

COMMUNITY CORNERSTONE

BY DEBORAH QUAIL

Ken Wilson

He's a native-born Nassagaweyan, raised on the 20th Sideroad, who attended local schools. After graduation in 1944 from Guelph Collegiate Vocational Institute (GCVI), Ken Wilson stayed home to work on the family farm for a couple of years. He helped his father raise draft horses, dual-purpose shorthorns, sheep, pigs, poultry and crops until he decided he needed a job off the farm.

When looking through The Guelph Mercury for job postings, Ken found the paper itself was advertising for a cub reporter: He landed the job for the next 10 years. Then he moved up the ladder with a position at The Windsor Star for three years, and then as a reporter and eventually as a copy editor at The London Free Press for 38 years until his retirement.

But during that time, Ken was "bitten by the genealogy bug," starting with an interest in his own family history. The entire chain of events was "caused by a wonderful letter written by my three-great-grandfather, John Youart, who arrived in Canada in 1831 and settled on Guelph Line north of Ebenezer United Church. In 1953 a letter arrived in the Campbellville post office from a professor at the University of Birmingham, who found it in his mother's possessions when she died. With no name or proper address, he sent a copy to Nassagaweya Post Office, Ontario. The Campbellville postmaster opened it and handed it on to my aunt Laura Easterbrook, who then turned it over to my father, Merwin Wilson. My dad and his cousin eventually contacted a family branch in Yorkshire through a local historian."

The 10-page letter was written in 1848, 17 years after the Youart settlement: It describes in great detail the trip across the Atlantic, sailing up the St. Lawrence, and transferring to a Durham when they got near Montreal. Flat-bottomed Durham boats were able to negotiate the rapids and were pulled

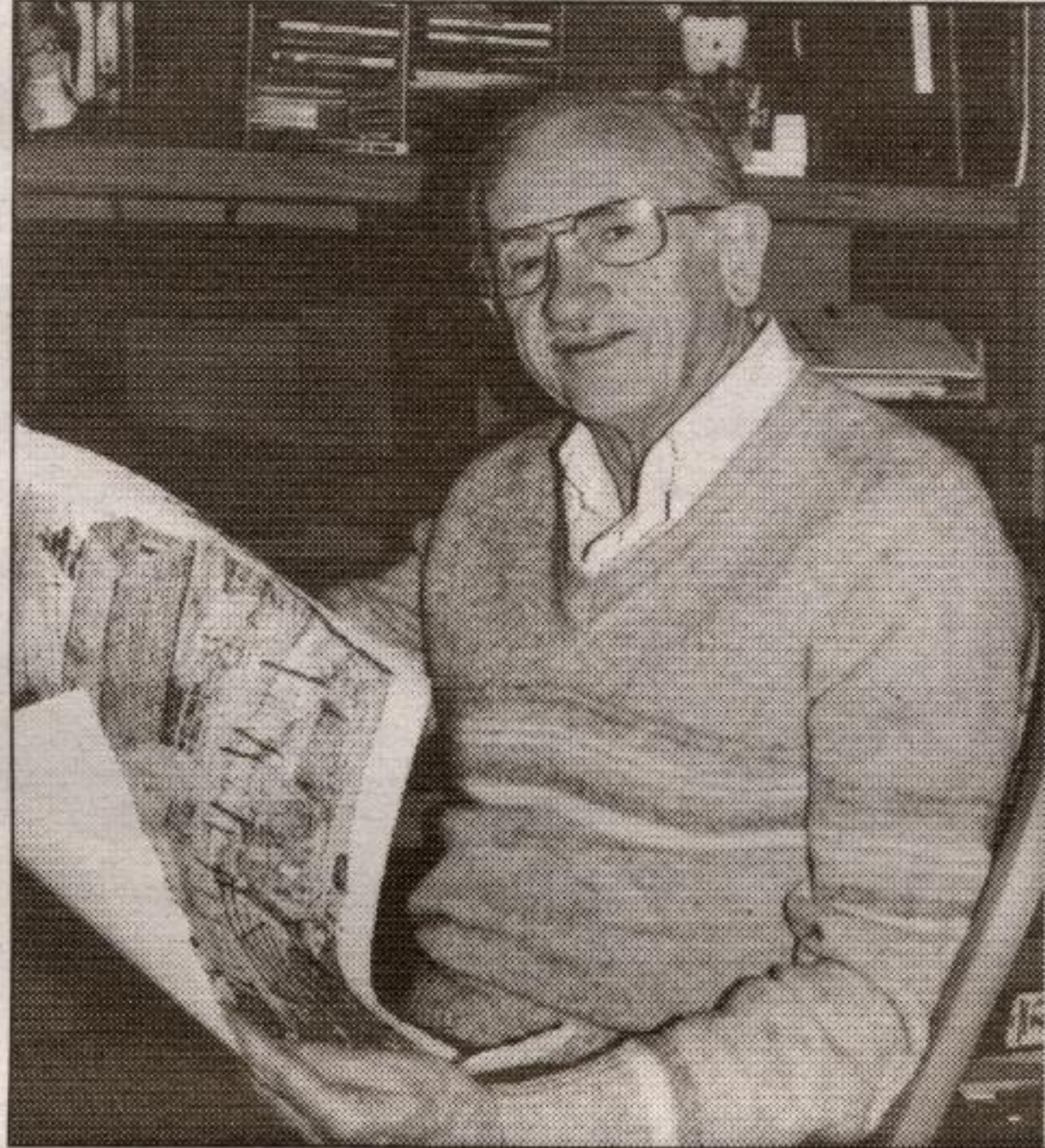
along by horses on the riverbanks. The family passed through Kingston, arrived at York, and proceeded to Burlington Beach by boat where John Youart and family finally disembarked for transportation upland. He related the whole story of clearing the land; the number of acres set in crops of peas, wheat or barley; the exact measurements of the log cabin they built with the "lights" (windows); crop prices and much more.

