

# DEVONIANS IN ONTARIO

a semiannual genealogical newsletter

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Welcome to the second issue of this newsletter devoted to information about Devon (England), Ontario and the people who emigrated from one to the other. Contributions of any kind for the newsletter are welcome.

## The Bible Christian Project

Many of the people who emigrated to Canada and the northern US from Devon from the early 1830s onward, espoused the Bible Christian faith. For those of you who do not yet know about the Bible Christians, here is a brief outline of its beginnings:

The Bible Christian movement was founded by the son of Wesleyan & Anglican parents living at Launcells in Cornwall. Not content with the sedate Anglican church nor the reforming Wesleyans, William O'Bryan (originally Bryant), started to preach all around his home village and into North Devon.

His attempts to join the Wesleyan ministry were turned down, so he and his followers, the Thorn family of Shebbear (North Devon), founded the Bible Christian movement in the home of the Thorns in 1815. It quickly took root and over the next ten years many more BC preachers went out to spread the word. The first conference was held in Shebbear in 1821, and a BC magazine followed in 1822. William O'Bryan's own book on the origins of the BC movement was published in 1823.

The earliest chapels were scattered over north Cornwall and North Devon, and were built with donations from followers from about 1830.

By 1831 William O'Bryan had fallen out with the Thorns, and chose to move to New York. Although he returned to Devon during the rest of his life, he and his wife are both buried in New York. The Thorns however remained in Shebbear and started a printing press, and then Shebbear College until their movement was assimilated into the United Methodist movement.

From Devon and Cornwall the Bible Christians went primarily to Prince Edward Island and Ontario, a few going to the mining country of Wisconsin. It was decided at the 1831 Conference held at Shebbear, Devon, that missionaries ought to be sent to these far shores to look after the spiritual needs of their former members, and so Rev. Francis Metherall was elected to go to Prince Edward Island and Rev. John Glass was sent to Ontario. Whether it was ill health, or the imposing nature of the country, Mr. Glass resigned within the year, and Rev. John Hicks Eynon was sent to replace him.

Eventually these men were joined by others and the job of building congregations and circuits was tackled with enormous zeal. Because Prince Edward Island (formerly St. John Island) had been settled at a much earlier date, first during the French Regime in North America, then by Loyalists during and immediately after the American Revolution, Mr. Metherall had a much easier time than did J.H. Eynon, who had nothing but a few

Indian trails through the bush to follow in his untiring search for his "lost sheep" as he called them.

In Prince Edward Island the task seemed insurmountable, as most people, though friendly toward the BCs, and willing to take part in anything that needed to be done, refused to join the sect—in other words they would not pay their subscriptions (their membership fees)! This was the frustration felt by all the preachers who worked at Prince Edward Island.

In Ontario, however, it was the country that was hard to navigate, J.H. Eynon's circuit, for example, being 200 miles in length. The people willingly came back into the fold once they knew he was there, and within his first year on his circuit he had 14 promises to build chapels. The people kept their promises, too, and indeed built not only those 14 but many others as well over the ensuing few years.

Many important names have been associated with the Bible Christians down through the years, and the Bible Christian Project is all about finding these people and telling their story, and the story of the people of their various congregations.

Where did these people come from? Where did they settle? Why did they leave their homes in England to come to an unknown new land?

We want to acquaint you with your roots in Devon and Cornwall, and we want to take your ancestors' stories back to Devon and Cornwall to the extended families and their descendants to show them what became of their relatives who emigrated all those long years ago.

The project will be in the form of a "Road Show" and will have three parts:

1. a static photo display showing villages in Devon, Cornwall, PEI and Ontario. It will include photos of the various ports from which our ancestors left their homelands.
2. a video and slide presentation about Devon, Cornwall, PEI and Ontario with commentary.
3. a book combining both of the above, plus loads more!

Right now there is a team in England gathering information, and a team in Ontario gathering information from this side of the Atlantic. It is one of the most interesting projects with which I have been involved in many years, and becomes more so every day. One of the reasons I became involved is because I too wanted to know more about these people. I'm sure my questions have been echoed all across the country, and so I have an idea what sort of information will assist you too to know your ancestors just a little better.

If any readers have information about Bible Christian ancestors, or photos, or chapel locations in your ancestors' areas, please get in touch. We want this project to portray all sorts of people, not just the preachers and missionaries. Tell us about your Bible Christian ancestors.

