

The Burlington Historical Society GAZETTE

Our March 2021 Speaker – Rick Green



Richard "Rick" Green, is a Canadian comedian, satirist, actor, writer, and advocate for awareness of adult ADD. He is most well known as co-creator of The Red Green Show, creator of History Bites and co-founder of comedy troupe *The Frantics*. Green also hosted Prisoners of Gravity on TVOntario.

Green holds a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Waterloo. His first job was as a demonstrator at the Ontario Science Centre, where he worked as a presenter from 1975 until 1979.

<https://totallyadd.com>

In 2009 he was awarded the CAMH Foundation Transforming Lives Award for writing and directing a documentary about attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in adults, entitled ADD & Loving It.

On June 30, 2017, the Governor General of Canada announced Green's appointment as a Member of the Order of Canada for "his contributions to Canadian television as a comedian, actor and writer, and for his efforts to raise awareness and understanding of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).



You do not want to miss this presentation!

March 2021 Speaker

Join us on ZOOM, Monday, March 8, @ 7pm
Rick Green

April 2021 Speaker

Join us on ZOOM, Monday, April 12 2021 at 7:00 pm
Our speaker will be Ken Armson
Topic: JOHN WALDIE

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President's Report *Joan Downey*

One year ago we held a meeting with speaker Dr. David Galbraith of the Royal Botanical Gardens. We enjoyed the speaker and the social connection with other members. Little did we know that would be the last gathering for more than a year. Gradually things are starting to reopen. But it will be some time before we return to “in-person” meetings in Centennial Hall.

In the interim, some of us are meeting virtually on Zoom. And, we have set up a reciprocal arrangement with the Oakville Historical Society to share links to Zoom meetings. For those who do not join Zoom meetings, I hope this newsletter keeps you informed about society happenings and also provides some reading enjoyment.

Enjoy the rest of the Winter and hopefully we'll meet again soon.



Photo Joan Downey

Membership Report *Pat Taylor*

Welcome to new members

Regina Bendig

Tom Corlett

Joe Loiacono

Mike Quakenbush

A number of our members have been taking advantage of the Interac option to pay their 2021 membership dues. The link is available on our website. No more need for stamps, envelopes or a trip to the post office in the cold weather. What could be easier?



The Farmerettes *Pat Taylor*

Farmerettes - I first heard that word in Joan's presentation on Agriculture for the lecture series we prepared for the Senior's Centre. Then, I came across it again during some research on the Pig and Whistle. Time to find out about these 'Farmerettes.'

There is lots of information on 'Google' but the source I used the most was a book entitled "Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz." What a strange name for a book.

In 1940, with a lot of the young men enlisting in the armed forces, who would plant and harvest the crops next year? The Ontario Government formed the "Ontario Farm Service Force." There were seven brigades in total – the one I was interested in was the girls group called the 'Farmerettes.' These were groups of students, at least 16 years old, that were to work on farms and be housed in camps. The camps were mainly in the Niagara, south western Ontario and the Thedford area (between Sarnia and Grand Bend). The camps, some had upwards of a 100 campers, would be supervised by the members of the YWCA. The "Y" would be responsible for food, discipline, housing, recreation and health. The



Farmerette program ran from 1941 – 1952 and recruiting took place mainly in high schools across the entire province. As an incentive, if you had good marks, agreed to and stayed the required 13 weeks you could be excused from writing final exams – but you needed your school principal's permission. For many 16 year olds it was a chance to experience a summer away from home, to earn a little money and to skip those dreaded grade 13 exams. And, they got to feel they were helping the war effort. Young ladies from all over the province enrolled in the program. In 1942 10,000 signed up. They were required to sign this pledge.

As a member of this Force your code of behavior is as follows:

I pledge allegiance to my King, my native land Canada and to the British Commonwealth of Nations.

My earnest desire as a member of the Ontario Farm Service Force is to support our Army, Navy and Air Force by assisting Canadian Farmers in their contribution to Canada's War Effort in the production and conservation of food.

To this end and in preparation for my work, I promise to keep myself physically fit, mentally alert and at all times to conduct myself in an acceptable manner.

I will follow orders promptly and serve cheerfully wherever I may be called and for as long as I am able.

The privilege of rendering service to my Country and the knowledge that I work so that there will be freedom and peace once again for all men – this will be my happiness and my recompense.

The first couple of years the girls could purchase a royal blue uniform – looked great when they were travelling to camp or home. But it was an expense most of the Farmerettes chose not to partake in and the uniforms were discontinued.

