

New-look United Empire Loyalist monument unveiled

Lazier centre of attention

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By Luke Hendry
THE INTELLIGENCER

It was a voyage to be remembered, but for Gwendolyn Lazier, it was "just fun."

Officials from all three levels of government and numerous community organizations gathered downtown Saturday morning to unveil the new look of Belleville's United Empire Loyalist monument. Many references to the city's history and that of the Loyalists were made, but it was living history that stole the show.

At 100 years old and still up to telling a good story, Lazier was the centre of attention, awe and respect during the unveiling ceremony. There she chatted amiably with dignitaries and friends, revealing bits of her historic travels.

"This is quite a day, isn't it?" she asked, surveying the northwest corner of Front and Dundas streets and the refurbished monument.

In addition to the original log cabin structure being reinforced and repainted on a new base, the monument is now surrounded by

Clarification

In an article in Saturday's Intelligencer, the name of Gwendolyn Braidwood was misstated.

In 1924, the Belleville resident — then Gwendolyn Lazier — rode to Washington, D.C. However, the article did not contain her current married name. The Intelligencer regrets the omission.

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several more historical plaques, including one that tells the story of two remarkable Belleville youngsters.

In 1924, Belleville residents prepared to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the arrival of the United Empire Loyalists in the Quinte region, Lazier, then 18, and 17-year-old W. Allan Dempsey set out to invite others to the ceremony.

Dempsey walked to Toronto, inviting dignitaries from the towns along his route.

Lazier did the same, but on a longer, more hazardous path.

"It was just fun," she said with a shrug.

Had her mother been alive, Lazier said, she would never have been allowed to go. But her father was dismissive in granting his approval.

"Dad said, 'Oh, go on. She won't get any farther than Shannonville anyway.'"

Jim Kokesh was an eight-year-old at the time, and remembers the day the teens left.

"As a kid, I think the biggest thing was the parade," he said of the departure ceremony at city hall.

Kokesh attended a Thurlow schoolhouse with Jack Parrott, and remembers being on the city's eastern limit — then around MacDonald Avenue — as Lazier passed.

"She went out Dundas Street,"

said Kokesh. "She just sauntered down the highway ... She would eventually pass the Parrott farm."

"I'd never ridden a horse before and I haven't ridden one since," said Lazier, who amazed many well-wishers when she revealed she carried a revolver with her.

"It was being sensible, really," she said. "I thought, 'I'm a long way from home.'"

It may have saved her from trouble: in northern New York State, a suspicious group began following her.

"There were four men behind me in a car," she recalled.

Extending her right index finger and thumb in the shape of a gun, she demonstrated how she brandished the pistol, discouraging the men from bothering her.

Lazier delivered her invitation to President Calvin Coolidge's White House; through a now-nameless Belleville woman who worked in the residence's kitchen, she was able to tour the building, but remembers little of that part of her adventure.

"It's so long ago," she said.

Her ride for Saturday was a bit more stylish: she accepted a stretch limousine ride home courtesy of city hall — but only after teasing parks and recreation director Doug Moses as he offered her the ride. The senior citizen was straight-faced as she looked up at Moses and replied, "I thought I'd walk."



INTELLIGENCER PHOTO BY LUKE HENDRY

Gwendolyn Lazier was back at the monument to see her ride commemorated on a plaque on the refurbished and relocated monument and to share her memories of the trip 81 years ago.

*Braidwood,
Gwendolyn
Lazier*