Looking forward to hearing from you all,  
Sher Leetooze, Bowmanville, Ontario  
[sher.leetooze@3web.net](mailto:sher.leetooze@3web.net)

This excerpt from Neil Semple's *The Lord's Dominion*, a history of the United Church of Canada, describes the first Bible Christian settlements in Ontario: "...other Bible Christians established a band of pocket settlements along the north shore of Lake Ontario from Oshawa to Cobourg and into the back townships from Lake Simcoe east through

Peterborough to Madoc. They too were involved in the lumber industry while attempting to farm. Anxious to establish their familiar religious fellowship, they quickly organized prayer and class meetings and appointed lay preachers.” (p. 119).

We hope that Sher will keep us updated about the progress of the Bible Christian project.

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Two notices from *The Canadian Statesman*:

24 April 1889

Crumb: In East Whitby, April 19<sup>th</sup>, Elizabeth, widow of the late Alfred Crumb, of Darlington, aged 82 years. Native of Bradworthy, Devon, Eng.

6 November 1889

Mason: Samuel Mason was a native of Devonshire, came to Canada with his parents in 1833...[lengthy notice]

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A2A (Access to Archives):

The most recent issue of the *National Archives Newsletter* (Kew) has this update about A2A. A2A is the English strand of the UK archives network; its database at [www.a2a.org.uk](http://www.a2a.org.uk) already contains the electronic equivalent of over 700,000 catalogue pages describing archives held across England in national, local and specialist repositories and dating from the 700s to the present day.

The A2A programme will make a further 150,000 catalogue pages available on the web by July 2005.

A2A is well worth looking at, and returning to, as it is added to all the time. It doesn't provide actual information, but it refers us to and indexes archival documents which may contain your ancestral names.

The only Devon-related item in the update was this:

South West Access All Areas: delivered by Cornwall Record Office for the South West Region, this project will convert 43,000 existing catalogue pages describing a huge variety of archives in the region, ranging from borough and church archives to the archives of the Gloucestershire Pig and Potato Production Club.

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**The following is taken from an announcement from the National Maritime Museum, London. There are many preconceptions about ports of embarkation of emigrants, some people thinking there were only two, Liverpool and London. There were many small ones, even in London and reference to PortCities UK might help researchers understand the situation:**

**“Further to many queries about ports of embarkation, the National Maritime Museum in London has a website launched last September called PortCities UK. Here is information about it from their website:**

## **PortCities UK**

The history of two of the UK’s major slave ports; the legend of the monkey hanged for treason by Hartlepool fishermen; the stories of the Thames floating smallpox hospital *Atlas*, and the couple who rode a scooter from Southampton to Australia are among those included on a new website, to be launched on 22 September. *PortCities UK* explores the history of five ports, the events and people who shaped them and the communities that developed around them.

Partners from organisations in London, Bristol, Southampton, Hartlepool and Liverpool have worked to create the site - [www.portcities.org.uk](http://www.portcities.org.uk) - supported by the National Lottery good causes distributor, The New Opportunities Fund.

*PortCities UK* invites visitors to experience the past by exploring the impact that major rivers and ports have had on the present. Selected accounts of events, people and industry create a rich picture of the cities. The interactive website enables public access to images from the historic archives, museums and libraries of the five partners. The online collection follows the digitisation of over 60,000 photographs, paintings, drawings and documents, most now displayed for the first time.

*PortCities UK* is a one-stop resource for people with an interest in exploring history, and for those with links to port cities through family history or work. The site aims to bring together the diverse threads of the UK’s ports and rivers to provide an entertaining and interesting learning platform for users.

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### **Libraries in the Durham Region area (compiled for use by attendees at the Cornish Gathering in Bowmanville, 2003)**

The south end of Ontario and Durham counties was one of the two principal locations for Devonians in Ontario.

**Clarington Library** (Bowmanville, Courtice, Newcastle, Orono)  
principal location: Bowmanville Branch, 163 Church St., Bowmanville L1C 4T7  
905-623-7322; website: [www.clarington-library.on.ca](http://www.clarington-library.on.ca)  
library catalogue at [catalogue.clarington-library.on.ca/](http://catalogue.clarington-library.on.ca/)

Genealogical holdings include *Canadian Statesman* newspaper and index, local Tweedsmuir histories. For in-depth research, they refer people to the Museum.

