholera epidemic." Indeed, that 1834 letter also reveals (unless Young, a long-time newspaper reporter, has polished up Burnett's writing) an author and historical witness of immense import. To transport the reader back to those desperate days in Galt, this is Alexander Burnett's August 1834 letter to "Mr Mitchell" in Hamilton, exactly as printed in James Young's book *Reminiscences of Galt*, pp. 100-103:

Alexander Burnett (1796- after 1871). The native of Aberdeen Scotland was a prominent citizen of Galt from his arrival in 1834 until his death. His descriptive letter is the best first-person record of the cholera outbreak known.



from James Young, *Reminiscences of the Early History of Galt*, 1880

Were I able to give you any idea of the state of things in Galt during the cholera, I would, but do not find myself equal to the task. Yet having once begun, I shall make a feeble effort; what is wanting you can fill up yourself.

On Monday, the 28<sup>th</sup> of July, all was life, and each was on the tiptoe of expectation. There was to be, and was, exhibited such a collection of wild animals as never was in these parts before. Towards noon, the steady and honest Dutchmen of Waterloo, began to canter into the village, with their well-fed horses, and thrifty wives, attended by plainly-dressed, chubby-cheeked children. Dumfries, from its utmost verge, poured in its tribute of sturdy Scotch, studded here and there with a whiskey-living wight,<sup>10</sup> who was glad to make the show his pretended errand, although he in truth only wanted something to wet his wizen.<sup>11</sup> Beverly, Blenheim, and more distant townships, sent in their sight-seeing sons and daughters.

In the afternoon all was bustle and confusion, nothing doing, nothing saying, but – “Have you been in at the beasts!” “What a beast the Lion is!” and “how large is that there Bear!” and “what creatures the monkeys are!” So passed the afternoon, with now and then an enquiry about the showman who had come to Galt sick with the cholera; but this was hushed down lest it might injure the Show, or hurt the stir of the tavern. Things went along until the gathering dispersed, the sun setting on many a son of intemperance, rolling home under the influence of the “wee drap o’ barley bree.”<sup>12</sup> Those more regardless of their home, and equally regardless of themselves, hung about the tavern and the village, while, by their joint efforts the loud voice of mirth had given way to the rude and boisterous roar of riot. Such was the state of things when I bade one and all of them “good-night,” went to bed and slept soundly.

Tuesday was just like other days, with various conjectures as to the value of the establishment of beasts, what cash they might have got, and so on.

Wednesday came, and with it a certain dubious expression might be seen on the countenances of some of the villagers. Others, thoughtless of the lurking foe, followed their usual avocations. Before noon there were seen to be clusters of three and four together, whispering their doubts and fears, even then afraid to speak the name of the horrid pest aloud. The Doctor of the village appeared to be more than usually busy, by his pony standing by hours at his door, saddled and girth unslackened.<sup>13</sup> Soon after noon the secret was out! The cholera, with all its horror and all its malignity, was upon us. Two persons had died, and several were sick. By sundown three more had fallen, and others were victims to the scourge. Fear now began to lay her timorous hand upon us, and each thought he felt symptoms that he never felt before. Our sleep was unsound and unrefreshing. Long and dreary was the night, while with doubt and anxiety the morning came.

That (Thursday) morning the sun rose upon nine of our neighbours and acquaintances who had settled their worldly affairs and paid the debt of nature. These were unburied, and yet lay as death had met them. Now was the hour of trial. The arm of industry became powerless, and hum of business ceased to meet the ear. Nought was heard but the sound and stroke of the coffinmaker’s hammer, as he nailed the rude and unsmoothed boards together, that the dead might be gathered to their fathers who had gone before them. Even the noise of the wagons to and from the burying-ground, struck you as having something ominous in the sound they made. Now and then your attention was arrested by the echo of the distant trampling of a coming horse, whose lathered sides and expanded nostrils showed his headlong haste, while the anxious features and sunken visage of the rider, told he was no messenger of fun, or heedless follower of a thoughtless frolic. He came for the assistance of the Doctor, but alas! How vain! The demon of Death, now triumphing in his strength and glorying in the number

of his victims, laughed to scorn the healing art, and bade defiance to the powers of drugs or medicine. Yet still, glad to cling to hope, the Doctor was sought and sent for.

So passed Thursday, and the sun of the day had not set when the last of thirty-five unceremonious burials had taken place in the neighbouring burying-ground – those from our village and suburbs in the short space of thirty-six hours. Twilight came, when all who had a chance reluctantly prepared for bed – yes, reluctantly, for, believe me, each had a secret dread and heart-felt fear that ere tomorrow's dawn, he or she should also be numbered with the dead. The night passed slow and restless.

With the morning of Friday, those who were first stirring were afraid and yet anxious to know what had been the events of the last few hours. On enquiry, glad was the heart when it was heard that few comparatively had been attacked, and fewer dead. Hope, the steady friend of man, again beamed in our eyes, while our hearts beat high with exultation. It seemed as if the monster Pestilence, had gorged itself with the number of its victims, and fatigued its energies with the work of destruction. Those who were under its power appeared to have greater strength to struggle for existence. It was less quick in its action and operation. Yet, steady to its purpose, and unrelenting in its grasp, some near and dear ones were suddenly attacked, and unexpectedly carried off, which cases, as they occurred, nearly extinguished the rising flame of hope. Nevertheless, it was abating.

Saturday, Sunday and Monday, it sought its prey and found them, although fewer in number. Two or three showed symptoms of recovery and two actually recovered. From out among the little circle of villagers, thirty-three had gone to their long homes. Among these was the smiling infant, the man of grey hairs and experience, the stripling just budding into manhood, and the maiden blooming into woman's state, just beginning to be conscious of her power and influence over the rougher part of creation; the man of steady habits and sedate behaviour, with the intemperate and the profligate, fell easy victims to the dreadful and afflictive malady.

