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## 2008 AGM Conference Edition

### The Quakers of Grey County: *The Final Flowering in Ontario*

*An invitation to explore the former Quaker presence in Grey County while attending the CFHA Annual General Meeting, Owen Sound, September 20, 2008*

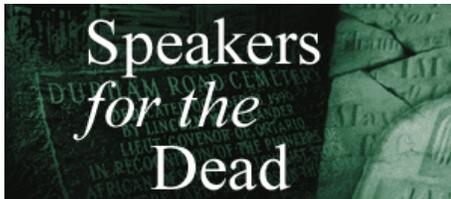
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Many of the readers of this newsletter will be familiar with the large poster which depicts the family tree of Quakers in North America in the literal likeness of a large tree with spreading and intertwining branches.

When we consider the Quaker presence in Grey County, Ontario, we may do well to draw out a similar, smaller tree. Created largely by Quakers that draw originally from the Quaker communities established earlier in southern Ontario, the Quakers of Grey County represent one of the sub-branches of the family tree. Chronologically speaking, we are out near the very tips of one branch of the now many-limbed and diversified tree. Although the Quakers of Grey County represent only a few shoots on this branch, they are shoots that will die off and disappear mere decades after coming into existence. Even as the fledgling Preparative Meetings were being established the sustaining unity and coherence of the earlier Quakerism was itself withering and disintegrating. As such, the Grey County meetings represent the cresting of the Quaker wave of settlement in Ontario. Like a wave, they vanish, not back into the ocean, as it were, into the sand itself. It is now the task of the modern day enquirer to recover the history and the meaning of those Friends who pioneered, built and ultimately abandoned the Quaker communities of Grey County.

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We are very fortunate to have Jennifer Holness, producer of *Speakers for the Dead*, as a guest speaker for our September 20 AGM. We will also view the 50 minute documentary as a part of the evening activities.

*Speakers for the Dead* examines a small town in rural Ontario and its quest to restore the history and dignity

of its Black descendants.

This story begins in the 1820s when ex-slaves and Black Loyalists, veterans of the War of 1812, settled in Priceville, southwest of Collingwood, Ontario. The area's first non-native settlers, they established homesteads, a school and a cemetery. Around the time of confederation (1860s), Scottish and Irish settlers displaced them, pushing them off the land to Owen Sound, Collingwood and further south. Soon, the only remnant of their existence in Priceville was the cemetery.

Fast forward to the 1930s, when

a Priceville farmer tears up their tombstones to plant potatoes and buries some of the grave markers under a two-ton pile of stones.

*Speakers for the Dead* traces the journey of discovery begun in the 1980s by descendants of Priceville's Black and White settlers. Could they find other tombstones? Would their search lead to a greater understanding of their origins? As they delve into the story of Blacks in the Priceville area, new truths are revealed and the townspeople are divided.

2000, 49 min 47 s

## 1851 Census

## St. Vincent Township, Grey County

The following individuals are listed as 'Friends' (husband and wife) on the 1851 St. Vincent Township census:

Thomas N. & Mary Converse  
(Carpenter)

Moses & Sarah Chandler  
(Miller)

George & Phoebe Bull  
(Farmer)

Thomas & Mary Cameron  
(Farmer)

Hiram & Elizabeth Bond  
(Farmer)

William B. & Susan Leavens  
(Farmer)

Renselear B. & Fanny A.  
Leavens (Farmer)

Clark & Catherine Hughes  
(Farmer)



William B. Leavens, courtesy of the Meaford Museum



Susan Leavens, courtesy of the Meaford Museum

## AGM Guest Speakers

### Jennifer Holness

As an award-winning producer, director and writer, Jennifer brings a wealth of talent and experience to the Canadian Friends Historical Association AGM & Conference. A multiple-award winner at the Toronto International Film Festival (*Love, Sex & Eating the Bones*, and *My Father's Hands*), and a recipient of numerous Gemini Award nominations, she has also worked with all the major television networks, including CBC, CTV and HBO.

She co-directed the film *Speakers for the Dead*, which won best documentary at the Reel Black Film Awards in 2000.

When not with her three girls, she is working on her current film *The Way the Ball Bounces*.

*Note: Books, DVD's, Videos and other items will be available for sale from the AGM Speakers.*

### Les MacKinnon

Called a "fiery fourth-generation Scottish Canadian" in the film *Speakers for the Dead*, Les is an inspiring and impassioned speaker for preserving local history. After hearing stories of the "darkies' cemetery", Les led a diverse group of local citizens of Priceville to reclaim and restore the place of pioneer Blacks in Grey County.

Les has said that "we need to see ourselves in the landscape of history. We have a proud heritage that's a shared history...we have a duty to respect that contribution."