They lived in a variety of units - tents, Nissen huts, a converted mill, a converted chicken coop, a re-arranged schoolhouse, or a converted barn. One girl recalls being sent mid-summer to “a lovely lodge, with one main building and cabins in the back.” It was Burlington’s Pig and Whistle – with hot and cold water and inside facilities. In the Vineland Camp the girls named their ‘privies’ The Royal York, The Waldorf Astoria, The Park Plaza and the Chateau Laurier.

Room and board and wages varied. To help with expenses each girl was required to hand in her ration book on arrival. One Farmerette was paid \$16.95 for a 56 ½ hour workweek – 30 cents an hour and paid \$4.50 for her room and board. Another Farmerette recalls, for picking, being paid 3 cents/box of strawberries, 8 cents/per basket of peas and 25 cents for weeding rows of carrots and parsnips. In one tomato field there were 250 plants in a row; the girls received 50 cents a row for staking and removing the suckers. One Farmerette left home in June with \$5.00 and returned home with \$2.00 – she worked all summer for net loss of \$3.00. Another girl made enough in 2 years to go with her Mom to Victoria B.C. to see her two brothers graduate from a school there.

But how did the girls know where they were to work? The farmers notified the Labour Secretary in each camp how many workers they needed the next day. The secretary assigned the girls and usually posted the list; other called out the assignment in the morning. After dinner or breakfast the girls would make their own lunch from supplies put out by the kitchen staff. In some camps 2 or 3 girls after dinner would make all the lunches for the next day.

Around 7-7:30 a.m. the farm trucks and wagons would arrive and the girls would climb aboard the appropriate transportation - most often riding in the open back box of a truck.

Each camp had specific jobs and crops as the summer progressed. Thedford was well known for its Dutch set onions, celery and peppermint. The girls planted, weeded, hoed and harvested. The harvested peppermint was taken to a ‘still’ on the property and was distilled for the oil. Some of this oil went to flavour chewing gum. But the onions....they were a dusty, dirty job requiring eye protection that the Farmerettes had to supply. The harvested onions were ‘scrubbed’ on a wire mesh to remove the outer skins. Every kind of soap and even lemons, were used to get rid of the onion smell. With all that scrubbing, they needed hand lotion. One Farmerette commented, “To this day Jergen’s Lotion smells to me of onions.”



In the Niagara and Burlington areas, in the market gardens, the Farmerettes set out plants, weeded, thinned, hoed, staked and harvested the crops. In the orchards, they thinned fruit, picked (and sampled) peaches and cherries. Almost all of the girls that had to thin peaches commented, or was it complained, of the fuzz on the peaches giving them a rash between their fingers, behind their knees and around their middle. To counter the itch, cornstarch was used. Some girls had to visit a doctor to get something more effective.

But it wasn't all work and no play. Beach parties, talent shows, sing songs, excursions to the movies, baseball in local leagues helped them pass their time off. Or shopping – in Buffalo, Detroit or Port Huron (USA). How did they get there? By hitchhiking, but NEVER ALONE. Thedford, in 1952, had a jukebox. This meant local boys and the cadets from Ipperwash Camp came for dances. The Beacon in Jordan Harbour was a favourite for the Farmerettes in the locale – for pie and ice cream, or a burger and fries or to enjoy their jukebox and dance floor. The Beacon can still be seen from the QEW.

In 1942, 17 Farmerettes competed for the title of “Miss Farmerette” and the honour to represent Canada as Miss Farmerette. (It is unclear where they were to represent Canada or at what pageant.)

How did the book *Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz* come about? From an ad placed in Ontario newspapers and farming magazines, author Shirleyan English received about 300 replies from former Farmerettes – she had thoughts of writing a book but other things intervened. Bonnie Sitter came across some photos that had “Farmerettes, about 1942” on the back. This sent her into research mode. She met Shirleyan and as a result – they co-authored a book and called it “*Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz*.”

The girls who worked in Thedford in the onion fields all mentioned about “skinning” onions. Once the onions had dried, they had to be gently rubbed on a wire screen set into a table-like structure. The chaff went EVERYWHERE – in their hair, down blouse fronts, into shoes and everywhere else on their bodies.

To quote one of the girls from the Niagara fruit belt area, “the worst job was thinning peaches as the peach fuzz was quite an irritant to the skin.



Now, the title of the book “*Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz*” seems quite appropriate.

But most of the now mid-80 and early 90 year olds commented how their experiences with the Farmerettes as one or some of the best summers of their life. Some even found the ‘love of their life’ – a truly happy ending.

Photos courtesy Canadian War Museum
www.warmuseum.ca

“What’s Behind the Name”

by Peggy and Les Armstrong

Published by The Burlington Historical Society (out of print)

Cummins Lane

Burlington’s Planning Department named this street to commemorate the former hamlet of Cumminsville which was located on Cedar Springs Road, just south of Kilbride, and given the name of it’s founder, Titus Cummins (1840’s).

