

## Ethel Willson Trewhella (1882-1959): Quaker Historian in York County, Ontario

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This subject is one with which I am already familiar as Mrs Trewhella's house and garden was adjacent to our own and I knew her when I was a girl. I remember her as an elderly lady dressed for her day's duties in a print dress with cotton pinafore and wearing a frilly cotton cap on her head. Her garden was a maze of grassed pathways around fruit trees, berry bushes, rhubarb plants, and flowers. She was in the habit of calling my mother to the fence to chat and report on one of her latest historical "finds." She often said, "Oh, Mrs McCann, if these fenceposts could talk, what stories they could tell!" Writing this article has been a good excuse to do some research into her life and make the information available to persons interested in Quaker history.

Ethel Willson Trewhella lived from 1882 to 1959, first in the Township of North Gwillimbury where she was born, and from her late teens to the end of her life in Newmarket. This article will try to put her into the context of the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. My task is to examine the woman and her family, and also the community in which she lived.



In the first half of the twentieth century, there was an increasing interest in Canadian history. The population of Ontario had matured to the point where it could celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the Rebellion of 1837 and the resultant creation of the province of Canada West in 1842. In addition, two anniversaries of the Confederation of Canada in 1867 coincided with two world wars - both the 50<sup>th</sup> (1917) and 75<sup>th</sup>

(1947). Re-discovery of the past was perhaps a reaction to war years. After the First World War, there emerged a sense of nationhood. Canadians saw their country as being important on its own right, with its own history, social structure and culture.

In 1917, when Quaker historian Arthur G. Dorland, professor at University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, was asked to present a paper on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of Canada Yearly Meeting 1867, it became apparent to him that the problem of reconstructing the early history of the Society of Friends in Canada was becoming increasingly difficult because of an inability to

gather information that was no longer available. Accordingly, he researched and published in 1927 *A History of the Society of Friends (Quakers) in Canada*.

Tied to the Canadian identity was an emerging interest in local history and local sites. Those interested in local history and related subjects not only turned to research but also turned to publishing.

Work being done by a number of persons in the area of York County stirred more interest in the district surrounding Newmarket.

A couple of men, Percy Robinson and Jesse Walton, who both lived in the district, made important contributions to publications that expressed regional identity. The contribution of Percy J. Robinson (1873-1953), a teacher and historian who taught at St Andrew's College, Aurora, during a career which spanned almost half a century is outstanding. Robinson is best remembered for his masterpiece, published in 1933, *Toronto during the French Regime 1615-1793*, which dealt with aboriginal fur trade routes and the rising commercial aspirations of Toronto. Another noteworthy figure in the district was Jesse M. Walton (1867-1945) who held wide interests in public affairs, historical data, and the temperance cause. In his later years, he amassed a great deal of information which he used as a prolific writer on historical matters, especially in a series of newspaper articles which appeared in the *Aurora Banner* newspaper in the 1940s and 50s. He was a descendant of a Quaker family from Pennsylvania, and maintained a close connection with the Society of Friends. He was also a member of the York Pioneer and Historical Society.

Ethel Willson was born in 1882 in the Township of North Gwillimbury, York County, Ontario.

Even as a child, she identified strongly with

her family ancestry of Quakerism, as well as with the heritage of York County, especially with the fascinating culture of the Children of Peace at Sharon, Township of East Gwillimbury, and later Newmarket. She had a strong sense of the region in which she lived. By that time, it had grown large enough to have a distinct society of its own which had developed from the early days of the province. This was a time when the committed amateur who had the time and the resources sought to bring local history to the attention of populace. The essential aspect of understanding Ethel Willson Trewhella's work is the importance of making local history public and permanent through publishing.

Ethel Willson's parents were married on 9 April 1879, in the Township of East Gwillimbury, York County, where the bride's family lived. Her father, Robert Allen Willson, a twenty-five year-old bachelor, was a farmer, who belonged to the Methodist Church. He was born in Pickering, Ontario County CW, on 8 October 1853, the son of Quaker parents, Robert Schooley Willson and Margaret (Gilmore) Willson. As a young man, he moved from Pickering to the Township of North Gwillimbury on the south shore of Lake Simcoe. Her mother, Sarah Jane Barker, a twenty-four year-old spinster, belonged to the Christian Church. She was born in Uxbridge Township, the daughter of Robert Barker and Martha (Haines) Barker. Witnesses to the union were William Kester and Mary J. Barker (sister of the bride), both of East Gwillimbury. The marriage was performed by license by the Revd David Prosser of the Christian Church. It is interesting to note that both the bride and the groom described themselves as being members of denominations closely associated with Quakerism. In the groom's case, although he

was of Quaker ancestry, there being no Friends Meeting close to where he was living, he had been attracted towards Methodism, popular at the time. In the bride's case, the Christian Church had been established in the northern townships of York County in the early nineteenth century, and had become so popular that many Quaker families had joined in membership.<sup>1</sup>

It is possible to trace movements of the Willson family through Census information. In 1881, Mr and Mrs Willson were living in North Gwillimbury and claimed membership in the Christian Church. Both Willson children were born in North Gwillimbury, Mary Ethel Jeraleen on 16 August 1882, and Charles Leslie on 17 April 1885. By 1891, the Willson family had moved to East Gwillimbury where the Barker family lived. Two young children are buried at Sharon. Ethel and Leslie Willson would have received their early education by attending township public schools. It was common practice for children in neighbouring townships who wished a high school education to reside in Newmarket where the high school was located. Often they boarded with families, or if they were fortunate enough to have relatives or friends living there, they were able to stay with them. Very likely, in order to attend high school, Ethel may have stayed with their Widdifield relatives until her parents had made the decision and necessary arrangements to move into Newmarket. According to his obituary, Robert Willson and his family moved into Newmarket about 1897 when Ethel was

around fifteen years of age. Moving to Newmarket was an obvious choice in the best interests of the family, not only for future opportunities for the children but also for Robert Willson's employment as a carpenter. By the 1901 Census, the Willsons were living in Newmarket and re-claiming their identities as Friends.<sup>2</sup>

Towards the turn of the twentieth century, Newmarket was experiencing an economic boom as a result of the removal of two large factories to the community: The Office Specialty Manufacturing Company and the Davis Leather Tannery. These industries created employment and the persons who worked there required housing for their families. Robert Willson was enticed by the demand for work as a carpenter. The Barker brothers also became involved in building homes. The buff brick home that the family built in 1904 and occupied for over half century was located on the north side of Millard Avenue, west of Main Street. It was in close proximity to other homes in the newly-developed area, and to the Friends Meeting House in Newmarket. The Willson family became members of the Newmarket Friends' Meeting and active in the Friends community.

