

# Highlights of our heritage

## Berczy settlers will remember this anniversary year

Settlers not a whining bunch of troublemakers

Carol and Lorne Smith took a trip to the Pocono Mountains, Pennsylvania, during the week of Oct. 16 to 21, and ended up settling the settlers' score card.

He writes: On our way back to Ontario we attempted to follow the route of the Berczy Settlers in their journey from Philadelphia and New York to the Genesee Valley and Upper Canada.

Our most exciting experience, was in Geneseo, about 100 km south of Rochester. At the Livingston County historical Museum, we explained our interest in the area and presented Pat Schapp, Livingston County's current historian, with a copy of the Berczy Settlers Association's recent publication, A Story of the Markham Berczy Settlers. Pat reacted with considerable surprise and then proceeded to tell us a fascinating coincidence.

The previous evening Pat had been invited to address the local Historical Society about the rise and fall of a small community called Williamsburg, about five km south of Geneseo.

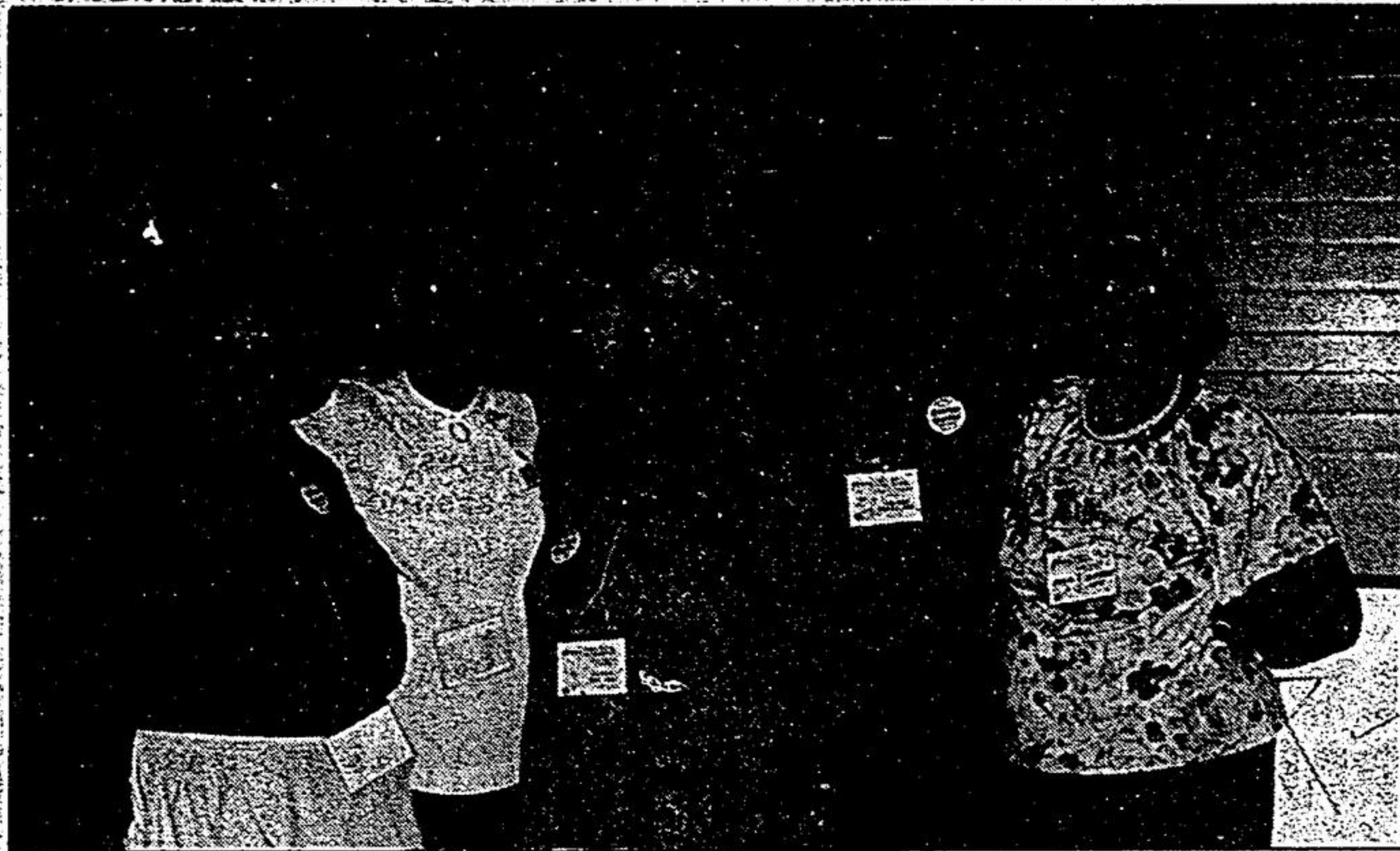
The county historian's interpretation of this story that she presented to the Historical Society was that the Berczy Settlement had been an absolute failure and had caused the demise of the community of Williamsburg.

