Historic Gloucester

Newsletter of the

GLOUCESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

www.gloucesterhistory.com

VOLUME 13, NO 3

Fall 2012

Billings Estate:
Home of Braddish Billings
Historic Gloucester is published by The Gloucester Historical Society. It is intended as a Newsletter to members of the Society to provide interesting articles on Gloucester’s past and to keep them informed of new acquisitions by the Museum, publications available, upcoming events and other items of general interest. Comments and suggestions regarding the Newsletter are always welcome.

Gloucester Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the City of Ottawa.
PRESIDENT’S REPORT

Again this year, our History Room on the lower level of the old city hall building at 4550 Bank Street South, at the intersection of Leitrim Road, was open every Thursday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., from early May to late October. Mary Boyd replaced me during the month of June, and other board members dropped by now and then.

Most if not all historical and genealogical societies are experiencing a drop in membership, as more and more of their members find the information they seek while staying at home and using their computers.

I did greet some visitors this year, though less than last year, which was also less busy than previously, and yet I plan to do the exact same thing again next year. It is important that people know that they can readily access our collection in person if they so wish. Furthermore, I have decided to go through our entire holdings, some more thoroughly than others. I began doing this to bring more order and logic to our holdings, but lo and behold, the result has been yet another project, quite ambitious as a matter of fact, namely another book.

This one will be called GLOUCESTER FROM A TO Z. In it people will find concise information on a multitude of topics related to the township of Gloucester and the city of Gloucester from 1798 to 2001: every school, every church, every post office and every railway station; all the tolls, roads, islands, bridges, arenas, newspapers, cemeteries, ferries, mills and factories; the reeves and mayors, township halls, city halls, library services, police department, fire protection; the Women’s Institutes; every entity whose name starts with Gloucester, including Gloucester Hydro, the Gloucester Historical Society and Museum and the Gloucester Hockey Association. I am not about to get bored in our History Room any time soon!

Robert Serré

Public Notice – The Gloucester Historical Society notifies all members that photographs donated to the society over the years may be copied, distributed or published by the society or the Ottawa City Archives. Whenever possible, credit will be given to the original donor of a photograph. If you have donated photographs to the society and you wish to restrict the use of those photographs, please notify the Gloucester Historical Society.

Board of Directors
2012-2013

Secretary and Newsletter Editor: Joan Scott (2014) Russell Johnston (2014)
Membership Shirley McCooeye (2015)

* Indicates date when this person is up for re-election to Board of Directors.
Gloucester Remembers Braddish Billings with a Plaque
By Glenn Clark

The year 2012 represents the 200th anniversary of arguably the most important event in Gloucester history, the arrival of Braddish Billings as the first permanent settler of the township.

Braddish was born on September 23, 1783 in Ware, Massachusetts to Dr. Elkanah Billings and Joanna Rogers. Dr. Billings had been a surgeon in the Continental Army during the American Revolution and was in support of the cause of the colonists but eventually tired of the new government. As a result, in 1792, the Billings family moved to Canada and eventually settled in Elizabethtown, now Brockville. Braddish took his Oath of Allegiance to the British Crown at age 18 in 1801 to enjoy the privileges of being a British subject in Upper Canada.

In 1808, he left Elizabethtown to get involved with the timber trade along the St. Lawrence River. The following year, he went into partnership with William Marr as lumber jobbers near Merrickville. This ended in 1810 when a storm caused a massive loss of timber.

In 1812, he began working as a lumberman for Philemon Wright in Hull but with the beginning of the War of 1812, Braddish had his bateau seized by the Americans on the St. Lawrence River.

As a result of these costly events, Braddish decided to settle at Lot 17 Junction Gore, Gloucester Township, a designated clergy reserve. It is believed that the site was chosen because of its proximity to the Rideau River, the abundance of timber, the presence of a creek and fertile soil.

Much of that year he spent in Merrickville where he met 17 year old Lamira Dow, a school teacher. They were married on October 18, 1813 in Kitley, and they returned on October 24th with all their possessions in a birch bark canoe. This included six chairs, a bed, a trunk, and a bundle of bed clothes. They arrived at the Gloucester shanty four days later.

Lamira Dow was born in Cambridge New York on March 1, 1796, daughter of Samuel Dow, and Cynthia Harkness who were Quakers. Their family moved to Upper Canada and settled near Merrickville in 1805 but Samuel died soon after. Cynthia remarried but she also died in 1807. Lamira was raised by her stepfather, John Scott. In 1813, Lamira became a teacher at the first school in Merrickville and was one of the first school teachers in all of Upper Canada.