In this era, around the turn of the twentieth century, many persons were swept into the Society of Friends on the wave of the Evangelical-Revivalist Movement. In Canada Yearly Meeting of Orthodox Friends, within a twenty-year period between 1880 and 1900 when revivalism was at its height, there were

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<sup>1</sup> Archives of Ontario: Ontario Marriages 1801-1928, MS 932-R32, #013438, York County, Twp East Gwillimbury. Marriage April 9, 1879; *Newmarket Era*, April 11, 1879 Willson-Barker marriage.

<sup>2</sup> 1881 Census Canada C-13249, Ontario, York North, Gwillimbury North, p19, family 97; 1891 Census Canada T-6380, Ontario, York North, East Gwillimbury, p27, family 135; 1901 Census Canada, Ontario West, Newmarket, p3, family 35.



approximately over 1,000 members added by request.<sup>3</sup>

The Christian Endeavour Society, first organized by young Friends in Canada in 1892, flourished in Newmarket. Meetings of the Newmarket Young People's Society of Christian Endeavour were routinely reported in the local newspaper. In 1901, Annie Knowles, president of the Society, presented a paper on "How to Improve the Meetings of Our Society" in which she stated that "a Society should not be content with a clique of their own. There should be a reaching-out for benefitting as large a circle as possible and a reaching-out for an attendance every week larger than membership."<sup>4</sup> Attendance at these meetings became very fashionable. Very likely, Ethel and Leslie Willson became members of the Christian Endeavour Society where they

met young persons of similar faith and interests.

At this time, the Newmarket Friends' Meeting had a popular pastor in Frank Cornell. The surname Cornell was among the family names of the earliest Quaker pioneers who settled in Pickering Township after 1810. He became a local favourite who was very much in demand as a speaker. Cornell was adept at drawing people to Friends' meetings. In the prevailing climate of revivalism, it was very much in vogue to be included in his congregation. When increasing attendance made it necessary to find a larger building, Friends purchased the former Congregational Church on Botsford Street to accommodate the larger congregation. Cornell was held in such high esteem that Friends built a parsonage on Church Street behind the church as an added inducement to entice the well-liked minister to stay with them.

Frank Cornell was very much in favour of bringing people together in a common cause. To this end, he decided to compose *The Canadian Friend*, a publication that began to be published in Newmarket, Ontario, in 1904, with himself as editor. This magazine was instrumental in re-uniting the fragmented and scattered groups in the Society of Friends and continues to be an important link in keeping Canadian Friends in touch with one another.

In the early 1900s, Ethel Willson was a young woman on her way to becoming an accomplished dressmaker. The wedding dress which she made for Margaret West's marriage to Frank Bothwell is exquisitely designed and intricately stitched. The young couple was married about 1913 at the Friends Meeting

<sup>3</sup> Arthur G. Dorland, *The Quakers in Canada: A History* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1927), 273.

<sup>4</sup> *Newmarket Era* (18 November 1901), 4, "Christian Endeavour."

House.<sup>5</sup> Although her photo shows her to be an attractive woman who likely had suitors, it is not known whether she was tempted to marry at a younger age or was prevented from marrying because of family duties. At any rate, her dependence on parents for mutual and financial support as she was growing up continued to adulthood. Possibly, there were a number of family influences that were bearing down on her. Perhaps, Ethel was worried that her parents' health and happiness still depended on their daughter's presence. Ethel settled down into a stable and rather sedate relationship with her parents. She was able to earn a living at home through dress-making projects and to enjoy membership in their Friends' church community.

Throughout her adult life, Ethel Willson took an active interest in community organizations and events. As a young woman, one of the local organizations which she participated in was the Canadian Home Circle (COHC). At the installation of officers in January 1912, thirty-year old Miss Ethel Willson was recording secretary, and her mother, Mrs R. Willson was Marshall. Their cousins, A.E. and Mrs Widdifield both held prominent positions. The work of Mrs Widdifield and Miss Willson received special praise. Six years later, at the December 1918 meeting, Miss Ethel Willson was appointed Representative to the Supreme Meeting in Toronto. A.E. Widdifield who had died suddenly in September 1918 was replaced as treasurer, a position he had held for fifteen years.<sup>6</sup>

The death of Mr Widdifield brought additional responsibilities, as well as some companionship, for Ethel Willson. Before the war (1914), his sister Esther Almeda Widdifield, homeless as a result of a disastrous fire, had come to Newmarket to live with her brother who operated a livery business. In 1907 when both of her parents were ill in bed, fire enveloped the Widdifield home at Siloam, Uxbridge Township. Miss Widdifield rushed into the blazing house and carried out first one parent and then the other. Both died within a few weeks as a result of their experience – her mother Elizabeth Smith on 18 February 1907, and her father Benjamin Kester Widdifield on 26 March 1907. The Widdifield family was of Quaker Pennsylvania stock. After her brother's death in 1918, Esther Widdifield made her home with her cousin, Ethel Willson.<sup>7</sup>

The next six years from 1918 to 1924 were heavy with increasing care for Ethel's aging parents. Her mother, Sarah (Barker) Willson died on 7 December 1921 in her sixty-eighth year, after an illness of three months. The funeral service was held on Saturday afternoon conducted by Reverend H. Parry, assisted by Reverend D. Prosser of the Christian Church. Officers of the Home Circle closed the service with their beautiful ritual and acted as pallbearers. Representatives from the Supreme Home Circle in Toronto attended the service. Since Mrs Willson was always happy amongst her flowers, many floral tributes were sent. Her father Robert Willson who had been ill since November 1923, suffering from hardening of the arteries and several strokes, died in a in a

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<sup>5</sup> Elman W. Campbell Museum, Newmarket, collection 2014.

