The earliest people living in the Grand River valley were descendants of ice age hunters who followed game herds across the grassy plains of the land bridge between Asia and North America. These later generations were known as “mound builders” and they left traces of their lives in prehistoric settlements that date back to 9,000 years BC. Nine of their home sites have been found around Rockwood.

Since then the Grand River watershed has been shaped, not only by the relentless forces of nature, but by the activities and settlement of the many people drawn to this area by its fertile soil, good water, and other natural resources.

By the time European explorers reached the Grand in the mid-1600s, the Mound Builders were extinct, and the Eastern Woodland tribes hunted and fished here. Southern Ontario was also home to the people of the Neutral Nation, who grew crops, hunted and fished, and moved on when the soil around their villages was depleted. In 1651, warring Senecas drove the Neutrals from the valley. Eventually, after a 100-year period of almost no permanent settlement, the land became home to the Mississaugas.

Over the years, French explorers, missionaries, and fur traders arrived. They mapped and documented and, in some cases, settled the area. The settlers were joined in 1775 by British Loyalists driven from their lands in the new American Republic. These included descendants of 6,000 German refugees who had made their home on land owned by the Six Nations in upper New York State. The Six Nations also fought with the British, and in 1784 were awarded land purchased by the British Crown from the Mississaugas. The Six Nations people, led by Chief Joseph Brant, were given land encompassing six miles on each side of the Grand River as far as Fergus. Their first settlement was at Brant’s Ford (Brantford).

From the late 1790s, hardy Scots immigrants, Mennonites from Pennsylvania, German
people from page one  
trades people and many others became part of the foundation of the rich cultural heritage of this area. Many ex-slaves also moved north into Canada, settling mainly around the border towns in the Chatham and Windsor areas. Some black families settled in the Grand River watershed where they were recognized as industrious workers but were often the victims of undisguised prejudice. Written records of black history in the watershed are sparse, perhaps because for many years in some areas black children were not allowed to attend school.

As blocks of land became available, farmers moved in to the fertile lands of the south and middle watershed. Lumber mills sprang up to deal with wood from the forests that were being cleared, and grist and sawmills were built to meet the needs of the settlers. The Grand provided drinking water, power, transportation, food, and also a waste disposal system for riverside communities. Because of the readily available waterpower, the middle of the watershed became the prime area for growth and industrial development. Since the 1850s, thousands more European immigrants brought their skills, perseverance and culture to the area. Stores and factories were built, streets laid out, and old wooden buildings were replaced by handsome stone structures. As roads and better transportation developed, cities were built away from the river, and farmlands gave way to urban sprawl.

The Grand story includes times of lush forests, plentiful game and fertile soils. It also includes times of severe degradation of the river because of forest clearing, wetland draining and the enormous pressures of rapid human settlement. It includes times of catastrophic floods and times of no water. It includes a time of pride when efforts by many organizations and far-seeing people restored the health of the river to a point where the Grand and its major tributaries were declared a Canadian Heritage River in 1994. The designation was based in part on the rich cultural heritage of the area.

Today the 800,000 people of the Grand include many races, religions, colours and cultures, each bringing important ingredients to the rich, multicultural broth flourishing in Grand River watershed cities, towns and villages. At a time of world tensions and troubles, it is good to reflect on the diversity of our watershed population and the special contributions of each to our heritage. It is a time to remember that the Grand River watershed is a good place to live, work and play—together.

Fisheries Management Plan

The Fisheries Management Plan is alive and well in our watershed. A comprehensive new brochure outlines the past, present and future of the Plan. It explains how the Grand River Fisheries Management Plan was developed in 1998, with many partners and public input, to provide direction on how the fishery, and the land base that affects it, can be managed to benefit future generations. Twenty-three accomplishments are noted for the past two years. Future Fisheries Management includes 42 projects, which are gradually being undertaken by volunteers through an Implementation Committee.

