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# GLENGARRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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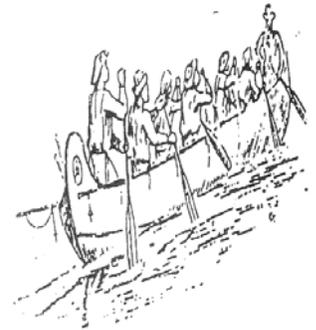
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## NEXT MEETING

**Date:** October 4, 2007  
**Time:** 7:45 p.m.      **Place:** LeClair Mansion, North Lancaster  
**Time:** 8:15 p.m.      **Place:** Optimiste Hall, North Lancaster  
**Topic:** Yesteryear in Clairville (aka North Lancaster)



### Please Note the Change in Venue:

The GHS meeting of October 4 will convene at:

7:45 p.m. at the LeClair House in North Lancaster, and at

8:15 p.m. at the Optimiste Hall in North Lancaster

### **Directions**

From the Brown House on Hwy 34, turn East on to County Road 18 to the 4-way stop in North Lancaster. At the stop sign, turn North on to 2<sup>nd</sup> Line (or County Road 26).

The Optimiste Hall is located on the East side of 2<sup>nd</sup> Line and is sandwiched in between the Township of South Glengarry and École Ange Gardien.

The LeClair Mansion is another 300 meters further North on the West side of 2<sup>nd</sup> Line.

### **Clairville and the LeClair Mansion**

**By: Richard Bleile**

At 4792 2<sup>nd</sup> Line Road at the northern edge of North Lancaster stands the impressive LeClair house, which after 120 years still retains many of its original features. “Constructed of brick with wood trim, the mansard roof, twin dormers and ornately bracketed central upper doorway were characteristic of late Victorian Second Empire Revival style and a French heritage” according to the South Glengarry Local Architectural Conservatory Advisory Committee. Other features such as the Italianate round-headed windows, bracketed eaves, double glazed front door with square transom, high ceilings in the large rooms, the sweeping staircase and robust joinery are exceptional in this rural area. The wide verandah, however, becomes a country setting. This mansion was most likely commissioned by Alexander LeClair (1843-1914) as an enticement to have his second wife Catherine Forestell (1863-1938), the

niece and ward of the affluent railway contractor Patrick Purcell, come to live at North Lancaster. (One might note a difference in age.) In any case, the eclectic architectural structuring of the house and its association with the important pioneer family headed by Charles LeClair who had settled in the area in the 1820's to become the first successful French Canadian merchant and entrepreneur in Glengarry formed the basis for historical designation in 2002.



LeClair Mansion  
Front View

The town that grew up around the enterprises of Charles LeClair (1805-1886) was called Clairville, later North Lancaster. LeClair, the father of Alexander and eight other children was a rural businessman and a shrewd merchant. He was a hotel, store and ashery proprietor. He also became a postmaster, justice of the peace and an officer in the militia. He loaned money (as, it seems, did many prominent Glengarrians of the time) and owned farms and tenant houses. His first wife and mother to his nine offspring, Thérèse Guindon, died in 1849. Charles was married for a second time to Catherine McDonell, a widow with one daughter.

Charles' second son, Peter Napoleon, graduated from the faculty of Medicine at McGill in 1861 and served for a period as coroner for Glengarry county. The third son, Guillaume, was ordained in Rome in 1861

into the order of St. Sulpice. He established a Canadian College in Rome where he served as superior till 1902. This outstanding cleric, administrator, and educator seems to have been the first Glengarry-born Francophone priest.

The able restoration initiatives of the **Arseneau** family have been primordial to the historical designation of the LeClair "mansion". Present occupant of the house, **Tammy Arseneau**, seems to be quite enthusiastic about it and the history surrounding it. On October 4<sup>th</sup> Tammy will be receptive to our curious membership at this historic edifice armed with several documents of interest, such as the will of Charles LeClair among other things. Perhaps members could be persuaded to come around to the **LeClair house as early as 7:45 pm** so as to allow some time to browse around before we drift across the road some 300 paces to the south to the Club Optimiste Hall at 4837 2<sup>nd</sup> Line Road. This is right beside the new Ange Gardien school.

At the hall we will have our regular meeting with the hopeful supportive attendance of several Clairville.....oops.....North Lancaster residents. We will hear Tammy relate her discoveries of the LeClair legacy.



LeClair Mansion  
View from 2<sup>nd</sup> Line



LeClair Mansion  
Grounds & Gardens

We will also explore other aspects of this community's development: the stores, carriage shops, cheese factory, bakery, livery stable, hotels. One of the blacksmith shops was that of Alderic Bourbonnais which has since become a specimen at Upper Canada Village. A race track?? A Flax mill started by Archibald J. McDonald who also served as township clerk of Lancaster for 35 years besides being elected as M.P. in 1925.

