

**THE 932nd MEETING OF THE BRODIE CLUB
MINUTES**

The 932nd meeting of the Brodie Club was held on Sept. 15, 1998 in the Ramsay Wright Building at the University of Toronto.

Chairman: Ken Abraham

Recording secretary: Oliver Bertin

Attendance: 16 Members and 6 Guests as follows:

George & Jean Fairfield, guests of Bruce Falls

Mary Tasker, guest of Ron Tasker

Vicky Draper, guest of Dave Fowle

Sandra Eadie & Eleonora Bertin, guests of Oliver Bertin

(Eleonora Bertin is the mother of Oliver and wife of late member Leonard Bertin)

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved without amendment on a motion by Jim Rising, seconded by Harry Lumsden.

NOMINATIONS FOR THE 1998-99 SEASON

Secretary - Oliver Bertin

Treasurer - William Carrick

FON Representative - Harry Lumsden

Membership Committee - Anne Falls, Joe Bryant, Jennifer Young

Program Committee - Paul Aird, Jock McAndrews, Bruce Falls, Hugh Currie,
Fred Bodsworth, John Riley, Jim Rising.

Environment Committee - Dave Fowle, Keith Reynolds, Don Huff.

These are the same officers as last year with the exception of Oliver Bertin who volunteered to replace Carrick as Secretary. Other nominations or refusals may be presented before the election on Oct. 20, 1998.

BUSINESS:

Carrick moved that a membership fee of \$10 a year and \$15 per family be levied in 1998-99. The motion was seconded by Rising. Passed.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Bruce Falls: Hugh Currie lost his wife, last summer due to a tragic accident. The club offered their condolences to Hugh.

Harry Lumsden: The Federation of Ontario Naturalists has divided the province into seven regions. He invited members to attend their local chapter.

Hugh Currie: Invited members to view the Audubon Collection at the Royal Ontario Museum from Sept. 22 nd.

SPEAKER:

George Fairfield was introduced by Currie.

Fairfield is a longtime member of the Toronto Ornithological Club. He edited the TOC newsletter including excerpts from his Birder's Diary until he retired last June. Earlier this year, he edited and published "Ashbridge's Bay", a history of the East Toronto marsh and the subject of the evening's lecture.

Ashbridge's Bay originally extended four kilometers from the current Toronto Harbour as far east as Coatsworth Cut at the foot of Coxwell Ave. With an area of 1385 acres, it was one of the greatest freshwater marshes in Canada. It was the home of a huge variety of wildlife and vegetation, and an important stopover and feeding place for migratory water birds.

The bay was really a shallow lagoon formed by the waters of the Don River to the north and erosion of the Scarborough Bluffs to the east. This left a long spit, Fisherman's Island, which extended the entire length of the marsh and onto what is now Hanlan's Point and the Island Airport. In the late 19th century, local authorities, helped by violent storms dug out Coatsworth Cut and the Eastern Channel.

In 1793, Mrs. John Graves Simcoe described the bay as "extremely pleasant" with water that is "beautifully clear and transparent." There were natural meadows, several ponds, loons, poplars, Lilies of the Valley and Everlasting Peas, which were very good when boiled. The air was dark with Passenger Pigeons, which could be killed by throwing a stick or twirling a bullet on the end of a string. Salmon were speared by torchlight at the mouth of the Don River.

The wildlife was still so abundant by the end of the 19th century that market hunters made a living shooting ducks and trapping muskrat. Frank Smith, who was the last of the gunners and trappers at Ashbridge's Bay said that the shooters would kill 50 or 75 plovers with one shot of a huge fourbore shotgun.

It was common to see flocks of 200 or 300 shorebirds, and thousands of waterfowl. Up to 12,000 muskrat would be taken in a single spring and sold for 65 cents each. The musk glands would fetch another 10 cents from a druggist at King and Parliament, who used them to make perfume.

Smith caught up to 100 turtles a day by wading into neckdeep water and feeling for them with his bare toes. According to Seton, up to 1,000 snow bunting were trapped a day and sold to local gun clubs for five cents apiece for use as target practice.

The most famous of the birds was the Cory's Least Bittern, a dark phase of the Least Bittern that was only found in Ashbridge's Bay and Florida's Lake Okeechobee. Cory's Bittern was virtually wiped out by collectors during the 1890s and is now believed to be extinct.

The beginning of the end of the marsh has been blamed on the Gooderham and Worts Distillery, a collection of historical buildings that still stands near the mouth of the Don River. A byproduct of the distillery was mash, which was produced in such quantities that it eventually fed feedlots that housed up to 4,000 cattle. An unavoidable byproduct of the feedlots, manure, washed into the bay, creating a stinking, polluted cesspool.

Local residents led by a neighboring farmer tried to halt the pollution, to no avail. By 1912, city council decided to fill in the marsh, which was largely completed in the

1930's. Smith shot his last duck in 1917, trapped his last muskrat in the spring of 1918 and saw his last water-lilies that June.

The speaker was thanked by Abraham, who encouraged him to write a sequel using the wealth of information he has collected since publication.

Questions & Observations:

Fairfield noted that the TOC has printed 1,000 copies of his book and sold 270. They retail for \$20, but he receives only \$12 wholesale and \$8 from his agent. The proceeds go to TOC.

Falls remembers seeing Horned Owls in the trees by the Coatsworth Cut and also recalled an incident when he and his friends encouraged a boy with a BBgun to shoot a Hoary Redpoll for the ROM collection.

There was a lively discussion about the rumrunning days of the 1920s. One rumrunner brought in a boatload of 2,400 bottles of Corby's Special from Belleville, worth \$23,000 in those days. The runners were ambushed by police at the bottom of Coxwell Ave., leaving one dead and one seriously wounded.

MEMBERS NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Norman Martin: said deer have caused the worst destruction to vegetation at Presqu'ile Point that he has seen in 20 years.

John Speakman: reported on the earlier than usual roosting behaviour of his Pileated Woodpecker, which has occupied a tree near his Lake Simcoe house for six years.

Jim Bendel: observed a Wild Turkey near Almont in the Ottawa Valley, lots of ruffed grouse but no nighthawks. It is difficult to measure the impact of the icestorm last winter.

Hugh Currie: has seen 127 Nighthawks in Toronto.

Oliver Bertin: reported a scarcity of small mammals in Algonquin Park and an abundance of foxes. Local naturalists attributed this to the winter icestorm, but Falls said it was more likely part of a natural cycle.

Harry Lumsden: has 109 Trumpeter Swan eggs this year, up from 95 a year ago. Some nesting pairs appear to have moved away to new locations.

Lumsden and Carrick are involved in a controlled scientific experiment to imprint swans and lead them by ultralight aircraft to central Indiana. The flight is expected to take six to 12 days.

Ken Abraham: reported that a windstorm last August felled 75 per cent of the large trees in Rondeau Park. "It is a significantly different place from what it used to be."

Abraham has helped place orange tags on 2,000 Canada geese between St. Catharines and Oshawa and 1,000 yellow tags on geese in James Bay. Reports of sightings are welcome.

The meeting adjourned at 9:58 p.m.

THE NEXT MEETING: will be held Oct. 20, 1998 at 8:00 PM in Room 432 of the Ramsay Wright Building.

SPEAKER: John Riley - Subject - The Niagara Escarpment as a World Biosphere Reserve.