

This Old Haus: A Place in Time By Susan MacFarlane Burke,
with Kenneth McLaughlin and Stephanie Kirkwood Walker

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This Old Haus: A Place in Time

By Susan MacFarlane Burke, with Kenneth McLaughlin and Stephanie Kirkwood Walker

Kitchener: The Friends of the Joseph Schneider Haus, 2008. 208 pages.
\$39.95 softcover. ISBN 09695578-3-8 (www.region.waterloo.on.ca/jsh)

Museums in Ontario have had a long history. Since the 1830s, hundreds have been opened and have served as public institutions and centres for learning throughout the province. Some of this history has recently been documented. Examples include Gillam's study of museums and the Canadian public, the theme issue of *Ontario History* that I guest edited (Spring, 2002), Teather's account of the Royal Ontario Museum, the story of Canada's Museum of Civilization by Vodden and Dyck, and Tivy's doctoral thesis "The Local History Museum in Ontario."

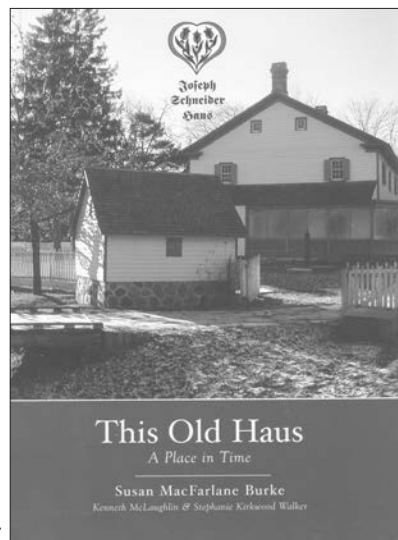
What is much less frequent is the telling of the stories of Ontario community museums in full-length books. *This Old Haus* provides an informative account of the life and history of the Joseph Schneider Haus Museum in Kitchener. It is a project of the Friends of the Museum to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the opening of this site to the public. This book is a biography of that building, and it details the saga of heritage enthusiasts who brought the local community and resources together to create and sustain the museum.

An introduction and the closing chapter by Stephanie Walker, a member of the Board of Friends, provide insight on heritage and landscape. Her succinct overview of the Schneider family history helps put the rest of the publication into a historical continuum. A piece by Kenneth McLaughlin (recently retired historian at St. Jerome's University, University of Waterloo) describes efforts to acquire the house and to establish it as a community museum. McLaughlin was chair of the museum board and a member of the Waterloo

Region Heritage Foundation, and his perspective as a heritage advocate at the helm of the early stages of development is especially informative.

Susan Burke's chapter, "Reviving the Haus," is central to the book. As the site's first and only curator, she kept a detailed diary of the restoration process for a period of 18 months, starting in November 1979. Burke recorded not only her personal observations but also documented "finds" made by the construction foreman and crew and others involved with the restoration. Excerpts from the diary provide readers with the experienced curatorial voice, essential and unique when telling the JSH story. Burke was at the JSH before it opened and has worked tirelessly with her staff for more than 25 years, assembling a first-class collection of artifacts and creating a cornerstone of cultural life in the Region of Waterloo.

Several chapters deal with subjects which are too often overlooked in published museum histories yet are the essence of any community museum. Topics include the landscape of the JSH site, its archaeology, outbuildings, furniture and equipment, and its place as a community asset and resource. Burke also draws attention to the roles of family and friends, students and artists in residence, and explains to readers activities behind the scenes. She felt it was important to record events, programs, displays, public



interaction and other museological initiatives associated with the Standards for Community Museums in Ontario established by the Ministry of Culture. Burke, McLaughlin and Walker together track how the Joseph Schneider Haus has evolved over 25 years, explaining to the public the concept of a successful ‘living history’ museum. *This Old Haus* is enriched by more than 500 photographs, illustrations and images. The intent was, however, not to produce a coffee table book but, instead, to enhance the JSH story of restoration and change.

We need more publications that record Ontario’s museological heritage and the history of individual community museums in our province. *This Old Haus* can be viewed as a handbook and a good example for other community museums to use when chronicling their own histories. It also provides in-

teresting reading for the public at large seeking a better understanding of such cultural institutions in their own communities. *This Old Haus* is an excellent book to add to your library!

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Belleville: a Popular History

By Gerry Boyce

Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2008. 311 pages. \$50.00 hardcover. ISBN 1-55488-412-4 (www.dundurn.com)

Don’t pass over this book just because you think you do not need to know anything about Belleville. Read it, because Gerry Boyce has written a book that readers should think of as Theirville, or Anyville. Certainly you will learn much about a small city on the Bay of Quinte – who was the first mayor, when the hospital was renovated: that sort of thing—but you will start thinking about your own town with fresh eyes. *Belleville* reminds would-be urban biographers that they have things to say that may resonate far beyond their town limits. Boyce tells stories to which we all can relate, and makes them focal points along the (perhaps) obligatory chronology. He provides large, thoughtful stepping stones on what so easily could have been a plodding trail.

Many of these stories are like fables. Who

knew that Belleville failed to make the short list of candidates for provincial capital in the 1850s because of paperwork incorrectly filed? Oops! (And Boyce laments that he recalls having seen the explanation of what went wrong, years ago in an archive, but his own flawed record-keeping has prevented him from finding the reference again. Not many researchers would admit to such a *mea culpa* yet we all have done just that.) The Belleville McFarlands hockey team inspired a generation of fans, but gave the city financial fits and taught it a lesson in fiscal management. Whose town has not had that sort of experience? How about the Prince of Wales, whose visit in 1860, so eagerly anticipated (with triumphal arches, bands, and all that), was cancelled because of politically-incorrect demonstrations by Orangemen and (I’ve never heard of these