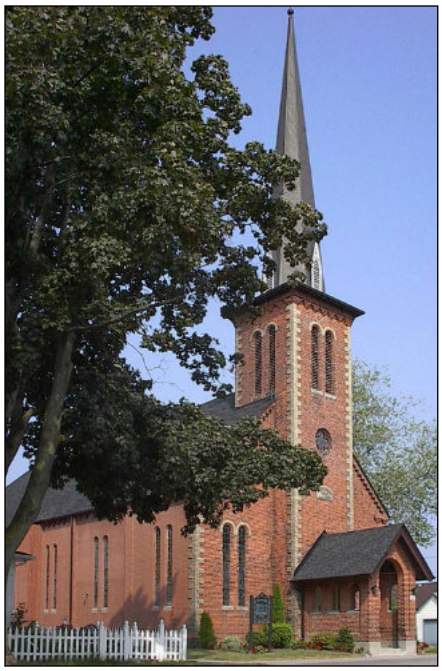
Newcastle Village and District Historical Society
NEWSLETTER 153 • FALL 2024


The church prior to 1910 (without portico), the church today, and the first NUC manse at 1102 Church St., built in 1859, now a private residence.

Newcastle United Church celebrates 200 years

By Myno Van Dyke

In the early 1800s the Methodist religion was brought to this area as part of the evangelical awakening after the War of 1812, by circuit preachers who were also known as "saddlebag preachers," as they travelled by horseback.

In 1823 at the age of 22, when John Ryerson (brother of Egerton Ryerson) was serving as a deacon on the Yonge St. Circuit, he attended an appointment at the property west of Newcastle owned by Samuel Wilmot, who provided a meeting room in his tannery for the preacher. Ryerson went on to become a leader in the Methodist Church in Canada, along with Anson Green, who was also instrumental in the establishment of a Methodist congregation in Newcastle.

On November 4, 1824, 23-year-old American preacher Anson Green is said to have preached the very first sermon in Newtonville. He then went over to Wilmot's and preached in a schoolhouse just west of the creek (now Wilmot Creek). He had a busy day, as he then stopped into Asa Walbridge's house on "the main road." Here he "left an appointment" which means he essentially started a Methodist congregation there. This home on King Avenue East, has been restored and is owned by Brian and Audrey Jose. Brian is a direct descendant of Asa Walbridge.

Construction of the first Methodist church – also the first church in Newcastle – at the southwest corner of Emily and Church Streets, was started in 1846 and completed in 1851. It was a frame building and there were no pews at first – blocks and planks provided seating. The guest minister at the opening was Rev. Anson Green.

In the following fifteen years, the congregation grew, and a larger church was needed. In 1866, a lot at the southwest corner of Mill and Emily Streets was purchased for $200 and in May 1867, the cornerstone for the new church was laid and the new red brick church was completed in 1868 at a cost of $6,000. Due to congregational growth, the church was enlarged in 1877 by extending it to the west.

In 1893, another addition was built to accommodate the Sunday School. The former frame church at Emily and Church Street, used as a Sunday School and Church Hall for many years burned down a few months after the addition was completed.

In 1909-1910 there were many new changes incorporated into the building including a Sunday School extension to the west, a new portico entrance on the front, four furnaces, electricity with 100 lamps, new carpets, a new pipe organ, new pews and a new kitchen

with new dishes and silverware. That year the church's Thanksgiving supper served 800 people – more than the population of the entire Village of Newcastle at the time.

In 1859, the first church manse was constructed on Church Street just south of the original church building. In 1910, a new church manse was constructed on the east side of Mill Street South. The former manse was sold and it soon became common that ministers wanted to purchase their own home and not live in a church manse so the newer manse was sold in 2002.