<sup>6</sup> *Newmarket Era* (19 January 1912), 4; *Newmarket Era* (4 October 1918), 2,3, Widdifield: At Newmarket, on Thursday 26 September 1918, Albert Edward Widdifield, Bailiff, in his 58<sup>th</sup> year. Our Local News: "Another Sudden Death of Prominent Business Man". *Newmarket Era* (17 December 1918), 2, Canadian Home Circle (COHC).

<sup>7</sup> *Newmarket Era* (19 April 1942), 1.

Toronto Hospital on Friday 15 August 1924 in his seventy-first year. Both children, Miss Ethel, and her brother Leslie, lived in Newmarket. His brother Morris Willson, who had gone to live in Leal, North Dakota, forty years earlier [ca. 1884], returned to spend a month with relatives and old friends in the Newmarket area. The funeral was held on Sunday afternoon in the Newmarket Friends Meeting House where Robert Willson was a member; it was conducted by Reverend H. Parry, and was largely attended. The pall-bearers were his old neighbours: Mervin Spinks, Fred Hewson, Elijah and John Collins. Friends from a distance attending the funeral were Mr Robert Fogg of Saskatoon; Mr Frank Barker of Dundas; Mr R.W. Walker of Port Perry; Mr and Mrs Phair of Uxbridge; Mr Charles Bedson, Miss Mercy Barker, Mr John Trehwella, all of Toronto.<sup>8</sup>

By 1924, Ethel was a middle-aged spinster with no apparent prospects of, or interest in, marriage. She was not lonely because she shared her home with her cousin, Esther Widdifield. After an appropriate year of mourning had been observed, a happy and surprising event took place on Wednesday afternoon 21 October 1925. Contrary to expectations, at the age of forty-three years, Ethel Willson married fifty-nine-year-old John Trehwella, a widower sixteen years older than she was, with two teen-aged daughters – Florence and Miriam. His wife, Mabel Brown, whom he had married in Brantford in 1905, had died in 1918. A meaningful adult relationship had developed between Ethel and John whom she had known for over a dozen years. Both of them appear in a group photograph taken in 1913 at the wedding of

Miss Addie Leon at “The Cedars” around the corner from the Willson residence in Newmarket. At that time, “The Cedars” was owned by the Scott-Montgomery family. By 1925, John Trehwella had the position of head engineer with the Dominion Steel Corporation at Sarnia, Lambton County.

A description of the wedding appeared in the local newspaper. In the presence of about thirty immediate relatives and friends a very pretty wedding was solemnized when Mary Ethel, daughter of the late Robert A. and Sarah (Barker) Willson, became the wife of Mr John Trehwella of Sarnia, son of the late Martin and Elizabeth (Hosking) Trehwella of Cornwall, England. The groom’s religion was stated as Methodist but in keeping with the bride’s religion as Quaker, the ceremony was conducted by the Reverend H. Parry of the Friends church. The bride, who was given away by her brother Leslie Willson, was dressed very simply in grey satin and carried Ophelia roses. She was attended by Miss Esther Widdifield as bridesmaid who wore peach-coloured crepe with black hat and carried red roses. Miss Dawn Willson, niece of the bride, made a pretty little flower girl in pink taffeta. The groom was assisted by Mr Samuel Edward Barker of Kettleby [King Township, west of Newmarket]. Miss Kathleen Barker of Dundas played the wedding music, and during the signing of the register Mr George Barker rendered a beautiful solo. Following the ceremony, a reception and buffet luncheon was served after which the newly-wedded pair left amid good wishes and showers of confetti for parts in Western Ontario. According to his obituary, John Trehwella settled in Newmarket in 1928; so, Ethel must have joined her

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<sup>8</sup> *Newmarket Era* (16 December 1921), 7, “Death of Mrs Willson; *Newmarket Era* (22 August 1924), 2,5, “The Passing of Mr R.A. Willson,” Our Society Column.

husband in Sarnia for several years before returning to live in Newmarket.<sup>9</sup>

After twelve years of marriage, Ethel Willson Trehwella became a widow at age fifty-five, when John Trehwella (ca1866-1937) died early Friday morning, 17 September 1937. On the previous Tuesday, he had received his last communion from Reverend Arthur Patstone of the Anglican Church, Newmarket. On Thursday, he had the comfort of a visit from his old friend of Mackenzie River days, Bishop Lucas. Gradually his strength faded and his tired spirit passed to its eternal home. In his memory, at the Sunday service in the Anglican Church, the congregation sang the beautiful hymn, 'There is a Blessed Home'. On Monday, the funeral service was held in the Anglican Church conducted by Reverend Patstone, assisted by Reverend Burton Hill of the Friends' Meeting who had visited frequently with him. The pall-bearers were George Barker, Wilmot Barker, Leslie Willson, Walter Haines, all of Newmarket, and Ernest Wood and Robert Hogg of Toronto.