The Livingston County version of the Berczy story is that the settlers were the dregs of the streets of Hamburg who were not prepared for the rigors of early American settlement. They are portrayed as having no skills, killing and eating the high quality breeding livestock, grinding the seed grain for flour and generally being a whining group of troublemakers.

Imagine the historian's surprise when she learned that the Berczy settlers established themselves in Canada, created a thriving new community in Markham and retained their identity to the point where 200 years later a descendant walks into her office and presents the success story in written form. Her one comment was "why were you not here 24 hours ago so you could have talked to the Historical Society?"

Carol and I collected information from the museum as well as the Rochester Historical Society to help fill out the Berczy story. We visited the waterfalls in Rochester that was the site of one of the first mills the Berczy documentation mentions. We concluded our journey by following the lake around to Lewiston before crossing the Niagara River to Canada.

As you can see, we thoroughly enjoyed our trip.



Descendants of Philip Eckardt, six generations later are pictured at their recent reunion. From the left are Mary Elson, Elsie Adams, Retah Pellatt, Gord Eckardt and Mabel Mitchell, the children of the late William Eckardt of Stouffville.

Katelyn, left and Emily Ross of Stouffville are descendants of Philip Eckardt and Johan Ulsen.

At left is John Summerfeldt of Stouffville, a descendant of John Henry Summerfeldt.

## Berczy settlers are captured on video

A video concerning the early life of the Berczy settlers, many of them Stouffville residents is available. It's a new educational video aimed at bringing life into the study of Markham/Stouffville's heritage. It's a learning tool with a format children can relate to.

Lorne Smith, of the Markham Berczy Settlers Association is a partner in creating the video. He said, "Students will gain an appreciation of the mystery surrounding the problems of early settlements. It's an intriguing story of the settlers' arrival to Canada."

The video is a part of a series on the history of Canada, called Stories in the Life of a Country. It's called, Odyssey of the Berczy Settlers - Conspiracy in Upper Canada, and was completed by Lifetime Productions. It captures the mystery of the Berczy settlement during the trip to Upper Canada and the early days of settling in this area.

The production of the video began last June and was completed in November. A lot of the work was in the re-creation of the Berczy settlement, and all the scenes were filmed in Canada.

The story depicts the challenges and hardships endured by pioneers and offers some insights into the immigrant experience. It's a story of the settlers who carved out the first 40 kilometres of Yonge Street and dredged the Rouge River in a grand scheme to bring the fur trade through the area. Also interesting is the idea that Toronto would not have developed as it is today without the role of the Berczy settlers.

The video exposes the controversy around the mysterious death of Berczy settlers' leader, William Berczy, whose enemies included Sir John Graves Simcoe. Only stones were found in his coffin when he was about to be buried.

CBC Radio's Alan Skeoch is the narrator. He was a partner in making the video and spent a lot of time researching the events.

It's not just for students though. Producer Mike Brillinger said, "People who feel Canadian history is dull, will be interested in watching this video. Immigrants will also be interested in learning about local history, and will find it just as exciting as their own country's history." Residents searching for their roots may find the video a useful research tool, he added.

To order copies of the video call Lifetime Productions at 472-4227.



Marion Lewis and Mary (Eckardt) Elson worked on the research committee of the Berczy Settlers. They put in countless hours for the reunion held August 20. Their anniversary year is over, but not without keepsakes and memories, pictures and recollections to share with future generations.



At right is a replica of the Philip Eckardt log home which was on lot 17 concession 6 in Unionville. It was built by Donald Elson and Gord Eckardt in 1994.

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