2022 HERITAGE EDITION

The Wilmot Name

By Ernie Ritz

A number of times in the past, the question of the origin of the name for Wilmot Township has been asked. One origin was suggested years ago by Miss Mabel Dunham, who had been the librarian at the Kitchener Public Library decades ago. As a keen student of history, she had written several books on the early history of the County.

She noted that Samuel Street Wilmot had conducted surveys in the township, and the connection seemed obvious to her. We can easily forgive her for making the assumption. This is particularly so because nowhere has been found any specific recorded decision to name the Township "Wilmot."

The earliest reference to the possibility of the geographic origin of the township appears in an article by John Graves Simcoe, who about 1793, was exploring the route of the road from Dundas to London. In the area of Brant, he mused about opening a township "to the rear of Blenheim and Blandford," which obviously would be the location of a later-day Wilmot Township. Several decades later, a sketch map of the area was made with the date of 1824 and the name "Wilmot." It is not known if that date was a later addition to the sketch map, but given the lack of further information, that is a possibility.

At that time, our country was a colony of the British Empire ruled by the Parliament of Britain, and subject to all their laws and decisions. The British Prime Minister was the Earl of Liverpool and the Under-Secretary of State for War and the Colonies was Robert Wilmot-Horton. Born as Robert Wilmot, he added the name Horton to his surname to comply with a request by his father-in-law.

Wilmot-Horton served as a member of British Parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme from 1821 to 1827, during the time that Wilmot Township actually could be said to have had its beginning.

His work included plans to have poor Irish and British families emigrate to the colonies. There they would be given land grants partly as an incentive for them to save the expense burden on the British Treasury, but induce them to start new lives on their own. He set up a committee of parliament on the topic of emigration. As chairman of that committee in 1826 and 1827, he would give leadership to those policies. After 1827 he left the Colonial Office, and that work was not carried on by that office.

The original survey of Wilmot, particularly the three main east-west roads and the 200-acre lots fronting on them, was undertaken by surveyor John Goessman.

Some years later, Samuel Street Wilmot, a surveyor, was called in to make a detailed report on the settlement of Wilmot. This was as a result of the Crown having taken control over the middle block of Wilmot in 1828 and "gave" it to the University of Toronto in spite of earlier commitments to the Amish settlers. Samuel Wilmot was commissioned to do so January 30, 1830, and he reported on the situation Feb. 11 of that year. That effectively would weaken the case for naming the township after him arriving on the scene some years after the first settlement of Wilmot Township.

So the foregoing taken from Archives records and researchers leaves us the most likely origin of the Wilmot name: Sir Robert John Wilmot-Horton.

Wilmot council gets update on cultural Heritage landscape study

By Veronica Reiner

The Region of Waterloo is conducting a cultural heritage landscape study throughout Wilmot Township, with the goal to identify and conserve cultural heritage resources significant to the community.

The study is a partnership between Wilmot, the region, the Heritage Resources Centre of the University of Waterloo and the township of North Dumfries. The project began in August 2020 and is nearing completion.

Bridget Coady, Cultural Heritage Principal Planner at the Region of Waterloo, provided an update on the study to Wilmot council members during a virtual meeting on Monday, January 17.

She began by recapping the research so far: over spring and summer of 2021, researchers with the Heritage Resources Centre of the University Waterloo have collected data for the study. This has been done through the study website page, virtual and telephone interviews, as well as virtual meetings with heritage committees.

"While engaging with the community, the project has experienced some limitations," said Coady. "Meeting face-to-face with community members or focus groups is not possible due to public health COVID measures.

"Subsequently, meaningful engagement has been a struggle, whether that be because of screentime burnout, or survey burnout by participants, a lack of geographical literacy, or perhaps technology literacy. The study did not receive as much participation as we originally hoped for."

Researchers developed a draft list of potential cultural heritage landscapes, as suggested by community members. The list includes Philipsburg, the Huron Road, New Dundee, the Baden Hills, downtown New Hamburg, and Baden. Other landscape suggestions

Researchers will evaluate each landscape to determine if they meet the criteria for heritage significance.

After the presentation, Councillor Angie Hallman said she connected with members of the Indigenous community for their feedback on study, and was speaking on behalf of them.

