



# THE GRENVILLE SENTINEL



Grenville County Historical Society Facebook: <https://shorturl.at/gixAO>  
500 Railway Avenue, Box 982 Email: [gchs@truespeed.ca](mailto:gchs@truespeed.ca)  
Prescott, ON, K0E 1T0 Telephone: (613) 925-0489  
Website: [www.grenvillecountyarchives.ca](http://www.grenvillecountyarchives.ca)

---

**Jul/Aug 2024**

**ISSN 0715-3783**

**No. 326**

**Upcoming Events:** Annual Dinner to be held this year at the Renegadz restaurant in Prescott on Wednesday, Oct. 9th. Social gathering at 5:30 and dinner at 6 pm. The speaker, Philip Ling, will talk about his work restoring the Maitland Tower and buildings on the property and improving the health of the St. Lawrence River. Philip is working with many different people, making it a place where people can connect with and learn about the environment. The menu is salmon or chicken with mushroom sauce, garden salad, and lemon cake for dessert. Price \$40. Tickets can be had by leaving a message at the archives 613 925 0489. Specify salmon or chicken.

## **Anniversary of Visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Prescott**

Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip spent the afternoon in Prescott 40 years ago helping the town celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Prescott's incorporation. On Sept. 27<sup>th</sup> the royal couple arrived at the CN Station, beautifully decorated for the event, and was met by Mayor Sandra Lawn and the Royal Visit Committee. There were many people on hand to welcome the royal couple at Fort Wellington, including the school children who had walked there to take part in this once in a lifetime event. Fraser Laschinger, acting on behalf of the Prescott Museum, is planning a display at the Town Hall to commemorate this wonderful day and Prescott's incorporation. Make sure to pay a visit if you are in town and see the display which should be in place by late September.

## **King Steet Promenade**

GCHS participated with a display for the King Street Promenade in Prescott held on Aug. 3<sup>rd</sup> as part of the civic holiday celebrations. Jane Ramsay and student Ethan Smith prepared the story boards with information about the local area. Many events were taking place including buskers, side walk sale, market, games, and many activities for children from 10 am to 4 pm. The weather co-operated and there was a very good turnout. President Jane Ramsay set up and manned our booth for the event.

## Remembering D-Day: Harold's Story



Spitfire

The 80th D-Day commemorations earlier this year were special for so many, and very meaningful for a Spencerville couple, Sandy and Steve Daoust. Sandy's dad, Harold Fairfield was a Spitfire pilot during the Normandy invasion, helping Allied Troops establish their beachhead by attacking enemy targets on the ground. Sandy and Steve are proud of Harold's service and have helped establish a link to that past, which started when he volunteered for military service in 1941.

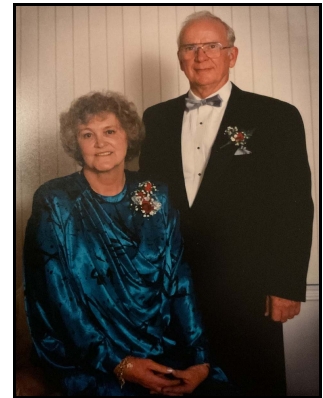


PI LI E H Fairfield

Harold Fairfield was a Cardinal native and trained at several bases in Ontario before being sent in January, 1944 to fly with Royal Canadian Air Force fighter squadrons based in Great Britain. Harold survived D-Day and was an effective Pilot Officer with his "Hornet" Squadron, helping allied

soldiers drive to Berlin. But on January 13, 1945, Harold's Spitfire was damaged by anti-aircraft fire in the Battle of the Bulge. He was able to bail out and landed safely in Belgium, though his parachute was caught in a tree. A local farmer got a ladder and helped him down. In short order, Harold met an American soldier and was driven back to his base. He would return to the air for many missions, surviving dogfights and heavy action. Harold served until the end of the war.

Harold met his wife Sylvia in the U.K., while she was serving with the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRENS). She was a Rotor Print operator working for



Lord Louis Mountbatten at the Admiralty Signals and Radar Establishment. They were married in 1945 and soon after set up a new life in Canada on the shore of the St. Lawrence River.

Harold worked 39 years for Canada Customs and Immigration at the Prescott-Ogdensburg International Bridge. He retired as Chief Superintendent. Harold and Sylvia raised four kids and had seven grandchildren.