**Clarington Archives** (Bowmanville museum, and archives at Kirby)

Bowmanville Museum, 37 Silver Street, Box 188, Bowmanville L1C 3K9

905 623 2734; toll free 888 567 2598

e-mail [bm-chin@durham.net](mailto:bm-chin@durham.net)

website [www.bowmanvillemuseum.org/](http://www.bowmanvillemuseum.org/)

Clarke Museum and Archives (at Kirby on Highway 35)

Box 152, 7086 Old Kirby School Road, Orono L0B 1M0

905 983 9243 (Thursday to Sunday only)

Genealogical holdings: cover Darlington and Clarke. For Clarke, they have ‘practically anything to do with family history,’ including wills, assessment records 1870-1913, family files, business files and records, cemetery transcriptions, church & school records, Tweedsmuir (for Bowmanville, Hampton, & Clarke).

**Oshawa Public Library**

McLaughlin (Main) Branch, 65 Bagot Street, Oshawa L1H 1N2

Tel: 905 579 6111; Fax: 905 433 8107

website [www.oshawalibrary.on.ca](http://www.oshawalibrary.on.ca)

Genealogical holdings: local directories and newspapers. The local history librarian says emphatically that they do not have family histories.

**Oshawa Historical Society**

museum at 1450 Simcoe Street South, Oshawa (in Lakeview Park)

telephone 905 436 7624

description at [www.city.oshawa.on.ca/tourism/history1.asp](http://www.city.oshawa.on.ca/tourism/history1.asp)

Genealogical researchers are welcome. They have the census on mf, files on families and businesses. The Oshawa municipal records are at the Archives of Ontario.

**Whitby Public Library** (branches in Whitby and Brooklin)

central branch at 405 Dundas Street West, Whitby L1N 6A1

telephone 905 668 6531

website at [www.whitbylibrary.on.ca/](http://www.whitbylibrary.on.ca/)

catalogue at [216.208.38.26/whitby.html](http://216.208.38.26/whitby.html)

Genealogical holdings: are principally about Ontario County. The book collection includes the local OGS branch (materials are no longer locked). The reference librarians described themselves as ‘not too experienced but glad to help’. They have Whitby directories from 1960 (earlier ones are in Oshawa Library). They have land records on mf (by township), local newspapers from 1850, some local church records (indexed), local history scrapbooks and 19<sup>th</sup> century biographical material on prominent people.

**Whitby Archives**

The archives are located at 420 Green Street, unit 7, but the mailing address is 603

Harriet Street, Whitby L1N 1L4

telephone 905 668 5570; fax 905 668 1940

information at the website [www.town.whitby.on.ca/intro/history.html](http://www.town.whitby.on.ca/intro/history.html), with a history of the town

**Whitby-Oshawa branch OGS**

Box 174, Whitby L1N 5S1

website at [www.rootsweb.com/%7Eonwob22/](http://www.rootsweb.com/%7Eonwob22/)

library at Whitby Public Library (note: online catalogue access as above)

**Trent University Archives**

1600 West Bank Drive, Peterborough K9J 7B8

705 748 1011 ext 1413

website at [www.trentu.ca/library/archives/](http://www.trentu.ca/library/archives/)

The Archives has a wonderful website with good listings of holdings and a subject guide specifically for genealogy. They have all extant newspapers for Durham, Northumberland, Victoria, Haliburton, Hastings and Peterborough counties. In the manuscript collections are diaries and business records. The original civil registration records for Northumberland and Durham are here, and assessment records for Northumberland, Durham and Victoria.

**East Durham Historical Society**

Box 116, Port Hope L1A 3V9

The museum is located in the scenic village of Garden Hill, Ontario just north of Port Hope on the Ganaraska Road #3632. Follow the road signs on County Roads #9 & #10. It is easily accessible from Hwy 401, Hwy 28 and Hwy 115/35.

website at [www.edhs.ca](http://www.edhs.ca)

They have a small collection and sell their publications; they often refer people to the Port Hope library (905 885 4712). There are bmd's for Hope & Port Hope at [www.nhb.com/hunter/BMD.htm](http://www.nhb.com/hunter/BMD.htm).

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