"One of the things that they wanted me to bring to your attention was that they felt that the things that were presented this evening were very heavily focused on settlers," said Hallman. She suggested other areas for the study, including Sunfish Lake, a long house on Bethel Road, and Punkeydoodles Corner.

The next steps for researchers are to consider the submissions from the public to determine whether suggested landscapes will meet the criteria for identification as a cultural heritage landscape.

The study's outcome will be in a final report that will identify candidate cultural heritage landscapes of significance. The report will also provide recommendations to inform and guide future heritage planning initiatives to help staff with long-term conservation and protection of cultural heritage landscapes.

Bridget Coady, Cultural Heritage Principal Planner at the Region of Waterloo, provides an update to Wilmot council members during a virtual meeting on January 17.

Heritage Wilmot Chairman discusses past accomplishments and future projects

By Veronica Reiner

The Heritage Wilmot Advisory Committee has maintained a tradition of embracing the township's unique history over the past several decades.

The organization is made up of volunteers appointed by the council, and are appointed with each municipal election.

The current committee, serving from 2019 to 2022, consists of Chairman Nick Bogaert, Patty Clarke, Rene Eby, Councillor Barry Fisher, Al Junker, Councillor Jennifer Pfenning, Vice-Chair Marg Rowell, Elisia Scagnetti, Artem Voytsekhovskiy, Scott Williams, Yvonne Zyma, and Director/Curator of Castle Kilbride, Tracy Loch.

"It's made up of a pretty broad range of backgrounds - everyone is passionate about heritage, of course," said Bogaert, who has served on Heritage Wilmot for about 10 years.

"Some people have been on the committee for decades, and there are some people that are relatively new to the committee. So it's a good mix."

Bogaert is from New Hamburg. He received his Bachelor of Environmental Studies degree from the University of Waterloo in 2004, and is a full member of the Canadian Institute of Planners and Ontario Professional Planners Institute. He is also a member of the Canadian Association of Heritage Professionals.

The committee typically meets up on the second Wednesday of each month at 6:30 p.m, with a break in the summertime. Before the pandemic, members met up in the Swartzentruber Room at the Wilmot municipal office; now, members meet through Zoom.

Topics include a property designation under the Ontario Heritage Act, organization-hosted events such as Heritage Day, and keeping inventory of significant old buildings in the township.

"Municipalities can have a heritage committee; not everyone has one, but many places do," said Bogaert. "Our township has had one for several decades."

Keeping an inventory of older buildings is an ongoing project for Heritage Wilmot. The inventory identifies buildings and protects them - for instance, if someone wants to demolish a building, a time period is triggered with the township and committee to allow them to review it further, and gives a chance to designate it as a historic property.

"Properties on the inventory - a subset of the committee goes around and takes photos of the property, and then creates a description of what the architectural features are and a bit of history about the property, so it involves some research" said Bogaert.

The list was created in the 1990s, and has been updated periodically over the years. Throughout the last eight years or so, the organization has been thoroughly and methodologically going through the township to ensure all buildings are covered.

Designation of heritage properties is a way of publicly acknowledging a property's value to a community, as well as ensuring the conservation of these important places for the benefit of present and future generations. The designation is a legal process outlined under the Ontario Heritage Act.

Some examples of local heritage properties include the New Dundee Emporium, Castle Kilbride National Historic Site, New Dundee Bandshell, EJ's Restaurant and Tavern/Baden Hotel, Blue Moon Hotel, and the Doctor's House. The complete list and details are available on the Heritage Wilmot website.

More recently, Heritage Wilmot helped to designate the Livingston Presbytarian Church as a heritage property, as well as St. James Lutheran Church.

In 2022, Heritage Wilmot will be updating their register/inventory list to include historic bridges, as well as looking to add landscape areas.

They are also looking to promote their Heritage Day event. In pre-pandemic years, it's hosted in different locations around Wilmot, and has taken place in New Hamburg, St. Agatha, and New Dundee in the past.

"It usually has a theme - we've done one that has a theme of, say, mills, and then we encourage people who own properties who have mills on them to come and talk about their property, and set up a booth," said Bogaert, adding the committee will help those property owners put together information.

"It's a chance for different heritage organizations around the region to get together, such as the Region of Waterloo Library, and historical societies."

There are also Heritage Awards awards (usually related to the theme) the Wilmot Heritage gives out, which may be given to individuals, properties, or organizations. Local politicians, such as the Member of Parliament (MP), Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) and Wilmot Mayor often attend and participate in awards ceremonies.

