

SPARROW LAKE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Winter 2015



President – Ken Thomson – 705-698-2917 – hamlet@csolve.net
Please see our website sparrowlake.ca for a complete list of executive and contacts.

SEPTEMBER MEETING 2014



community to this area, now known as Rama First Nation Reserve. The original Mnjikaning people did not live in villages, but preferred to distance themselves to allow for personal habitat to hunt or collect firewood. Elder nomads often went away for months at a time to trap for furs in northern territories and visit with extended family.

Over time, the Mnjikaning site became a traditional meeting place for Aboriginal nations, a place where agreements would be struck, treaties made, useful information shared, goods exchanged, stories told, spiritual ceremonies conducted and festivities enjoyed. After intense discussion with local leaders, a small number of weir stakes were removed in 1993 by qualified underwater archaeologists for preservation from threats of erosion, boat traffic and recreational fishing pressures. Education remains an important tool to be used in protecting and presenting this national historic site. www.mnjikaningfishweirs.org

The Sparrow Lake Historical Society annual potluck supper on Sat. Sept. 27 featured guest speaker Mark Douglas, who spoke about the heritage of his Mnjikaning First Nation at the narrows of Lake Simcoe and Lake Couchiching, national historic site of the 5000-year-old Fish Weirs, one of the oldest human developments in North America.

In ancient times, wooden poles were harvested from the forest with stone tools and driven into the mud at the narrows to divert fish into a heart-shaped trap where they could be harvested with spears or by hand. An annual festival during the spring fish run attracted friends and family from miles around when a glut of fish would be consumed or dried for storage, giving a sense of



THOMAS HENRY NICHOLS



*Thomas Henry Nichols with children Sam and Mary
circa 1880*

Thomas Henry Nichols married Susannah Bagley and settled on the Sparrow Lake Road in Severn Bridge, where they donated land to establish St. Luke's Anglican Church at Hamlet, Ontario in 1877.



Three generations of Nichols raised their families in this house, built by Thomas Henry Nichols: Tom & Sue, Sam & Nellie, Ben & Helen. The property was sold and house and barn demolished sometime in the 1960s.

(Top) William Henry Thomas Nichols (1873-1951) married Abigail Sarah Bushill (1873-1961) and lived at Hamlet.

(Middle) Sam Nichols (1874-1925) married Eleanor Bowers (1874-1939) shown here with baby Irene circa 1900. "Nellie" was a daughter of "Granny Bowers."

(Lower) A cemetery was established on the St. Luke's Anglican Church property for the families of Sparrow Lake and environs.

(Photos courtesy of Lorraine Nichols.)



Hamlet, Ont.: St. Luke's Anglican Church 1962 on land donated by Thomas Nichols

GRANNY BOWERS' STORY



Rebecca Bowers (nee Gugin)
Mother of Eleanor
"Nellie" Nichols,
Hamlet, Ontario.
Excerpts from "Granny
Bowers' Story" as told
by herself.
(The Cowley-
Bracebridge Press, 1942)

Rebecca Gugin was raised in Alliston on the estate of her father James

Gugin, who emigrated from England to the Canadian frontier after serving as a doctor in the Napoleonic wars and the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. The second youngest of twenty children, Rebecca married William Bowers (1838-1903) at sixteen years of age.

"Then my misfortunes commenced. We had five sons and three daughters and had to work very hard to support them. My husband could drink all the money he and I both earned. He wanted children but would not provide for them. This made it very hard for me after being used to plenty. When we were a year and ten months married, our first child was born. About that time pioneers were settling in Muskoka, and my husband went to see the country too, thinking he would make a home for us there. He liked the country fine and so came home to get us...The virgin forest stood at that time untouched by the hand of man. Huntsville was a trading post, and there was no railway or accommodations north of Barrie. We were not long hewing out a sight for our home, and we were soon settled. That spring my second child arrived, and that summer and fall my husband got work helping to cut a road through five miles of bush. The job lasted three or four months and the men were very glad to get the work then as they needed money to help them along, but they didn't get much. The pay was 90c. a day and board themselves...

After I was settled back in Alliston for the winter, my husband went to Allandale to cut wood. He worked there with Squire Little, and all he saved from Xmas to March was \$1.00. The rest went for board, tobacco and drink. With the dollar he bought enough calico for a dress for myself and the little girl...I made up my mind to go to him, about 25 miles, and I walked all the way...I was not well for a week. I was so sore from carrying the child...In the shanty was a heap of straw in the corner for a bed and an old quilt and old stove and cracked stove pot. This was all we had to make a start with. I had to take my white undershirt to make a sheet. It made a

good-sized sheet too, for skirts were made full in those days. Then we had the quilt to put over us. We had to do with this till fall, and we had all summer to get a few more things together. The woodcutting wasn't much of a job, so we had to go in for haying and harvesting for Squire Little. We did four or five acres of wheat for him and eight acres of oats for another man. My husband cradled it with the grain cradler while I raked and binded. Then we pulled nine acres of peas for the Squire. The pea vines were seven feet long and a very heavy crop. Then we did odd jobs such as digging vegetables and the like till fall set in. I got my share of the wages for all the work I did. In the fall we went to Barrie to do our shopping. I got some hay ticking for a bed and some flannelette for sheets, and he got groceries and provisions. Then we were more comfortable...

