

Topical Overview

Early History

- Beginnings
- Neutral Iroquoians
- Neutrals
- Contemporary Natives

Early Settlement

- Greater Fort Erie
- Agriculture

Commerce

- Fort Erie Business
- Ridgeway Business
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- Crystal Beach Business
- Dairies
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- Education

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Preface



Fort Erie Historical Museum

The Disher family.
This photo was taken circa 1912 at Erie Beach. From left are: Ed Disher, Maggie Disher, Florence Disher, Clara Disher, Ron Disher, Libby Disher and Ashal Disher.

A musical composition, the sum of many interwoven parts, requires a variety of voices to produce a harmonious whole. The history of Fort Erie may be compared to an intricate piece of music. Its rich diversity would be lost if delivered as a solo effort.

Diversity is reflected in the book's title and content. *Many Voices—A Collective History of Greater Fort Erie* has been researched and written by many people who represent our diverse culture. By combining their different approaches to interpreting the past, we can offer a balanced account.

In 1966 members of the Bertie Historical Society began collecting memories and memorabilia for a history book. The torch was passed to the Fort Erie Museum Board in 1992 when they established a book committee. This work, therefore, represents over 30 years of collecting, four years of concentrated research and a commitment made by nearly 50 people—truly a grassroots community project.

At the outset, the book committee proposed a number of topics based upon their knowledge of local history. Then, each volunteer author chose his or her topic, decided upon the emphasis, and carried out the research. According to each author's preference, a

number of possible resources were used, with museum staff offering whatever assistance they could. Each author defined the scope and amount of detail to be included. Finally, each chapter was prepared according to standard format and revised, proofread and checked. The result is a unique collection of subject matter, perspectives and writing styles which reflect this community. In another place, another time, the collection would be different; this one is ours.

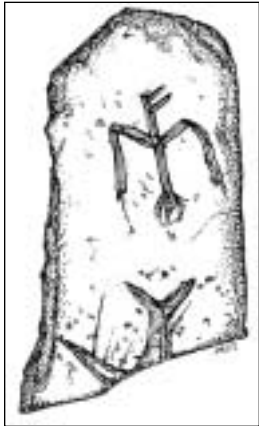
The purpose of *Many Voices* was to compile a comprehensive history of most aspects of the life and times of greater Fort Erie for the last 200 years as a permanent record of reference facts in a single convenient volume.

Two ideals guided this publication: a determination to educate, and a hope to instill pride. There are so many treasured resources—people with stories to tell, historic buildings, distinctive natural landscapes—that are diminishing, dying, disappearing before our eyes. Our book is an attempt to capture the past for the benefit of future generations.

As history is an ongoing process, our chronicle is an open document. Unfold its pages as you will.

The Editors.

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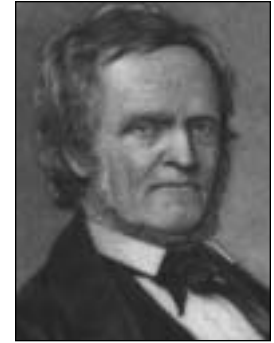
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Introduction



Fort Erie Historical Museum

The Quirk family.
Mr. John Quirk was a railway conductor for the Erie and Niagara Railway line. This photo is of his family in the 1880s.

Many Voices is actually 48 separate books bound together in one volume. It is not designed to be read from front to back. Each chapter is a self-contained unit, arranged according to subject matter (see Topical Overview).

Each chapter may be appreciated on several levels. Pictures and captions give a quick glimpse of the subject; small boxes (sidebars) present capsules of details; quotations and “teaser lines” hint at the content; and the text itself is an insightful essay about the subject. Many of the photographs are published here for the first time.

Scope

Some community histories would include these 48 subjects in a straight chronological account and draw conclusions about the “big picture,” the “meaning” of it all. We have chosen to take only the first step in this exercise—to

furnish the basic facts, as we found them, and invite readers to draw their own conclusions.

For example, you will read of the demise of industrial and commercial activities on Point Abino. Your own opinion about whether this was a positive or negative development will complete the story. You will become one of the “many voices” speaking in this book.

Names

Depending upon their expectations, readers will find either a lack or an abundance of names in this book. In the Index are more than 3,000 names; those are the relatives, friends and neighbours who were driving forces in our history. The emphasis is upon what they accomplished, not on their family lineage. That is why there are no chapters devoted to family genealogies. Tracing local family histories is an art unto itself and

deserves a book of its own—perhaps *Many Voices* Volume Two.

As a compromise, we suggest that the most important family history is, of course, your own! In the Genealogy chapter there are resources to use and space to record names and dates in your own family.

Great care was taken to spell names correctly, however, names were not always spelled the same in the past. Names were written phonetically, as they sounded to the person recording them. Names were often changed to a more familiar form, substituting English spellings for the foreign sounds. Sometimes individuals changed the spelling of their given names or surnames, in order to distinguish themselves from another person or branch of their family. Sometimes there was no reliable written record to confirm any one spelling.

Dates

History, on the most basic level, focuses on dates and events. In these chapters, writers have tried to be precise and avoid vague allusions to time periods by repeating dates frequently; this practice makes it easier for readers to follow the chain of events and make connections between events occurring in different sectors of life. Our purpose was to produce a useful reference book, written in an entertaining and popular style.

Facts

Facts are statements which stand up to intense scrutiny; facts agree with other established truths. One looks for facts in primary sources such as diaries, census records, council minutes, maps, business journals; that is, first-hand accounts written by persons actually involved.

Some information is derived from secondary sources, which are not as good as primary ones for facts, but may be the only source known and/or available. Secondary sources are accounts written by persons who have read a primary source or other secondary sources. There is always the risk of “transcription error” when information passes through a human mind: individual bias, interpretations and experiences tend to interact with facts and may cause errors. Sec-

ondary sources include the contents of newspapers, magazines and books which are not first-person accounts.

Folklore

Another source of historical information could be called folklore. These are the conventional beliefs, legends, stories and memories which have been passed down through the ages. They are troublesome because all too often people remember things differently. While not excluded totally from the work, these sources were used sparingly.

Mistakes

This book is a secondary source, and it is a human endeavour, which means that it will contain mistakes. A thoroughgoing effort was made to verify and correct minor typographical errors, names, dates, places, but we want to hear about items we missed. A “perfect book” would be an oxymoron, so we intend to issue errata slips to reinforce the reference value of our work.

Notes

All of the chapters in *Many Voices* have notations of sources, a feature which serves two functions. First, if a reader disagrees with what is written, the type of source can be identified (primary, secondary or memories); then, if a reader wishes, the actual source can be located for verification. Second, if the reader wants to learn more, the notes indicate where additional information may be found.

The same fact or set of circumstances or series of events may mean vastly different things to different people. Conflicting interpretations—and the sparks that fly when minds meet—provoke the sort of lively debate which makes history interesting. History is far from being “cut and dried”; there will always be new ways to look at old events.

Finally. . .

This book is now in your hands. You may determine how to use it—select a favourite topic first to read in depth, study the photographs, look up some familiar names, or browse through the short pieces. The choice is yours.