



# NELLES MANOR MUSEUM

1798 Heritage House and War of 1812 Battle Site

July 2024

Newsletter

Volume 2024, Number 5

**Nelles Manor Museum** is operated by **Nelles Manor Heritage House**, a non-profit charitable organization.

We present Nelles Manor, a 1798 Georgian style house built by United Empire Loyalist Robert Nelles from local materials. The Manor opened as a museum in 2016 and represents the history of the Nelles Family who through their involvement in early government and military service plus their extensive early trade and commerce helped to build Canada as an early Nation. The Manor grounds are also the site of the Engagement at the Forty that took place during the War of 1812 - that may have been an important part in the destiny of Ontario and Canada.

## Engagement at the Forty Commemoration



Nelles Manor Museum volunteer reenactors Mark Les, Hans Vetter, Phil Conklin and George Nelles raise the flags.

On Saturday June 15 Nelles Manor Museum commemorated the 111<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Engagement at the Forty which took place at the Forty (Grimsby) on the Nelles family properties June 8, 1813. The local militia, Indigenous scouts and the British Navy sent the Americans with what they could carry back to Fort Geog.

There was also a display of local War of 1812 artifacts from the collection of Brent Saigeon.

Fran Giles from the Niagara Handweavers and Spinners was on hand to demonstrate spinning.

## Board of Directors

L. Coutts – Chair

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J. Roberts

## Museum Manager/Curator

K. Pyatt

## Music at Nelles Manor – Old Tyme Fiddlers



The Old Tyme Fiddlers performed on Sunday June 23 as the first in Music at Nelles Manor concert series. Many braved the weather forecast and enjoyed the music and refreshments before the skies opened. The rain was short lived, and the musicians played on.

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## Upcoming Events

### **Sunday July 7 - Music at Nelles Manor Series: Michelle Hedley**

2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

This is the second concert in our series of four.

Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for students. Children under 12 are free.

### **Saturday July 27 – An Afternoon with Jane Austen**

Music and Gossip on the Green.

*Developed from an original idea by Paul Pipher.*

The performance starts at 2:00 p.m.

Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for students. Children under 12 are free.

### **Monday August 5 – Music at Nelles Manor: Shari Vandermolen Trio**

2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

This is the third concert in our series of four.

Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for students. Children under 12 are free.

### **Sunday August 18 – Music at Nelles Manor Series: Natalie Walker**

2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

This is the last concert in our series of four.

Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for students. Children under 12 are free.

## Contact

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## Unraveling History Through a Pocket Watch

Good day, readers! I'm Lori, a volunteer at the Nelles Manor Museum. Recently, I embarked on a fascinating journey of historical discovery sparked by an email from Scott, a vintage watch collector from Norfolk, Virginia. Scott's inquiry concerned an American Waltham Sterling Silver pocket watch inscribed with "W.B. Nelles, July 20, 1881." Intrigued, I set out to uncover the story behind this mysterious inscription.



### The Initial Inquiry

Scott's email piqued my interest immediately. He explained that he inherited the watch from his father, a fellow collector and retired railroad worker from Maryland. With only the inscription "W.B. Nelles, July 20, 1881" to go on, I began my investigation. The first step was to determine if "W.B. Nelles" matched any records in our historical data.

### Tracing the Nelles Lineage

The Nelles family, who emigrated to Canada, spelled their name with an 'e,' while many who stayed in the United States spelled it 'Nellis.' This distinction led me to hypothesize that the watch belonged to a member of the Canadian Nelles family. Diving into the genealogical records compiled by the Herkimer County Historical Society, I found that there were surprisingly few individuals named W.B. Nelles.

One candidate stood out: William Ball Nelles, born December 6, 1836, in Grimsby. William married Mary Jane Bodwell, and they had a son, Andrew Buckley Nelles. Interestingly, William's father, Peter Ball Nelles, died on July 20, 1881. This date seemed too significant to be a mere coincidence, suggesting that the watch could have been engraved to commemorate Peter's passing. Painted portraits of Williams parents, Peter Ball Nelles and Maria Sumner Nelles hang in the drawing room of the Nelles Manor.

### Historical Context and Commercial Ties

I then explored how William could have acquired the watch. By 1873, William Ball Nelles had become Captain Nelles due to his service during the Fenian Raids and was living in Ingersoll, Ontario. Researching Ingersoll's history in the 1880s, I discovered it was a thriving community with significant commercial activity. Interestingly, there were at least three merchants specializing in pocket watches. This evidence confirmed that William Ball Nelles could have easily acquired the pocket watch.