Although she had had no children of her own, Ethel had been a good step-mother because Florence and Miriam continued to consider the Willson home on Millard Avenue their home. The girls had been pupils at nearby King George Public School and had attended Newmarket High School. Miriam became Mrs Robert Bowers and lived in Orillia but was buried with the Willson-Trehwella family in Newmarket. Florence married Harry Dyer and lived in Toronto where she was buried.<sup>10</sup>

Less than five years later, when Ethel had

reached the age of sixty, her cousin Esther Widdifield died at their home on Wednesday, 8 April 1942, in her sixty-eighth year. Among her surviving relatives were a sister-in-law, Mrs Henry Widdifield of Charlevoix, Michigan, and two nephews, Kenneth and Albert Widdifield in Chicago. She was a first cousin of John W. Widdifield of Siloam, former member of the legislature. Miss Widdifield was an active member of the Friends church as long as her health permitted. In recent years, she had been an invalid. The funeral service was held at the residence, 40 Millard Avenue on Friday afternoon; Reverend John Roberts, Toronto Friends minister, conducted the service. She was buried with the Willson-Trehwella family in Newmarket Cemetery.<sup>11</sup>

Even before the death of her husband in September 1937, Ethel had begun to submit articles for publication in the local newspaper. "Yonge Street and Historic Friends Meeting House" appeared in June 1937. At the same time, her account of "The Yonge Street Quakers," a record of both Orthodox and Hicksite bodies, was published in 1937 in a booklet by J.M. Walton of Aurora.<sup>12</sup> After this article, and the death of her husband in 1937, there appears a hiatus in writing. The outbreak of the Second World War in 1938 claimed her attention and for the next eight years until 1945, her time was divided between war work, and nursing care for her cousin, Esther, who had become an invalid for several years before her death in 1942.

After the end of the war, another article entitled, "Tells of Early History of Friends on

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<sup>9</sup> Archives of Ontario: Ontario Marriages 1801-1928, York County, Newmarket, MS 932-R739, #023713; *Newmarket Era* (30 October 1925), 3, Trehwella-Willson.

<sup>10</sup> *Newmarket Era and Express* (23 September 1937), 1, "John Trehwella Dies, Had Wide Experience of World", 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Newmarket Era* (19 April 1942), 1 "Bravery of 35 Years Ago Recalled by Lady's Death".

<sup>12</sup> *Newmarket Era* (30 June 1937), 7.

Yonge Street,” appeared in May 1946. Several years later, a series on Samplers which appeared in the *Era and Express* was well received. It was an account of their origin and told of several samplers which were to be found in the Newmarket district. *The Romance of Samplers* was also published as a booklet in 1949.

In her aim to commemorate those people who had transformed an uninhabited wilderness into a province, she researched and wrote “The History of Job Hughes, Friends’ Minister of Yonge Street 1805-07,” a longer work which appeared in the *Era and Express* in four instalments in May 1949. In introducing the series, the editor, John A. Meyer, stated that he considered himself most fortunate to be able to print another series of articles from the pen of Ethel Willson Trehwella who was well known for her historical writings. He considered that the article which represented painstaking research by Mrs Trehwella would be a valuable addition to the history of York County. A follow-up to the series on Job Hughes appeared in the next issue, “Yonge Street Friends address to Lt-Gov. of Upper Canada in 1806.” The next writing project was even larger. During 1951-52, “The Story of Sharon” was published by the *Era and Express* in forty-two instalments.<sup>13</sup>

In June 1952, in recognition of her work in writing a history of Sharon, Ethel Willson Trehwella was made a life member of the York Pioneer and Historical Society. The award was presented at the annual combined picnic held by the Historical Society and York County Women’s Institute at Sharon Temple Saturday

afternoon. J.E. Kavanagh, New York, vice-president of Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and an ‘old boy’ of Sharon, made the presentation. Mr Kavanagh was born at Sharon and attended school there. He taught school in Ontario and later was insurance agent for the Metropolitan Company. Mr Kavanagh and W.E. Hanna, president of the Pioneers, also received honorary life memberships.

York County had its own situation regarding local history with a large part of its population tracing descent from a small number of pioneer families and had a strong impulse towards regional identity and history. The York Pioneer and Historical Society founded in 1869, and incorporated in 1891, as a group committed to publishing articles related to the history of York County. In 1879, members managed to save the early log cabin of John Scadding which was moved to the Exhibition Grounds. After the loss in 1912 of the Meeting House at Sharon, the Society purchased, on 4 June 1918, Sharon Temple and grounds. The complex of buildings which grew up to be associated with and support the Temple was transferred in 1991 to the Sharon Temple Museum.<sup>14</sup>

Mrs Trehwella was among those who established the Sharon Burying Ground Association in 1952 and was its first secretary. Dr R.W. Breuls of Sharon was chairman. In May 1912, all materials used in the construction of the Meeting House formerly owned by the Children of Peace were offered for sale by ABB Willson and Charles E. Lundy. It had been decided that since the structure would

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<sup>13</sup> *Newmarket Era and Express* (16 May 1946), 10; *Newmarket Era and Express* (5 May 1949), 4 “Series Traces History of Job Hughes, Friends’ Minister of Yonge Street 1805-7,” *Newmarket Era and Express* (5, 12, 19, and 26 May 1949), 4 instalments; *Newmarket Era and Express* (12 June 1949), 4; *Newmarket Era and Express* (14 June 1951), “History of Sharon.”

<sup>14</sup> *Newmarket Era and Express* (19 June 1952), 1, “Life Memberships Presented at York Pioneer – W.I. Picnic” (2 photos).



eventually fall into decay, the money from the sale could be used for proper maintenance of the Sharon Burying Ground.

Notices of the annual meetings in June of the Sharon Burying Ground Association continued to appear each June, encouraging attendance from those wishing to see the restoration of the burying ground. Chairman – Dr R.W. Breuls; secretary – Mrs John Trehwella.<sup>15</sup>

During the early 1950s, a number of events gave evidence of a burst of interest in genealogy, local history, and historical sites. The old Quaker meeting house on Yonge Street, one of the oldest buildings in the district, had needed repairs for some years. Members of the Society of Friends who held meetings there once or twice a year lacked the funds and the help. Finally, when the condition of the building became serious, a little money was obtained and Young Quakers, along with a group of boys from Pickering College, and other interested individuals, formed a work party to make repairs to the building. The interest and assistance by staff and students of Pickering College which was founded by the Society of Friends was much appreciated by those interested in historic sites. Five years later, a provincial historical plaque was sponsored by York Pioneer and Historical Society and erected at the Yonge Street Meeting House by the Ontario Historical Sites Board. Both Elmer Starr and Harry Beer, headmaster of Pickering College, were involved in the project.