The colour brochure was produced by the GRCA, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and is available at the GRCA Headquarters in Cambridge. For more information, call Warren Yerex. (519) 621-2763, ext. 249. Email: wyerex@grandriver.ca or check the website at www.grandriver.ca

Wetlands Forum

Wetlands are a precious resource. They reduce floods because they are natural storage reservoirs. They improve water quality because they trap sediment and soil-bound nutrients and contaminants. They offer critical habitat for fish and wildlife—in fact, they offer the highest biodiversity of any landscape unit. Yet the Grand River watershed has lost over 65% of the wetlands it once had. Wetlands continue to be degraded and lost through development, agriculture, peat extraction, creation of ponds, and road construction. Even when development stays back from wetlands, the flow of surface water and groundwater that sustains wetlands may be disrupted and wetlands are isolated from supported vegetation units and larger wildlife corridors.
If current trends persist, we will continue to degrade and lose wetlands. This situation is clearly a public concern as a capacity crowd of over 130 people attended a Wetlands Forum hosted by the GRCA on October 25, 2001. The purpose of the forum was to highlight:

- the importance, values and current status of wetlands within Ontario and the Grand River watershed;
- the impacts of recent land use change on existing wetland features and functions and current wetland management issues;
- the strengths and weaknesses in our current approach to managing wetlands;
- new methodologies and approaches in wetland protection, enhancement and restoration;
- next steps needed to improve wetland protection and management in the Grand River watershed.

Nancy Patterson, representing the Canadian Wildlife Service, provided an overview of the state of wetlands in the Great Lakes Basin. She indicated that since 1800, an estimated 20 million hectares—one-seventh of Canada’s wetlands base—has been lost. In southern Ontario, two thirds of our wetlands have been lost or degraded. In the southern part of the watershed, the percentage increases to almost 100 percent. The Canadian Wildlife Service administers a variety of programs to research and conserve wetlands. Nancy stressed the need to form partnerships since wetlands management crosses many jurisdictions that use differing classification systems, scales and techniques. Several emerging issues, such as climate change and invasive species, have an impact on the health of wetlands and will also have to taken into consideration.

Dr. Barry Warner from the Wetlands Research Centre, University of Waterloo explored examples of situations in North America that could possibly occur in the Grand River watershed. The Mississippi River, while much larger in scale and scope than the Grand, has similar characteristics. Both flow through agricultural lands and carry high sedimentation and nutrient loads. Research shows that the excess nutrients transported by the Mississippi River have resulted in low levels of dissolved oxygen in the Gulf of Mexico. This condition causes extreme stress to most aquatic life. Will this situation happen in Lake Erie at the mouth of the Grand? Barry also outlined a restoration plan to revitalize the Everglades ecosystem in Florida. A total of $7.8 billion have been allocated over the next 20 years for re-creation of the landscape to its former state. He suggested that we might want to consider restoring our landscape in the Grand River watershed to improve existing wetlands and create new ones where possible. Other management issues we should consider relate to the ability of wetlands to store carbon thereby contributing to Canada’s commitment to reduce CO₂ emissions through protection and restoration.

Invasive species of plants, animals and microbes/viruses in wetlands may also cause environmental and economic harm, or create a public health hazard and should be considered in any management strategy for the future.

Angus Norman and Hal Schraeder from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources provided an update on the Ministry’s evaluation system for wetlands and an interpretation of the provincial policy statements that relate to wetlands management. Ontario’s Wetland Evaluation System is held in high regard by other jurisdictions and was developed primarily to serve the needs of Ontario’s planning process. However, it does not address the vulnerability of wetlands to various sorts of developments and pressures. Hal clarified that if a wetland is found not to be provincially significant through the evaluation system, the conclusion that it is insignificant is misdirected. Protection of all wetlands is encouraged in the provincial policy statement.
Wetlands need to be understood as elements of a natural heritage infrastructure that supports and sustains growth and settlement rather than hindering it.

Peter Bryan-Pelham from Norfolk County and Dave Richards from the Ministry of Natural Resources spoke about an innovative and successful program initiated in the Norfolk County where 73 percent of the wetlands have been lost, mostly to agricultural drainage. Portions of some municipal drains were not needed or did not function well. Working with rural landowners and other partners, these drains were altered to use the wetland’s natural storage capacity to hold water.

Shane Gabor from Ducks Unlimited spoke about the function and value of wetlands from the water quality and supply perspectives. Research shows that wetlands are effective as barriers that filter contaminants from waterways. Specifically, they retain sediment, absorb nutrients, degrade pesticides and reduce pathogens. Wetlands store surface water and reduce flooding. Wetlands, riparian buffers and upland cover work together to retain our freshwater resources. Shane urged us to conserve all existing natural landscape features on a watershed basis to ensure good water quality and supply.

