



Historic Gloucester

Newsletter of the

**GLOUCESTER HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

www.gloucesterhistory.com

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*Merry Christmas and a
Happy New Year*

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THE GLOUCESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY
 IS HAPPY TO ANNOUNCE
 THAT ITS HISTORY ROOM IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
 EACH THURSDAY FROM 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.
 BETWEEN MAY 3 AND OCTOBER 25, 2012,
 OR BY APPOINTMENT

LOCATION: 4550B BANK STREET (AT LEITRIM ROAD)

FOR MORE INFORMATON
 Contact Robert Serré at 613-749-0607 or bob.rosealine@gmail.com

Cover Photo:

This time we do not have a photo for the cover, but instead are sending you a Christmas Card to wish you and yours all the best for the holidays and the New Year to come. We also want to thank you for supporting the Gloucester Historical Society.

Historic Gloucester is published by The Gloucester Historical Society. It is intended as a Newsletter to members of the Society to provide interesting articles on Gloucester’s past and to keep them informed of new acquisitions by the Museum, publications available, upcoming events and other items of general interest. Comments and suggestions regarding the Newsletter are always welcome.



Gloucester Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the City of Ottawa.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

The **Woodburn Fall Lecture** was given on November 13, 2011 at the Gloucester Adult Seniors' Centre, Earl Armstrong Arena on Ogilvie Road. Loral Dean was the guest speaker ably assisted by her cousin David Mowatt. An article giving a brief overview of the lecture appears on page 7 of this newsletter.

The Gloucester Historical Society is always looking for interesting speakers who can tell us about some of the fascinating aspects of life in Gloucester in bygone years. If you can suggest a person, or a topic, that you think would be of general interest please let us know.

As always, we also would like to receive your memories of your families and their lives in the area once known as the Township of Gloucester. You can write this up if you wish or, if you prefer, just come and talk to us and give us the details.

We hope to be able to present more lectures such as the Woodburn one and we encourage you to come out and listen to how others are recording their histories. We know you will enjoy it.

*Joan Scott,
Newsletter Editor*

Public Notice – The Gloucester Historical Society notifies all members that photographs donated to the Society over the years may be copied, distributed or published by the Society or the Ottawa City Archives. Whenever possible, credit will be given to the original donor of a photograph. If you have donated photographs to the Society and you wish to restrict the use of those photographs, please notify the Gloucester Historical Society.

Board of Directors 2011-2012

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF BILLINGS BRIDGE

by Robert Serré



*An Old Farmers Bridge Across the Rideau
which was replaced in 1912 (photo from
Ottawa Citizen, December 23, 2000)*

Billings Bridge was the first settlement in Gloucester Township [Carter 1984]. In 1812, Braddish Billings, a lumberman, spotted a picturesque site on the south shore of the Rideau River, in the Junction Gore, and he eventually settled there with his wife, Lamira Dow [Johnston 1982]. Born in Massachusetts in 1783, Braddish was the fourth of seven children born to Dr. Elkanah Billings and his wife, Joanna Rogers. Braddish married Lamira Dow on 18 October 1813 in Merrickville, Upper Canada, and they had eight children [Billings].

A settlement developed around the Billings farm [Rooney 2004], located on lot 17 in the Junction Gore. Eventually, Braddish acquired several other land holdings in Gloucester, Nepean and Osgoode townships. A sawmill was built in 1823, and in 1829 the family moved to a two-and-a-half-story frame house on the hill [Kitchen 1996]. The settlement eventually grew on both sides of the river [Clark 2009].

Braddish Billings established a ferry which became a convenient way for farmers to cross the Rideau River [Rooney 2004]. Around 1829-30, a bridge was built through private subscriptions on land owned by Billings on both sides of the river [Kitchen 1996, Johnston 1988]. It was a wooden structure, and was repeatedly washed out by spring floods and rebuilt [Hodgson 1998]. The bridge was called the Farmer's Bridge [IHACC 1879], and the settlement itself came to be known as **Farmer's Bridge**, but in 1865 a post office opened under the name Billings Bridge. The first postmaster was David Taylor [Carter 1984].