After my fifth and sixth children arrived, we decided to go to Muskoka again. In the spring of the year 1873 when my youngest child was five months old, we moved and started in with the other pioneers. My husband sold an inheritance property in Mulmur and bought a good yoke of oxen, a good cow and ten hens to start. The oxen carried us to Muskoka. When we arrived there, we found some other people had settled on the land we had when we first came out, so we had to find another homestead and build another log house. We found a spot in the wilderness and cut logs, and put up our house the first year in a temporary way. It was ready to live in on the 4th of November, and it was a very bad winter with 4 feet of snow. The place had a good beaver marsh, and my husband cut a stack of beaver hay for the animals for the winter, but they would not eat it as they had been used to better, so we had to sell the oxen and wagon for \$40 and the cow for \$18. We just had the hens left, and there was no work for men in the country then, only cutting cordwood at 40c. a cord, and not very much of that unless you went three or four miles looking for a job. We made snowshoes from Basswood bark and a broad runner hand-sleigh, and started in making shingles all winter in the house. He rived them and I shaved them, and our eight-year-old boy packed them, about thirty-one or thirty-two thousand that winter. In the spring we bought flour and potatoes for seed, and there was enough left to buy a couple of sheet-iron sugar kettles. While we were making sugar and syrup, we got a potato patch cleared. Sugar fetched only 10c. a lb and syrup 80c. a gallon, and it all had to be carried to market in Bracebridge about 8 miles. We carried a load of sugar and syrup to town, and a load of provisions home. My husband got a few days work from the neighbours through the summer while I tended the potatoes. We had a nice crop, which helped us a lot through the following winter. We had a good cranberry marsh, so we picked cranberries all fall and sold them to buy flour for the winter. Bracebridge was growing larger and helped us a lot in buying our produce."

PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS



Here we are in late winter and looking forward to better weather to come. We hope you are all well and sharing in the anticipation of Spring. Our May meeting will be an election year, and if you wish to take a turn at helping at the helm, this is the time to let us know. There is always room for eager new folks to pitch in. Give us a call or send a message with your interest.

We are grateful for the support of all our members and count on continuing the efforts of everyone in carrying out the mission of telling the history surrounding us.

Memberships are also due and the mail-outs will show the paid until date on the envelope. For email members you can inquire by email. See you in May!!

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Special thanks to Lorraine Nichols for providing most of the material for this issue of the SLHS Newsletter from her research into the Nichols family.

Submissions for the summer newsletter will be gratefully accepted. We are particularly interested in anything from the late 1800s or early 1900s. Photos or photocopies can be scanned and sent by email in jpg format, or text documents in doc format. Any physical artifacts or notebooks can be brought to the Spring meeting, and we can arrange to have them returned or put them in the SLHS archives.

RECENT WEBSITE UPDATES

A BOOKS page was added at the request of Betty Chish-Graham
<http://sparrowlake.ca/books/>

Thomas Henry Nichols
<http://sparrowlake.ca/pioneerfamilies/thomas-henry-nichols/>

Granny Bowers' Story
<http://sparrowlake.ca/sparrow-lake-historical-society/granny-bowers-story/>

Frank Stanton 1877-1968
<http://sparrowlake.ca/pioneerfamilies/frank-stanton-1877-1968/>

John Franklin 1828-1917
<http://sparrowlake.ca/pioneerfamilies/john-franklin-1828-1917/>

Send newsletter submissions to webmaster
Steve Stanton - stanton34@rogers.com

ANNUAL SPRING MEETING

The Sparrow Lake Historical Society annual spring meeting will be held Saturday May 30, 2015 at 7:00 p.m. at the Severn Bridge Community Hall.

Lori Oschefski of Orillia, CEO of the British Home Children Advocacy & Research Association, will be giving a presentation on the history of British Home Children in Canada. Lori will also talk about author Cecilia Jowett, who was a home child with connections to Orillia, Stephen Leacock, Longford Mills and Sparrow Lake.

<http://canadianbritishhomechildren.weebly.com/>

Sparrow Lake Historical Society Membership Renewal & Application Form

Please note: The year that your membership subscription is paid up to is shown on the envelope in bold letters next to your name.

For those email recipients who are not sure of the year please contact Ken Thomson at hamlet@csolve.net.

Name -----

Mailing Address -----

Postal/Zip Code -----

Email address _____

Will you receive your newsletter via email? YES NO

Single \$15.00 ----- Family \$25.00 ----- New ----- Renewal -----

Also note that now there is a ten year membership available for \$200.00 for a family or \$125.00 for a single membership.

Ten Year Single ----- Family-----

Please make cheque payable to – **Sparrow Lake Historical Society** – and mail to **Ken Thomson, Treasurer 1729 Peninsula Pt. Rd. RR #1, Severn Bridge, ON, P0E 1N0.**