Oh, my dear sir, this was the time to divest us of our highflying notions of our consequence and importance. This was the time I felt the curse of being a bachelor. My fears and anxieties were centred in myself, and became a burden to me, bearing me almost to despondency and despair. I was alone and none to care for, and no one to care for me, or such as me. The husband and the father divided his cares and his fears amongst his family. He saw in his wife a sympathizing nurse in sickness, and an interested friend whispering hope in approaching death. His wife, in turn, looked to him as her protector and friend, while the children, who were conscious of their danger, looked to each and both for succour and support. Life's cares are said to be comforts. I believe it. Happy he who has one who is sharer of his joys and partner of his sorrows.

Yr friend and servant, sir, I am, Alexander Burnett.

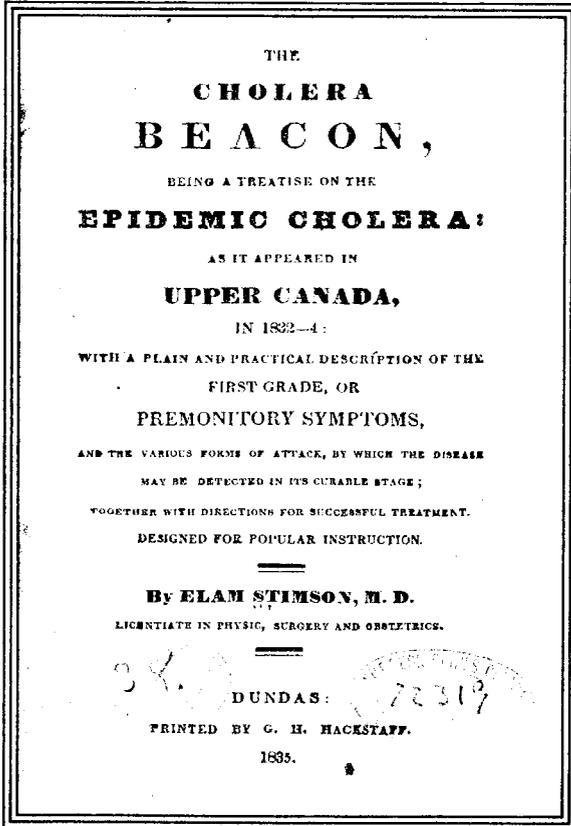
## B) Elam Stimson's 1835 Account of the Galt Outbreak

In Bob Burt's article "Three Ring Circus of Death," brief mention was made of Galt's first doctor, Elam Stimson and his 1835 booklet *The Cholera Beacon*. That publication, along with a 1937 biographical introduction of Stimson by Dr Edwin Seaborn, president of the London and Middlesex Historical Society (LMHS), was available on the internet in 2012.<sup>14</sup> One paragraph of Seaborn's biography is of special interest here as it details the life of a small-town doctor in the 1820s Grand River area:

Some time in 1824 he removed to Galt. His practice there was very extensive, Paris, Princeton, Drumbo, Ayr, Hamburg, Waterloo, Berlin, Guelph, Preston, East and West Flamborough St George, all are within the then sparsely settled country over which he travelled on horseback with capacious saddle-bags, green-baize leggings, and heavy dark 'surtout' ministering to the needs of the sick, poor and rich.... In the latter part of 1828 he removed still farther west, to London, and continued the practice of his profession.

Stimson was not in Galt during the 1834 outbreak but he quickly learned of the incident – probably via letters from friends back in Galt. In *The Cholera*

*Beacon*, published a year later, Stimson also goes into great detail about what he knows of cholera:



Elam Stimson's 1835 treatise on cholera was published in Dundas, Ontario one year after Galt (and the future Waterloo County area) suffered a devastating outbreak. With medicinal hindsight, it is easy to dismiss his work as of no value but it does contain valuable historical information on the epidemic in Upper Canada. The entire work is available through numerous websites.

<http://collections.nlm.nih.gov/pageturner/viewer.html?PID=nlm:nlmuid-64751130R-bk> (as at December 12, 2012)

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of July, 1834, Galt, a village on the Grand River, U.C., was visited by Showmen with a Menagerie. It was exhibited under an awning of canvass, nearly enclosed at the sides, and drawn together in a conical form almost to the top. The day was excessively warm, and the crowd suffocating. The exhibition lasted about 3 hours. It is estimated that about 1,000 persons were present, and that not less than 200 of them died of Cholera within ten days. The population from which the assembly at the exhibition was composed, in the Townships in the vicinity of Galt, is supposed to be about seven thousand.

The first case was in one of the Showmen, who sickened on that day, which was Monday. No other case occurred until the following Wednesday morning — on that day not less than thirty were attacked, all of whom had been at the show. The greatest number of cases were on the Thursday and Friday following — but new cases occurred for several days. In speaking of an *attack*, we here allude to the time the patient supposed the attack commenced — the time he was “taken down.” The average length of time the disease lasted after this event was about sixteen hours.

Four days previous to the exhibition of animals at Galt, two children of Mr. J. G., on the Governor’s Road, 12 miles south east of Galt, were attacked with Cholera, one of which died. On the same day (24th July) two cases of what we shall call second-grade Cholera came under our care, being the first that occurred of that form of the disease within our knowledge that season. About this time also, many were affected with first-grade symptoms — but with the exception of the children alluded to we have not been able to learn that any case of fully developed Cholera occurred in this part of the province previous to the exhibition of animals at Galt; and for several days subsequent to that event, and in which more than two hundred were attacked with Cholera, all had been at that exhibition with only two or three exceptions. From the 6th of August the disease became more general and was not confined to such as were at the Menagerie. About this time it appeared at Hamilton and Dundas — situations more low and marshy than Galt, and adjacent to Burlington Bay, or the head of Lake Ontario. From these facts it is evident that a deteriorated state of the atmosphere existed previous to the 28th July, yet the fatal catastrophe following the exhibition at Galt was mainly attributable to the highly vitiated, or imperfectly oxygenated air, produced by the numerous and sweltering crowd under the canvass — the ventilation being altogether inadequate for so numerous and crowded an assemblage. It appears that at Hamilton, Dundas and several other situations the Epidemic influence was the product of the more common causes of general infection, united with a local infection, which last is caused by the action of heat upon putrescent vegetable matter.