There were three main thoroughfares in the settlement, on the south shore of the river: (1) the River Road, which ran east and northeast towards Hurdman's Bridge, then north towards Janeville and New Edinburgh; (2) the Bowesville Road, also called the Long Island Road, which ran in a southwesterly direction; (3) the Metcalfe Road (later Bank Street), which ran south and southeast. By 1876, the privately-owned Ottawa and Gloucester Road Company had macadamized the main intersection in the village, and was charging a toll to cross the bridge [Hodgson 1998].

There was a township hall in the settlement in the 1850s, but little is known about it. In 1874, it was sold at auction, and work began on the construction of a new township hall on the east side of the Metcalfe Road. It was a red-brick building, and council met there for the first time in 1875 [Hodgson 1998]. This building served its purpose until a new town hall was completed in Leitrim in 1962 [Séguin 1991].

On 25 December 1854, the first train of the Bytown and Prescott Railway rolled through the Junction Gore, and arrived in

New Edinburgh. This railway was renamed the Ottawa and Prescott some time after 1855, and the St. Lawrence and Ottawa in the 1860s. It became part of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1884. A flag station was erected on the Billings Estate [Bond 1965, Kitchen 1996].

The first school occupied a little house, built of square logs by Braddish Billings near his own house, and in it children from families on both sides of the river received the rudiments of an education [IHACC 1879]. In 1867, Lamira Billings, then 71 years old, purchased part of lot 18 from her son Braddish to build a proper schoolhouse for the village [Rooney 2004]. In 1896 a two-story frame school house was erected on lot 18 [Hodgson 1998].

Presbyterian services were held in the first town hall. In 1865, Sabra Billings paid for the construction of a frame church on the north side of the River road, east of the bridge, and it was used by both the Presbyterian and Methodist congregations; it was also known as the Free church. Also in 1865, a Methodist class was started in the settlement, and out of it a Billings Bridge circuit

commenced in 1877. Eventually, it thrived so well that its membership outgrew the first Methodist church built on the Billings property [Johnston 1988]. In 1889, Billings Bridge became a separate Methodist circuit, and Sally Billings funded the construction of a red-brick Methodist church, located across the road from the Presbyterian Church [Hodgson 1998].

In 1876, work began on the construction of Trinity Anglican Church. It was a brick structure, located on the north side of the river, and the opening service was held on 12 August 1879 [Hodgson 1998]. In 1877, the Anglican parish of Gloucester was established. Its headquarters were located at Billings Bridge, and it had outlying stations at Cowan's (later Leitrim) and Taylorville [Clark 2006].

Until 1873, Catholics in the settlement came under St. Joseph's parish in Ottawa. From 1873 until December 1886, Billings Bridge was a mission of the parish of Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes in Cyrville [Lavergne 1986]. In 1879, services were held in the school house by Father Magnan. The parish of St. Thomas was established by



Intersection at Billings Bridge in 1923. The road going over the bridge on the left is Bank Street, then called Metcalfe Road; the one to the right is Riverside Drive. (Photo from Ottawa Citizen, December 23, 2000)

Archbishop Duhamel in 1886, and a chapel was built on the west side of the Metcalfe road. It was opened in December 1886, but on 6 June 1888 it was destroyed by a violent storm, and replaced by a brick-faced structure which opened in 1889 [Hodgson 1998, Clark 2006]. A new church was built in 1958 on Kilborn Avenue [Pelletier 1986].

As the community of Billings Bridge expanded, a number of subdivisions were established. The first appeared in 1874 when thirty acres in the south half of lot 19 were converted into a residential neighbourhood known as **Gateville**, located south of the village and nicknamed **Gabtown**. Another subdivision appeared in 1892-93 on a one-hundred-acre lot that was subdivided and named **Rideau Park**; it was bounded by Stanley Avenue (now Pleasant Park) and Billings Avenue [Hodgson 1998, Clark 2006].