But that is not where the story ends. Harold's crashed Spitfire was located in

December, 2019 by a farmer in Belgium. This was a find! Soon experts from the U.K. were contacted. Aero Legends is a group that specializes in restoring vintage aircraft. After intensive research into the history of the warplane, they got in touch with Sandy and Steve Daoust back in Spencerville, who were able to provide key documents to verify the Spit, such as Harold's log book.

Some parts of the old warplane were retrieved for a re-construction. After more than two years of painstaking work, the MJ444 Spitfire flies again. It is a two-seater now – suitable for enthusiasts who want to pay for a vintage flying experience.

Harold passed away in 1998 at age 76. But his story lives on through Sandy and Steve Daoust and Aero Legends. If you want to see more about this remarkable story, please visit:

<https://www.aerolegends.co.uk/news/mj444-the-rebirth-of-a-legend>

David Graham, July 2024

### **Early Days in Edwardsburgh, Part 3**

A book in our collection, *For Friends at Home*, is a book about a Scottish emigrant, James Thomson, who came to Grenville County in 1845 and tells about some of his successes, his failures, and his exploits settling in a new land.

Temperance was alive and well in the

area in 1849 and many signed the pledge in the Presbyterian Church. A society was formed holding monthly meetings with more than 100 members in an area less than two miles. A debating club was also formed that year in November and they met once a week.

James moved to Chicago, Illinois in July 1849 looking for a more lively place and by March of 1850, he had moved on to the gold fields in California. In 1853 he visited his family in Scotland and returned to Edwardsburgh on December 31, 1853. He later wrote to his father in Scotland that he had reported to the Customs House in Prescott and had no trouble there.

In 1851 the price of land in the upper part of the province was rising quickly from 7 pounds to 17 pounds, but was still manageable in Edwardsburgh with cost about 5 pounds per acre.

The Grand Trunk Railway was to be built in 1855 and James signed a contract to work on a three mile section with a promise of more time if they were successful. Later, the men working there had the job of the fencing and grading of a five mile section in the Township of Matilda and couldn't do any grading until the frost was out of the ground. Snow on the ground was better to do the fencing.

Henry Armstrong owned a small farm and a saw mill at the head of the Galop Rapids in Edwardsburgh. Henry's grandfather was purported to have

served with Gen. Burgoyne and bought land in Upper Canada in 1801. Henry was the father of Mary who was to become the wife of James Thomson, and James was courting her in April 1854 when he sent a letter home to his sister, Mary Armstrong.

James reported that Mr. McPherson's oldest son died 13 March 1854. About this time James purchased a farm, east and within one-half mile of the village, 150 acres fronting on the St. Lawrence River. It had a "pretty good house" on the lot as well as a barn, cost 862.10 pounds, down payment of 500 pounds and the rest to be paid in yearly installments.

James was still working with the railroad, so had little time left over for farming on his new property. There were fifty men and twenty horses working on the railroad and they expected to finish 1 ½ miles by the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1854. Workers had to pay up front for horses, wagons, and tools.

The Sons of Temperance held a demonstration at an open-air Soiree in Spencerville. They had a platform decorated with banners and flowers for the speakers and the band. These were out in the open and 1000 people attended. They had dinner and speakers, followed by the Edwardsburgh Brass Band, eighteen in number. Participants thoroughly enjoyed the food provided by the people attending.

In June of that year, James' house was

still unoccupied, but he had ploughed 10 or 12 acres, planted wheat and oats, and some potatoes. He was able to rent out his pasture and was expecting 10 to 12 acres of hay. There were maple and beech trees on his farm. The GTR passed through his farm with 2/3 of the property in the front of it and 1/3 in the rear of the railroad. The GTR purchased an 80 foot wide strip for which they paid James 15 pounds per acre plus 25 pounds for timber and other damages.

Back then they didn't have restaurants and movie theatres, but they certainly had entertainment. There were Sunday School and Bible Classes held at the Methodist Church in Edwardsburgh. The Methodist Sabbath School would meet in the church with neighbours and friends joining them. They would be led to a picnic area in a shady spot in the woods by a brass band. Each family would bring provisions to share, and there was music with the brass band and some speakers. Often there were about two hundred people attending, with Sunday Schools from neighbouring groups joining in. At one of these occasions, James married Mary Armstrong, after which they went to Prescott and then by steamboat on a honeymoon to Niagara Falls, Toronto, and back home after a week. It was surprising to find that newly married couples had honeymoons even back in 1854.