If Stimson’s estimate (1,000) of the number of menagerie visitors is correct, about one in eight people in the surrounding area attended the performance. Elizabeth Bloomfield shows Waterloo Township’s population alone in 1831 as 2,106 and in 1840 as 4,424 so 1834’s numbers would be in the 3,000 range.<sup>15</sup> Stimson himself lists 7,000 for all the surrounding townships. His attendance figure is the only contemporary one available. Also of importance in his account are the two cases southeast of Galt area *before* the arrival of the menagerie.<sup>16</sup>

None of the causes or reasons for the outbreak given by Stimson above were correct: rotting vegetable matter and fetid air do not cause or spread cholera. Although Stimson’s understanding of cholera as detailed in *The Cholera Beacon* appears appallingly primitive, it was in line with even the most advanced medical theories then prevalent in the United States, Great Britain and

Continental Europe. Poorly oxygenated air, blamed by Stinson, actually plays no role in the cause or spread of the cholera bacterium. A particularly valuable modern account of the medical community's struggle to comprehend cholera is found in Sandra Hempel's 2007 book, *The Strange Case of the Broad Street Pump*.<sup>17</sup> Stinson is not mentioned but his analysis of cholera would not seem out of place when positioned alongside the most advanced medical knowledge of the 1830s detailed by Hempel.

### 3) Newspaper Reports

There were few newspapers in Upper or Lower Canada at the time of the 1834 cholera outbreak and almost all were published weekly. In those days before telegraph and telephone and with somewhat erratic letter delivery service, news was naturally many days behind the occurrence. Editors got much of their out-of-town news from copies of other newspapers arriving a week or two or three after events had happened. While searching for contemporary news reports about the summer of 1834 cholera epidemic in Galt, the following accounts emerged only after diligent research by WHS member Marjorie Kohli. They shed light on how other Canadians learned of Galt's tragedy and provide researchers two centuries later with valuable information.

The *Montreal Vindicator* was published once (and sometimes twice) a week and it printed this brief article on August 12, 1834 after picking it up from the *Brantford Sentinel* newspaper. [The misspellings and awkward grammar which follow are in the original newspapers' pages.]

Blantford, Aug 2. – We have the satisfaction of announcing, that none of our resident citizens have as yet been attacked – the cases occurring in Galt, Paris and Blantford, were confined principally to the Travelling Menagerie of Gregory, Crane & Co. which lately visited these villages – the last two exclusively. There were two deaths by cholera in this town on Thursday last – both of the persons were, however, attached to the Caravan – *Sentinel*

Three days later, on August 15 the *Vindicator* reprinted a brief paragraph from the *Toronto Advocate* of August 4 which indicated that Toronto, too, had been hit by the outbreak. That was followed by a first-hand description of the Galt tragedy.

Toronto, August 4. ...In all from the commencement we have heard of 90 cases [in Toronto], several of which may not have been the epidemic cholera. — *Advocate*.

The Cholera rages in Dumfries township, Gore District. The deaths appear by a letter published in yesterdays *Guardian*, and dated August 2nd as follows:

We have been visited [in Dumfries] with the noisome pestilence that walketh in darkness and wasteth at noonday. It began to rend forth its arrows of death last Tuesday, and within thirty hours there were thirty deaths in this vicinity. There have been several cases every day since, and every one proved mortal except one. The scene it exhibited was awful indeed; here you could see men digging graves and burying their dead in the night, by torches and fires built in the grave-yard, and every few minutes hear the clattering of horses' feet – a messenger despatched in haste for a Physician for something for the sick. There was less cases of Cholera yesterday than any day since it commenced its pestilential sway. — *Advocate*, August 7, 1834.

The *Advocate* was first published by William Lyon Mackenzie in Queenston, Upper Canada in May 1824 before he moved it to Toronto in November of that year. During the first decade it was called the *Colonial Advocate* but in December 1833 the word *Colonial* was dropped.<sup>18</sup>

The oldest daily newspaper in 2011 Canada is the *Kingston Whig-Standard* and it began in February 1834 as the *British Whig* published by Dr Edward John Barker.<sup>19</sup> From this fledgling newspaper's page three comes this August 12, 1834 story which Barker borrowed from the *Toronto Courier*.

As will be seen in another part of our paper, the inhabitants of this city have no reason to conclude, that the visitation of the disease to them is greater or more destructive than elsewhere – when in the little village of Galt from 20-30 deaths have occurred – and in some parts of the Western District in a similar proportion.

A more detailed portrayal of the cholera's dreaded appearance in Galt is found in the August 15, 1834 edition of the *British Whig* and it, too, was credited to the *Toronto Courier*.

CHOLERA — A letter received from the Editor of this paper, dated Burford, 6th August, 1834, says:

“The Cholera is prevailing in the villages and townships, near and beyond the head of the Lake to a considerable and in some places to an alarming extent. Previous to my passing through those places there had been three cases in Hamilton, two in Ancaster and three in Brantford, all fatal. In Dumfries there is stated to have been between 20 and 30 fatal cases and in the village of Galt alone an equal number. From the fact that several of the persons who died of cholera at Galt, Dumfries and Brantford were attached to the travelling Menagerie which was lately at Toronto; as well as from the reported fact, that the pestilence has appeared along the line through which this Menagerie has travelled, it is universally reported and generally believed that the Menagerie communicated the disease. So far indeed has this belief prevailed, that the Grand Jury now sitting at Hamilton, have actually indicted the said menagerie as the cause of the disease, and Judges Warrants have been

issued for the arrest of the parties connected therewith. Without hazarding an opinion upon the philosophy of this opinion, or of this proceeding, it may undoubtedly be conceded that the existence of a large body of wild beasts, with the half putrid animal food upon which many of them are fed, and the various other accompanying impurities; in any neighborhood where disease exist must be imminently calculated to aggravate that disease; and that, therefore, at such a season as the present, the interference of the proper authorities for the removal of such an aggravating cause, is proper and commendable."