Now, the organization's usual Heritage Day cannot happen in person due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but Heritage Wilmot will find alternative virtual ways to celebrate. For example, Wilmot township staff will share social media posts about it, and committee members have worked to spread news about cultural heritage.

Those who wish to join Heritage Wilmot can apply around municipal election time. A call for members is published in local newspapers, those who wish to apply can submit a cover letter, and the township selects people to be on the committee.

"Most people who apply get on; there's the oversight in case there's a lot of people interested. They can't take everybody," said Bogaert. "I know that's the case for some of the bigger municipalities - they have much more of a process to go through."

When asked what he likes about New Hamburg, Bogaert said, "It's a really neat spot; there are really interesting buildings and lots of great businesses, and some of the old farmhouses there are pretty remarkable."

The official heritage designation of St. James Lutheran Church. Front row: MPP Mike Harris, Church representatives Peter Gingerich and Connie Miller, Director/Curator Tracy Loch; Back row: Chairman of Heritage Wilmot Nick Bogaert and MP Tim Louis.

Valentine's Day on the Thirteenth Line - 1930s Style

2016-01-151 Ivan Holzschuh envelope

2016-01-151 Bernie Logel

2016-01-151 Annie

2016-01-151 ROSS

By Nancy Maitland, Wellesley Township Heritage and Historical Society

Some of our younger readers may not be familiar with how Valentines used to be handled in public schools. Back in the 1930s at Wellesley's S. S. #21 on the Thirteenth Line, each student made an envelope, added their initials, and secured it to their desk. Everyone then trooped around the classroom delivering Valentines to their classmates.

One family's donation to our collection included carefully maintained keepsake photos and documents as well as some "ephemeral" items – things that are meant to last a short time. A little treasure trove of Valentines brings an old-fashioned festivity to life.

Ivan Holzschuh (1926-2012), the father of our donor, kept his 48 Valentines in the envelope he had made. Because the school was small, 48 cards probably represent a several years of celebration. Most of the Valentines were homemade; a few were "store bought." There were 23 cards from girls and 20 from boys, two were from teachers (store bought) and three were unsigned.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the boys didn't seem to take the "love" theme of Valentine's Day seriously. Three cards were sent anonymously. One unsigned card had the verse, "My love for you will never fail/ As long as piggy has a tail." Doesn't that sound like something a 10-year-old boy would write?

Another card was signed "From Somebody," and included the verse "I love you big / I love you little / I love you like a little pig. Probably another 10-year-old boy.

One card was signed "From You Know" (with EARL written at the bottom of the card)."

And here's Bob who almost didn't sign the card at all. He wrote "Not even from Bob."

Girls sent very different messages:

· My heart is in the balance / You better come and get it [Helen Logel]

· From my heart / I send this love / to my loving valentine [Caroline Voll]

· If you will be my Valentine / This February day / I will be as happy as the merry month of May [M.J]

· Candies are sweet and so are you / If I had my choice / I'd choose you. [Elsie]

Several of the homemade cards are outstanding and can be seen here.

We are fortunate that the donor also provided an S. S. #21 class photo from the mid-1930s so we can put a face to many of the Valentine senders.

The shame of slavery left unasked questions about my family's history

Ending a silence that lasted for generations, Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette reporter Nigel Gordijk says it's time to start telling his ancestors' story

At left is the author's father, Sylvion Gordijk, in his RAF uniform during national service, which was optional in the former British colony of Guyana. Also shown are his mother and seven brothers.

By Nigel Gordijk

Many families' histories are passed down through word of mouth, but mine wasn't. The most challenging story I've ever tried to tell is my father's, because his side of the family never talked about their past. Even though his generation is no longer here, DNA testing and research have helped me find the missing chapters.

I was born in London, England, in 1965, a year after my father, Sylvion Gordijk, and mother, Edmay (Keturah) Chan, emigrated from their native Guyana, the only English-speaking country in South America. The former colony is close – physically and culturally – to the Caribbean islands that were once part of the British empire.

Keturah's ancestors were from China and arrived in Guyana in the 1860s, along with hundreds of thousands of indentured workers from distant countries, in a post-emancipation wave of immigration.

