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NEWS

‘The pieces of our history that get lost’: Golden Tales preserving Clarington’s community stories

Oral history project will result in digital archive

The Golden Tales oral history project is preserving local stories with the help of area seniors.



By **Moya Dillon** Clarington This Week

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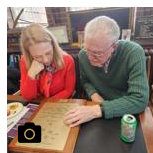
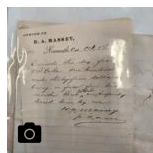
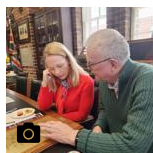
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Moya Dillon Metroland

Newcastle resident Bill Lake with his family farm sign during a Golden Tales social that invited area seniors to share their stories for the oral history project.



From family histories to the ever changing landscape, the Golden Tales oral history project is preserving local stories.

The Clarington Library, Museums and Archives is nearing completion on the project, which has been collecting the personal histories of area seniors, thanks to funding from the Ontario seniors community grant program.

“Seniors bring enormous wealth to our communities that no one else can,” said Lee Higginson, project lead for Golden Tales. “People don’t think their histories are important or worthy of being written down, but that’s our history. Those are our local truths and once they’re gone, there’s nothing you can do to get it back.”

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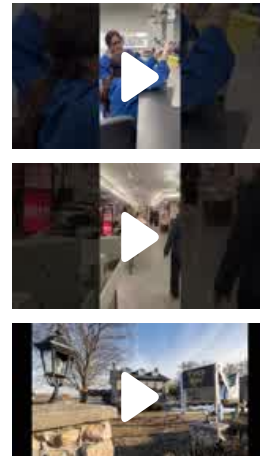
To that end, Higginson has been hard at work collecting stories from Clarington residents. At a recent social at the Newcastle Community Hall, she heard from resident Bill Lake, whose family has been farming in the community since 1852.

“I’m still farming,” said the 89-year-old, whose land is two doors down from his family’s original farm.

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Lake brought along a sampling of historic receipts kept by his grandfather and father — going back to the 1800s — and said he has a wealth of artifacts at home, from more bills and documentation to historic farm tools.

“I just like old things, I like history,” Lake said, praising the project for helping to preserve the community’s history. “It’s keeping our heritage alive for sure.”

Higginson said residents, such as Lake, are the reason the project exists.

“He is the keeper of the history for his family,” she said. “I wish projects like this were taken really seriously and were really well funded everywhere, because losing one person like Bill Lake or losing that person in the community that has that bank of knowledge and who people rely on to remember stuff, you’re losing all that history.”

Ric Pearce made the trip to Newcastle for the event from his home in Port Perry, bringing along his family tree to illustrate his family’s long history in Newcastle, where he grew up.



“My dad was a milkman here for 54 years,” Pearce said. “He started his own route when he was 12, at that time, the family farm was just south of the Hole in the Wall, going down Mill Street.” That family farm is now a housing development, but its history will remain preserved thanks to Pearce’s stories and the Golden Tales project.

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“There are so many stories nobody knows about, so I think it’s really good,” Pearce said of Golden Tales, noting he’s hoping to start a similar initiative in his home community in Scugog. “We’re really involved in the historical society in Scugog and we’d love to do something like this. We’re really trying to get those stories people forget about.”

Heather Ridge, curator and heritage services manager for CLMA, said the project will result in a digital archive that can be accessed online.

“What we are trying to achieve is the preservation of these stories for future generations and we’ll do that by creating a digital record,” Ridge said. “These are the pieces of our history that get lost, so to capture them and preserve them is really important.”

While the value of a digital archive is undeniable, Higginson also notes that the conversations and stories shared during the project had their own unquantifiable value for all involved.

“There’s a huge value in allowing people to tell their stories and feel heard, especially having that face-to-face time with a population that isn’t always seen as valuable, that’s really important,” Higginson said. “Giving people a stage to share their life has been equally important as anything that comes out of the project.”

That being said, Higginson said she hopes the archive is visited by all members of the community in the years to come and that it provides comfort to families in being able to access their own histories.

“I think every single person, regardless of age, has the same regret where they think, ‘I wish I had asked that person before they were gone,’ or ‘I wish I could hear my grandmother’s voice one more time,’ or ‘I wish I had asked my grandpa how to make that,’” she explained.

“I hope the people who participated can see it and enjoy it and I hope their families can see it and think it’s great. I hope that it will become the basis of a Grade 4 class project where they say, ‘Find a story in your community.’ Down the road, after a century has passed, I hope someone can use it to solve a mystery they were wondering about in the community. There is value from all angles.”

You are invited to celebrate the culmination of the Golden Tales project with a [celebration](#) on March 22 from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. at the Sarah Jane Williams heritage Centre in Bowmanville.

For more information or to participate, visit www.cplma.ca/goldentales.



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