As with Stimson's suggestions earlier about the causes of the disease, modern medical knowledge disproves the possibilities offered in the above newspaper account. A final extract from the *British Whig*, this time using the *Brantford Sentinel* as source, appeared on August 26, 1834 so it is probably a week or so outdated.

Since our last publication there has been but one case of cholera in this town, and that of a mild nature, as the person attacked has recovered. We are however sorry to add, that this dreadful malady is now existing among the Indians on the Grand River, a few miles below Brantford. In this place it appears very fatal. We have no recent intelligence from Galt or Dumfries. Paris, we are happy to add, still continues unhappy. — *Brantford Sentinel*.

That article in the August 12 *Montreal Vindicator* provided clues to the identity of the circus which received the brunt of blame for bringing the cholera disease to Galt. Early American circus history is extremely well documented and it proved an easy task to get a detailed description of the Gregory, Crane and Company circus. More properly, these touring shows in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century should be termed "menageries." The word "circus" came into common usage *after* 1835. Gregory, Crane and Company was only in existence for two years, 1833 and 1834. Gerard Crane had been involved with menageries for a number of years while Spencer Gregory was a first-time showman.<sup>20</sup> In 1833, the pair purchased animals from several former menageries and put together an impressive roster of beasts headed by an elephant named Flora. Other animals on display included a 700-pound polar bear, South American puma, North American panther, male and female leopards, tiger, camel, albino raccoon, black bear, hyenas, ostriches among others.<sup>21</sup> A lion trainer was on staff to handle the big cats. This list is for the Gregory, Crane and Company menagerie which toured much of the northeastern United States. It isn't known if the grouping which visited Galt was the full menagerie or a subset. In any case, the list is impressive and most of the exotic beasts would never have been seen before by people living in the western part of Upper Canada. No wonder its late July appearance in Galt attracted so many visitors from nearby villages and townships.

#### 4) The Cholera Broadside

The particulars of history sometimes resonate in peculiar ways centuries after they occur. In the case of the 1834 cholera epidemic in Galt, it took on a form most unusual in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In 2006, Kristine Williamson was a graduate student in the public history course at the University of Western Ontario.<sup>22</sup> One of public history's goals is to reach a different audience than the academic one – to take history out where people not traditionally 'into' the subject can discover it. Williamson wanted a project based on her hometown Galt / Cambridge's downtown area and searched for "an historical diamond in the rough" which had enough substance to "sustain a creative history project." While reading James Young's book, *Reminiscences of the Early History of Galt*, she found it in the 1834 cholera outbreak. After amassing enough evidence, facts, figures and anecdotes, Williamson knew she could generate a traditional article and probably have it published. As a public historian, however, she wanted more: she wanted a way to reach that "different audience." Working with artist and curator Andrew Hunter of the University of Waterloo, she reached back in British history to the 16<sup>th</sup> century when broadside ballads began appearing.<sup>23</sup> Through this medium, stories, fables, news events and advertising had been posted on trees and buildings, spread through the land from hand-to-hand, and sung in taverns and meeting places. Williamson now had to channel the facts she had accumulated into the ballad form.

By far the most challenging aspect of my internship was actually writing the traditional broadside ballad. Hunter suggested I look over a number of ballads and base my writing on one. Incidentally this is how most ballad writers actually operated – by taking an already popular rhyme and changing the focus. [It was] difficult trying to include specific names and dates that would make the piece historically accurate.

Williamson eventually turned out 30 stanzas, reduced those to the best 11 and titled the finished work *The Cholera Menagerie*. Printed, along with traditional woodcut decorations, on 11 x 17 inch paper, the broadsides were then rolled and tied with ribbon. Now what? The public historian in Williamson took her to the Mill Race Festival of Traditional Folk Music in Galt / Cambridge. There she posted a number of the broadsides around the downtown and at the site as well as handing them out to concert-goers. Attached to the ribbon were buttons announcing the project and soon many visitors were sporting the buttons and tracking down the author with questions on both the broadsides and the topic. Instead of a conventional packaging within the covers of a book, Williamson's public history package had attracted attention to the project and piqued people's interest via a new but traditional method. Not only those attending the three-day festival had learned of *The Cholera Menagerie* and its

portrayal of an important piece of Galt history but many city residents pressed her for more details. "By thinking outside of the standard vehicles for historical transmission, I was able to touch the public in a unique and rewarding way." Williamson had proven what many public historians believe: "there is no *one* public and therefore there can be no *one* public history."

*The Cholera Menagerie* is reproduced here by permission of the author who encourages that it be read or sung aloud.

Gather 'round, gather 'round and I'll tell you a tale,  
That is sure to make your blood shiver,  
Of the cholera menagerie that came 'round this way,  
To the banks of the mighty Grand River.

'Twas a hot summer day in 1834,  
When Galt was the place to be.  
Out by the river, just as today  
Come to witness a travelling menagerie.

The prospects of Galt that July afternoon,  
Were better than could have been planned,  
When the wandering zoo came on wagons and carts,  
To entertain by the fine River Grand.

"Come young and old!" The posters did cry,  
"For our show will surely impress,  
The Burgess Menagerie will make light of the day,  
For every Galtonian guest."

Oh the heat and bright sun that July afternoon!  
"A scorcher" claimed all who attended,  
Still none were deterred from the travelling show,  
But the zoo would bring more than intended.

All the day, 'twas heard 'round  
"Oh, have you seen the fine beasts?"  
The wild jumping monkeys,  
Elephants from the Far East.

Into the evening, the revelry grew,  
As the showmen caroused in the town,  
But rumours soon grew (so terrible, but true!)  
That Cholera had too been brought 'round.

"Go home, go home" pleaded wise Doctor Miller,  
"For we are faced with a great calamity!  
The feared Red Death is upon us all,  
And it's sure to strike every family."

But it was sadly too late as the plague made its haste  
Visiting each home in town  
And to each it laid waste, at a startling pace  
Fair Galt had been harshly struck down.

The noble Reverend Strang implored the people,  
"Use my Church to house the afflicted,"  
But soon the boards were being pulled from the floors,  
To make coffins for those Death had convicted.