One of my cousins produced a comprehensive family tree with names and dates along our Chinese lineage, going back to the mid-19th century. Another wrote detailed accounts of their lives, adding context and flesh.

Sylvion's parents moved to Guyana from the neighbouring Dutch colony of Suriname. Other than that, all I knew were their names, James Gordijk and

Antoinette Sanches, their dates of birth, and, having seen photos of them, that they were Black.

With no knowledge about their past, I was left with an unbalanced sense of identity because I knew only half my story. I began to correct that a few years ago.

In 2016, I took an Ancestry DNA test that confirmed Keturah was, unsurprisingly, 100 per cent Chinese. It also revealed that 40 per cent of Sylvion's ancestors originated from several west African countries, while the remaining 60 per cent were European. This hinted at why he and his family were varying shades of Black.

A year ago, an acquaintance, Teneile Warren, put me in touch with Peggy Plet, a Kitchener-based researcher from Suriname. Peggy offered to help me trace my father's family, so I shared what little information I had.

After a lifetime of ignorance, I anticipated slow, incremental progress, if any at all.

One week later, on the eve of Family Day, Peggy sent me information that swept me back four generations to meet the last enslaved person in my family, my great-great-grandmother, Betje.

Betje was owned by multiple people and sold several times. Illustrating the complex history of slavery, her final owner, Anna Pieternella Groenhout, was a Black woman who had been enslaved herself until 1839. Two years later, she bought my ancestor.

As well as being Groenhout's housemaid, Betje also worked paying jobs on the side. From 1853, she began buying her four young children out of captivity

through a practice called manumission. By 1862, she'd earned enough to free herself, too.

Her liberated children were the first to use the last name Gordijk, which was assigned to them either by their former owner or, more likely, a Dutch government clerk. Enslaved people were sometimes given muddled versions of Dutch names, and it's likely that Gordijk is derived from Gorredijk, a town in the Netherlands. I'm only the fourth generation of my family to carry this surname.

Betje died in 1898 at the age of 76, having lived the last 36 years of her life as a free person. That was long enough for her to know and hold my grandfather, James Gordijk.

It seems negligent now, but it never even occurred to me until a few years ago that my Black ancestors in colonial Suriname would have been enslaved. No one in my family ever talked about slavery, let alone its connection to us.


No. 73. Ao. 1853.

18 Junij.

Gouvernements – Secretarie.

Paramaribo, den 16 *Junij* 1853.

Van wege Zijne Excellentie den Gouverneur dezer kolonie, wordt hiermede bekend gemaakt, dat, tengevolge van de daartoe gedane verzoeken, *Brieven van Manumissie* zijn verleend geworden aan de navolgende slaven, als:

COURANT

VERTENTIE BLA

Aan de slavenkinderen, *Anna*, oud 11 jaren, *Johannes*, oud 10 jaren en *James*, oud 1 jaar, kinderen van *Betje*, toebehoord hebbende aan A. P. Groenhout.

Notice of sale in an 1853 Suriname newspaper of three "slavenkinderen" (slave children) by A.P. Groenhout to their mother, Betje, who was also owned by Groenhout. A fourth child, the author's great-grandfather, Frederik, was sold to Betje in 1861.

Why were they silent, and was I complicit in that silence by not asking questions?

Peggy told me this isn't unusual. "I think that goes for a lot of families, not just yours. Shame is a lot of what's contributing to these feelings."

I've made a conscious effort to learn more since these initial discoveries. For instance, I knew that my father's skin tone was light because he had white forebears, and the brutal truth of what that means hit me after I read a New York Times article by Black American poet Caroline Randall Williams, titled, "My Body is a Confederate Monument."

Williams' ancestors were enslaved in Tennessee, and she described herself as possessing "light-brown-Blackness." Through research and DNA testing, she came to a conclusion that's common for many families that have a history with slavery.

She wrote, "I am the descendant of Black women who were domestic servants and white men who raped their help. I am more than half white, and none of it was consensual. The Black people I come from were owned by the white people I come from."

Given the Caribbean's parallel colonial history, it's reasonable to infer that that must also apply to my father's family.

Long before I had DNA validation, I'd always defined myself as half-Chinese and, almost apologetically, only part-Black. I've never been comfortable describing the colour of my skin, perhaps because a significant part of my racial identity was ambiguous.