Only upon arrival in Gloucester did Lamira realize the degree of Braddish’s poverty and the rustic conditions in which they would live. In her own words, she was ‘some disappointed’. Immediately, Lamira helped to harvest the corn crop that had been planted the previous spring. She would face many hardships during her early years in Gloucester including a well documented incident of them being swept through rapids at Hog’s Back with their first child, Sabra. But Lamira proved to be a strong woman who was fully capable of living in the wilderness. And it was true wilderness, with the closest store being 50 miles away. Even though the Philemon Wright settlement was closer, goods were generally only available to those who lived in that settlement.

In 1814, Braddish and Lamira built a new cabin and the ruins of that cabin and particularly a large stone fireplace and chimney survived until about 1960 when Riverside
Drive was widened. The stone from that fireplace was made into a wall that is still in place along the Rideau River bicycle pathway, a short distance east of Bank Street.

Braddish and his family remained the only residents of Gloucester until 1819 although there were a few neighbours across the river in what was then Nepean Township and today Ottawa South. In the early years of their life in Gloucester, Braddish spent most of his time in the timber trade, and slowly clearing his land. By 1820, 50 acres had been cleared. He operated a sawmill on his property along the creek that ran through it and that creek was named ‘Sawmill Creek’ for this reason. In 1821 – 1822, Braddish took a license to operate a tavern.

With the arrival of Colonel By and the founding of Bytown in 1826, Braddish began to switch his endeavours to Agriculture as a new market for produce and other farm products began to emerge. In order to bring those goods to market, Braddish operated a ferry service across the Rideau River for all the other farmers that were beginning to settle in the area.

During the late 1820s he began to build their third home, a much more substantial building which they moved into in 1829. This home was named Park Hill because of its imposing location high on the hill overlooking the Rideau River. Today it is the Billings Estate Museum National Historic Site.

Soon after this was completed, he led a subscription to build a bridge across the river which opened in 1830. This wooden structure was initially named Farmers’ Bridge but soon became known as Billings Bridge. Unfortunately, the bridge was very vulnerable to the spring ice break up and was swept away on a number of occasions before the current steel and concrete bridge was built in 1915.

The opening of the bridge brought commerce to the area and slowly a village developed which was named after the bridge and the Billings family. Few realize today that the Village of Billings Bridge covered both sides of the river prior to annexation of Ottawa South in 1907. The village included many businesses, at least four churches, two schools, a post office and the Gloucester Township Hall which was located there from 1850 until 1962; twelve years after the area had been annexed into Ottawa.

Over the years, Braddish Billings acquired a substantial amount of land including all or part of Lots 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20, Junction Gore in Gloucester Township and Lot M, Concession C in Nepean Township, which covered an area in today’s Ottawa South as far north as Cameron Avenue. His land holdings peaked at 1572 acres but for most of his life totalled about 772 acres. Interestingly, Braddish did not acquire title to the original land in Lot 17 until 1837. His Gloucester land holdings covered much of the area now known as Alta Vista and Elmvale Acres.

Braddish took his turn in holding almost every post in local government, including Surveyor of Highways for Russell in 1830, Magistrate for Gloucester Township in 1834, and Bathurst District in 1835, Justice of the Peace for the Dalhousie District in 1842, District Councillor in 1846 and he ran for MLA of the Russell riding in 1848 but withdrew due to poor health. He also campaigned to bring a judicial seat to Bytown, which became a reality in 1842 in part due to his assistance in building Bytown’s first jailhouse and courthouse. Braddish was a major in the militia and an ardent Mason. He also played a
role in bringing the first railway to Bytown and this railway ran across his farm adjacent to his home starting in 1854.

Braddish Billings died on April 8, 1864 at age 80 and was buried in the family cemetery. His tombstone has been restored and can be viewed at the Billings Estate Museum National Historic Site.

Much progress was made in Bytown and Gloucester during his lifetime and it is fitting that he be honoured on this important anniversary. Accordingly, the Gloucester History Society has commissioned a plaque, which will be placed in Linda Thom Park at the north end of Billings Bridge. It is to be located on the west side of Bank Street adjacent to the sidewalk and park entrance. The site was chosen for its visibility to pedestrians, and because it is located on part of the original Billings Estate property and next to the bridge named in his honour. Installation is expected in November.