An active member of many local and regional heritage groups, Les is a frequent speaker on Black history in the lower area of Grey County. Professionally, he is involved in environmental assessment. The Canadian Friends Historical Association is delighted to have Les deliver our evening key note address.

### Karolyn Smardz Frost

Being an archaeologist and historian gave Karolyn the immense background on the lives of Thornton and Lucie Blackburn. Based on that research, her book *I've Got a Home in Glory Land* was the 2007 winner of the Governor-General's Award for non-fiction.

The former Executive Director of the Ontario Historical Society, Karolyn is now a much in demand speaker across North America. Anyone who has had the pleasure to hear Karolyn speak or read her recent book, have been left spellbound by the unique lives that she has literally unearthed and brought to light.

The Canadian Friends Historical Association was lucky to have Karolyn speak at our 2008 Spring Conference, and we are delighted that she has made time to be with us again. A resident of Collingwood, this might be one of her closest speaking engagements this year.

## Grey County Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

By Gerald L. White (Reprinted from CFHA Journal #49, Summer 1991)

The history of the Meetings of The Society of Friends in Grey County, Ontario, spans a period of about forty years from 1861 to 1900. This was one of the areas of relatively late settlement and one of the last locations for the development of Quaker communities in the province. The three meetings in Grey County were located in the Townships of Collingwood, St. Vincent and Sydenham along the shore of Georgian Bay. After the surveys of Collingwood and St. Vincent in 1833-34 and of Sydenham in 1842, the initial settlement proceeded slowly but gath-

ered momentum in the late 1840's.

Three families of Friends came to these townships in the early period of settlement and formed the nuclei around which Meetings eventually developed. The Bonds took up land, lot 23, concession 9, St. Vincent Township, three miles northwest of Meaford in 1836. The Knights settled near the eastern boundary of Sydenham Township in the vicinity of the village of Woodford in 1845-56. The Rorkes came to Collingwood Township in 1847-48, acquiring lots 24 and 25,

concession 12, at the village of Heathcote (Williamstown).

Many years would elapse before these three locations grew into communities of Friends of sufficient size to undertake the building of meeting houses and during this time Meetings were held in homes.

The Collingwood Meeting House was built in 1861, the first St. Vincent Meeting House was a former school purchased in 1866 and the Sydenham meeting House was erected in 1866.

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## Grey County Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends *continued*

Grey Monthly Meeting was formed in 1871 with two Preparative meetings participating - Collingwood and Sydenham - and an indulged meeting in St. Vincent. St. Vincent Preparative Meeting was formed in 1885, but it did not function regularly. Monthly Meeting usually alternated between Collingwood and Sydenham until the closing of the Sydenham Preparative Meeting in 1888. From that date until the late 1890's, Monthly Meeting was held at the Collingwood Meeting House.

The little groups of Friends in Grey County were at some distance from the principal Quaker centres in Ontario. However, there is ample evidence that this did not isolate them even in the early period of difficult travel. Access to Pickering and Newmarket became much easier with the arrival of the railroad at the town of

Collingwood in 1855 and its extension to Thornbury in 1871 and Meaford in 1872.

Within Grey County, the St. Vincent and Sydenham Meetings were only a few miles apart, but it was a long drive to Collingwood. The shortest route from Collingwood to Sydenham was about 17 miles and to Morley, some 22 miles. Fortunately, travellers could always count on a warm welcome to visit, have a meal or stay overnight.

The diary of Thomas J. Rorke for the years 1875-77 gives some indication of visits by Friends from Yonge Street, Pickering and farther afield. Amongst those from considerable distances were Thomas W. Ladd, Brooklyn; Samuel Morris, Philadelphia; James N. Richardson, Ireland; Sarah Satterthwaite, England; Joseph Dillon, Iowa; and Elwood Scott, Indiana. Thus the Friends in

Grey County were in touch with various aspects of current thought within the Society.

There are many gaps in the story of the *Meetings of Friends in Grey County*, but hopefully enough has emerged to ensure that their contribution to the religious life of the county will not be forgotten.



**Collingwood Meeting House – Heathcote, Ontario**

*Photo courtesy of Andrew Cresswell*

## The Quakers of Grey County *continued*

The story of these Friends, like all history, ultimately consists of the sum of the individual stories of the principal participants involved. Although Arthur Dorland's standard reference *The Quakers in Canada* makes only the briefest mention of these meetings, poignant stories of the struggles both temporal and spiritual of these Friends are emerging. The CFHA Annual General Meeting will provide a good opportunity to review and update our understanding of this difficult period which in many ways represents the final flowering in Ontario of the Quaker expansion.