When I showed Teneile Warren my DNA results, she said, "This tells me that there was a fair bit of mixing on the way (and it's) also so indicative of settler colonialism in Suriname. I think that while this DNA profile isn't predominantly Black, one has to consider the cultural identity within which you were raised."

Because of my mother's Chinese ancestry and my predominantly Caribbean upbringing, I've settled on Sino-African as a label that comfortably defines me.

There's still so much for me to discover, but I'm finally making progress in writing my family's story. My ancestors don't have to remain silent any longer.

2022 HERITAGE EDITION

The Sandhills

By Ernie Ritz

Fortunately for us, our heritage includes not only stories of people but other tangible items and places. Here we refer to a very prominent geological feature of our area, known as the Sand Hills, and the wide expanse surrounding them, covering several townships. Formed by the end of the last glacial period, they have had their effect on our population and activities.

Many thousands of years ago, as the glacier records with which we are familiar, had stopped moving in a southwesterly direction, like a bulldozer, it had pushed ahead of it many surface boulders, as well as gravel and sand. Then it came to a halt as a warming climate began. It left not only the material but also a few immense blocks of ice. This soil mixture formed the sandhills and a vast area of more level lands extending for miles. The largest blocks of ice melted over the centuries, forming what are called kettle lakes, such as Hofstetter Lake just southeast of the sandhills. This set the stage for the arrival centuries later of humans who began their interaction with the local features.

Let's now look at how humans used and also misused these features and resources.

Centuries later, with the prevailing westerly winds of our area and as yet colder climate, our Indigenous People took advantage of the hill to break the severity and give some protection from wintry blasts. They built a small settlement partway down the sheltered side of the hill. Game was plentiful, and fresh water, and perhaps fish would always be available in the deep waters of the nearby kettle lake. Relics of their lives there have been found in that location.

The height of the largest hill provided a fine view that spread a great distance. This attracted the attention of two men with some scientific knowledge, who, in the 1930's, used a pair of heliographs for an experiment in signalling. The heliograph was a simple mirror system on a sort of tripod, a sighting mechanism and a type of telegraph key. One of the men was on the top of the highest hill, while the second was on a high elevation near Paris, some 30 miles away. They did manage to signal to each other.

When we spoke earlier of misuse of the hill, we refer to the fact that for many years sand and gravel were being taken out of the sides of the roadway which had been cut through the second highest hill. Very appropriately, the road is now known as Sand Hills Road. In my early teen years, a group of my friends would join me on a bicycle trip to the hills to enjoy sliding down the sandy slopes.

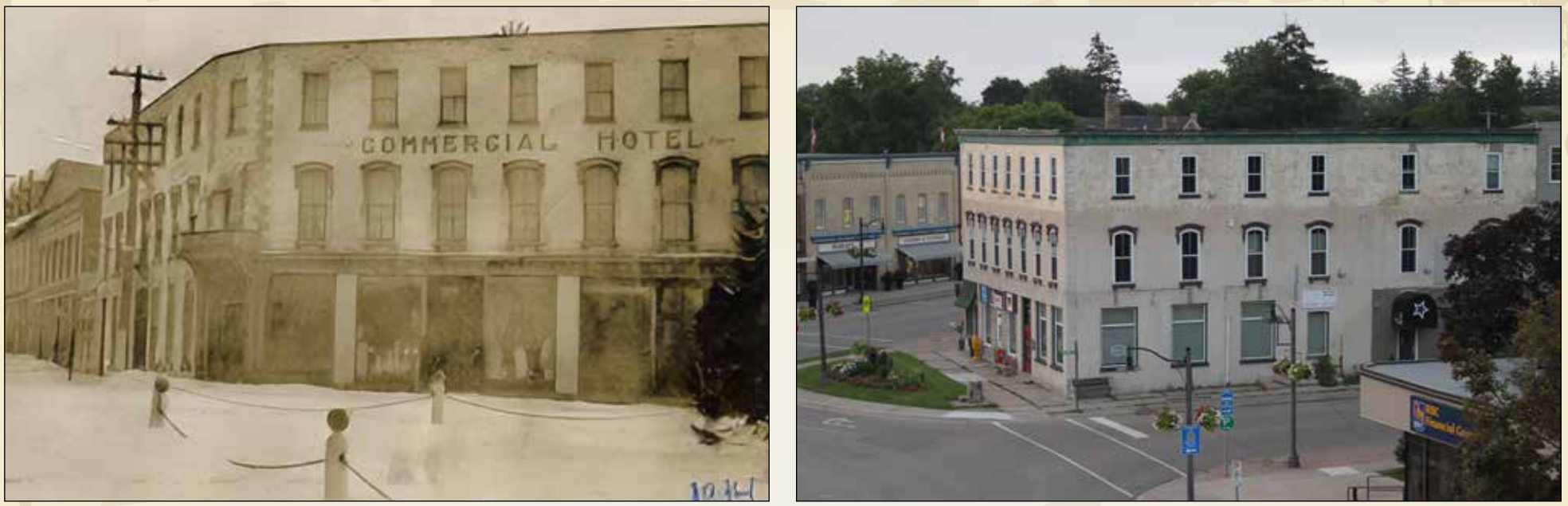
During the 1930's, a suggestion was advanced that a monument be placed atop the hill with a large light which would honour the nearby location of the birthplace of Sir Adam Beck, known as the father of Ontario Hydro. It did not come to reality as the difficulties of the depression years and World War 2 intervened.