Both churches and manses, as well as additions and improvements in 1910 were funded by large financial contributions by the Massey family, owners of Massey Manufacturing in Newcastle, the village's largest and most successful business enterprise. Massey Manufacturing was in Newcastle from 1847 until 1879, when it moved to larger facilities in Toronto. The Massey family continued to be very generous to the village that gave them their start for decades after they moved.

On June 10, 1925, the Methodist Church, Canada, the Congregational Union of Canada, and 70 percent of the Presbyterian Church in Canada entered into a union. The Methodist congregation and the Presbyterian congregations in Newcastle amalgamated and the church name was changed to Newcastle United Church.

After the amalgamation, the original frame Presbyterian Church on the northwest corner of Church and Caroline became vacant and was torn down. The current church parking lot at the NE corner of Emily and Church was purchased by the NUC after the house on the lot had a terrible fire in 1966 and was torn down

Over the years, the church saw several upgrades and changes. In June 1964 the congregation authorized major repairs and renovations. Between 1965 and 1976 memorial stained-glass windows were installed in the sanctuary. In 1999, a new 3-manual Allen organ was installed. In 2018, the congregation voted to proceed with a renovation project of the church hall and a small extension to the west. The hall renovation was completed in December 2019. However, the construction of the addition to the west side of the church was postponed.

In late March of 2020, the COVID epidemic began, and in-person church services were suspended. This meant that the church had to come up with new innovative ways to continue to reach the congregation. Services were conducted online via Zoom and recorded and made available on a YouTube channel. Minister Mary-Jane Hobden initially conducted live services from her home and later from the church. Music was pre-recorded at the church and the Music Director, Joanne McLennan, recorded a weekly "Music to Wash Dishes By." The church finally re-opened to in-person services in September 2021.

In 2022, the church became a local drop-off centre for needed items for Ukrainian refugees. As well, the church became home to a second congregation, Al Ikram, a local Muslim faith community. They gather in the church hall for their weekly Friday afternoon prayers. In 2023, a new audio-visual system was installed in the sanctuary and hall utilizing large screens and projectors, along with a new speaker system for those with hearing challenges.

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus is credited with the idea that the only constant in life is change. For 200 years now, Newcastle United Church has embraced many changes and challenges and still survives. The 200th Anniversary Committee has planned several events this fall culminating in a special church service on November 3, 2024.

Olive Wilmot and Mary Magdalene

a talk by
Judith Clapperton and James Breech

Wednesday, October 16 7 p.m.
Newcastle Community Hall

Had They But Known Her is a work of historical fiction by former resident of Newcastle, Judith Clapperton, about the life of Olive Wilmot.

Judith corrects the false information that Olive was reviled as a loose woman and depicted as the "prostitute" Mary Magdalene in the magnificent Tiffany stained glass window in the chancel of St. George's Church, Newcastle.

Dr. James Breech is New Testament scholar and will talk about the Tiffany window.

Admission is free but donations to the NVDHS are always appreciated. Free refreshments following the talk.

Local Heroes – Part 1

By Brian Wilson & Paddy Duncan

We begin this series with this question: Can the residents of a small village community make a significant, positive contribution to the world? We think they can - consider these various Newcastle and district residents:

Chief Wabakinine

Wabakinine, a local nomadic chief of the Mississaugas, part of the huge Anishinaabe hunter/gatherer nation, was a frequent visitor to the Newcastle area and Wilmot Creek for salmon fishing.