Mr. Cummins wore many hats: he was Justice of the Peace, first postmaster of Cumminsville (1851) and grain merchant. His place of burial is the Union Burying Ground or “Brick Cemetery” on Plains Road.



Other family members lived locally, with three Cummins-Van Norman marriages.

NOTES: Cummins Lane is a short street which runs off Duncaster Drive.

Cumminsville at one time was home to 200 residents, many were employed by the Hamilton Powder Company. On 9 October 1884, mid-way through the noon hour, there were 2 explosions. Residents of Hamilton saw a huge white cloud raise to the north, followed by black smoke. The plant had exploded! Four men were killed instantly and 2 wounded. One later succumbed to his wounds.

The plant was never rebuilt and the villagers moved on. Today there is no sign of the once thriving village.



Donations of memorabilia continue to trickle into the Archives (my

John David Nelles was a teacher at Lawrie Smith and Elizabeth Gardens Schools in the 60s and vice-principal and later principal at Strathcona School from the late 60s until it closed in 1988. His son recently donated a number of staff pictures from those years. Unfortunately, they are not identified. In the coming month I will post the photos on our website for you to browse. If you can provide any information about the year, school and staff names, your input would be most appreciated. He also donated the Strathcona School bell.

Also, a resident found a City of Burlington A-Z Community Guide dated April 1988 and dropped it off in my mailbox. There is a letter from then mayor, Roly Bird in the front and the guide includes many maps of local areas

Freeman Station Update *Alan Harrington*



The Friends of Freeman Station had such good feedback regarding their Christmas light display that they decided to keep the project going. For the month of February they changed to a Valentine's Day theme. Keep an eye out. Who knows what will be next?

Photo Alan Harrington

Outreach Report *Joan Downey*



Alan has booked the 4th annual History Tour for 6th March – The Waldie Tour. Meet at the Tourism Office at 414 Locust Street at 10:45 am to enjoy this walking tour. The tour will end around noon. Please dress for the weather and wear comfy shoes.

Get a bit of fresh air, enjoy Alan's playful banter and learn something about our history. All this for the low cost of \$0.00!

To ensure that we follow the COVID-19 rules for limiting the group to 25 we ask you to please book a ticket. [click here to book your ticket](#)

5 Dec 2020 walking tour of Spencer Smith Park
Photo: Anne Soroichinsky

Burlington Historical Society Executive

Officers (Elected)		Directors (Appointed)		Convenors (Appointed)		Archive Volunteers
President	Joan Downey	Programs	Alan Harrington	Greeting Cards	Anne Wingfield	Peggy Armstrong
Vice President	Rebecca Keddy		Warren McCrea	Phone Committee	Elizabeth Baldwin	Josie Hammond
Secretary	Dobriila Kinn		Helen Callaway	Heritage Burlington	Rick Wilson	Rebecca Keddy
Treasurer	VACANT	Archives	Joan Downey		Alan Harrington	Jennifer Kemp
Past President /		Webmaster	Wayne Murphy	50/50 Draw	Frank Armstrong	Dorothy Kew
Bookkeeper	Jane Ann Newson	Membership	Pat Taylor	Publicity	Jennifer Kemp	Dobriila Kinn
		Newsletter	Joan Downey			Chris Mallion Moore
		Outreach	Joan Downey			Donna Ryan
						Pat Taylor
						Russ Woodley



The Burlington Historical Society
 Preserving Burlington's History for Today and Tomorrow

Membership - 2021

Date: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____ Postal Code: _____

Telephone: _____ Email address: _____

Membership Dues

New Member

Family: \$40.00

Senior: \$25.00

Renewal

Adult: \$30.00

Yes, as a **new** BHS member I wish to receive the Gazette newsletter and other e-communications and understand I can unsubscribe at any time.

Volunteer

Are you interested in volunteering with the Society? Would you like to help us in preserving the history of our City? Tell us a bit about your talents and interests – info@burlingtonhistorical.ca

Donation

I wish to make a separate donation to the society in the sum of _____

A Tax Receipt will be issued for all donations totalling \$25.00 or more

The Burlington Historical Society is a registered charity # 119217693RR0001

Mail completed form and remittance(s) to:

The Burlington Historical Society
 Membership Convenor
 PO Box 93164
 1450 Headon Road
 Burlington, Ontario L7M 4A3

Make cheques payable to The Burlington Historical Society

OR

e-transfer funds to
info@burlingtonhistorical.ca



If you are a new member using e-transfer, please email the completed form to us at the above email

OR

Leave it at the Membership table at any General Meeting

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