"Come on, Come on!" was the grave diggers chorus  
"Precious life from our town has been torn,  
Death was written on your forehead and mine  
Before we had ever been born!"

Within three days the plague had passed  
Leaving one hundred dead in its wake,  
And the legacy of the Burgess Menagerie  
Was mortality it wrought by mistake.

Just east of Mill Creek, on the hillside of Main  
Most of the victims were buried,  
Once a small cemetery, now Centennial Park  
Reside the ghosts of those Cholera carried.

Gather 'round, gather 'round and I'll tell you a tale,  
That is sure to make your blood shiver,  
Of the cholera menagerie that came 'round this way,  
To the banks of the mighty Grand River.

## Notes

1. Jim Quantrell of the Cambridge Archives has identified that macadamized road as 2011's Dundas Street North in Soper Park.
2. The division of Dumfries into its North and South components did not occur until 1850 during the run-up to the creation of Waterloo County. See Hayes, p.24.
3. Voisin, p. 127. Also personal communication to the author, September 4, 2011. A house on the site was called "*The Grange*." In the Cambridge Archives, the file MG1 Volume 132, titled *The Grange* contains many reminiscences of the home by people who had either lived in it or nearby. W. Bruce MacDonald compiled the history in 2004. His grandparents bought the Grange shortly after World War One and his personal memories combine nicely with recollections by others. On page seven of the manuscript, MacDonald writes that his grandmother often told the story that *her* grandfather (who lived in the Galt area in 1834) claimed "...that the bodies of the two men who started the Cholera epidemic in Galt in the 1830s are buried at the top of the tallest hill behind and slightly to the North of the Grange." Andrew Taylor, who was a well-known Galt historian in the 1950s through 1980s, writes of a different burial at the spot so the evidence is contradictory but MacDonald makes a convincing case for his grandmother's grandfather's story. Note also the phrase 'circus' is used in most accounts of the outbreak. More properly it was a menagerie. For an explanation of the terminology, see the contemporary newspapers accounts section later in this article regarding the Gregory, Chase and Company.
4. Calder's stone is one of the few original and legible grave markers of an 1834 cholera victim. It is noted at <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GScid=2140840&GRid=55605210&> (as at October 20, 2011).
5. This tantalizing information is on a message board within the RootsWeb site. The note from Joan Hooks mentions a Cedar Springs Cemetery, however there is no such cemetery in Ontario and the writer obviously meant Cedar Creek Cemetery. She also hedged by saying they died "...probably of cholera." See <http://listsearches.rootsweb.com/th/read/SCT-SELKIRK/2004-11/1100634698>. That the Dalgleish names are missing from the cemetery interment list is perhaps explained by a note on the Cedar Creek web page which states that the cemetery records burned in 1906 and were recreated from memory. See <http://www.waterloogs.ca/cemeterypics/CedarCreekCemetery.html> (as at October 20, 2011).
6. Kate Conway, "Pioneer Days in Wellington," *Guelph Mercury*, March to November 1889.
7. Information on the Ruby family deaths are augmented here with information from the website page *Langenberger Familien und Zugeheiratete* at <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=rubelli&id=117830> (as at October 20, 2011).
8. Benjamin Springer was brother-in-law to Richard Beasley who was so important in the history of the future Waterloo Township. He died August 16, 1834 and his wife Mary Ryckman / Rykeman passed away two weeks later. On the following RootsWeb forum the author adds the cholera epidemic claimed "...many of their children." Only Benjamin Jr's death can be verified. <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/UPPER-CANADA/2000-02/0949887783>.

9. Voisin, p. 10 and p. 16. The author notes that teeth and bones found in 1962 along Wilmot Street were tentatively identified as belonging to Cushman's daughter. The site is just a short distance from his original mill. Voisin's information has been augmented here from the Alden family website at <http://www.alden.org/aldengen/pafg248.htm> (as at October 20, 2011).
10. Wight is an archaic word meaning "person." It usually connoted one with a desperate or despicable character.
11. Wizen has virtually disappeared from use and dictionaries. It once meant "Throat."
12. Strip away the accent and it reveals "A drop of barley brew." i.e., whisky.
13. Meaning the saddle and harness were tightened and thus the horse was always ready to be mounted at a moment's notice and ridden away by the doctor on an emergency call.
14. Search *The Cholera Beacon* and select [books.google.ca/books?id=9FcXAQAAMAAJ](http://books.google.ca/books?id=9FcXAQAAMAAJ). Much of *The Cholera Beacon* is taken up with Dr Stimson's analysis of cholera's causes, symptoms and effects. However, his brave effort to explore this most dreaded of all diseases has little relevance to modern medicine's understanding. A website search for *The Cholera Beacon* will provide a link. Note that the 1937 LMHS version was re-typed for its report and contains a *major* error. It says 10,000 people attended. The actual 1835 publication is reproduced as published at <http://collections.nlm.nih.gov/muradora> with the 1,000 figure. C.M. Godfrey, *The Cholera Epidemics in Upper Canada*, (Toronto, Seccombe House, 1968). This is one of the first modern studies of the outbreak. The author, a highly respected medical professor, administrator, editor and curator, compiled a mass of statistics and details. However his work barely mentioned the cholera epidemic in Galt or the townships. He mistakenly quotes Stimson in reference to the 1832 outbreak on page 32. *The Cholera Beacon's* title page is also used at the Toronto Public Library's website as part of a brief look at the cholera outbreaks of 1832-1834 and their effects on Toronto. [http://ve.torontopubliclibrary.ca/toronto\\_1834/cholera.html](http://ve.torontopubliclibrary.ca/toronto_1834/cholera.html) (as at October 8, 2011).
15. Elizabeth Bloomfield, *Waterloo Township through Two Centuries*, (Kitchener: Waterloo Historical Society, 1995), p. 403.
16. It is also interesting to note Stimson's reference to the Governor's Road 12 miles southeast of Galt. That road was built in 1793 and connected Dundas with Paris and later with Woodstock and London. It suggests a possible route the disease took in reaching Galt: Dundas (where cholera was present in 1832 as noted in Bob Burt's article); Governor's Road east of Paris (where Stimson claims two cholera deaths); then the northward road which later became Highway 24 (along which, Voisin in endnote three above, posits the burial place of two circus workers who died of cholera.) If the menagerie did take that route it is equally possible some of its workers picked up the disease along the way rather than causing it. Also see in the main text's next chapter various newspaper reports of the menagerie's travels.
17. Sandra Hempel, *The Strange Case of the Broad Street Pump: John Snow and the Mystery of Cholera*, (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2007). Equally valuable is Hempel's explanation – in lay terms – of how cholera occurs. *Vibrio cholerae* are bacteria occurring in brackish waters across the globe. They can live up to five days in foodstuffs and two weeks in water. Entering the human stomach they multiply quickly producing a toxin that turns the intestines into what she