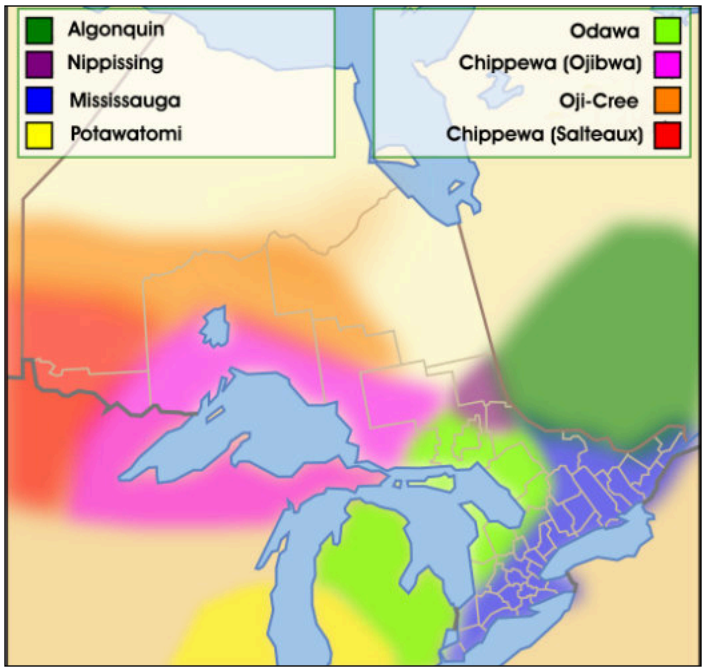
When Lord Dorchester took over as Upper Canada's governor in 1886, he knew that Upper Canada would soon be a separate province from Quebec. He preferred Kingston as the capital but chose York (Toronto) instead. There was a large region of indigenous territory belonging to the Mississaugas between the two previously negotiated treaty lands at Niagara and on the north shore of the St. Lawrence.

Dorchester wanted to join those the lands between the Crawford purchase on the St. Lawrence and York, to provide an unbroken strip of territory for settlement, and as part of a larger British plan to accommodate the large number of refugees entering the country from the newly formed United States of America after the American Revolution ended in 1783.

The refugees were loyalists to the British crown, and they had nowhere else to go – many of them were forced from their homes and threatened with mob violence. Life for British loyalists in the Thirteen Colonies had become untenable and they believed that the British connection in what was to become Canada guaranteed them a more secure and prosperous life than that offered by American republicanism.

Superintendent of Indian Affairs Sir John Johnson and his subordinate, Colonel John Butler, met with Wabakinine and other Mississauga chiefs to negotiate the land surrender for what was to become the Johnson-Butler Purchase or "Gunshot Treaty" at the Bay of Quinte and at York on September 23, 1787.

Some 626 First Nations people attended the negotiations at the Bay of Quinte and another 391 attended at York and the two groups were given £2,000 worth of ammunition, muskets and tobacco, as a reward for loyalty to Britain and for their service during the



Map of Anishinaabe territory c 1800. Source: SHOTHA, Wikipedia under CC license 4.0

American Revolutionary War. It was not, as interpreted later, a payment for the land. Payment for the land didn't occur until 1788, in York.

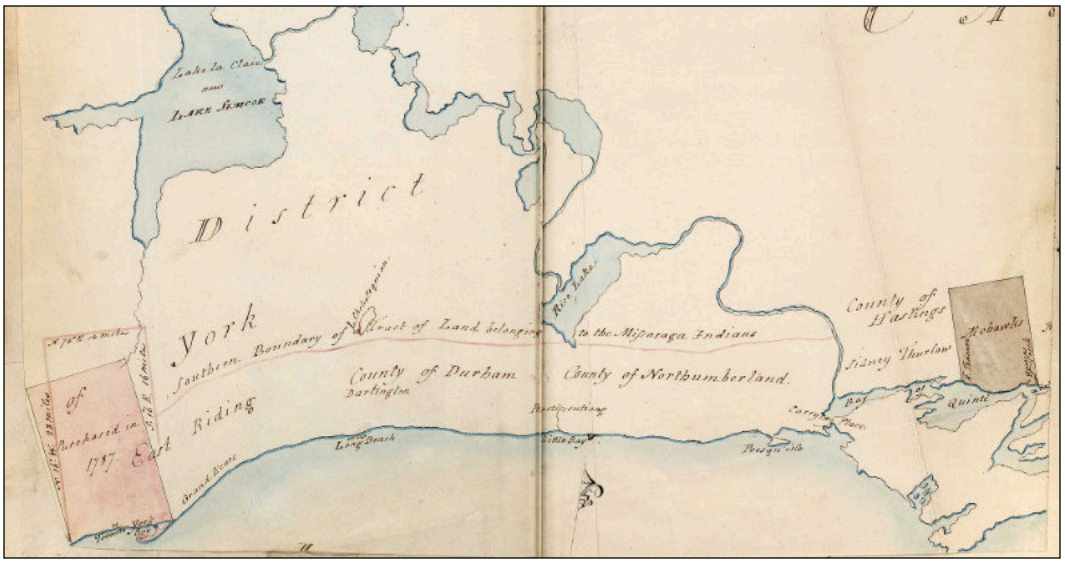
The boundaries of the Gunshot Treaty territory were to be the north shore of Lake Ontario from the Etobicoke River to the Bay of Quinte and as far inland as Rice Lake. (see map) - said to be the distance that a gunshot could be heard from the lakeshore on a clear day. The terms of payment and borders were never recorded in the actual treaty documents and it wasn't resolved until the signing of the Williams Treaties in 1923 (and then revisited later).