In 1938 Grade 8 students from New Hamburg elementary school were taken to the site of the former First Nations campsite on the east side of the hill to dig for artifacts. It was my pleasure to be part of the group, and we did find some arrowheads and pieces of pottery. Unknowingly we had been disturbing the site now closed, which later was used by qualified archeologists who tried to record what was left.

Ten years later, I hiked to the top of the hill on a beautiful summer afternoon to view the countryside. It would have been better with a telescope or binoculars, neither of which were available at the time. A few years later, the large antenna was set up on top of the highest hill to maximize the signal distance of the new Kitchener TV station.

For all of the above reasons, the Sand Hills are a most visible and noteworthy part of our heritage. Admire them as you pass by.

The Hardiness of New Hamburg's Buildings



At left, the three-storey Peel Commercial Hotel in 1914. At right, the building as it stands today, featuring a mix of commercial businesses.

By Marie Voisin

When you are walking through the downtown core of New Hamburg, you would not know that many buildings have weathered disasters and undergone major changes. The fact that they are still standing is a testament to the builders and the people who have maintained them.

Four large structures withstood major damage due to fires but were rebuilt afterwards. The current Zion Evangelical United Church at 215 Peel Street was not the first church on this property. A brick structure that measured 40' X 60' was erected in 1843 and was demolished for a larger building in 1870. In 1919, the steeple was shortened, and the church was remodeled. Church services switched from German to English in 1923. A major fire on February 5, 1948, caused $300,000 in damages, and the church members rebuilt their place of worship.

The large three-storey commercial building facing Peel and Huron Street and backing onto Wilmot Street, [90 Peel Street], was once the Commercial Hotel. A smaller frame structure that housed various retail stores stood here in the 1850s and was called The Montreal House. Samuel Merner purchased the building in 1864, demolished it, and built a two-storey brick hotel. In 1882, a strong wind knocked a hanging oil street lamp into the building, and a fire broke out. The fire was put out without causing major damage. However, on the afternoon of January 18, 1898, a major fire struck, and the building was almost lost. A citizen's bucket brigade worked tirelessly to put the fire out as the fire brigade's steam-powered water pump was out of commission. Damage was heavy, and everything in the basement and the second floor was destroyed. It took six months for owner Benjamin Spahr to rebuild the hotel and add a third floor. There were other smaller fires: a fire in the hotel's livery in 1900 and another one in 1947 in Dr. Harry Katzenmeier's dental office, which also damaged the second floor of the hotel.

The Mammoth House at [55-59 Huron Street], currently Zehr Insurance, was built by William Scott around 1850 with commercial tenants situated on the first floor and apartments on the second and third floors. When Christian and Catherine Ernst owned the building in 1884, a fire engulfed the commercial tenants on the main floor as well as stock in a rear warehouse. The village's steam pumper, with the help of neighbours, saved the edifice. The interiors were refurbished, and life returned to normal. When the current owner, John Zehr, was restoring the building in 2014, he discovered burnt rafters in the attic as well as evidence of smaller fires on the second and third floors, most likely due to chimney fires in apartments as the chimneys were built with single bricks.