A lively question and answer period followed the presentations. The Wetlands Forum concluded with an invitation for participants to take an active part in helping the GRCA develop an appropriate and reasonable policy to protect wetlands within the Grand River watershed. Staff is currently meeting with municipal planners, provincial agencies, developers, consultants, and others to develop a draft policy discussion paper for public review and comment. The draft is expected to be available in January 2002. For more information, or for copies of the Wetlands Forum presentations, please contact Barbara Veale, GRCA. E-mail: bveale@grandriver.ca Phone: (519) 621-2761 ext. 274.

WHAT’S HAPPENING?

Having Regard

Gord Miller, the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, released his annual report, Having Regard, to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly on October 1, 2001. The report identified many shortfalls in the Province’s administration and implementation of environmental policies, programs and legislative tools that have resulted in severe stresses on the environment. The Commissioner warned that provincial ministries and agencies involved in land use planning must recognize that there are limits to the growth and development that can be placed on Ontario’s landscape beyond which there will be serious damage to the ecological processes—those processes upon which we depend for our quality of life.

The report’s five sections deal with:

1. The Environmental Bill of Rights—monitoring and reporting on government compliance with the Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR) and educating the public regarding their rights.

2. The Environmental Registry—The Environmental Registry provides electronic access to the government’s environmentally significant proposals. The Commissioner identifies notices that should have been posted but were not, and monitors the quality of the notices (timeliness, information posted, etc.).

3. Significant Issues including hazardous waste, septage and sewage sludges, transportation and land use planning for the Greater Toronto Area, air quality, and compliance and enforcement at the Ministry of the Environment.

4. Ministry Environmental Decisions—reviewing and commenting on standards, guidelines, legislation, regulations, management plans, etc.

5. Reviews and Investigations—investigating ministries responses to applications made by Ontario residents under the EBR. Commissioner Miller stressed in his report that many of the environmental problems we are currently facing in Ontario are essentially land use concerns. The land disposal of biosolids, transportation planning, water restrictions, etc., are problems that stem from “our inability to look at the whole landscape when making our decisions and to incorporate an ecosystem perspective into those
decisions”. Mr. Miller also states that “We must accept that there are limits to the growth and development we can place on the landscape beyond which there will be serious damage to the ecological processes that we depend on for our quality of life.”

A copy of the full report is available on the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario’s website at www.eco.on.ca

Apps’ Mill Birthday Bash

Over 250 people attended a special birthday party on October 21st. Apps’ Mill Nature Centre in Brantford turned 20 years old. Dignitaries, staff, guests, and the public were invited to share their memories of this beautiful educational centre, and to take part in a full day of activities. A tree was planted in honour of the milestone anniversary, to be enjoyed by future generations of students as they learn about the wonders of the outdoors.

Almost 10,000 children, in school classes or community groups, visit Apps’ Mill each year. That means that over 200,000 youngsters have learned more about the environment through this important facility.

Apps’ Mill Nature Centre was the second nature centre made possible by support from donors to The Grand River Foundation. The first centre was the Laurel Creek Nature Centre (Waterloo) in 1976, while the third was the new facility at Shade’s Mills in Cambridge opened this past spring.

New Hamburg Wastewater Treatment

A new milestone in Waterloo Region wastewater treatment was reached this fall. The New Hamburg Wastewater Treatment Plant was officially opened in October. Baden and New Hamburg were previously serviced by two older separate plants, and lack of available treatment capacity was restricting development in both communities. Expansion of the existing plants was not possible because of adverse water quality impacts on the Nith River. The solution is a single advanced wastewater treatment plant designed to service both communities. The old Baden plant has been converted to pump sewage to the new plant, but will remain covered and kept available to hold peak flows in wet weather for later treatment when flows decrease.

The new plant now serves a population of about 7,800, and can be expanded to meet the needs of both communities for the next 40 years. For information, or to arrange a tour, contact Mr. David Andrews. Phone: (519) 575-4720. Email: adavid@region.waterloo.on.ca

Grand Art Show

The Waterloo Community Arts Centre will celebrate the Grand River during Heritage Month, February 2002. A juried art show called The Grand View will be held at the Arts Centre in the old Button Factory in Uptown Waterloo. Interested artists in southwestern Ontario are asked to submit up to two works pertaining to the Grand River watershed. All submitted pieces will be shown in the gallery and then juried. After the jury selection, a gala opening will be held. Plans are also under way to take the artwork on a tour of galleries throughout southwestern Ontario in March. For more information, contact Gloria Armstrong. Phone: (519) 886-4577. Email: wcac@sentex.net