calls “virtual pumps” which rapidly take water and salts from the body’s blood and tissues. The ensuing diarrhea contains huge numbers of the bacteria and, if it finds its way (again) into the water or food supply, the outbreak expands. In reality, all the horrible symptoms of cholera are secondary ones caused by the loss of body fluids. Victims die primarily of dehydration. Treating the disease is basically a case of replacing the lost fluids and salts as quickly as possible. See pages 273-275 of Hempel’s book.

18. e/n <http://www.edunetconnect.com/cat/oldnewspap/pap1.html> (as at October 4, 2011).
19. e/n <http://www.thewhig.com/PrintGenArticle.aspx?e=3590> (as at October 4, 2011).
20. Gerard Crane (1791-1872) had an influential career in showmanship and settled in Somers, New York which, to this day, honors Crane and others who helped develop circus entertainment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His home, Stone House, is on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places; he reportedly also kept a rhinoceros on this property. <http://www.somershistoricalsoc.org/menageries2p5.html> (as at October 4, 2011).
21. A detailed timeline history of early American menageries and circuses compiled by Stuart Thayer is found at the following website. The Gregory, Crane and Company listing is number 36. <http://www.circushistory.org/Thayer/Thayer2b.html> (as at October 4, 2011).
22. The information in the following section is taken from a presentation Williamson gave at the History on the Grand local history seminar held in Galt / Cambridge in October, 2009. “New Perspectives: Approaching Public History with Artistic Licence” is at [www.cambridge.ca/relatedDocs/Williamson\\_Presentation](http://www.cambridge.ca/relatedDocs/Williamson_Presentation) (as at October 21, 2011). Evidence available to Williamson in 2006 pointed mistakenly to the Burgess menagerie being the one that visited Galt.
23. Andrew Hunter has a long track record of organizing and curating art projects for many major Canadian and international art galleries and museums. Shortly before Williamson met Hunter, he had been appointed to the University of Waterloo’s department of fine arts and was director of the university’s art gallery. He was later an adjunct faculty member at UW’s school of architecture and one of the principals of DodoLab.

## THE 1832 CHOLERA BURIALS NEAR BRIDGEPORT

by rych mills with Helga Hartman

Like the major outbreak two years later, the 1832 cholera epidemic in North America also left a mark in Waterloo Township. In the Waterloo Historical Society's newsletter of April 2006, editor Marion Roes included a short article concerning cholera victims of 1832 buried in the Bridgeport area. A tip had come from Helga Hartman, membership chair of WHS, whose early years were spent in Lexington, which is northeast of Waterloo – and due north of Bridgeport. In 1952, an elderly neighbor had told her of some very old graves in what was called Melitzer's Swamp adjoining Melitzer's Creek not far from Bridgeport.

Forty years after her school days, Hartman recalled the stories when she learned that development was taking place in that part of Lexington / Bridgeport. Fortunately, in 1992, she was able to get a detailed map of the graves' location from 90-year-old Wilfrid Roedding who, as a boy, had lived beside the site on his father, Louis J. Roedding's farm. He recalled to Hartman that he had often climbed a fence to visit the graves. At the same time, another 90-year-old, Gordon Koerber, described seeing, as a boy, the small wooden crosses and picket fence from Woolwich Street. In the intervening decades, the fence had been removed and the crosses disappeared so the field could be plowed square.

But who was buried there?

In Ezra E. Eby's *A Biographical History of Waterloo Township*, which, as described in a preceding article, has now been transcribed to the Waterloo Region Generations website, (<http://generations.regionofwaterloo.ca>) we find the answer in several listings. Noah and Hannah Rose Hembling with their seven children had come to North America in the spring of 1831 and moved inland via Quebec and Hamilton to settle near Bridgeport on part of Peter Erb's GCT Lot 125.

Noah Hembling was a native of Beccles, St Andrew's Parish in the county of Suffolk in England, as was his wife Hannah (Rose).<sup>1</sup> All their children were born there. Eby shows the two 42-year-old adults dying of cholera in early July, 1832 along with their six-year-old daughter Mary. All were buried on what Eby referred to as Dilman Moyer's farm in Waterloo Township.<sup>2</sup> Six other Hembling children survived the disease and were raised by neighborhood families.<sup>3</sup> Another Hembling, 35-year-old Sarah, a sister to Noah, had married Isaac Woolner in 1819 in the same St Andrews Parish in Suffolk. The safe arrival and

settling of her brother Noah and his family in Waterloo Township was likely relayed back to England in the fall of 1831 and encouraged a larger party of fellow immigrants from Suffolk to depart for new lives in Upper Canada in the spring of 1832. Little did anyone guess that just days after arrival, Sarah and her two-year-old son James were to find a final resting place in that same quiet corner of the Erb / Moyer farm.<sup>4</sup> Under the Isaac Woolner listing in Eby's book comes a more complete story of these deaths. Sarah and Isaac Woolner, their six children, together with members of the William Howlett family and the James Howlett family had sailed from England and arrived safely at Quebec City, then carried on to Hamilton, Ontario in June 1832.