Samuel Merner purchased two frame buildings that stood on 112-120 Peel Street [Josslin Insurance Building] in 1878. He demolished them and built a three-storey brick structure almost identical to his William Tell Building [71-79 Huron Street] which he built in 1876. On September 19, 1899, a fire broke out in The New Hamburg Independent's office on the main floor. Archival issues of the first issues of the paper from 1878 to mid-1882 were lost. The other tenants on the main floor and some on the second floor also sustained damage. The building was refurbished, and businesses once again thrived in this location until July 22, 1959. A major fire tore through the entire building destroying everything in its path. It took three days to extinguish the fire; four people died in the fire, and the third floor was completely gutted. Businesses were forced to relocate until the building could be rebuilt. The third floor was removed and appeared to have never been there. Charred beams can still be seen in the basement of 112 Peel, where the Little Short Stop is currently located.

There are some buildings in New Hamburg that have undergone transformations due to changing times. The frame apartment building with pale-yellow aluminum siding at 178 Mill Street was built before 1892. At that time, the property was owned by David Ratz, and it is not known if he built the large clapboard frame structure. Jacob Laschinger purchased the building in 1892 for repairing carriages. A smaller structure beside it was used by Michael Dietrich for a blacksmith shop. By 1910, the building was abandoned and purchased by John and Andrew Callanan, who used it as a showroom for their Frost and Wood/Cockshutt Plow Company. In 1934, Alois Haunn used it for a farm implement dealership and coal delivery. Gideon Weber purchased the building in 1946, and due to the housing shortage after WWII, he demolished the blacksmith shop and remodeled the frame building into four apartments. When Andrew McCallum purchased the building in 2008, it was in rough shape. Windows were broken, and the front door wouldn't shut. The frame structure had settled over the years, and the milled log support beams in the basement sank, causing the floors above to be uneven. McCallum refurbished and updated the apartments.

43 Peel Street, the annex of Home Hardware, was not always a two-storey commercial building. As early as 1854, Louis Klein owned Market House Store in this building. In 1881 Henry Gerth purchased the building and added a third floor in 1883. He lived in the upper floors and had his saddle and harness-making business on the main floor. Several years later, John and Sarah Otto refitted the building for their tannery and wool product manufacturing. They closed the tannery in 1917, and the main floor sat empty for several years until their daughter Lillian and her husband Leslie Wanklin purchased it and lived in part of the house. William P. Seyler, purchased the building from the Wanklin estate in 1944 and promptly removed the third storey with its mansard roof as it was in poor shape. He used the materials from the third-floor demolition to build an extension at the back of the building, and he opened Seyler Furniture Company. He closed off the windows so he could showcase his furniture against the walls. It later became Pearson's Furniture, and in 2005, Larry Taylor purchased it for an annex to his Home Hardware store.

Another building that has undergone great changes is the Peel West Centre, located at 148 Peel Street. Absalom Shade sold this parcel of land in the middle of New Hamburg to Samuel Merner and his business partner John Nopper in 1846. They erected a building in which they manufactured stoves, ploughs and small farm riggings. Merner went on to manufacture threshing machines, mechanized saws, reapers, mowers and separators in this location. In 1885 it was described as a two-storey showroom on Peel Street with a paint shop behind it, and built at a right-angle following the path of Wilmot Street was a machine and moulding shop. In 1893, Henry Brodrecht and Jacob Knechtel purchased the property and built threshers and traction engines for the Western Canada market. On February 28, 1902, the factory was consumed by fire, destroying the two-storey brick building and most of the machinery. Reginald Puddicombe acquired the property in 1926 and, until 1929, manufactured Zenoleum — a disinfectant animal-dip and insecticide for livestock and poultry. He emptied the building and demolished the two-storey office building in 1933. Ezra Hammer rented the lot for his used car, truck and tractor sales that same year. Hammer purchased the empty warehouse in 1946, demolished it and built a showroom for his new vehicles. Jerome Stockie, Oliver Shantz, Ross Morrison and Bob Starr all used the property for their car sales until 1995 when Ron Jackson changed it into a strip plaza.