NOW AVAILABLE

In Our Midst

A new book on the history of the Waterloo County Jail promises a great read for those who enjoy drama and intrigue. In Our Midst: Stories from the Waterloo County Jail, by Melissa Maclean and Keith Wilson, depicts some of the crimes and criminals that were associated with the first public building in Waterloo County. These true stories of sadness, murder and sexual intrigue span 125 years and make history come alive. See page 6
Words and Wonders

A new publication showcases the works of Guelph area poets and artists. *Words and Wonders: A Guelph Area Anthology* was produced by the Canadian Poetry Association in collaboration with the Guelph Arts Council, with a generous donation from an anonymous benefactor. One hundred and thirty poems and images celebrate the creativity and talent of the people of Wellington County.

The 150-page anthology, containing poems about nature, history, political issues and many other topics, was edited by Katherine Gordon and designed by Peter Physick-Sheard. Copies are on sale at the Guelph Arts Council office at 147 Wyndham Street, Guelph. For more information call (519) 836-3280. Email: gac@sentex.net

Heritage Planning Workshop

The School of Planning and the Heritage Resources Centre will offer a Heritage Planning Workshop at the University of Waterloo on Monday evenings, from January 7 to April 1, 2002. The goals are to create greater awareness and understanding of heritage among professionals and citizens; provide information and develop skills needed for community action; and empower both professionals and citizens by encouraging engagement, co-operation and teamwork. The course will be of special interest to planning professionals, citizens concerned about and involved in heritage work, and members of heritage organizations.

Enrollment will be on a first-come, first-serve basis, with a maximum of 20 registrants. The seminar will be offered for graduate and undergraduate credit. Practicing planners and others interested in heritage can work for the certificate in Heritage Planning. Regular university fees apply for registered students. Fees are $240 to attend the seminar series and $350 if the participant wishes to fulfill the requirements for a certificate. Applicants with limited resources can contact the Heritage Resources Centre to see if a workable alternative can be reached. For more information, phone (519) 888-4567, ext. 3066. Email: hrc@fes.waterloo.ca

HOME DEPOT GREEN TEAM

The Home Depot Waterloo Green Team’s mission is to increase environmental awareness through the development of proper waste management procedures within the retail store in Waterloo. The Green Team promotes environmentally friendly products and partnership building with respect to various environmental projects and initiatives. The program began in the fall of 1999 when members of the Green Team developed a mission statement and set down the basics of the program. The program has three phases:

Phase One involves diverting as many recyclable products away from the waste stream as possible. The Green Team diverts scrap wood, cardboard, aluminum, shrink wrap, fine paper, scrap metal, plastic bottles and scrap pallets away from the garbage containers. Shopping bags that are returned to the store at the returns desk are also reused. The scrap wood generated within the store is sent to a local recycler that grinds it up for mulch and cattle bedding.

Phase two involves the promotion of environmentally friendly products within Waterloo Home Depot. A partnership with the environmental action group, Get Rid Of Urban Pesticides (GROUP), was developed for this phase. Customers that purchased $50 dollars worth of pesticide-free lawn care products at Home Depot
were eligible for a rebate through GROUP.

Phase three includes the development of partnerships with local environmental groups such as Waterloo Communities in Bloom and the Waterloo Wellington Children’s Groundwater Festival. For Earth Day 2000, Waterloo Home Depot worked in close collaboration with the Regional Municipality of Waterloo. On April 15, 2000, 100 volunteers from various groups planted 525 native trees around the Forwell Creek storm water management pond. This highly successful project has seen the reforestation of a forest that has been lost due to development.

As a result of the Home Depot Waterloo Green Team, Waterloo Home Depot spent less money in 2000 than it did in 1999 to handle its clean waste, allowing its store to come $10,000 under budget for clean waste haulage for the year 2000. The program has caught the attention of various levels of management within the company. There are signs that the company as a whole will adopt these practices.

Home Depot Waterloo donates returned or defective items, display materials and clearance items that otherwise would be thrown out to Habitat for Humanity Restore. Habitat for Humanity Restore then refurbishes these items and sells them to the public. The money raised is used to fund affordable housing for low-income families. This program is now being implemented across in Home Depot stores across Canada.