John Graves Simcoe, who became the first lieutenant-governor of the new province in 1791 expressed some concern about the carelessness of the arrangements to Governor Dorchester, who decided that though the boundaries had not been well documented, the transfer was valid, and it was "best not to press that matter or shew any anxiety about it" to the Mississaugas. The continuing uncertainty didn't make the new inhabitants very happy. More negotiations ensued over the next 135 years.

Wabikinine had been a signatory to treaties governing lands around the Niagara River in 1781 and at the western end of Lake Ontario in 1784 between Burlington Bay and the Credit River involving about one half of the band's traditional hunting grounds. They had also surrendered land in the Bay of Quinte in 1783 to the Fort Hunter Mohawks who had been loyal to the British in the US. By the early 1790s, an estimated 10,000 Loyalists would arrive in Ontario, and settled on

land that the Crown had previously recognized as "Indian Land."

Wabakinine became a chief because he had been a great warrior, he was trusted by his people and worked to maintain a position of moderation, despite pressure from some of the younger Mississaugas. Knowing the dangers of the possibility of an American invasion, he encouraged his people to remain British allies, and if necessary, to fight with them in defence of the Crown.



Detail of map showing "Purchases from the Indians in 1787, the Mohawks' Land and boundary of the lands of the Missasaga (Mississauga) Indians." The pencil line paralleling the shore of Lake Ontario became the northern boundary of the territory ceded under the Gunshot Treaty. Courtesy of the Toronto Public Libraries,

The British, in turn, viewed Wabakinine as a positive and stabilizing element in their tense situation in Upper Canada. British military leaders placed great value on their strong alliances with First Nations and saw the numerous First Nations warriors (who outnumbered their own forces) as essential to the colony's defence should the Americans invade.

The Royal Proclamation of 1763 had attempted to standardize administrative policies on the acquisition of indigenous lands, and implicit in the policy was the idea that the indigenous people would retain traditional hunting and fishing rights, without explicitly recognizing aboriginal ownership of the land. It was under this policy, Wabakinine and the other indigenous chiefs in the area ceded much territory of their territory.

Key to our understanding now, is that the British desire to secure land title was a foreign concept to the Mississaugas – the concept of individual ownership of land was unknown to them. Along with the vague wording of the treaty, which was to last as long as "you see the sun in the sky, as the rivers flow, and the grass grows" were issues with translation and interpretation.

The treaty called upon the Anishinaabe to "surrender" the land, and this treaty, and subsequent treaties like it, are referred to as "land surrenders," but there is no such word in the Anishinaabe language.