Bibliography

- A Brief History of the Billings Family prepared by Billings Estate Museum volunteers, 2001
- Carleton Saga, by Harry and Olive Walker, 1968, pages 155 to 161
- Billings Bridge: A Sketch of the Village 1830-1950 by Carol Hodgson, 1998

Historical Atlas of Carleton County, Ontario by H. Belden & Co., 1879, pages xxxv, xxxvi, li

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**Naming of Harry Allen Bridge**

by Joan Scott

Former Mayor of Gloucester, Harry Allen has at last been recognized for his contribution to Gloucester. Due to the efforts of Roger Pyper, former President of the Community Association of Blackburn Hamlet, and a group of concerned citizens, the Greens Creek bridge has been renamed The Harry Allen Bridge.

Harry Allen worked with the NCC in the realignment of the Rockcliffe Parkway at St. Joseph Boulevard to form a direct link to Blackburn Hamlet. He also had given land for this purpose and worked with the NCC in the widening of the bridge over Green’s Creek. Harry Allen was instrumental in having the Blackburn bypass located where it is because he felt it would divide the residential area from the schools and commercial areas of Blackburn Hamlet if it went through the built-up area. For these reasons it was felt appropriate that the bridge should bear his name.

The commemorative renaming ceremony was held at City Hall on August 30, 2012. The bridge is now identified by name on boards on either side of the bridge. As well there is a brass plaque attached to a large stone on the north east side of the bridge. Harry Allen was most pleased to see that his contribution to Gloucester is appreciated and has been officially recognized.

Reference to the bridge, and to Harry Allen, may be found on the GHS website.
WHO WAS WHO IN GLOUCESTER
by Robert Serré

[The following entries are taken from a book which our Society published this year. It contains short biographical profiles of 234 men and women who left their mark in one way or another.]

Thomas Andrew SPRATT, son of James Spratt and Sarah Moore, was born on a farm in Ellwood, south of Billings Bridge, on 11 September 1865. He married Annie Gamble in 1891, and their children were named Elma, Gladys, James, Irene, Beatrice, Bert, Merrick, Jennie, Jessie, Lottie, Melba, Whitney and Frances. He moved to a farm on Heron Road, and ran a dairy between 1892 and 1900. In 1908 he named his farm Hedge-dale after its thorn hedge. He was one of the original founders of the Ottawa Dairy, of which he was vice-president. He was the owner of the World Champion Dairy Cow Maudie De Kol in 1912. He was a member of the Hawthorne Methodist Church choir, and a steward in the church. A Conservative in politics, he was a member of the Orange Order, Billings Bridge Lodge No. 222. He served as reeve of Gloucester Township from 1927 to 1930. He died at home in August 1930.

Sources:
HWITH (Hawthorne Women’s Institute Tweedsmuir History) [copy held in the History Room of the Gloucester Historical Society].

Arthur Donald (Art) PRICE, son of Malen Lemuel Price and Mary Emily Court-tenage of Welsh and Pennsylvania Dutch extraction, was born in Edmonton, Alberta, in 1918. In 1921 his family moved to Ontario. He was educated at Western Technical School, and attended the Ontario College of Art for one year. He married Dalila Barbeau, daughter of Dr. Marius Barbeau, and they had five children. In 1948 he moved to Ottawa, and worked for the National Film Board. He built a house and studio in Blackburn Hamlet in 1949. In addition, he had a successful career as a sculptor. Some of his notable works were the stainless steel ball in its reflecting pool at the National Research Council of Canada on Montreal Road, the restoration of the Tin House Court on Sussex Drive in Lower Town, and the cast aluminium at the Alta Vista Postal Terminal. He was 90 years old when he died in December 2008.

Sources
Orléans Star, 13 February 2009.