In 2001, the Home Depot Waterloo Green Team is processing scrap wood into products such as plywood and shelving to be sold in the store, thereby reducing the number of trees needed to produce these products. Aside from continuing to pursue its mission, Home Depot Waterloo Green Team will put increasing pressure on its vendors to reduce the amount of waste packaging that is shipped with products sold in the store. For more information, contact George Dunseith, Green Team Captain, Phone: (519) 883-0580. Email: lordunse@enoreo.on.ca

Habitat for Humanity ReStore

Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region Inc. (HFHWR) is the local affiliate of an international non-profit, non-government organization that makes affordable home ownership a reality for low-income families. Habitat offers these families a “hand up, not a hand out”. Habitat uses donations of land, cash, building materials, and volunteer hours to help families build homes.

The mission of the ReStore is to acquire and sell used and surplus building materials and appliances. The mandate is to reduce dumping of these materials into landfill, to provide a source of inexpensive building materials, and to generate funds to support the HFHWR’s home building program. By maximizing its contribution, the ReStore assists HFHWR in fulfilling its mission.

The ReStore is stocked with donated materials only. These donations are accepted as drop offs at its retail location at Northfield Drive, Waterloo. Businesses also donate written off and discontinued items which they would normally destroy. These donations are picked up five days per week year round.

Since 1995, the ReStore works with a salvage crew of about 25 to 30 volunteers to remove all reusable materials from buildings slated for demolition. The ReStore also has a collection area at the Erb Street landfill in Waterloo. Homeowners and contractors are encouraged to donate useable items and also save themselves dumping fees. This project started in 1999, in partnership with the Regional Municipality of Waterloo.

In 2000, the ReStore carried out the following activities:

- picking up an estimated 150 truck loads of dropped-off items from homeowners and contractors;
- stripping out reusable materials from 8 buildings, recycling about 80,000 lbs of items which were resold;
- collecting approximately 35,000 lbs of material that would have otherwise ended up in the landfill.

In total, for the year 2000, the ReStore estimated that between 600,000 and 750,000 lbs of material were diverted from the landfill as a result of their efforts. For more information contact Brian Daynard, 519-747-0664. Email: hfhwr@sentex.net or visit the website www.habitatwaterlooregion.on.ca

People’s Car Cooperative

The People’s Car Co-operative of Kitchener-Waterloo, is a registered non profit organization which provides environmentally-friendly and well-maintained vehicles in convenient locations at affordable prices for the shared use of its 45 members.

A successful grassroots initiative since 1998, The People’s Car Co-operative aspires to own and manage a fleet of cars citywide and become an integral part of the community’s transit system. The Co-operative is committed to educating the public about the environmental, economic, health and social benefits of car-sharing while encouraging the public to relinquish individual car ownership.

To date the Co-operative owns four cars at different locations in Kitchener and Waterloo and hopes to eventually have cars in every neighbourhood in the area. Members schedule time to use them by telephone and are billed monthly for the time and distance traveled. The co-op covers the cost of insurance, gas, repairs, and other expenses. Co-op car sharing reduces pollution, traffic congestion, personal

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DID YOU KNOW?

- Settlers in the early 1800s faced a constant threat to their livestock from wolves, foxes, weasels and bears. Some farmers dug their pigpens six feet deep and surrounded them with high fencing.
- In 1816, Christmas was warmer than many days in June and July. Some small pools stayed frozen all summer.
- John Galt, the founder of Guelph, quarreled often with his employer, the Canada Company. This resulted in an ignominious return to England in 1829, dismissal, and a spell in the debtors’ prison, in spite of tremendous support from families that settled in the prospering Township.
- In 1832, T. W. Magrath wrote “The Winterskin of the bear generally sells for six or seven dollars, and is very useful in sleighs and as bedding”.
- In 1836, the road between Guelph and Waterloo was reasonable for horseback travelers, with a roadside tavern about every ten miles.
- The Guelph census of 1881 shows a total black population of 107. The British Methodist Episcopal Congregation (known as Colored Methodists) was made up initially of escaped slaves who were joined by other immigrants after the American Civil War.
- During the 1914-1918 war, Guelph police, under War Department orders, seized all amateur radio broadcasting sets in the area. Puslinch residents turned over their radios voluntarily, and one owner offered to accompany the set overseas as its operator.

ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER

This newsletter is produced as a communications tool by the Grand River Conservation Authority on behalf of the partners in The Grand Strategy. This newsletter can be seen on the Internet at www.grandriver.ca

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Contact the Editor, Liz Leedham, c/o Barbara Veale at the above address. Newsletter submissions must be made by the 15th of the month prior to publication, and may be subject to editorial change. Tax deductible donations and sponsorships toward the cost of producing this newsletter are always welcome.

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