In October 1953, the Sharon Temple

museum committee acquired Sharon's first pipe organ, the first pipe organ built in Canada in 1820. Old cemeteries were receiving more attention. Since funds from the federal government had been made available, work was being done at the Sharon Burying Ground.

More people were beginning to realize the value of historical sites. They have a cultural value, and as tourist attractions, they contribute to the economy of the community and the country.

In August 1951, guests of Mr and Mrs Thomas Collins of Sharon and Mrs John Trehwella of Newmarket were Captain and Mrs John W. Haines of Haddon Heights, New Jersey. The purpose of this visit was to make the acquaintance of their Canadian kin, the descendants of William Haines, Mary (Haines) Hollingshead, and their brother Samuel Haines, all of whom had been early settlers in Upper Canada. Samuel Haines had obtained his land from the Crown in 1806. During the afternoon and evening of Thursday 23 August, with Mrs Charles E. Lewis and Mrs Thomas Collins as co-hostesses, a reception was held at the home of Mrs Trehwella, [Millard Avenue]. Miss Mercy Barker presided at the tea table, ably assisted by Miss Anna Lewis of Toronto, Miss Edith Haines of Sharon, and Misses Jean and Barbara Lewis of Newmarket.<sup>16</sup>

At the inaugural meeting of the 1951 council in January 1951, Mayor Joseph Vale said that he thought that council should commission someone to write up a history of the town and obtain some first-hand early recollections from some of the older citizens.

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<sup>15</sup> *Newmarket Era* (3 May 1912), 4, "For Sale by Tender"; *Newmarket Era and Express* (17 September 1953), 4; *Newmarket Era and Express* (31 May 1956), 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Newmarket Era and Express* (13 September 1951), 8, "Come From New Jersey to Meet Kin Here"; *Newmarket Era and Express* (22 October 1953), 2, The Editorial Page: – "Interest in Local History"; *Newmarket Era and Express* (23 October 1958), 1, "Unveil Plaque at Quaker Meeting House."

He pointed out that there were several citizens who could contribute information to such a history and that they should be interviewed by whomever the town might commission to record the history. Among the citizens whom he suggested as sources of information were Fred Hartry, age ninety-two, D'Arcy St, and Mrs Sutherland, Prospect St, who was approaching her one-hundred-and-third birthday in March 1951. He noted the death during the past year of Silas Armitage, a Quaker who, having reached the century mark, was a source of information about early Newmarket. Reeve A.D. Evans said that the proposal for a recorded history of the town had been made at a recent meeting of the library board, and he thought the council would be of assistance to such a move.

For almost three years, the subject of a history of Newmarket was on and off the town council agenda. There were so many views in council which opposed each other that agreement on any kind of action seemed hopeless. The public library board spent considerable time discussing the right way to go about it and finally, in October 1953, made a recommendation to town council that Mrs Ethel Willson Trehwella should write a history of the town of Newmarket. It was felt that Mrs Trehwella, the descendant of early district settlers, no doubt had more information about the town and had access to more material than any other person in Newmarket. Most important of all, she probably had more time and enthusiasm for the job than anyone else. When Mrs Trehwella received authorization by council to prepare a history of the town, it was agreed that she would do the work for a sum

of \$1,500.<sup>17</sup>

Mrs Trehwella began the tedious and time-consuming process of researching the history of the town. From time to time, the newspaper would report an item of interest which she had discovered; for instance, she found out that the Newmarket Band had been formed as early as 1859. In the preparation of the history Mrs T made the disturbing discovery that records of the Newmarket public schools, dating back to 1823 when the first school was established in the town, had been kept by each secretary-treasurer of the board. Much alarmed, she attempted to provide proper protection for them by calling attention to these records and requested that they be placed in the provincial archives or some similar vaults. At a meeting of the public school board on 6 April 1955, it was decided that these records should remain in town and would be stored in the town vaults for safekeeping, with the exception of recent ones needed for reference by the present board. Mrs Trehwella was given free access to the older records in the preparation of her work.<sup>18</sup>

Centennial Year arrived in 1957. In the spring of that year, Councillors George Knapton and George Haskett, members of the small sub-committee in charge of centennial celebrations, were anxious that the book should be ready for sale before the centennial celebrations got under way in the summer. They introduced a resolution instructing Mrs Trehwella to forward the manuscript to a publishing firm for an estimate on the cost of publishing on the grounds that it would cost nothing to obtain an estimate but council should know what might be involved before any further decisions would be made.

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<sup>17</sup> *Newmarket Era and Express* (4 January 1951), 1, "Mayor Proposes Written History of Newmarket"; *Newmarket Era and Express* (22 October 1953), 2, The Editorial Page: – "Interest in Local History."

<sup>18</sup> *Newmarket Era and Express* (9 December 1954), 2; *Newmarket Era and Express* (14 April 1955), 1, "Around the Town."

Councillor Knapton assured council that prices would be obtained from several publishers, and that the editorial department of the publishing firm would go over the manuscript before it would be printed. The resolution was tabled when criticism was voiced by several members of council.

A new motion was introduced to set up a three-member committee to check Mrs Trehwella's work.