James SORLEY was born in Scotland on 21 January 1829, and came to Canada in 1849, according to the 1901 census. He laid out the gardens at Spencer Wood (Sillery), the official residence of the Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec, and was assigned to the landscaping of the first grounds of Rideau Hall in 1867, remaining in that position under nine governors general. At the time of the 1871 census, he was living in New Edinburgh with his wife, the former Margaret McCormick, also born in Scotland, and five children: twins John and Janet, Mary, James and Ellen. The first three children had been born in Canada West, and the last two in Canada.
East. Margaret was 77 years old when she died on 20 December 1898. James Sr. died at the age of 81, in New Edinburgh, on 9 June 1910, and was buried in Beechwood Cemetery. His son James became a farmer, on the south side of Montreal Road, on lot 21 in the first concession of the Ottawa Front. James Jr. married Margaret McClellan, and they had five children, named Janet, John Neil, James, Donald and Margaret. In 1893, he began milk delivery from his farm. He sold the business in 1918 to the Ottawa Dairy Co., but his sons Neil and Donald resumed the dairy operation on Skead (now Blair) Road, calling it Morningside Dairy. The family farm was sold to the National Research Council in 1950. According to the Sorley family tombstone in Beechwood Cemetery, James Jr. was born in 1861, and died in 1924, and his wife Margaret was born in 1860, and died in 1929.

Sources:

Patricia Marilyn (Pat) MESSNER, daughter of Linda Ohm-Meier and Austrian-born Joe Messner, was born in Hamilton on 17 March 1954. She grew up in Ancaster, moving to Ottawa around 1964. She trained at Rapid View on the Rideau River, specializing in slalom, and dominated the national water skiing scene from 1964 to 1981. She won bronze at the Canada Summer Games in 1969, and bronze at the 1972 Olympics in Munich. Also in 1972 she won silver medals in the Western Hemisphere championships and the California International Cup. In England, in 1975, she won the bronze medal in the world championship, the first world medal ever won by a Canadian woman. In 1976 she won the gold medal in the Western Hemisphere championships in Mexico. She won the U.S. Masters in 1978, and in 1979 was the first Canadian woman to win the World Slalom Championship, in Toronto. She won silver at the World Cup in 1980. Educated at McGill, Carleton, Waterloo (B.A.), the University of Ottawa (B.Ed.) and Algonquin College, she became a musician and a high school teacher. In 2005 her residence was located in Carleton Place.

Sources:

Ken REYNOLDS was born in Brownsburg, Quebec, in 1929. In 1935 he moved to a farm located between Leitrim and South Gloucester. He was educated at Ottawa Technical High School, and started calling square dances as a teenager. In 1947 he began doing music promotions while working full time in Ottawa as an automotive machinist. He launched a booking and promotion company in 1951, and two years later he received a booking agent licence for Ottawa from the American Federation of Musicians. In the 1950s he managed the Wilf Carter tours, and as of September 1955, he also managed the Entertainment Bureau of Frank Ryan’s CFRA radio station, featuring the Happy Wanderers.
 until 1965. He and his wife Dottie were married on 17 November 1956. He was the tour manager of the Don Messer Jubilee Show from 1961 to 1973, and worked for the federal civil service from 1962 to 1989.

Source:

Harold CLARK, son of Harold Gainsborough Clark and Caroline Cutts, was born in Gloucester Township. His great-grandfather had been brought out from Ireland as a gardener by Braddish Billings, and his parents were wholesale florists. In 1937 he married Lois Elizabeth Musson of Bowesville, and they had seven children. They worked as retail florists in Leitrim for 34 years. Harold Clark and Fred Barrett set up the Leitrim Athletic Association with the assistance of Orville Kemp, Graham and David Ritchie and other residents. An outdoor rink was built on the Leitrim school grounds, and a hockey team was formed, with Clark and Barrett sharing the coaching duties. Harold was also secretary-treasurer of the local school board for 18 years, and served on the Gloucester Police Commission for 15 years, seven of them as chairman. In the 1970s he was part-owner of the Gloucester Rangers.

Sources:

William Henry HURDMAN, eldest son of Charles Hurdman and Margaret Graham of County Cavan, Ireland, was born in Hull Township, Quebec, on 9 October 1818. With his brothers Robert and Charles Jr. he started a lumber business under the name of W. Hurdman and Brothers, and built a bridge over the Rideau River to link piling grounds in Gloucester Township with mills at the Chaudière Falls. He married Sarah Sophia Smyth, daughter of William and Sarah Smyth of Hurdman’s Bridge, on 17 October 1861, and their children were named Wilhelmine, Bertha, Edith Augusta and William. In 1873 he moved to lot 13 of the Junction Gore in Gloucester Township. He served as reeve of the township in 1877-79. The great fire that destroyed much of Hull and part of Ottawa in 1900 wiped out the Hurdman Brothers enterprises there. He died on 20 February 1901, and was buried in Beechwood Cemetery.