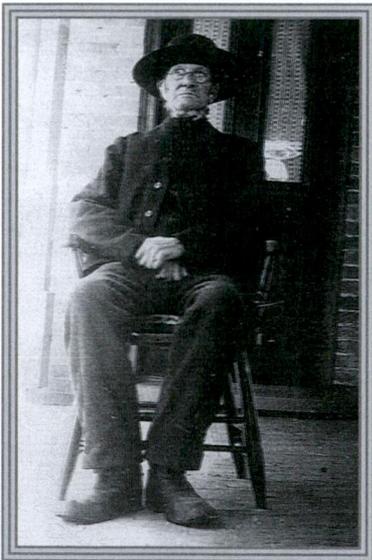
Maryanne Szuck

An eye-catching black granite monument in Breslau Mennonite (known until 1968 as Cressman's) Cemetery remembers both a cholera victim and a cholera survivor. Sarah (Hembling) Woolner was one of the 1832 immigrants from England who died near Bridgeport. Her orphaned six-year-old son Jacob was taken in by the Eby family and became a prominent Waterloo County Mennonite preacher. Woolner family descendants unveiled the new, two-sided monument in April 2009.

While at Hamilton they, for several days, resided in a house in which the former residents had died of cholera. Here they contracted this dreadful disease which proved fatal to so many of the small number immediately after their arrival at Mr. Peter Erb's, a little north of Bridgeport, in the evening of the 28th day of June, 1832. They came from Hamilton with Mr. Peter Erb who was there on business. No sooner were they in possession of their new home when one of their children took sick and before morning proved a victim of cholera. In less than ten days eight of the party died of the same disease. Some are buried on Dilman Moyer's farm near Bridgeport while the Howletts are buried at Snyder's, Bloomingdale. Noah Hembling and his wife, relatives of those who came in 1831, also died of the same decease [sic]. They are buried on Mr. Moyer's farm.<sup>5</sup>

Eby's 1890s wording and mathematics are a bit confused. Noah Hembling and family were those who settled on Peter Erb's GCT 125 in 1831. They were awaiting their relative Sarah Woolner's arrival, an arrival that was accompanied by cholera. Three Hemblings (Ezra Eby missed the death of six-year-old Mary Hembling) and two Woolners were buried on the Erb / Moyer farm so that leaves three others from the immigration party, members of the Howlett family from Suffolk, to be listed as among the eight perishing from cholera in the summer of 1832. As noted by Eby above, their burial was in Bloomingdale in the cemetery formed near Jacob Schneider's original settlement. The Howlett deaths are detailed only in Isaac Horst's *Up the Conestogo* where he, too, states that eight of the party from England died but lists James Howlett and his wife plus William Howlett and his wife as victims.<sup>6</sup> That would add up to nine deaths when added to the five buried in the Erb / Moyer farm corner.

While the numerical figures are inexact, what is intriguing is that the disease, as far as is known, spread no farther in Waterloo Township than this single early settlers' party in 1832. Was it just luck that no one else died from that group of people – at a rough count, some 30, counting the Hemblings – plus those they may have come in contact with, especially Peter Erb? He had met the group at Hamilton and accompanied them to Bridgeport where Noah Hembling's family had settled the previous year.



Jacob Hembling Woolner (1826-1917) farmed on land west of Kossuth. He attended and ministered at Cressman's Mennonite Church in Breslau. At his death he had been ordained for more than 50 years.

Maryanne Szuck

Six Hembling youngsters survived but were now parentless: in the Woolner family another six children lost their mother. Isaac, their father, was unable to raise them. All 12 of these Hembling and Woolner children were victims also – although living – of the cholera epidemic, and were taken in by area families. Elizabeth Bloomfield in *Waterloo Township through Two Centuries* lists the adopting families for five of the Hembling orphans (not mentioning Eleanor): Isaac C. Shantz – William; Isaac Eby – Jeremiah; Jacob Shantz – Lucy; Jacob Erb – Jacob; Deacon Samuel Eby – Sarah.<sup>7</sup> The latter also took in eight-year-old Jacob Woolner who was to

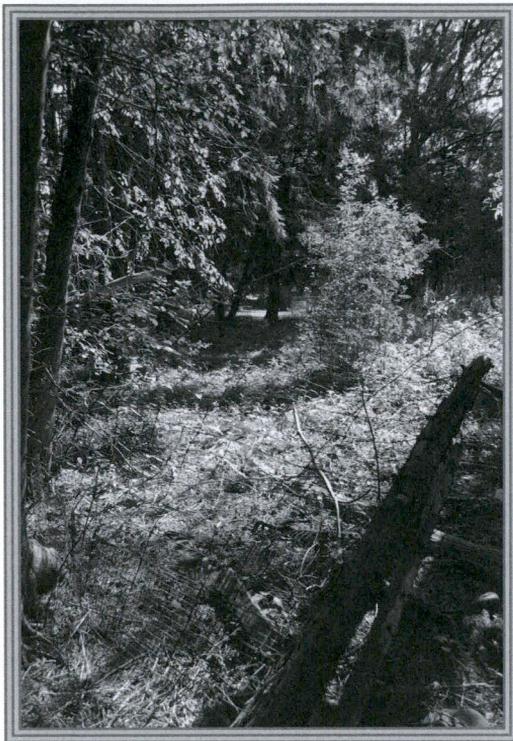
become probably the most prominent of these cholera orphans. Deacon Eby, a Mennonite, cared for Jacob. Curiously, for a lad born and baptized Anglican in Suffolk, England, Jacob Woolner became famous as a Mennonite minister! In May 1848, he was baptized, accepted into the Mennonite church, and in 1867 ordained by Mennonite bishop, Joseph Hagey. Jacob Woolner maintained that position for 50 years until his 1917 death. For a number of years he served as minister at Breslau Mennonite Church, in whose graveyard he was subsequently buried. The above information is trackable, in part, through the Waterloo Region Generations website noted earlier in this article. The Jacob Woolner story has also been detailed by his great-great-granddaughter, Maryanne Szuck, in the June 2010 issue of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario's newsletter.<sup>8</sup>

With no evidence of further cholera after-effects in that summer of 1832, we must presume that was the end of the cholera outbreak in Waterloo Township. Until the "new" epidemic described in Bob Burt's preceding article sent some Waterloo citizens back home from Galt with the cholera bacterium, the disease seems to have disappeared in Waterloo Township.