Councillor John Choppin suggested that someone with a knowledge of the town should check the factual background. His suggestion was countered by Councillor Lorne Paynter who said, "My understanding was that this lady had been asked to compile this information because of her knowledge of local history. Where are we going to find anyone beyond her to tell us whether this information is correct or not? I can't see having others go over this book now, on which she has spent several years." Councillor Gladstone Ridler argued that council couldn't accept the work of one person. He was fearful that if some statements were contrary to fact, or misleading, the book printed as its official history would make the town the laughing stock of everyone. He felt that there would be no sense getting a quotation on the manuscript if there were changes to be made in it. He thought that Mrs Trehwella should not object to some editing by qualified persons before the book would be sent to press, and suggested that council should hold the resolution for one week. "It has taken this woman since 1954 to complete this history," remarked Mr Knapton. "I don't know where you can get anyone who can check figures, visit the archives in Toronto, and the other sources of information, to report back to council in a week." "Mrs Trehwella is qualified to do the history," said Deputy-Reeve Violet

Robinson MacNaughton, "but she has no experience in writing. The manuscript should be referred to the librarian." The committee of three named by town council to edit and check the manuscript were Mayor Herbert Gladman, newspaper editor Jack Struthers, and Mrs Horace Jaques, public librarian.

One month later, at the beginning of May 1957, the committee of three named to check the manuscript reported. When the mayor had asked to be excused from the committee, he was replaced by Harry Beer, headmaster of Pickering College, who praised Mrs Trehwella's work and said the book would be an asset to the entire district. Editor Jack Struthers stated that it would be impossible to check on the accuracy of the work unless one wanted to do the same three years of research that Mrs Trehwella had put into it. He had been surprised himself to read some accounts and suggested that many of the facts in the history would amaze Newmarket residents. He termed the book invaluable and recommended its publication. He suggested that some local business or industry might be interested in underwriting its publication. Councillor Knapton recommended speed in considering the matter because the book should be on the market for the centennial celebration. Mrs Trehwella was instructed by Town Council to forward her manuscript of the town's history to a firm of publishers for an estimate of the publishing cost.

As it had in April, the question of copyright came up again. Mr Struthers recommended that the author have the copyright in recognition for the work and untold time spent in its preparation. He explained that Mrs Trehwella did not want royalty payments, so that if more copies of the book were sold than covered the cost, the town would receive the money.

Although Mrs Trehwella had stated that she had no interest in the royalty, council had no idea what attitude her heirs might take. Councillor Ridler was of the opinion that since the town had paid Mrs Trehwella for preparing the work, the book should belong to the town if it were published, but her name should appear on the book in recognition of her work. Councillor Choppin's suggestion that the author give an assignment of the copyright to the town was approved by council.<sup>19</sup>

In June 1957, Jack Struthers wrote an editorial reporting that Council had turned down a proposal to proceed with the publication of the book by a Toronto publisher whose letter appeared elsewhere in that issue. The intention was to ask for bids from printers. He expressed the hope that the book should not be left on a dusty shelf in manuscript form but urged that it should be published because it could be of use to schools and libraries as well as many interested readers. Although time would not permit the publication of Trehwella's history of Newmarket in time for the centennial celebrations that summer, there was still time to publish the book for the Christmas trade. The publication of the book by the end of that year would come close to the actual centennial date for the incorporation of Newmarket as a separate municipality which was 1 January 1958, although the Special Act had been passed in May 1857. He admonished that the payment of \$1,500, which she had been promised by the town, was not much more than a token. He expostulated that the author, who had received numerous honors for past work in similar fields of writing, deserved much credit for her work, and that credit

should be given in the form of publication of the book.<sup>20</sup>

In response to the Town's request for an estimate on the cost of publishing the book, in June 1957, they received a letter of reply from book publisher McClelland and Stewart, explaining that it was not easy to estimate costs quickly because it was necessary to have the manuscript read carefully first in order to assess the editorial problem involved before actually calculating manufacturing costs. It continued:

Mrs Trehwella's manuscript does not fall into the category of what we would call a sound commercial publishing proposition. It is well-written; it gives the impression of having been well-researched and would appear to us to be a sound local history. The difficulty is, of course, that the market for such a book is normally not large and in this sense, it is not a commercial publishing proposition. Because the book is good, we would be prepared to offer you a publishing service, but only on a basis where there would be no financial risk involved as far as we are concerned. Because of the length of this work in relation to potential market, the cost is relatively high. We would be prepared to supply you with 2,000 copies at a net unit price of \$3.75; 3,000 copies would cost you \$3 net per book, and the net cost would be proportionately lower on larger quantities. This quotation is based on a book of 416 pages. The overall size of the book would be 6 inches by 9 inches. It would be bound in cloth and jacketed.

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<sup>19</sup> *Newmarket Era and Express* (4 April 1957), 1, 3, "New Committee Concerned with History of the Town"; *Newmarket Era and Express* (9 May 1957), 1, "Town History is Praised, Urge Speed in Printing to Release at Centennial."

<sup>20</sup> *Newmarket Era and Express* (13 June 1957), 2, "The Editorial Page: "Hope for History Publication."

No provision has been made in these figures for the inclusion of photographic illustrations which would be useful in such a book but fairly expensive.

In explaining that they were book publishers, not book manufacturers, they pointed out that it would cost less to produce such a book if it were manufactured by a book printer and binder. The difference in price would represent design and editorial costs, proof-reading, and supervision of manufacture. The time required for the production of a book such as this would likely be six months, due to the fact that a book of this sort is of absolutely no use unless it is factually accurate in every respect. This requires checking and re-checking at every stage and this cannot be avoided.

In response to this advice, the *Newmarket Era and Express* was asked to tender a price for publishing Mrs Trehwella's history of the town. In a letter to council, July 1957, Editor John Struthers said it was impossible to quote a price until more detailed information was provided regarding the type of book wanted by council.<sup>21</sup>

Plans for centennial celebrations proceeded with Mrs Trehwella offering tidbits of history as they went along. The Friends of the Library decided to hold an historical display of small articles of local interest in the Newmarket Public Library during the centennial celebrations 15-18 August 1957. A committee headed by Mrs Donald Downey included Mrs John Trehwella, Mrs Howard Cane, Mrs Rose Kudelka, Mrs George Case, Mrs Beatrice

Brown, Miss Leonora Starr, and Lawrie Cane. Articles to be included in the display were to pre-date 1900 and be connected with Newmarket.