Instead, via the oral translation at the time, Wabakinine agreed to share the land, while the recorders wrote (in English) that he agreed to surrender it. In 1787, the Anishinaabe had no written language, but in the oral recitations of the treaty terms handed down over the years, the meaning was clearly at odds with that of the written British version.

The Loyalist settlers were given deeds for their new land parcels, with all the rights pertaining to such in British Common Law, and as loyal British subjects they believed themselves entitled to those very rights, and as American colonists they often shared a common disregard for the "rights" of Indigenous people.

In 1969, the Nisga'a from BC took the federal government to the Supreme Court, claiming that treaties like the Gunshot Treaty clearly indicated that the British government recognized that the indigenous people had at least some traditional rights to the land. A split decision in this landmark case led to the negotiation and settlement of many land claims across the country – some of them ongoing today.

Wabakinine helped to bring lasting peace between the settlers in Upper Canada and the Anishinaabe people, in stark contrast to the rest of North, Central and South America, where devastating "Indian" wars continued until the end of the 19th century, killing thousands of people, white and Indigenous alike, including entire Indigenous nations. Almost all the wars were over the settlers' and government desire for Indigenous land.

After the Gunshot Treaty was signed in 1787, the resulting peace led to the arrival of thousands of new immigrants and colonists, who quickly outnumbered the Indigenous population. By 1830, almost all Indigenous land in Southern Ontario had been ceded to the British and the remaining small pockets of First Nations people were viewed as an impediment to growth and prosperity

by settlers who, with the growth of their own population and militia, no longer saw any need for them as valuable military allies.

The land surrender treaties continued until 1862, though the first two mineral rights treaties in northern Ontario in the 1850s created a template for treaties with First Nations going forward, spelling out the preservation of hunting and fishing rights. By then the First Nations of southern Ontario had lost access to traditional fishing and hunting grounds and many were destitute, living on small reserves, mission lands or squatting on Crown territory.

The relationship with the settlers had shifted and the First Nations people were now seen as being in need of "civilizing" – and were encouraged to abandon their traditional ways of life and adopt a more agricultural and sedentary British (and Christian) lifestyle.

It's doubtful that this was a future envisioned by Wabakinine or any of the First Nations signatories to the Gunshot Treaty in 1787.

Cowanville - a brief history

By James Breech

Cowanville, named for original settlers William and Polly Cowan, sits in the centre of Clarke Township at the corner of Concession 4 and Morgan's Rd., Orono. It is marked on Google maps at some scales as "Clarke" – likely a reference to the former Clarke Township rather than the actual spot on the map. Former local Councillor, Wendy Partner had signs installed to identify all of the former villages in the area, including Cowanville.

Cowanville was never more than a small hamlet and there is little evidence left of it today, but one of the remaining buildings is the Cowan's farmhouse, now owned by Vicki and James Breech. Cowanville's small brick church stands just east of the corners on the south side and is now a private residence. The sawmill south of the church and its dammed mill pond on Graham Creek near the end of Cowanville Rd. are both gone. Other buildings no longer standing include the Orange Hall which sat at the NW corner of Concession 4 and Morgans Rd. on the Cowan's property.

Other local family names included: Fisher, Alldread, Francis, Reid, Couch, Potts, Millson, Cobbledick, Lent (sawmill owner), Walsh, Davison, Grose, Graham, Ruddick, Stutt and Stapleton. Many descendants of those families remain in the area.

William Cowan (1785-1836), and his wife Polly Adair (1790-1867), who were born in County Monaghan, Ireland, and their seven children (ranging in age from 2 to 22) embarked on an arduous journey in 1832 from Fermanagh, Ireland to Upper Canada.

After three months crossing the Atlantic, they landed in Quebec City, where they transferred to a ship which took them to Montreal. There they transferred to a Durham boat or scow and proceeded up the St. Lawrence. Where the river was very narrow and the current too swift for the crew to pole the boat upstream, they were pulled by a yoke of oxen. At Kingston they transferred to a schooner and steamship. They then took a stagecoach or walked to their final destination, landing in Haldimand Township and remaining there for a few months.