But the small corner of five graves didn't...completely!

Helga Hartman's discussion with that pair of 90-year-olds in 1992 revealed that in their early years – probably into the 1920s – the tiny plot was maintained, surrounded by a white picket fence and respected. The news that it had later simply been plowed over is cheerless but, sadly, that seems the fate of many pioneer farm graves.

The trigger for Hartman's 1992 re-interest in the graves was a burst of development in that area just outside Bridgeport along Woolwich Street. She and several Bridgeport residents feared that the site would simply become part of a subdivision and forgotten forever. Gordon Kaster, Paul and Marilyn Oswald, Barb (Boettger) Quickfall (a Hembling descendant) and Hartman visited the property. Using the information from Wilfrid Roedding and Gordon Koerber they were able to map out the original property lines and fence locations. Good news resulted from their investigation: the graves had not been located on the lands being considered for development, the former Springbrook Fur Farm, once owned by the Oswald family. Instead the group established that the graves were across the property line and within an area known locally as Melitzer's Swamp. It is well within a floodplain area as defined by the Grand River Conservation Authority and thus ineligible for any development. Since then, Hartman has been in further consultation with City of Waterloo planners and they in turn connected her with MHBC Regional and Urban Planning and Resource Development of Kitchener who had prepared an archaeological assessment of the area in conjunction with Detritus Consulting. That report, now on file with



the City of Waterloo, specifically notes the most plausible site of the graves and places them on what is called “the wetland setback.” There will, as a result, never be any direct impact on the cholera victims’ graves from property redevelopment.

For over 180 years, a quiet, overgrown corner of woods in what is now southeastern Waterloo has provided the final resting place for five 1832 Bridgeport cholera victims.

Marion Roes

In the context of the overall cholera outbreak of 1832-1834 in North America, the effect on the townships and villages that would make up the future Waterloo County was small. As seen though, when examined in detail and in context, the consequences of those tragedies have ramifications to the present day.

## Notes

(Full bibliographical details on publications mentioned below will be found in the notes following Bob Burt’s article, *Three Ring Circus of Death*.)

1. Most of Eby’s references to “Place of Birth” for the people in the emigrating party of Woolners and Howletts show Ilketshall St Andrews Parish, St Andrews Township or Beccles in County Suffolk, England. This area is close to the North Sea, about 100 miles northeast of London and just inland from the port of Lowestoft which is the most easterly town of England. Beccles, near the River Waveney, is about six miles west of Lowestoft while Ilketshall St Andrews is a three miles farther to the southwest. Ilketshall St Andrews appears in Eby as the “Place of Marriage” for Sarah Hembling and Isaac Woolner in 1819.
2. At the time of burial, it was still Peter Erb’s property (GCT 125) but when Eby published his book six decades later, Dilman Moyer was the owner of part of GCT 125 so that is the reference Eby used. Peter Erb was a member of the extensive Erb family from Pennsylvania which purchased so much of the German Company Tract. He and his wife Susannah Bomberger, a pair of 20-year-olds, trekked north

and took up their 333-acre property in 1807. They were part of the same party which included Benjamin and Mary Eby, Abraham Weber and Joseph and Barbara Schneider. All the Erbs are mentioned extensively in Bloomfield's *Waterloo Township through Two Centuries*. Peter Erb's GCT 125 took in much of the land comprising the large oxbow bend in the Grand River from (today's) Kaufman's Flats to Bridgeport. Kiwanis Park is now an extensive portion of Peter Erb's original Lot 125 and Woolwich Street cuts through the original purchase. Parts of Lot 125 along the Grand River were sold to prominent Kitchener citizens such as Kenneth Sims and A.R. Kaufman for luxurious private residences in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

3. For example, 12-year-old Lucy Hembling, the oldest daughter of Noah and Hannah Hembling (and older sister of Mary) went to the neighboring Mennonite family of Jacob Shantz. She eventually married Abraham Eby; through this one couple there are many descendants of the survivor branch of the Hemblings in Waterloo Region, including at least three members of Waterloo Historical Society – Barb (Boettger) Quickfall, Anne Beynon and Doug Kuhn. All are great-great-grandchildren of Lucy Hembling Eby.
4. Six other of Sarah Hembling Woolner's children survived but her husband / their father Isaac was unable to take care of them. He eventually remarried and moved to Marsville, southwest of Orangeville where he raised a second family. Jacob Woolner and, in fact, *none* of the Woolner cholera survivors, chose to move back and live with their father's new family once he established a homestead.
5. Ezra E. Eby, *Biographical History of Early Settlers and their Descendants in Waterloo Township plus a Supplement by Joseph B. Snyder, 1931 Plus Index and Notes by Eldon D Weber*, (Kitchener, privately published, 1971), p. 387. This narrative coincides nicely with the observations by Telfer and Gilkison in Bob Burt's preceding article.
6. Horst, *Up the Conestogo*, p. 416.
7. Bloomfield, p. 117. It may seem curious that Peter Erb's name is missing from the list of families taking in cholera survivors but the Ezra Eby notation for Peter and Susannah Erb shows nine children of whom six or seven were still at home in 1832 so the Erb house may simply have been too full. However, the Jacob Erb who is shown in Bloomfield's listing taking in the orphan Jacob Hembling, is probably Jacob B. Erb the eldest son of Peter and Susannah Erb. Jacob Erb was married to Mary Clemens in 1830 and lived near Erbsville. At the time of the cholera deaths in 1832, they had, at most, one child.
8. Maryanne Szuck, "Jacob Woolner, Mennonite Preacher," *Ontario Mennonite History, Volume XXVIII Number 1*, (June 2010), p. 8. She notes that Jacob Woolner's brothers and sisters were named Abraham, Martha, Isaac Jr, Sarah and James. The authors appreciate WHS member Maryanne Szuck's assistance and her permission to use photographs and information from her article.