In September cholera hit the area causing many deaths, hitting the newly arrived immigrants especially hard.

The Grand Trunk Railroad section from Montreal to Brockville was completed on September 6, 1855 and it was expected to be open in the fall of 1855.

James went out to the Caribou again and mentioned these names from the area that were also there: Edwin Brouse and Mr. Bissell of Augusta who joined Mr. Easton on a trip to the Caribou in 1862. Others mentioned were James McIlmoyle, Raney, Smith, Mrs. Easton, Brown, as well as the boys from Adams Mills and Eldridge from back of Prescott.

Many letters were exchanged with his family in Scotland and eventually members of the Thomson family did come to live in Edwardsburgh as well.

James Thomson died Feb. 10, 1895 aged 72 years and his wife Mary Armstrong died March 14, 1916 aged 80 years. His children were James Melville, b. 1855, Henry A. B., b. 1856, Ella M., b. 1863, and Alexander, b. 1864.

This book, with so many colourful, historic stories, is certainly worth reading if you can find a copy.

### **Stagecoach Prescott to Bishop's Mills**

This photo appeared in the Prescott Journal in the 1960s with this description under it and is located in the GCHS collection. In 2015 Tyler Deschamps posted the same photo on

the *Spencer City (Spencerville) remember when!* Facebook site with a similar but more concise caption. Tyler's photo was a better copy than ours, so I have used it here. Pearl Spero, wife of George Spero, mentioned in the article died 15 Oct. 1909 at the age of 25 years.



“All aboard for Domville, Roebuck, Garretton and Bishop's Mills! Bill Baker holds the lines of the team ready to leave on his daily route carrying mail and passengers between Prescott and Bishop's Mills and return. Seated beside Mr. Baker is Pearl Lawrence, who became the mother of Lawrence Spero and who died three weeks after Mr. Spero was born. She and her mother Mrs. Al Lawrence, managed the post office at Roebuck in the stone house now owned by Alf Anderson. The young Miss wasn't going anywhere, though she hopped into the stage to have her picture taken. Mr. Baker is the brother of Sam Baker, R. R. 2, Prescott, and Mrs. Herb Bass of Edward Street. The picture, believed to be taken about the turn of the century, at Roebuck, came from Freeman Boyd of Brockville by way of the collection of the late Dr. P. A. MacIntosh to the



Spero family.”

### **First Toll Road Along St. Lawrence Built of 3-inch Planks**

Prescott Journal Sept. 1, 1949

“The Journal is indebted to Mr. William Beddie, Augusta Township Clerk, for information concerning the Toll Road in existence for many years on what is now No. 2 Highway. Mr. Beddie was Superintendent of this Toll Road for seven years, from 1907 to 1914, at a salary of \$100 per annum. He was responsible for the maintenance of the road and the collection of tolls. When Mr. Beddie took on this position, the road was macadamized, but for many years prior to the turn of the century, the section of the road between Prescott and Maitland was built of three-inch plank.

The original planked section of the road was built from selected lumber purchased from Wharton’s Sawmill located in the vicinity of the Johnstown Creek, at a cost of \$3.00 per thousand feet.

The Prescott-Brockville Toll Road was in existence until 1915, under the direction of a Toll Road Company, the directors of which included James Buckley, F. J. French, and J. K. Dowsley. The stock of the Toll Company was valued at \$40,000. Toll charges were: Horse and Buggy, five cents, team of horses ten cents. Farmers and other residents whose properties adjoined the toll road were assessed an annual tax payment.

### **Four Toll Gates**

There were four toll gates between Prescott and Brockville, the first being at the corner of what is known as the Merwin Lane; the second was at the corner on the Heck Farm west of the Blue Church; the third one mile west of Maitland, and the fourth at the corner of the road running north immediately to the west of the Ontario Hospital.

The Toll Road Company and the Superintendents had no easy task keeping the road in passable condition throughout the varying seasons of the year. When the Government appointed a Toll Roads Inspector differences of opinion arose frequently.”

### **Memberships**

Annual Membership: \$20.00

Life Membership: \$200

*You may etransfer funds to [gchs@truespeed.ca](mailto:gchs@truespeed.ca) or make checks payable to Grenville County Historical Society Inc. Specify that the money is for membership and forward them to:*

Gini Leonard,  
Membership Chair,  
GCHS,  
500 Railway Ave., Box 982,  
Prescott, ON  
K0E 1T0

**Editor:** Bonnie