Please enjoy the other articles in this, our AGM issue of the CFHA Newsletter. Consider joining us as we view the special display of Quaker holdings organized by

the Grey Roots Museum, explore the pioneer village and consider the meaning of the lives of the Grey County Friends. There is interesting additional work to be done in rounding out and completing our understanding, and so there are further lessons to be gleaned from the historical records. Please come and join us on September 20<sup>th</sup> in Owen Sound. We look forward to seeing you!

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It has been a long time coming: A NEWSLETTER! Special thanks are due to the contributors of this edition: Andrew Cresswell, Heather Anne Lambert, Jane Zavitz-Bond and to Ruth Jeffrey-MacLean for distribution.



**John Hall was born in Canada in the late 1700's. He helped Tecumseh's First Nations warriors as a scout during the War of 1812 and was abducted with his mother and 11 siblings by Americans and put into slavery. He eventually escaped and settled in Owen Sound in the 1840's with his wife and children. His death certificate reads April 9, 1900.**

## September 20th AGM Conference Agenda

<u>Time</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Location</u>
08:30 a.m.	Registration	Patio
09:00 a.m.	AGM	M-P Room
11:00 a.m.	Break	
11:30 a.m.	Museum & Archive Tour	
12:30 p.m.	Lunch	M-P Room
01:30 p.m.	TQSB Performance	Patio
02:00 p.m.	Bus Tour— Owen Sound Black Heritage	
04:00 p.m.	Break	
05:00 p.m.	Dinner	M-P Room
06:00 p.m.	Introduction—Jennifer Holness	Theatre
06:15 p.m.	Documentary— Speakers for the Dead	Theatre
07:00 p.m.	Key Note Address—Les MacKinnon	Theatre
07:30 p.m.	Talk & Reading – Karolyn Smardz Frost	Theatre
08:00 p.m.	Q&A Les MacKinnon, Karolyn Smardz-Frost and Jennifer Holness	Theatre
08:30	Closing Remarks, Departure	

**Canadian Friends Historical Association** was founded in 1972 with the aim of preserving and making known the religious, cultural, social and pioneer heritage of Quakers from when they first settled in Canada until today.

CFHA is open to all who share an interest in Canadian Quaker History.

Membership in CFHA is welcomed and needed. Membership supports the Canadian Quaker Archives and helps maintain CFHA's website

Dues for general and institutional membership are \$15 per year. A membership entitles you to Canadian Quaker History, the annual journal, and periodic newsletters published by CFHA. There is also a life membership which only costs \$200.

We are always looking for fresh new material on Quaker History in Canada. If you have an article that you would like to submit to the journal, please send to: CFHA email at [CFHA@pickeringcollege.on.ca](mailto:CFHA@pickeringcollege.on.ca)

With copies to:

- Jane Zavitz-Bond's email at [janezb@allstream.net](mailto:janezb@allstream.net)
- Heather Anne Lambert at [halambert@aci.on.ca](mailto:halambert@aci.on.ca).

The September AGM is being held at the Grey Roots Museum & Archives in Owen Sound

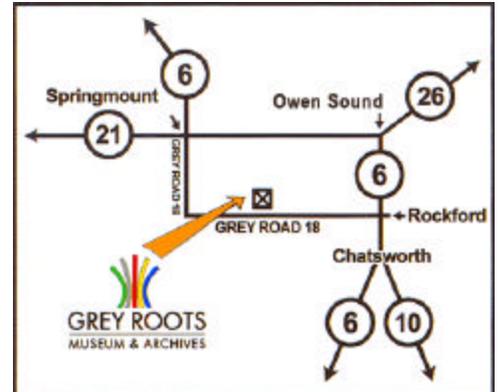
Grey Roots Museum & Archives has grown and developed into a unique facility from the County Museum's beginning in 1955 and the later establishment of a County Archives in 2000 in order to promote and preserve the heritage of Grey County.

Initial interest began by the forming of a committee to establish a museum project, displaying borrowed artifacts in a temporary space. A permanent home became realized in 1959 by the work of the Grey County Historical Art Society and the purchase of a church building in Owen Sound followed by the official opening of an Art Gallery and Museum accommodation.

By 1967 the need for greater space led to an agreement by the municipalities of Grey County and the City of Owen Sound to jointly sponsor the building of a museum. On June 3 of that year the Grey County-Owen Sound Centennial Museum was officially opened at 6<sup>th</sup> Street in Owen Sound. This was followed by the encouragement to establish a County Archives

With the growing expansion of both the museum and archives, the County acted to bring together both facilities. The new and current facility, Grey Roots Museum & Archives, which also includes Grey County Tourism, had its grand opening on June 18, 2004.

Today the facility continues to grow with the development of a Heritage Village and the acquisition of both museum collections and archival materials.



Located off of Hwy #6 west of Rockford, south of Owen Sound, at Inglis Falls Road. The museum is 112 km (70 miles) west of Barrie; 202 km (126 miles) north of Toronto.

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