

The Maryhill Historical Society

Maryhill
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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Join Our Society! Become a Member!
Membership: \$25 Annual \$50 Lifetime

Winter 2019-2020

Editor: Susan Motz

Introducing your new 2020 Committee:

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Greetings From The New President

As the incoming President of the newly named Maryhill Historical Society, I want to thank all who have supported this Society the last 42 years. Going forward, with a new name to reflect changing times, we hope this Society will grow with new members and new ideas while retaining our rich heritage. At the recent Annual General Meeting, Marg Drexler and Lee Ann Wetzel were added to the board replacing Ken Hanson and Diane Beitz. I want to thank Diane and Ken for their years of service to the board. Something new this year, we are going to try Open Houses one Sunday each month during the winter. We are hoping this will appeal to those researching their families. We will still have our summer Open Houses. I am asking for everyone to share their old pictures from the Maryhill-Bloomington-Shantz Station and other local areas on our Facebook Group Site. We want to keep the Society alive in these changing times and we welcome new members and fresh ideas. 'Fröhliche Weihnachten' to all our loyal members, and their families and I hope you have a great winter. It sounds like it's going to be cold and long!

Tom



Join us this Winter /Spring

at the Edward Halter House, Maryhill

We are open once a month
on Sundays from 11am to 2pm

January 26
February 16
March 22
April 26
May 24

An Item From the Past - Tinker Toys



Years ago many letters to Santa contained a request for TinkerToys. A set consisted of a bunch of wooden spools, wheels, and spokes that could be fitted together to make just about anything. Like the Lego of today, TinkerToys were under most family Christmas trees. TinkerToys were created in 1914 and were packaged in a cardboard tube to help reduce shipping costs for mail orders. The back of the package contained a space for an address label and postage. By 1918 over 2.5 million sets had been sold. If you have an old set, check the colour of the spools and sticks. In 1932 red spools were added and red sticks in 1953. In 1955 green, blue and yellow sticks were added. In 1914, the original TinkerToys sold for 60 cents. TinkerToys are still sold today although they come in a box and are made of plastic. A set of 100 today will set you back approximately \$50!

From of Our Community: Irene Sarah Harnack Bitschy

A real treat this winter—we learn about the life and times of one of our eldest members of our society. This article was written by Irene's daughter Lynda Tranebo.

Irene was born on October 18th 1914 on the family farm in Shantz Station to Joseph and Johannah (Reinhart) Harnack. Irene was the middle child of nine siblings. She had five sisters and three brothers: Katherine Wilhelm, Doretta Bauman, Stanley Harnack, Edgar Harnack, Eleanor Harnack, Wilfred Harnack, Vera Schnurr, and Gladys Bitschy. Today Irene is the only living sibling.

As the First World War was just beginning so was Irene's life. Irene was not even two years old when her sister Eleanor was born. Over the next year Eleanor became very sick and in 1917 Irene was sent to live with her godfather Charles Reinhart, because, her mother couldn't take care of a young child as well as a sick child. She lived with her uncle Charlie and Aunt Sara for the next two years. Sadly Eleanor passed away. Irene never knew what her sister passed away from.



Every member of the family had a chore or two to do. Irene's chores were to sweep the wrap-around porch on the old farmhouse as well as help her grandma Harnack (Eva Kersnowski Harnack) pick raspberries from the garden.

In 1920 Irene started school; it was just down the road from the family farm. Shantz Station SS14 was a one room school house that had eight grades being taught by one teacher. It wasn't easy in those days for a left handed child like Irene to get along in school. At that time they weren't as understanding as they are today for lefties. In fact some people in the church felt that left handed people must be witches, but thanks to a little persuasion from her father, the school turned a blind eye to her using her left hand. Irene is still a lefty today.

One of Irene's fondest memories occurred when Santa brought her a porcelain doll head. She was so happy because their usual Christmas gifts were socks or mitts, a few nuts, a piece of candy and usually a large orange. She sewed a body and cherished that doll for years to come. In the winter after dinner she would follow her brothers and sisters to the skating rink that was on the pond just down the road. Her brothers would make a fire and the pond was lit by the lanterns that they had brought from home.