In 1975, the City of Ottawa bought the Billings house and 17.4 acres of land surrounding it. Today, 8.3 acres of land, together with the existing buildings, form the Billings Estate, a historic site having national significance that is managed by the City of Ottawa [Paine 1980].

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Woodburn Fall Lecture

by Joan Scott

The **Woodburn Fall Lecture** was given on November 13, 2011 at the Gloucester Adult Seniors' Centre, Earl Armstrong Arena. Forty-nine people came to hear the tragic story of a local hero whose true cause of death remained a mystery for 60 years. Numerous photos of Flight Sergeant James Woodburn, DFM, the subject of the lecture, were on display.

Loral Dean, daughter of James's older sister Jean Blair Woodburn, was the guest speaker. She was ably assisted by her cousin David Mowatt, son of James Woodburn's eldest sister Marjorie. Loral's father Homer Dean, an RCAF chaplain with a keen interest in military history began researching the intriguing story of James Woodburn's short life over 20 years ago. After Homer's death David Mowatt completed the manuscript.

Loral gave an interesting view of the early life of James Woodburn from childhood on the family homestead on Innes Road in Gloucester to his university days at Guelph Agricultural College. As a young man growing up in troubled times, James led a normal life until the menace of a world war inspired him to forego his studies and enlist in the Royal Flying Corps. He trained as a fighter pilot and joined RAF 18 Squadron of Bomber Command.

During his short career he flew a Blenheim bomber on a number of hazardous missions. In August 1941 James and his crew flew a very dangerous mission to bomb a power plant at Knapsack, near Cologne, Germany. One of the crew was wounded and the plane was badly damaged, but by clever manoeuvring, James was able to bring the plane safely back to base, even though they

had to make a belly landing when they got there.

Because of his exemplary actions James was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal, one of the first graduates of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan to be so honoured. He wrote to his parents saying that he wished they could be with him when he went to Buckingham Palace to receive the medal and meet King George VI. Unfortunately he never made it to Buckingham Palace.

His luck ran out on October 22, 1941. James's plane was one of six Blenheims who went on a raid on military barracks at Al-Khums, Libya. The unit log book reported that they failed to return. The official report stated that James and his crew were killed in a flying battle at Khums, North Africa and that the aircraft blew up in the air.

The shock of losing a robust young man of such a tender age - he was only 21 years old - was a great strain for the family, especially when there were no details of what had happened. In fact it was sixty years later that the sad truth of the fatality was known. This was discovered by the relatives and friends who interviewed the families of some of James's flight crew. Apparently a parachute bomb that had been dropped blew back into the plane and exploded.

Loral and her family felt that this life story should be told and they set out to finish the memoir started by Homer Dean and have it published. It is called "*A Tribute to James Woodburn and His Crew.*" It will be published shortly under the authorship of Homer Dean, David Mowat and Garry Turvey. Garry was a cousin of Rear Gunner Geoffrey Robinson and he has written a section in the book on his cousin as well as supplying a photo of the collective grave in Tripoli.

Publications Available From the Gloucester Historical Society:**For further details regarding publications visit our website: [www.gloucester history.com](http://www.gloucesterhistory.com)****(Postage, if mailed, in brackets)**

<i>Blackburn - Glen Ogilvie - Centennial History 1887-1967</i> Compiled and Edited by Mrs. Anna Elliott	5.00 (3.00)
<i>Bowesville: A Place to Remember</i> By Grace Johnston	20.00 (12.00)
<i>Famillies pionnieres des Carrieres de Gloucester dans l'Est de l'Ontario</i> By Robert Serré	10.00 (3.00)
<i>Famillies pionnieres de Cyrville (Canton de Gloucester)</i> By Robert Serré	10.00 (3.00)
<i>Gloucester Lions Club Inc. , History of the First 42 Years, 1968 to 2010</i> By the History Committee of the Gloucester Lions Club and Robert Serré	25.00 (8.00)
<i>Gloucester Memories</i> By Mel Rowat	5.00 (3.00)
<i>Gloucester Roots</i> Compiled and edited by Lois Kemp	20.00 (5.00)
<i>Gloucester Township Ratepayers Listed by Family Name and Concession/Lot Number for the Years 1855, 1864 and 1872</i> Compiled by Robert Sérre	10.00 (3.00)
<i>Hawthorne Reflections</i> by Laurel Sherrer	10 .00 (3.00)
<i>Memories of the Lock Stations</i> Compiled and Edited by Grace Johnston	5.00 (3.00)
<i>Milk/Cream Producers—Distributors in Gloucester 1892-1975</i> Compiled and edited by Grace Johnston	15.00 (5.00)
<i>Pioneer Families of Cyrville (Gloucester Township)</i> By Robert Serré	10.00 (3.00)
<i>Pioneer Families of Glen Ogilvie (Gloucester Township)</i> By Robert Serré	10.00 (3.00)

