

Yosef Drenters restores old Academy



YOSEF DRENTERS with one of his most recent works, a man praying for peace, has attracted attention from art lovers all over the continent. The unique compositions are fashioned from material most people would classify as "junk". Drenters came to Canada from Belgium and worked as a lumberjack, miner and cowboy before returning to his father's house near Rockwood. A few years ago he bought the historic Rockwood Academy and is restoring it. (Staff Photo)

The historic Rockwood Academy, alma mater of railway magnate James J. Hill, Ontario Premier A. S. Hardy, Hon. Sir Adam Beck, United Church Moderator Rev. Dr. T. A. Moore and famous baseball player William Sunley is being restored.

One of the most famous boarding schools for boys in the province a hundred and some odd years ago, the large stone building has stood vacant except for owners who lived in it, since 1883. It was decaying slowly as the years went by when 29 year old Yosef Drenters bought it for \$8,000.

Drenters arrived in Canada from Belgium at the age of 20, a student from the seminary who concluded the priesthood was not for him. He worked as a cowboy in the west, as a miner in the Yukon, as a lumberjack in British Columbia and then came back to work as a hand on his father's farm in Eramosa township.

Now Yosef Drenters lives and works in the old school restoring the elegance of a building founded by Quakers with a love of learning. Obsessed with a desire to create he made his first sculpture in 1958. He called it "Mother and Child."

Since that time his works have catapulted Drenters

into prominence as one of Canada's best known creators of art. Working with old farm implements and objects which people have discarded as "junk" he has fashioned figures of burnt, oiled wood which have uplifted the human spirit and brought a demand for his work.

His debut exhibition sold out. The CBC filmed a documentary on him. But he's still a simple man, obsessed with restoring the old Academy on the outskirts of Rockwood. His labor on the old school has sometimes taken precedence over his career as a sculptor but he achieves the same satisfaction from fashioning figures or restoring buildings.

Last weekend Yosef Drenters opened part of the restored Academy to visitors and they came from a wide radius to look at his work and the sculptures he has created. Since creativity runs in the family it was only natural his father, Joseph, a Rockwood resident, and a brother Andre from Alton should exhibit their work too in the large restored workshop on the bottom of the Academy.

His works are not without critics. Some have called them "totems."

His laborious work on the old Academy is gradually bringing back to the grey stone building the elegance



OBJECTS IN ONE of the restored school rooms of the Rockwood Academy are examined by visitors over the weekend. Included in the display were desks and ink wells used by stu-

dents, the ornate front gate leading to the school which Yosef Drenters has restored and various historical articles relating to the Academy's history. (Staff Photo)

it once had as a leading Upper Canada school.

The old Quakers who founded the Academy would approve of the work Yosef Drenters is doing. It reflects their philosophy of life.

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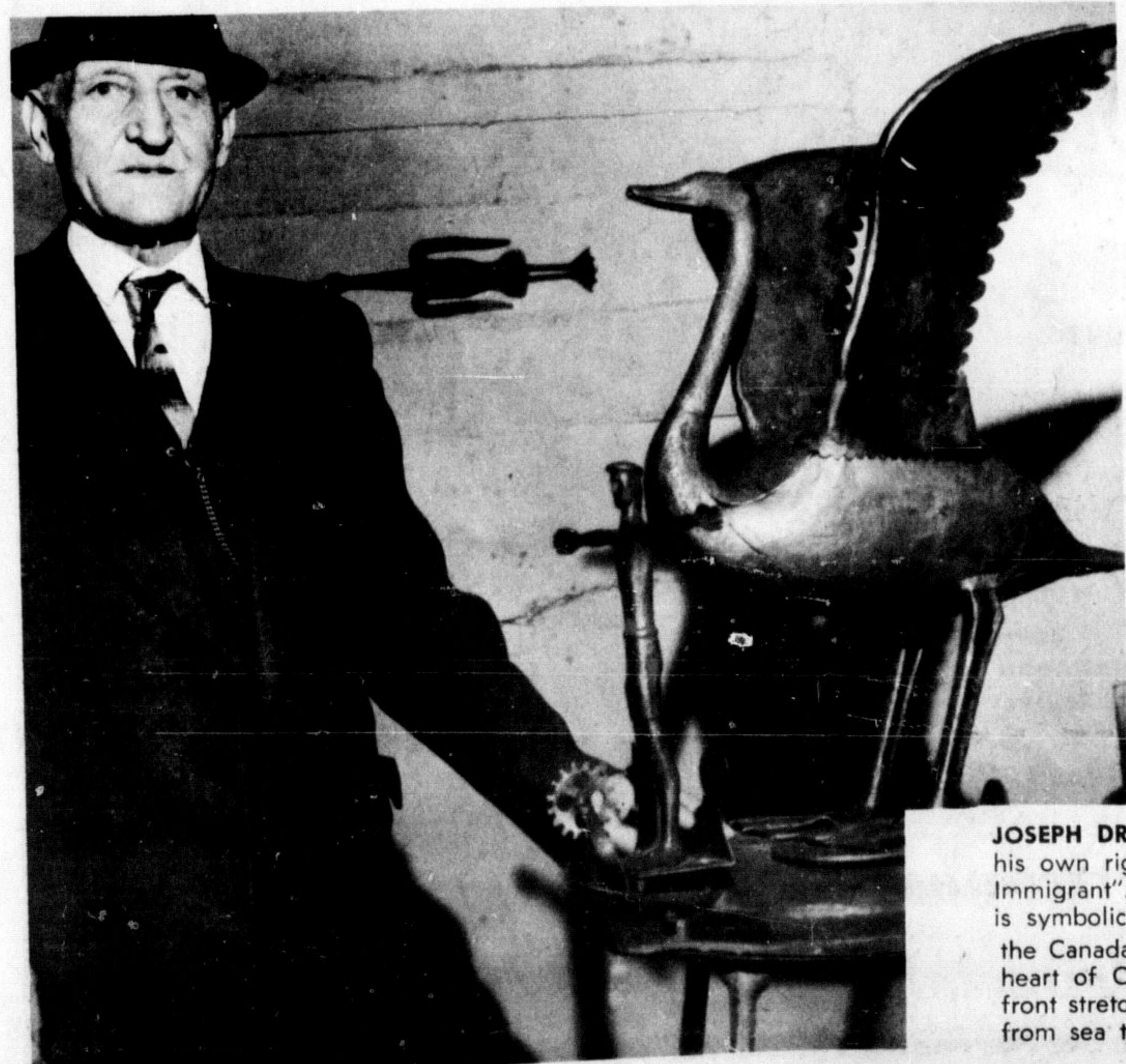
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THIS SCULPTURE, "Pioneer Family" was completed by Yosef Drenters eight years ago and is now owned by the University of Windsor. It was part of the display at the Rockwood Academy over the weekend and Mr. Drenters said it is on its way back to Windsor after being used by the CBC in a Christmas TV special. (Staff Photo)



JOSEPH DRENTERS SR., a part time artist in his own right, created this work called "The Immigrant". Crowned by a Canada Goose it is symbolic of the direction immigrants, like the Canada, migrate. The bird stands on the heart of Canada while the human figure in front stretches its arms embracing the country from sea to sea. (Staff Photo)

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