### The Watch's Journey to the United States

To explain how the watch traveled from Canada to the United States, I turned to William's son, Andrew. Andrew became a doctor and moved to Michigan, where he married Jessie A. Stuckley and had a daughter named

Geraldine Nelles Brown. Analyzing the pictures Scott provided, I noted the original watch's fob—a customized arrowhead. I began to explore types of arrowheads. Research indicated this fob resembled those from the Lake Forest Middle Woodlands region in Northern Michigan, further linking the watch to Andrew's time in Michigan.

#### The Search for Geraldine

Next, I investigated Geraldine Nelles Brown to see if she could provide a link to Maryland. Unfortunately, Geraldine's trail went cold after her husband Grover Cleveland Brown's death in 1940, in Franklin County, Ohio. With no records of children and no further leads, it's possible Geraldine sold the watch during hard times, leading it eventually to Scott's father.

#### Conclusion and Continued Exploration

My research concluded that the pocket watch likely belonged to William Ball Nelles and was engraved in 1881, the year of his father's death. This project allowed me to delve into the rich history of pocket watches and the Nelles family.

Scott's gratitude and enthusiasm for the research have been immensely rewarding. He even expressed interest in visiting Nelles Manor Museum and exploring our historical collections further. If any readers have additional information or insights into this story, I invite you to reach out.

Thank you, Scott, for this incredible 143 year journey through history. I look forward to potentially meeting you and continuing our exploration of the past.

*Lori Bruni UE*

## Musical Instruments and Heritage

During his orientation volunteer/musician Paul Pipher and I discussed the 18<sup>th</sup> century violin and small guitar that sit in the drawing room at rest. He then sent the following piece to share with you. Paul and his fellow musicians from Kindred Spirits will be performing at part of the Afternoon with Jane Austen (developed from an original idea by Paul) event on July 27.

*Kate Pyatt*

### William's Cello

My grandfather was born in 1886 in Portsmouth, the tough naval base on the English Channel. When he was 9 his sailor father stopped sending support and he was forced out into the streets where he spent the next 4 years eating from garbage cans and sleeping rough. For a while a kindly baker left his door open at night for him to sleep on the warm ovens and scrounge for crusts. Sometimes he left a jam pail for William to scrape out. He was a 'street urchin.' Eventually he was found a place in a Bernardo Home where he served as Mrs. Bernardo's house boy. There he learned to read and sing. He left for Canada at age 16 in a 3-piece suit and bowler hat

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to help with the harvesting, determined to become a true English gentleman.

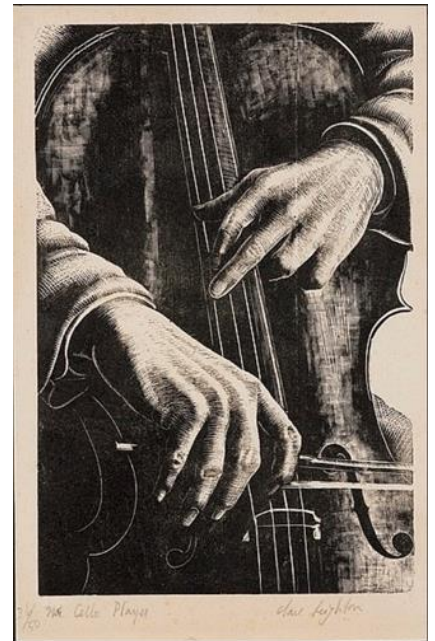
The Mennonite farmer who met his train considered his slight undernourished stature insufficient for the hard work of harvesting but had to take him because the train had pulled out. But despite William's inability to understand Pennsylvania Dutch, his hard work was better than words and he quickly earned the farmer's respect. He was soon treated like a son in the family of girls.

William adopted the farmer's religion and became a minister of the Gospel, shepherding his family around the small churches, towns and camp-meetings of Ontario. He was a man of many diverse interests: beekeeping, tropical fish, exotic birds, and music. Somehow, he scraped up enough money to purchase violins for 3 of his children, a piano for another, a cello for himself, and a few introductory lessons for them all. Thus, equipped he toured the small churches, towns, and camp-meetings of Ontario spreading the Gospel with his family orchestra. Over my computer is their framed picture; beside it, his cello.