When Irene was old enough her father would have her take coal oil to her uncle Charles. The cost was a nickel. Uncle Charlie would pay her for the oil and then slip another nickel into her hand just for her. Irene took that nickel home and gave it to her grandma so that her grandma would have money to give to the church for Sunday offering.

At the age of 14, in 1928, Irene was working and living at her Aunt's hotel in downtown Kitchener. There she was washing and ironing the linens in an upstairs room above the tavern. The floor in that room had a trap door with a carpet covering it. This was one of the scariest times of her life. Prohibition had become reality and it was being enforced. There was a look-out at the front door of the hotel and when the police came walking down King street for inspections the men downstairs would knock on the ceiling and Irene would open the door send down the wash basket to be filled with the liquor. Irene would hoist up the basket shut the door and cover the basket with the laundry and continue ironing until the police finished searching the hotel. Fortunately they never got caught.

More about Irene Bitschy

Prohibition Still & Hard Times

Her own family was also making liquor for sale during that time. The family farm had a “pot still” as she remembers under the old summer kitchen. She was at home with some of her brothers and sisters when the police came to the farm to do a raid. She remembers a police officer who was friends with her father coming to the farm to warn her father that the raid would be happening. Everything was hidden away and the entrance covered over. The police only found one small bottle of liquor up above the kitchen door. Her father claimed it was for medicinal use. Angry and disappointed at not finding the evidence of a bootlegging operation the police issued her father a ticket for having liquor on the premises. Looking back at those times money was scarce and families needed to be fed. It was risky, but times were hard and they did what it took to make a living.

Garden parties and picnics were a regular affair. Irene’s brothers were friends with the boys from Maryhill. William Bitschy was one of those boys. It was at one of these gatherings at home that William (Bill) set his eyes on Irene. She wasn’t having anything to do with that. She left the gathering went upstairs to her room and stayed there. Bill danced with her grandma Harnack and convinced her to talk to Irene. This worked in Bill’s favor and they became a couple shortly after. The new couple had some trouble getting married at St Boniface Church because Irene had been living in Kitchener. The priest at the church at that time said “I will marry Bill but not Irene”. They made a compromise and on April 25th 1935 Bill and Irene were married at St. Mary’s Church in Kitchener. Their wedding supper consisted of hotdogs and potato salad and, of course, whiskey. Their honeymoon was spent in Niagara Falls. When they returned they lived for awhile with Bill’s sister Minnie and then they moved to a service station on the corner of Frederick and Bruce Street. Irene was pumping gas and scooping ice-cream at the station, while Bill was hauling coal. They lived there for a few years and then moved to Breslau. It is there in 1940 that Irene became a mother for the first time. Irene had four daughters Charlotte, Sheila, Marlene and Lynda. Irene lived in Breslau for about 5 years at which time she and the family moved back to Shantz Station. They bought a farm right behind her old home. Her last three daughters were born there. Irene worked along with Bill on the farm. He was delivering milk and hauling coal while Irene worked the farm. Milking the cows and working in the fields were just some of the chores to be done. In 1953 Bill took a job with the Canadian National Railway. And in 1957 they sold the farm and moved into Kitchener.

Irene was a stay-at-home mom until the University of Waterloo opened a student residence. She was convinced by her neighbor Betty to join her in applying for a job as a cleaning lady and “house mom” at the university. She had to take two buses to the corner of King and University Street in Waterloo. There was no transportation from that corner to the student residence so she was picked up by car and driven to the other side of the campus. While Irene worked there she made many good friendships with the students especially the ones from out of the country. There were times when she would invite those students to her home for a meal. She would often say that they were home sick and in return they would share different food that they received from their own families. Irene retired in May of 1975. She and Bill enjoyed their retirement together. Irene loved to go to her daughter’s cottage and sit out on the dock. Sadly Bill became ill in 1988 and he passed away in August of that year. They had been married for 53 years.

In 1989 Irene sold her house and moved to an apartment on Natchez road in Kitchener. This would be her home for the next eighteen years. She started to join senior’s clubs. Playing cards and bingo were just some of the fun things that she took part in. Meeting new people was always easy for her. She applied for her first passport in 1990. Her first time on an airplane took her to Alaska where she could see Russia from the coast. She also enjoyed trips to California, Florida, and Georgia and lastly the best of all was Tennessee, where she toured Elvis Presley’s Graceland.