Perhaps the most unassuming property that has a very rich history is 3 Waterloo Street, Affinity Health Clinic, on the corner of Huron and Waterloo Streets. It is utterly unrecognizable today from the grand, three-storey hotel it once was. Samuel Roberts built a two-storey brick tavern/hotel here before 1851. The 1861 Census described it as a four-storey brick hotel, but we know it to be the three-storey Queen's Arms Hotel with the White Pigeon Saloon on the west side, facing Waterloo Street. In 1866 when it was purchased by Samuel and Elizabeth Zingg, it was described as a 3½-storey brick building, 40x60 feet on a half-acre lot. The illustrious Ernst Robert Beger purchased it in 1873 and changed it into a blacksmith and carriage manufacturing shop. He tore down the smithy at the rear of the building and built a new blacksmith shop to the right of the main building. Since Beger had no use for the upper floors, he rented them out to various businesses in town. When carriage manufacturing began to die out, car and truck repairs took over the main floor; Clarence B. Roth, Ignatz Ditner, Cecil

Continued on page 21

The Hardiness of New Hamburg's Buildings

Black-and-white image from 1906 of the building fronts along Peel Street.

Continued from page 20

Caping and Reuben Bender had garages/showrooms here. The building had outlived its usefulness by 1939, when it was abandoned. James Monaghan and Noah Wagler purchased the brick building and garage in 1940. The smithy was demolished in 1946 to make room for an expanded Plymouth-Chrysler dealership and Reliance Petroleum station. Monaghan radically altered the appearance of the former hotel, removing the third storey and the west corner, and altering the facade on Huron and Waterloo Streets. Today, little evidence remains of the Queen's Arms Hotel and the White Pigeon Saloon.

As the saying goes, "you can't tell a book by its cover"; the same is true for buildings in New Hamburg's downtown core. You would be surprised at how old some of them are and all the changes they have undergone since 1850.

Iconic entrance to Queen's Park (Tavistock Arena) Initiated by the Women's Institute 1929

The Bridges of Wilmot Township

The Nith River lazily meanders past the old Bridge Street bridge. (Photo credit: Rob Laurette)

By Yvonne Zyma, Member of Heritage Wilmot

Wilmot Township has the unlikely claim to fame of being home to four of the remaining truss bridges in the Waterloo Region. Elegant examples of functional simplicity, truss bridges are reminders of the age when metal and steel were the preferred bridge construction materials. By the 1930s, the use of concrete spelled their decline. The truss design of the 1840s saw many modifications, most often to provide greater strength and stability or to reduce costs during difficult economic times. It was a time when Wilmot Township was mostly agricultural.

Built in 1936, the Hartman bridge's riveted steel Pratt (or Polygonal) design was cheaper than concrete during the Depression. Previous bridges on the site did not withstand the torrents of the Nith River. An iconic landmark, it marks the western border of New Hamburg's Heritage Conservation District. It was designated under the ON Heritage Act in 2001, and the Region of Waterloo did significant rehabilitation in 2006.

The Shade Street bridge, or Bridge #15, is a Pratt truss bridge. It was uncommon in 1953, when concrete was the usual building material, to build a riveted steel bridge. It contributes to the "rustic and rural image of Wilmot" according to "Spanning the generations," a study by the Region of Waterloo. In 2004 a sign was installed to warn of the dangers of jumping into the Nith from the bridge.

There are two Camelback truss bridges in Wilmot, with the oldest truss in Waterloo Region being the Oxford-Waterloo bridge built by the Hamilton Bridge Co. in 1912. Wilmot and Blandford-Blenheim Townships share responsibility for the structure, which has been damaged multiple times. It saw an emergency closure in 2013 when a supporting beam was split due to heavy truck traffic over its load limit. The municipalities shared the $133,500 repair cost and reinforced the existing structure.

Built in 1913, the Bridge Street bridge, or Bridge #28, is a metal, welded, single-span Camelback bridge like its twin to the south. The Regional bridge study describes it as a "significant landmark," and it "belongs to a group of other significant through camelback truss bridges in the Region." In 1983, it was repaired because this solution cost 20% of the cost of replacement. In 2005, the load restrictions were lowered due to its aging condition. The Township of Wilmot has recently endorsed an Environmental Assessment Phase (EA) to assess the need to rehabilitate or replace this bridge.

Wilmot's other spans are the Perth Street overpass, a nine-span timber railway bridge built in 1950, and the New Hamburg Viaduct, a single-span steel railway bridge over the Nith River just north of Shade Street. These bridges are under the authority of the railways.

Today we face the challenges of keeping these historic structures functional and serving our current needs, while acting as reminders of our past.