The Newmarket Legion's plan to hold a regatta on tiny Fairy Lake during the centennial celebrations described it as the 'first' regatta to be held in Newmarket. In response, local historian, Ethel Willson Trehwella noted that a regatta was held on the village pond in 1863. The main features were model ships 'perfect in every detail' which were sailed in races. Newmarket in the old days was a lively community with many sporting events and fairs being held.<sup>22</sup>

In August 1957, another attempt was made by Councillor George Knapton to send the history manuscript to a Toronto publisher. It was proposed that two thousand books be printed at a cost of \$8,700. Mr Knapton told council members that if they were worried about all two thousand copies not being sold, that matter would be taken up by a local committee of prominent citizens who would promote advance sales of the book at the centennial celebrations and, if necessary, make up the losses by a public subscription campaign later. Chairman of the finance committee, John Choppin, said that \$8,700 was nearly a mill on the tax rate, and if this were paid, there would be a deficit at the end of the year. Mayor Gladman, Reeve Wrightman, and Councillors were all opposed to publication because the expenditure had not been included in the 1957 budget. Councillor Lorne Paynter, who seconded the motion, was the only other supporter saying that when council had

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<sup>21</sup> *Newmarket Era and Express* (13 June 1957), 8, "Hear from Publisher in Newmarket History"; *Newmarket Era and Express* (11 July 1957), 11, "Ask for Tender on Town History."

<sup>22</sup> *Newmarket Era and Express* (18 July 1957), 3, "Friends of the Library Plan Centennial Museum Aug 15-18"; *Newmarket Era and Express* (1 August 1957), 2, the Editorial Page: "Not the First Regatta."

commissioned Mrs Trehwella to write the manuscript, it had a duty to publish the book.<sup>23</sup>

Although the Town voted against publication of Mrs Trehwella's book, a centennial book was published in Newmarket in 1957, entitled *Newmarket Centennial 1857-1957* (red book). This book, produced in its entirety in Newmarket, Ontario, Canada, was compiled by John Luck, and contained one-hundred-twenty-eight pages. "Short Sketches of Newmarket History" by Ethel Willson Trehwella, was included on page two, and Mrs Trehwella's name was listed in Thanks to Contributors page one-hundred-three.<sup>24</sup>

The following year after the Centennial, in May 1958, a steering committee for the publication of Newmarket's history, as prepared by Mrs John Trehwella, was named by Mayor Belugin. Councillors Knapton and Haskett, members of this committee during the town's centennial year, were replaced by Deputy-Reeve Choppin and Councillor Malcolm. "Council has spent \$1,500 on this work to date but has no right to spend anymore," said Mayor Belugin. "The citizens who are interested in having this book published should come forward and assist now." He suggested the collection of subscriptions with donations being deposited in the bank until a sufficient amount had been raised to cover the publishing costs.

Encouraged by the fact that a committee had been set up to study possibilities for its publication and start an advance fund, Jack Struthers, managing editor of the *Newmarket Era and Express*, wrote an editorial which saw

new hope that the History of Newmarket by Mrs Ethel Willson Trehwella would be published. In a scathing indictment, he continued:

The subject of publishing the history has received ruthless treatment in the past. In the first place, Mrs Trehwella was directed by a past council to write the history. The small monetary reward offered to her was no more than a token sum. It amounts to a few pennies per page; a professional would scoff at such an offer on a business basis. As for the time involved, Mrs Trehwella has made a great contribution to the community in all the research she has done, without mentioning the effort in completing a manuscript. We doubt that the payment offered would do much more than cover her expenses in the several years she has devoted to research and writing. Rather than haggle about costs and methods, the town should be honoring Mrs Trehwella for her great effort. It seems to us that arguing around the council table already has caused Mrs Trehwella much personal embarrassment. Let's see some definite action now and pay tribute to Mrs Trehwella's work in some civic way.<sup>25</sup>

Attempts were made to create more interest in the project. The October 1958 meeting of the Friends of the Library gave the fund-raising project a good start for the fall and winter season. Highlight of the meeting was a

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<sup>23</sup> *Newmarket Era and Express* (15 August 1957), 1, "Town Turns Down Publication of Local History."

<sup>24</sup> *Newmarket Era and Express* (29 August 1957), 3, "Readers Write."

<sup>25</sup> *Newmarket Era and Express* (15 May 1958), 1 "Committee is Formed to Plan Publication of Newmarket History"; "Councillor George Knapton Favors Publication of History"; *Newmarket Era and Express* (22 May 1958), 2, The Editorial Page: "Pay Tribute to the Effort."

discussion about Mrs Trehwella's work. Mrs Alex Kudelka presided at the meeting and speakers were Mrs Trehwella, Harry Beer, and Jack Struthers. Mayor Belugin was chairman during the feature portion of the meeting. Mrs Trehwella outlined the work involved in writing a local history. She gave several verbal pictures of early life in Newmarket. Of especial interest was the coming of the railroad and the first market. Mr Beer said that an historian must have perseverance, ability to sift material, and talent to write. In his opinion, Mrs Trehwella had all three.