Continued on the next page ...

More about Irene Bitschy

In 2006 Irene packed up her apartment and moved into assisted living at Chateau Gardens in Elmira. She continued to live there enjoying the small community. In 2011 Irene moved once again to Forest Heights Long Term Care in Kitchener where she resides today and has just recently celebrated her 105th birthday.

Irene Sarah Harnack Bitschy is in good health and there are days that she is smart as a whip. Forest Heights keeps her busy in fact sometimes too busy. One of her favorite lines is “don’t these people here know how old I am? I need my afternoon sleep.”

Irene has four daughters, twelve grandchildren, fourteen great grandchildren and one great great grandchild to arrive soon. Irene never thought she would ever see the day that she would be part of five generations.

We encourage our members to write their life stories or share a story about their loved ones. We are always looking for life stories or people to interview. Special thank you to Lynda Tranebo for submitting this article.



**Merry
Christmas
and
Season's
Greeting
to you
and
your family!**

Weddings and Canon Law

Irene Bitschy's wedding meal, served in 1935, consisted of hot dogs and potato salad. We may think it odd to serve hot dogs at a wedding today, but in 1935—the heart of the Great Depression—a hot dog was not only a popular item but also a treat for many who couldn't afford to clothe their children or put food on the table.

During the Great Depression, 1929—1939 many Canadians suffered unprecedented levels of poverty. For many in the Maryhill area, owning a farm or large property cushioned the poverty. The country living allowed for our families to grow their own vegetables and fruit, and farm their own animals for meat, milk and butter. The cool root cellar provided a safe place to store the harvest and allow for families to eat during the winter. Regardless, times were tough. We've heard stories and seen pictures of our members wearing dresses made from flour sacks.

So a wedding meal of hot dogs was a treat in 1935!

Weddings were often held in the morning—followed by a breakfast/brunch. Canon Law required Catholics to fast from food and water from midnight the night before receiving Holy Communion. Wedding masses were held early in the morning (often at 10am). After mass, attendees were hungry. The immediate wedding party would often go to a family members house for breakfast. The rest of the guests would join the newly wedded couple after lunch, usually at the bride's home. A meal would be served, often cold cuts, pickles and salads (potato salad), and plenty of alcohol. Entertainment consisted of a few local musicians with their accordion, fiddle and/or guitar. Everyone had a fun time dancing into the late night. Often the summer kitchen would be cleared of furniture to make room for the event. It was not unusual to have 100 people at the house/farm for a wedding. Another fun fact about weddings—the outhouse would be equipped with actual toilet paper for a wedding rather than the Eaton's catalogue!

By the mid 1950s the “Fasting Rule” had changed, and Catholics could eat up to 3 hours prior to receiving communion. The time of weddings then shifted .. some were still held in the mornings, but afternoon weddings became an option!

Found in Grama's Scrap Book

This summer the historic West Montrose Covered Bridge was temporarily closed to both vehicles and horse-drawn buggies. It required repairs to a damaged beam; the landmark was open to pedestrian and cyclist only.

It wasn't that long ago that the original Highway 86 passed through West Montrose and all traffic crossed the covered bridge.

In 1958, a bypass was built around the community of West Montrose. A new bridge was constructed and traffic was diverted from West Montrose. Built in 1881, the narrow wooden West Montrose Covered Bridge could no longer support the demands of increased truck traffic on Highway 86.

Years ago, my grandfather—Barney Brohman—would count the cars that passed on the 86 highway recording the numbers in a journal. There were obviously little traffic and certainly no transport trucks—as we know them today; there is no way they could have fit under the covered bridge.

This article—found in my grandmother—Angela (Schmuck) Brohman's scrapbook announces the closing of the Kissing Bridge to highway traffic. It reads as follows:



The covered bridge at West Montrose will soon cease to be a main traffic artery.

New Span to Bypass 'Kissing Bridge'

Modernization has overtaken Ontario's last relic of a more romantic age, the 'kissing bridge' at West Montrose.

The Ontario Highways Department yesterday awarded a \$107,291 contract to the Toronto construction firm of R.A. Blyth for a new bridge.