Cowan farmhouse c1849, now owned by James and Vicki Breech.

The Cowan family finally settled on Lot 17, Concession 4 of Clarke Township. It was all woods at that time and there were no close neighbours. But one morning Polly Cowan went to the top of the big hill to the west in the same lot wondering if she would see smoke anywhere in the neighbourhood. She heard a rooster crow and came home pleased, saying she would go back the next morning, and wherever that rooster was, she would try to find it. She went back the next morning and at the foot of Mount Tom found a family by the name of Fisher who had come from either the US or from Ireland that same year. They had brought some chickens with them, and were the Cowan's closest neighbours, about a mile away, through the woods. Their first home was a log cabin.

William Cowan's eldest son George founded an Orange Lodge on the Cowan property in 1839. The Orange Order was a Protestant fraternal society, founded in 1795 in County Armagh, Northern Ireland to commemorate the

victory of William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne on July 12, 1690.

Militantly anti-Catholic, the Orange Order grew and developed as it carried its mysteries and ritual and a propensity for liquid (i.e. alcoholic) socializing in areas where there was little to do after hours of back-breaking toil. In such places to be Orange was to be entertained and to have fun, and the Orange Lodges' membership varied more with the economic state of the country (and members' ability to pay their dues) than it did with political/religious/temperance questions that exercised the press of the day. The NVDHS has on display two ribbons worn by members of LOL # 265 Cowanville.

The lodge building stood on the southeast corner of his farm, which George Cowan called "Orange Grove." As far as is known, it was the first Orange Lodge in Clarke Township. We found a key that Leslie Wilson identified as the key to the Orange Lodge. She said that no one locked their homes in those days, but the Lodge was locked because the valuable vestments were stored there. By 1926, the Lodge had moved to Newcastle. Known locally as the "Cowan Lodge" local members included Hiram A. Millson, Fred Graham, F.Baldwin Lovekin. A.A. Colwill and George Martin, as well as William Cowan's grandsons Robert and George (Wellington) Cowan and great grandson Alonzo Cowan. LOL #265 no longer exists.

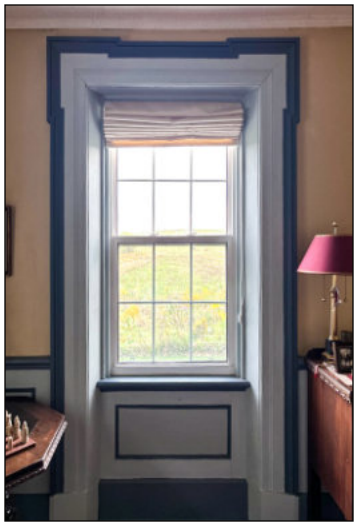
The Cowans were not very active in the community, although George's son Moses Cowan was the tax collector for the ward of the township in 1896. While all were literate, including the women, none are known to have pursued a high school education. Margaret Etta, daughter of Thomas Cowan, another of George's sons, did sit for and pass her high school entrance exam, but there is no evidence that she attended.

The Cowans seem to have been a frugal lot – none of them took out mortgages on the original property, though most of their neighbours had mortgages at various times during the 1800s and early 1900s. None of them are found on the Municipal Indigent lists. They also seem to have been exceptionally law-abiding and paid their property taxes promptly. They were either too old or too young to serve in WWI, though one of George Cowan's great-great grandsons served and died in WWII.

Loyal Orange Order #265, Cowanville ribbons.

The house at Orange Grove is believed to have been built circa 1849-51. At that time, it is likely the bricks were made on site, although they may have been carted by the wagon load from the brick works in Newcastle over roads that were little more than rutted trails through the woods and swamps at that time. The entire population of Clarke was just 1,884 in 1851 – by the next census in 1861 it had more than tripled. There are few remaining houses from the 1840-1850 period.