Harry Beer, chairman of the citizens' committee in charge of the fund for the publication of the town's history stated that publication of the History of Newmarket depended on the advanced sale of copies and general contributions. According to him, the greatest support in advance purchases of copies had come from out of town. The fund needed \$7,500 to have the book published, but only \$750 had been collected. Letters had been sent from the committee to community organizations requesting their support. To date, only three groups had responded: the Business and Professional Women's Club, the Reading Club, and the Friends of the Library. "Our town needs a recorded history," said Mr Beer. "In this book each reader will find his own focal point." Anyone interested in making an advance purchase of the book at \$5 each or in making a contribution, was invited to contact the secretary, Miss Leonora Starr or members of the committee. Both Harry Beer and Leonora Starr were members of the Newmarket Friends' Meeting. By early December, Miss Leonora Starr, secretary of the

local fund-raising committee, was able to report that \$1,000 had been collected. When the objective is reached, the history of Newmarket, written by Mrs Ethel Willson Trehwella, will be published.<sup>26</sup>

The following spring, Ethel Willson Trehwella died at the age of seventy-seven years, at her residence on Wednesday, 29 April 1959. She died during the night and her body was not discovered for a couple of days. Her death notice appeared in the newspaper slightly over a week from the date of death, and her obituary appeared two weeks later relegated to page sixteen, with a plea for funds for publication of her history of Newmarket. Before her death, details of problems associated with publication of the town history were important enough to rate front page or editorial page coverage.<sup>27</sup>

In March 1960, almost a year after Mrs Trehwella's death, a letter from Harry Beer was read before council in which he asked that his committee be relieved of its fund-raising responsibilities and suggested that it was now time for the history project to revert back to council. By canvassing interested persons and organizations, and from advanced sale of copies, the group had collected over \$1,500. During the discussion which followed, Councillor George Knapton pointed out that there was still a big gap between the amount already collected and the target figure, estimated some years ago, of \$6,900 for one thousand copies. He thought that an extensive canvass would attract further donations and advanced sales. Councillor Clare Salisbury hinted that perhaps the town's Jaycees would undertake to sell the book. However, in spite

<sup>26</sup> *Newmarket Era and Express* (23 October 1958), 1, "Hope for Support in History Publication"; *Newmarket Era and Express* (4 December 1958), 1, "\$1,000 is Collected for History Publication."

<sup>27</sup> *Newmarket Era and Express* (7 May 1959), 6; *Newmarket Era and Express* (14 May 1959), 16 "Ethel Trehwella."

of these suggestions, council felt that the project should remain with the committee, and rejected a proposal that it should assume responsibility for the publication of a history of Newmarket. Said Mayor Otton, "We appreciate the work these people have put in, but we do not feel that we should take on the task of arousing people's interest in the book and certainly not the financial burden."

By this time, Jack Struthers had been replaced as editor by Philip G. Jones who was not as involved as Struthers but still wrote a convincing editorial. He was worried that council's latest rejection of assistance created a risk that the book would be forgotten. At the same time, he felt that council members should not be blamed for turning down the proposal to get involved in the book's publication because it was not their job to take on a financial risk with the town's money when some people might not be as enthusiastic about the town's history as others. He hoped that a town organization would step forward and assist the small group which had been struggling these past years to get the book published. He acknowledged that the manuscript might not be brilliantly written, and that it would not have the sales that popular novels have enjoyed, but the fact that it was an exhaustive and factual account representing years of effort and painstaking research to bring all the material together should bring some recognition from townsmen.<sup>28</sup>

Yet another year later, the manuscript of a history of Newmarket was still lying in a Pickering College vault gathering dust. The work by the late Ethel Trehwella had been completed in 1959. In February 1961 Leonora Starr led a delegation to Newmarket Town

Council in a final bid to re-awaken interest in the manuscript. She reported that a drive for advance sales at \$5 per copy and donations had resulted in contributions amounting to \$1,500, amongst them a sum from Vincent Massey. This money was being held in a joint account by Miss Starr and Mr Beer. It was earlier reported erroneously that the money had been turned over to the municipality. Subscribers to the book were getting impatient at the delay in publication and some had demanded the return of their money. In a letter read to council members, Miss Starr wrote that one individual had even suggested that she was having a good time on the proceeds.

Many council members, unaware of the original publication difficulties of the manuscript, were eager to learn just how far Newmarket Town Council was committed. The question, "How can we get off the hook?" from Councillor Charles Lloyd brought a spontaneous cry of despair from Miss Starr. Deputy-Reeve, Caroline Ion, said that it had been her impression that the original committee had intended that municipal financial support would be limited to perhaps a small difference between cash received from the book's sale and publishing costs.

A month later in March 1961, an editorial pointed out that using public money to underwrite projects that are not directly concerned with the everyday running of the town is a debateable question. The editor put forth the proposition that even if Newmarket's written history might not be commercially viable to warrant publication on its own merits, the manuscript had an intangible contribution to offer to the maturity of the community. If subsidizing the arts is generally accepted, why

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<sup>28</sup> *Newmarket Era and Express* (10 March 1960), 1, "Efforts to Publish Town History Flagging"; *Newmarket Era and Express* (17 March 1960), 2, The Editorial Page: "History is Forever."



couldn't Newmarket do it?<sup>29</sup>

Finally, in order to mark an important milestone in Canadian history - the centennial of the Confederation of Canada in 1967, the Town decided to publish the history of Newmarket written by the late Ethel Willson Trehwella. The town dedicated the book to her memory. By 1967, early efforts to have the historical work published had themselves become history. Readers of the newspaper were reminded that the town had authorized someone to write the book in 1951 and had appointed Mrs Trehwella in 1953.

The history book was bound in a bright green paper cover, and contained an interesting 371 pages of history from the earliest settlement to the mid-1950s. Only six hundred copies were printed. It is generally conceded that the book suffers from having been cobbled together without sequence in content and without index. For a decade - from 1957 to 1967, an amount of \$1,575 from advance sales had been held in trust in the bank by two Quakers. The efforts on the part of a few enthusiasts had brought rewards. Without this trust fund, town officials say the book might never have been published.<sup>30</sup>

The contributions which Ethel Willson Trehwella made to the history of her area, particularly Sharon and Newmarket, were significant. She pursued investigations into local history because it was a subject which she loved. She published numerous articles, booklets, and almost managed to publish a book before death claimed her. As an amateur historian, Ethel Willson Trehwella deserved more recognition than she received.

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<sup>29</sup> *Newmarket Era and Express* (9 February 1961), 1, "Bid to Publish Town History"; *Newmarket Era and Express* (2 March 1961), 2, The Editorial Page - "Town History."

<sup>30</sup> *The Era*, Newmarket ON, (5 July 1967), 12, "Newmarket's History on Sale."