But the covered relic is to be granted a reprieve. It will be left standing for

local traffic, although Highway 86 is to be diverted to cross the new bridge a half mile east of the existing structure. The old bridge, a relic of the horse and buggy days, was believed to have been built about 130 years ago, although the top was not added until many years after the floor was laid. Some of the original timbers are 50 feet long. The original floor of three-inch oak planks was replaced recently with asphalt and gravel. The constant menace of flooding necessitated the building of a central abutment and it was at this time that the bridge was

covered in for extra protection.

Through its dim interior have passed many pioneers of Waterloo County. It has become a tradition that a kiss is the price of crossing the ancient structure.

(A tradition no doubt scoffed at by the more hardy farmers and villagers of West Montrose).

The bridge is believed to be the only one of its kind in the province.

The heavy toll of today's traffic has put into semi-retirement a relic of romantic days in southern Ontario.

This article is from 1958—and they mention the bridge being approximately 130 years old, dating it to approximately 1828. It was in 1881 that Woolwich Council approved the plans for a two-span covered bridge as prepared by John and Benjamin Bear. The total cost, of the bridge was \$3,557.65. The horse and buggy was the primary transportation and in winter, the buggy wheels were replaced with sleigh runners. This required the township to hire an individual to shovel snow onto the bridge roadway to avoid damage to the flooring. From 1885 until 1950, coal oil lamps were lit inside the bridge overnight; they were replaced by electric bulbs.

Our 'Kissing Bridge' is the last remaining covered bridge in Ontario.

A New Tradition at Christmas - By Patricia Weiler

Christmas is associated with family, festive meals, favourite Christmas music and much more. A few years ago our family added something unique to the mix. My husband, John, and I made ornaments using pictures of our ancestors and hung them on our Christmas tree. We kept it simple. Pictures were photocopied and pasted onto red shiny card stock. Then a little pizzazz was added by simply drawing some curly designs around the edge using a gold marker. Some of the pictures are very old going back to the late 1700s and some are as recent as John himself (d. 2015). These ornaments create an opportunity to talk about our ancestors. Grandchildren and visitors have asked about ones that stood out to them. "Who's the old guy with the funny sideburns". And then the stories about Anton Weiler begin. "And who is that guy?" "That's Xavier. He was a tailor." A conversation about our ancestors has been launched and hopefully interest in family history grows a little in the younger generation. So Anton, Andrew, Regina, Jacob, Uncle Jim, John and many more, we remember you at this family time of the year



The Last Word The Lynx Mystery

Years ago, the Commercial Tavern had a stuffed (taxidermy) Lynx above the bar in the Gentlemen's Beverage Room. Legend had it that someone had shot the cat in the forested area around Maryhill; and had the cat stuffed and on display.

Well the legend is true – Bill (William) Halter shot the lynx in 1924. We know this because there was an article in a local newspaper in 1924 and it listed the following:

Saturday Dec 20 1924

William Halter shot a lynx in the swamp, close to the village. It weighed more than 25 pounds. He will have it stuffed and mounted.

This news was referenced in a book titled "**A Journal Of New Germany**" written by Helen A Moyer and Sheila Reinhart.

Bill and his brother Charlie owned and ran the Commercial Hotel in Maryhill in the early 1900s through to the mid 1950s. The cat was mounted behind the bar in the Gentleman's Beverage Room (obviously a part of the bar for men only). It was on display for many years. Many of our members remember the cat. Mary Ann (Fehrenbach) Stroh remembers helping her mother and the Halter family to clean the hotel. As a little girl, she was allowed in the Gentleman's Room and recalls the cat behind the bar.

Whatever happened to the Lynx?

When asking around – I learned (much to my surprise) that MY family had the cat for a short while in our house when I was a little girl. In the 1970s my dad (Emil Motz) brought it home. It scared me – it looked so real. We didn't keep it for very long – and we are unsure how we ended up with it or who my dad passed it along to. We do know the Paul Waechter family had it for a while. I reached out to the Bridgeport Rod & Gun club to see if perhaps it ended up on display there, but they don't have it. So members – where is Maryhill's Lynx? Our cat will be celebrating its 100th birthday in a few years!



This column will feature stories from years ago—often handed down by word of mouth.

Got a story you want to share? Contact us!!