The interior woodwork is much more elaborate than that of the average farmer's house. The "eared" design of the window and door surrounds in the principal rooms exists in only one other home in the area built by the same builders. The stonework in the basement of the house was done by a skilled stonemason.



Cowan farmhouse east elevation (sunroom and garage are recent additions). Original interior woodwork surrounds the windows with a distinct "eared" design not typically seen in the average farmhouse.

The house was owned by Cowans until 1942 when it was bought by Jim Simpson. The next owner was Walt Henderson who sold it to Jim Peters in 1984. James and Vicki Breech bought it in 1991.

Vicki and James Breech had been looking for a property in the area for some time. Having looked at over 700 listings and having visited over 70 properties, they chose this one as soon as they saw it, despite the fact that it required extensive restoration. and was clad in white and black vinyl siding. The previous owner had kept cattle, and the interior of the house was covered with fly droppings.

The Breechs have extensively restored the house. Unfortunately, the original bricks were too badly spalled to be saved. They had the outer course replaced by a local bricklayer with bricks made in South Carolina that look original. The wooden windowsills were rotted and were replaced with Indiana limestone. The twelve-pane double-hung windows were replaced with modern replicas. They have added an all-season sunroom in place of the original rear porch and a mud room joining with a new garage that has a new two-bedroom self-contained apartment above.

Interior restoration work included the removal of orange shag carpeting and the plywood from the floors, some new heated stone floors, removal of the fake wood paneling, and replacing 30 broken windows. They had the wood floors sanded and stained and painted the house to emphasize the elaborate moldings. Because the house is not large, they decided to paint each room a different colour but to continue the double blue trim throughout for continuity. All the renovations were made in keeping with the historic character of the original house.

The former Clarke Church (Methodist) in Cowanville was built in 1882. Closed in 1955, it became a private residence in 1963.

One of the two original barns on the Cowan property. Stone foundations have been repaired, new gutters and downspouts added and new roofs installed.

The two remaining barns, out of an original four, had been lifted onto stone foundations around 1894. There is a signature in the mortar by George's son William dated 1894.

To preserve the historic barns, James and Vicki have had all the stonework repaired and added gutters and downspouts on both barns, installed a new floor and replaced the roof of the big barn.

Victorian era farmhouse on the north side of Concession 4, east of the original Cowan farmhouse, built by one of the Cowan family..

This article was composed by James Breech using materials gathered by the late Leslie Wilson, with additional material provided by Paddy Duncan.

The Cowanville sign on Concession 4 marking the location of the former hamlet.

NVDHS in action...

NVDHS at Orono Fair in September. Peter Martin and Erla Jose and visitor.

NVDHS BBQ Potluck on September 16. Beautiful day and great company!

Brian Jose presents Lifetime member award to Erla Jose for her dedicated service to the NVDHS over the past 25 years. Congratulations, Erla!

Photos: Willie Woo, Les Harris and Paddy Duncan

Newcastle Village and District Historical Society

The Newcastle Village and District Historical Society was formed by a group of citizens in 1981 to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of the former Village of Newcastle and its immediate environs. Today, we have an extensive collection of artifacts, documents and photographs and offer help with research into the history of the area, including its businesses and families.

We are located in the former public library in the Newcastle Community Hall. We have permanent and special displays in the historical room and are open to the public twice a week. We are a registered charity, supported by our members, local sponsors and donors, with some additional assistance from the Town of Clarington and the Government of Canada (Canada Summer Jobs). We welcome all new members and donors!

20 King Avenue, Unit 3, Newcastle, Ontario, L1B 1H7
Open: Tuesdays & Saturdays, 9:30 a.m. to noon
Website: newcastlehistorical.ca
Email: info@newcastlehistorical.ca

Individual, family and corporate memberships are available for $15-30/year. Memberships may be purchased or renewed on our website, in person or by mail.