Sources:

Did You Know?
When you sneeze, all bodily functions stop, even your heart!
People do not get sick from cold weather; it’s from being indoors a lot more.
Babies are born without kneecaps. They don’t appear until they are 2-6 years old.
The average person over 50 will have spent 5 years waiting in lines.
A coat hangar is 44 inches long when straightened.
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**A Day in November**  
by Robert Serré

Things are slow at the office, so on such a fine November afternoon, you decide to leave early, and to casually walk home. You've been restless lately, can't stay focussed somehow, don't feel a sense of purpose, and you long for something new.

Down the main street you go, mingling with the crowd, walking at a rhythmic pace that plainly shows you are in no particular hurry. Lost in the throng you soon let go of any self-consciousness, and countless impressions bombard you from all sides. Noises, smells, faces, textures, colours, the breeze in your hair, your hands warm in your pockets, your body loose and comfortable.

On impulse, you enter a hotel lobby, find a cozy spot, sit in a huge, luxurious chair, and contentedly watch people milling about, or sitting reading, or standing waiting. The tension has left you; it seems that nothing matters. You are an indistinct part of an irrepressible ebb and flow.

Up you stand and out you go, on your way again down the street. The crowd thins out. You reach a bridge, maintaining your effortless stride, casting a dizzying glance at the fluid motions of the water below. You're on a busy main street again. Something attracts your attention on one of the quaint side streets: a crowd, colourful uniforms, a general hubbub, official cars, looks of expectation. You slow down, you're curious, intrigued. You walk towards the centre of the activity, and stand among other attentive folks, people in front of their houses, expectant like you.

A Highland band stirs you into keen observation of a group of uniformed men and women leaving an assembly hall across the street. They walk towards you, then turn right towards the main street. You see each one so clearly, young, old, slim, overweight, good-looking, homely, graceful, awkward, proud, firm, dignified. These are not indistinct, god-like, disciplined symbols of military might, but ordinary humans so very like you. You can't help remembering two uncles who went overseas before you were born. You can't help reflecting on war and people dying for a cause. Your throat tightens up painfully, tears slowly flood out of your wide-open eyes down both cheeks, your mouth quivers, your body heats up, you stand there motionless and let the scene engulf you, roll over you, slide past you.

A moment later, it's over. The crowd disperses. People talk and shuffle about. Motor cars move out and you go back to the main street to resume your quiet, peaceful walk home on such a fine November afternoon.

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**When the three-year old opened a birthday gift from his grandmother, he discovered a water pistol. He squealed with delight and headed for the nearest sink.**

His mother was not so pleased. She turned to the grandmother and said,

“I’m surprised at you. Don’t you remember how we used to drive you crazy with water guns?”

The grandmother smiled and replied,

“I remember.”
Members Wanted:

The Gloucester Historical Society is always looking for new members. Regardless of age, anyone who is interested in the history of Gloucester, as a Township, City, or part of the City of Ottawa, can benefit from membership in the Society. There is a well-stocked history room at our Leitrim Road office. Every Thursday, from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm from early May to the end of October, there are knowledgeable people there to help you in all aspects of research about your family, friends or neighbours in Gloucester.

Your membership entitles you to receive the *Historic Gloucester* newsletter four times a year so that you can keep up with what is going on with the GHS and read interesting articles of times and places of long ago. For more information on the Gloucester Historical Society be sure to check out our wonderful website at [www.gloucesterhistory.com](http://www.gloucesterhistory.com).

Family Histories Wanted:

If you have information on any family who resided in Gloucester, we would be happy to add this to our records. There may be others who would like to share this information but have been unable to find it. And, you may find that the family of someone you know was once a neighbour of your ancestors!

Volunteers Needed:

The GHS is always looking for volunteers to assist others with research, to assist at society functions or to help the Board of Directors in many other ways.

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**IF YOU HAVE NOT YET RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP, OR IF YOU WISH TO BECOME A NEW MEMBER, PLEASE COMPLETE THE FORM BELOW AND SEND IT IN WITH YOUR CHEQUE.** (Membership year runs from Jan 1 to Dec 31 calendar year)

**NOTE: NEW MEMBERSHIP FEES EFFECTIVE APRIL 2012**

Membership Form—Gloucester Historical Society/Société historique de Gloucester

Membership/Adhésion 2012 - $20.00 for one year........ $150.00 for life membership........

NAME:_____________________________________________________________________

ADDRESS:__________________________________________________________________

CITY:_________________________ PROV_____________________ POSTAL CODE__________

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