"My wife and I went to Yorkshire in 1985 as a result of the letters, passing through villages and farms where the other side of the family lived and worked. When researching genealogy, I constantly find that you must go to where things originate. While there, we came across another earlier letter that my relative wrote and copied it out by hand, but by Christmas the family we had visited found the original version and sent it to us."

Without personal contact with the local residents and tramping the countryside on genealogical quests, Ken believes that a great deal of information would never have been found. He has been driven to complete an immense amount of research on several Nassagaweya families related to him and has three-inch binders on each one. Some previous information regarding the date of construction of the first log Ebenezer church was found to be incorrect because of Ken's careful research and findings in a family document that discusses the church's construction.

The Nasagiweya Historical Society (using the original spelling of the township) was founded in 1971 with an eye to preserving the past. The late Bill Gregg, a former president, had the idea of writing a book over 30 years ago.

"After he died, it was hoped that I'd do something with it," Ken remarks. "For the past 10 years, I've



Ken Wilson holds a painting of his great-great-great-grandfather John Youart's farm in Fryup, Yorkshire, that he left to come to Nassagaweya.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

done an enormous amount of research and work at my own expense."

The Nasagiweya Historical Society has received notification from the Milton Community Fund that they will be granted \$10,000 to support staff costs for their ambitious undertaking. The book will be well illustrated with period and current photos. There are great examples of such books in nearly every township in Ontario, Ken notes, but Nassagaweya is one that has been missed. The history will concentrate on the north half of Nassagaweya, back to its beginnings in the Ice Age, and proceed through more recent archeological finds with First Nations data.

"There is evidence of 33 native villages in the Campbellville area - it was a great viewing spot for them up on Rattlesnake Point," Ken explains. "Then the United Empire Loyalists came to Nassagaweya circa 1819, and the subsequent arrival of European settlers happened from about 1828 to 1840. There are some century farms still around, and we're trying to trace as many early pioneer families as we can."

As a result of his interest, Ken, who now lives in the London area, is in North Halton as often as he can. He refers to the landscape as God's Country, saying, "I have deep roots here; it's just beautiful."