**Meet us at North Lancaster on October 4<sup>th</sup> at the LeClair house at 7:45 and then at the Optimiste hall at 8:15.**

From the 4-way STOP in mid North Lancaster go north on 2<sup>nd</sup> Line road to find the Optimiste hall at 4837 ( 200 meters from the stop sign) and the LeClair "mansion on the hill" (300 meters farther on – opposite side of the road).

**See you there,  
Richard**

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### **Sinatra on the Hill ??**

Frank Sinatra is alive and well and living in North Lancaster. Did you know that? Tired of all the publicity, he has retired to the country as a guard dog, but

"a picture's worth a thousand words" and we are not certain how well he is executing his guardly duties. Oh! and by the way, as he aged, one eye turned brown.

Meet Frank, North Lancaster's own "Old Blue Eyes."



Leclair Mansion  
Arseneau Family Dog . . . On Guard !!  
One blue eye, One brown eye

### **LeClair's Corner Or Clairville**

The cross roads in North Lancaster, today's County Roads 18 & 26 (2<sup>nd</sup> line) was once known as LeClair's Corner. According to Ewan Ross in his Lancaster Township and Village, the hamlet appeared under the name, Clairville, in at least one official map, Smith's Canada, Volume 1, 1852, p. 352.

Born in Lower Canada, Charles LeClair, believing there was greater opportunity in Upper Canada bought the land on which the mansion stands today and established both a store and farm.

The LeClairs proved to be an enterprising family. Both father Charles and son Alexander were successful merchants in North Lancaster until fire destroyed the store. Apparently Alexander relocated to Brockville at that time but was returned for burial in the St. Margaret of Scotland churchyard.

## COLLEGIO CANADESE The Canadian College in Rome

The Canadian College in Rome was founded in 1888 under the auspices of The Canadian Congregation of St. Sulpice. Located in the Via delle Quattro Fontane, the Canadian College is a philosophical seminary to which the cream of the Canadian clergy are admitted following completion of their studies in Canada.

The third son of Charles LeClair and Thérèse Guindon, Louis Guillaume (also known as William) was ordained within the Order of St. Sulpice in Rome in 1861. Following ordination, Father William served as curate first at St. Ann's and then at St. Patrick's in Montreal, followed by a short stint at Oka.

The elder Charles maintained a chapel in the LeClair Mansion in North Lancaster, complete with a bell to call the faithful when Father William was visiting so that the neighbours could attend religious services.

In 1885 he was called upon by the Gentlemen of St. Sulpice to return to Rome and supervise construction of the new Canadian College. When the college first opened its doors in 1888, Father William was appointed Assistant Rector of the College and then Rector in 1896, a position he held until 1902. He retired to Notre Dame parish in Montreal and died in 1906.

The Sulpicians of Notre Dame parish in Montreal have a lively place in the history of the city. Until the late nineteenth century, the whole of Montreal's Roman Catholic community came under the direction of the Sulpicians of Notre Dame. The ecclesiastical history of Montreal in the second half of that century was dominated by a struggle between the Sulpicians, who wanted to maintain their hegemony over the Island and Bishop Ignace Bourget who wanted the sprawling Notre

Dame divided up into smaller parishes. As the protégé of Pope Pius IX (1846-1878), Bourget ultimately triumphed and Montreal was subdivided into smaller parishes.

In some aspects however, the Sulpicians remained ascendant. They opened Notre-Dame-des-Neiges-Cemetery (NDN) in 1854 which became the largest cemetery in Canada and the third largest cemetery in North America. To this day, NDN is still run by the Fabrique of Notre Dame parish.

Father William may have been the first but was certainly not the last eminent cleric of the Order of St. Sulpice to call Lancaster Township home. The second name will be perhaps a little more familiar to you, his eminence the late **Paul Émile Cardinal Léger**. Following in the footsteps of his less famous predecessor, Cardinal Léger was also Rector of the Canadian College in Rome from 1947-1950.

According to Oscar Ménard's My Memories: Village of Lancaster 1887-1987 Cardinal Léger's parents, Ernest and Alda, operated a store in the village of Lancaster between 1920 and 1922 and lived on Oak Street in the house that Mr. Ménard maintains is the present day funeral parlour. (Mr. Ménard wrote this in 1987 so I cannot guarantee it is still the funeral parlour but I am certain our members from Lancaster will set me straight on this). The Cardinal's brother, Jules, you may recall was the Governor General of Canada back in the seventies.

**See You on October 4th!**

. . . . Rosemary O.