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Tel.: (519) 776-4268 Fax: (519) 776-4014
Email: essexfreepress@on.aibn.com
Website: <http://essexfreepress.reinvented.net>
Publisher: Laurie A. Brett



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One step forward

With all eyes focused on the future but feet cemented firmly in the past, a new local history group is preparing to embark upon an exciting adventure.

The Essex and Community Historical Research Society – a small group of local history buffs, genealogists and librarians – has been hard at work for months doing what comes naturally – research!

It takes a lot of forethought and planning to launch a new organization that, for all intents and purposes, is peniless. But that small detail hasn't distracted the group from their primary goal, which is to set up a research centre capable of housing diverse collections

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of materials that document the history of Essex and the surrounding communities.

Anyone who has used the Harrow Early Immigrant Research Society's collection knows how valuable that organization's work has been for preserving local history and making resources available to the public. With a little bit of luck and a lot of hard work, Essex and its neighbours will soon have a similar heritage gem.

But to be self-sustaining, the group needs help – financial help and volunteer help. Until funding programs can be accessed and some stability achieved, the group will be working to develop its membership and its collection of materials. If you have an interest in local history or wish to research your family tree, please consider attending the first public meeting of ECHRS at 7 p.m. on Jan. 18 at the Essex Community Centre.

Or, if you possess historical materials that you wish to share with the community, please consider donating them to ECHRS. Books, letters, photographs, maps, news clippings, and copies of family trees will all be gratefully appreciated. It takes years to develop organized collections of materials and we're certain that the people of our community have valuable contributions to make.

Online and searchable!

The Essex Free Press has always been concerned about preserving history. With every issue we not only record the week's events in print but also preserve it both in its digital format and on microfilm.

Thanks to a Knowledge Ontario pilot project, we are now able to offer free access to recent issues of the Free Press through a searchable database. Knowledge Ontario is a collaboration of library and heritage organizations whose goal is to create a digital environment about and for Ontarians. Visit <http://news.ourontario.ca/efp> to search or browse our online collection dating back to July 5, 2006. That was the week we announced the Stanley Cup would be coming to town for the Fun Fest.

If only our ancestors had the technology solutions we enjoy today!



i.a.nespolon@gmail.com

Canada lost a true friend this past week with the passing of U.S. President Gerald R. Ford.

As a 13-term Michigan congressman from Grand Rapids, Ford had a unique understanding of America's northern neighbour. His predecessor, Richard Nixon, while a genius in foreign policy, could not abide Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. Ford repaired the rocky relationship with one that was sensitive to Canadian issues. He insisted that Canada be included in the G-7 group of industrialized countries, a membership in an exclusive club of nations that benefited us over the ensuing years.

It's almost been forgotten, but Gerald Ford was the sole remaining living member of the Warren Commission, a blue ribbon panel set up to investigate the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Appointed by JFK's successor, President Lyndon Johnson, Ford threw all his energies into the hearings, and remained convinced



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that the killer was indeed Lee Harvey Oswald.

Upon taking office, Ford bound up the nation's wounds after the Watergate conspiracy. As the House Minority leader, he was appointed vice-president upon the resignation of Spiro Agnew and became president when Richard Nixon lost his base in Congress and was forced to tender his resignation.

Ford's pardon of Nixon enabled the nation to put the political poison of the period behind, and to go on to establish détente with the Soviet Union and a thawing of the Cold War. Ford tried to end the Vietnam conflict gradually, so pro-American Vietnamese could escape.

But a heartless cut-off of funds by Congress put in motion a swift exit of US forces, leaving their allies to face the fury of the communist army.

Ford's wife Betty, having survived a bout with breast cancer, went public with a disease that, in those days, was talked about only in hushed tones. Later, afflicted with an addiction to alcohol and pills, she lent her name to the Betty Ford Centre, an alcohol and drug rehabilitation clinic. Past First Ladies would never have taken up such a controversial cause.

Gerard Ford assumed the presidency under extraordinary circumstances and led the country for 14 months before losing the election to his Democratic opponent, Jimmy Carter.

In his inaugural speech, President Carter recognized Ford's important contribution to American history: "For myself and for our Nation, I want to thank my predecessor for all he has done to heal our land."

America was a better place because of Gerald R. Ford.



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