Publications (continued):

<i>Pioneer Families of the Gloucester Quarries</i> By Robert Serré	10.00 (3.00)
<i>Pioneer Families of Hurdman's Bridge (Gloucester Township)</i> By Robert Serré	10.00 (3.00)
<i>Pioneer Families of Janeville (Gloucester Township)</i> By Robert Serré	10.00 (3.00)
<i>Pioneer Families of New Edinburgh, Volume One: 1830-1870</i> By Robert Serré	10.00 (3.00)
<i>Pioneer Families of St. Joseph (Orleans) in Eastern Ontario</i> By Robert Serré	10.00 (3.00)
<i>Pioneer Families of Rockcliffe Annex and Manor Park in Gloucester Township</i> By Robert Serré	10.00 (3.00)
<i>Place Names of Ottawa, Canada's Capital 1791-1950</i> By Robert Serré	12.00 (3.00)
<i>Remembering Carlsbad Springs (Gloucester Township)</i> By Mary Boyd and Robert Serré	10.00 (3.00)
<i>The Story of the First English Church of Gloucester Township:</i> The history of St. James Anglican Church, Leitrim, 1853-2003 By Glenn Clark	50.00 (20.00)
<i>1879 Belden Map of Gloucester Township</i> The map shows who owned each lot in 1879 as well as the location of roads, churches, schools and interesting features of the township during that early time.	10.00 (5.00)

Note: Copies of publications may be ordered through: Robert Serré, President of the GHS, 1057 Riviera Drive, Ottawa K1K 0N7, e-mail: bob.rosealine@gmail.com. A shipping charge as shown for each publication will be added to mail orders.

It is all right to drink like a fish if you drink what a fish drinks.

If you growl all day you will be dog tired at night.

Members Wanted:

The Gloucester Historical Society is always looking for new members. Regardless of age, anyone who is interested in the history of Gloucester, as a Township, City, or part of the City of Ottawa, can benefit from membership in the Society. There is a well-stocked history room at our Leitrim Road office. Every Thursday, from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm from early May to the end of October, there are knowledgeable people there to help you in all aspects of research about your family, friends or neighbours in Gloucester.

Your membership entitles you to receive the *Historic Gloucester* newsletter four times a year so that you can keep up with what is going on with the GHS and read interesting articles of times and places of long ago. For more information on the Gloucester Historical Society be sure to check out our wonderful website at **www.gloucesterhistory.com**.

Family Histories Wanted:

If you have information on any family who resided in Gloucester, we would be happy to add this to our records. There may be others who would like to share this information but have been unable to find it. And, you may find that the family of someone you know was once a neighbour of your ancestors!

Volunteers Wanted:

The GHS is always looking for volunteers to assist others with research, to assist at society functions or to help the Board of Directors in many other ways.

IF YOU HAVE NOT YET RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP, OR IF YOU WISH TO BECOME A NEW MEMBER, PLEASE COMPLETE THE FORM BELOW AND SEND IT IN WITH YOUR CHEQUE.

Membership Form—Gloucester Historical Society/Société historique de Gloucester

Membership/Adhésion 2010 - \$15.00 for one year..... \$100.00 for life membership.....

NAME: _____

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