

Belfountain's richness attracted Group of Seven artists

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

'We're so fortunate ? let's celebrate it!'

This is Sarah Bohan's take on life. She means it in so many ways. Part of her enthusiasm is to enjoy her immediate surroundings, which are Belfountain village and the beautiful countryside in which it is located. To enjoy and care for its history. There is plenty of heritage in this region. Of it all, Ms. Bohan's attention and that of the Belfountain Heritage Society (BHS) has been largely focussed on the Melville White Church.

Built in 1837, a small rural church of such antiquity has inevitably has a difficult life of desperate deterioration and, in this case, a stupendous rescue on the part of many like-minded people, with fund raising and grants for organizations and government departments.

In 1992, the Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) applied to the Town of Caledon to demolish the very dilapidated old church. From that day to this, members of the then newly formed Belfountain Heritage Society struggled on many fronts, on the site of the church itself and the offices for permits and funding. Over the years, they virtually rebuilt the church, replacing or renewing every aspect of it and adding to it as necessary.

This was the work of the BHS, a group of some 11 souls who ultimately celebrated the longevity and coming together for the 175th anniversary of the church and its continued restoration 'and enhancement?'. They had a fully catered tea, presentations to members of the BHS, amusements for the children.

Given its renewal, including a source of heat and a composting toilet, the church is more than ready hold events of many types. With beautiful acoustics, it is suitable for concerts; with its elegant simplicity, it is suitable for gatherings and weddings.

President of the BHS, Sarah Bohan, has a long personal history with the church. She told the Citizen her tale.

'My parents came from England and I always had an interest in heritage buildings. When I went to the University of Toronto, I did an extra course in heritage geography. My professor was Dr. Thomas McIlwraith, who wrote the very interesting book, Looking for Old Ontario. It's worth having in your library.

'In this course, which I thoroughly enjoyed, he took us on field trips ? I still have the hand out he gave us. It tells how to roughly classify vintage, heritage houses.

'One of those trips took us to Belfountain and the Melville White Church.

'When we [her partner and herself] moved up here, I thought I had come round full-circle. I invited him to come to the 175th anniversary and he did come.?

So, once she learned about the BHS, she was, as she put it, 'bright-eyed and busy tailed?', wanting to set the next meetings and so on, only to be told that the meetings were once a year.

She did become involved with the BHS, being delegated as President quite soon. After the 175th Anniversary, everyone had worked for years and felt they had accomplished quite a bit, which, indeed, they had. It seemed 'the old guard?' were looking for the younger to lead the old church into its new life.

Two weeks ago, the Belfountain Heritage Society hosted its fifth Belfountain Music Festival in support of the Melville White Church.

The two weekend festival's finale was held in the MWC, as had other concerts during the festival. The entire collection of of concerts received rave reviews from audiences and was granted a great success.

Here is a thought: no matter how remarkable such occasions are and the music festival was wonderful, they are still meant to raise funds for the church, which like any antique building, has a long list of maintenance needs. This can lead to a discussion about ticket prices, balancing costs against income, whether to offer seniors and student discounts even for catered events.

Ms. Bohan loves the Belfountain area, its richness in history. She loves riding her horse too, which she cares for herself on a property other than her own. She loves dreaming of other events to hold in support of the MWC.

Late in 2016 into 2017, the BHS held an film festival about the Group of Seven many of whom had travelled to Belfountain and painted there. She discovered that there is a Group of Seven wine; they combined that with food and had three evenings of showing films about the famous Canadian artists.

They held a heritage picnic, at another time, with horse drawn wagons to bring people on a tour of the village and to the picnic spot. People dressed in costumes and brought baskets of food. They had a wonderful time and learned a great deal about their own neighbourhood.

'There are lots of good ideas,?' Ms Bohan is sure. 'We need more people to help make them happen.?

So, as people who have done much, have left room for others to come, the door is opened for new members, with time in their lives and fire in their hearts for the preservation of heritage and an affection for the old Melville White Church to join in.

Said Ms. Bohan, "When I think of an idea that I would like to do, I think others might like it too. We live in a wonderful place and we should enjoy it."

To learn more, visit the website at www.belfountainheritagesociety.com