North Halton Happenings

APRIL 13

GEORGETOWN CHORAL SOCIETY presents Mozart's *Requiem* at 7:30 p.m., Holy Cross Roman Catholic Church, 224 Maple Ave., Georgetown. The performance also includes *Gloria* and *Fantasia*. Tickets are \$20/\$18/\$15 at Bergsma's Paint & Wallpaper in Georgetown Mall, and The Freckled Lion on Main Street, Georgetown. Call 905-873-2559.

APRIL 3

CANADIAN FEDERATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN MILTON AND DISTRICT MEETING at Hugh Foster Hall, Growth and Change at Milton District Hospital, with Cindy McDonnell, Chief Operating Officer for MDH. Public meeting 8:30 p.m. For information call 905-878-2421.

APRIL 6

Arboretum Sunday afternoon walk - DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME. Discover the history of time on a walk discussing old calendars, time differences and the physics that make Earth the place it is. Meet at the J.C. Taylor Nature Centre at The Arboretum, 2 p.m. Sunday Afternoon Walks are free with a suggested donation of \$3 a person. Call 519-824-4210 ext 52113.

APRIL 10

MILTON FAIR HOMECRAFT EUCHRE PARTY at 7:30 p.m. in #1 Hall, Milton Fairgrounds. Refreshments and prizes. Admission \$3.

APRIL 11

EUCHRE PARTY at Eden Mills Community Hall, sponsored by Eden Mills Friendly Seniors, 7:30 p.m., \$5 a person. Refreshments and prizes. Everyone welcome; your support is appreciated.

APRIL 12

An overview of SAFETY EQUIPMENT, features of a chainsaw, how to hold, start & use as well as the basics of keeping your saw clean and sharp will be held in the Campbellville area between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. Safety equipment will be available for purchase at the course. Pre-registration is required. Contact David O'Drowsky 519-853-4994 or fax 519-853-5119.

APRIL 13

Arboretum Sunday afternoon walk - BIRD MIGRATION. Join us as we greet our feathered friends returning from their winter in the south. Unveil the secrets of migrations and who is new in The Arboretum. Please meet at the J.C. Taylor Nature Centre at 2 p.m. Sunday Afternoon Walks are free with a suggested donation of \$3 a person. Call 519-824-4210 ext 52113.

APRIL 17

The Milton Historical Society presents AN OVERVIEW OF NASSAGAWEYA. Venue to be determined. For information call the Milton Historical Society at 905-878-6904.

APRIL 18

GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE, Holy Rosary Church, 7 p.m. Join a number of Christian churches in the Milton area for a combined service.

GOOD FRIDAY at Ebenezer United Church. Worship 10 a.m., brunch 11 a.m. (Adults \$8, Children 6-12 \$3). Everyone welcome.

APRIL 21

MILTON & DISTRICT HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY meeting at 7:30 p.m. at the Royal Canadian Legion in Milton. Guest speaker will be Karen Michaud speaking on Planning and Planting a Herb and Salad Garden.

APRIL 26

SILENT AUCTION at Boston Presbyterian Church on 3rd Line just north of 5 Sideroad for 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sandwiches, pie and coffee available.

APRIL 26 & 27

FAST FOR CHANGE: the youth group of Nassagaweya Presbyterian Church is joining the youth of Halton Region to fast. If you'd like to sponsor a participant or if you'd like to join the fast, call Nassagaweya Church at 905-854-1055. Join in by contacting World Vision at www.worldvision.org

MAY 3

Halton Sportsmen's Association 23rd ANNUAL CHARITY BREAKFAST (6 a.m. until noon) at 5155 Steeles Avenue Milton. All proceeds go to Milton Hospital.

MAY 3 & 10

HERE ON THE FLIGHT PATH, Dinner Theatre by the Milton Players Theatre Group. Doors open at 6:30 p.m., dinner at 7 p.m., curtain at 8:15 p.m. \$30 per person. Also show only tickets. Milton Seniors' Activity Centre, 500 Childs Drive. Call 905-875-0629.

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