I had often said that when I retired, I would take up the cello. Starting with night-school and then private lessons, I eventually did. But first I needed an instrument. I asked my father what had become of Grandpa's cello. 'Sold to Mr. Martin, fifty years ago,' he said, 'but I keep in touch with the family, and I'll ask.'

Mr. Martin's son told us that his father had a garage full of string instruments in various states of repair, that the house had been sold and in 2 weeks, Mr. Martin was to go into a nursing home. But he would check. Lo and behold it was still there! So, Dad went and re-purchased it and the bow, and brought it to Niagara where I still live. Mr. Martin Jr. said that since his father had purchased it for \$50, it would be fair to pay \$75 to get it back. We agreed, and despite spending almost \$2000 to restore it, I ended up with an instrument and bow worth several times the amount. My teacher loved the instrument and being down on her luck from time to time, used to borrow it for professional gigs.

William's cello still goes around Ontario playing in small towns and churches and wherever it can brighten up a community. My camp-meeting days are over at present, but once upon a time I did play for them, on trombone!





## Artefact Showcase

For this month's Artefact showcase, I have chosen the Nelles family sundial. This sundial was created locally in 1811 and is made of lead. It was originally situated outside on the Nelles Manor lawn and was used to tell the time. Sundials track time by the shadow of the shaft (gnomon) which is cast by the sun; you read the time by checking the placement and the length of the shadow on the sun dial.



In the mid-1800s, the Nelles sundial was brought inside the house and began to function as a "guestbook". Important visitors in the Manor were encouraged to scratch their names into the sundial, and these inscriptions are still visible for viewing at the Nelles Manor Museum.

Sundials are the oldest time keeping devices in history; they were used all around the world for thousands of years and continued to be used even after the invention of the clock. Many early clocks were inaccurate, with the first pendulous clocks in the mid-17th century frequently losing around 15 minutes a day. It was regular practice to recalibrate clocks with sundials. Price was also a factor; A typical grandfather clock in the 1680s could cost the average family their yearly rent. Sundials were significantly more affordable, and rudimentary ones are easy to create; with enough know-how, you can even use your own body to make a "human sundial". But by the 19th century, the clock had become more precise and accessible to the masses, which made the sundial largely obsolete as a time keeping device.

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*Clara Falconier*

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# Supporting Nelles Manor Museum

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## Become a Friend of Nelles Manor

Some of the benefits of becoming a Friend of Nelles Manor includes receiving first notification and early registration for ticket sales on all events and programs. As a Friend you also tour the Museum for free during our regular season. As a member of the **Museums of Niagara Association** we are part of the reciprocal agreement program so that with your support through Friends of Nelles Manor you also have free admission or other perks at the other Niagara museums that are part of the program.

To become a Friend of Nelles Manor the annual cost is only \$25 for individual and \$40 for family. Your contribution helps support the preservation of the Manor and programs. This contribution helps the museum financially as we do not receive annual operational funding from any government level. Your contribution shows us the community support and interest in our mandate of protecting heritage.

If you would like to become a Friend of Nelles Manor, please contact us at [info@nellesmanor.ca](mailto:info@nellesmanor.ca).

Remember, Friends of the Manor receive advanced ticket sale notice.

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## New & Renewed Friends of the Manor

Ingrid Kessler & Richard Beaupre  
Katherine MacKinnon  
Tim McDonald

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## Volunteering the Gift of Your Time and Knowledge

If you have the time and want to contribute to an important cause while meeting some great people along the way, please consider becoming a volunteer. The museum offers many diverse opportunities and has many areas that need your support. We appreciate the gift of your time and knowledge and can coordinate around your availability - whether for a few hours or a whole day; weekly, monthly or a few times a year.

If you are interested in being a tour guide, we train and support you. We have a detailed training manual for you to be able to lead our visitors through the history of the home and the Family.

Join our great group of dedicated volunteers!

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## Financial Support

As a nonprofit charitable organization funding is always top of mind. Nelles Manor Museum is a gem in the landscape of early Upper Canadian history and is a centrepiece in the community. Maintaining a 1798 building is an ongoing responsibility and with your support it will continue for centuries more.

Nelles Manor Museum is an independent organization that does not receive any sustaining funding from any level of government.

**Become a Donor** by contacting us at [info@nellesmanor.ca](mailto:info@nellesmanor.ca) or calling 289-235-7755. All donations of \$20 or more receive a tax receipt.

### **Legacy Giving**

A donation from your estate or life insurance policy to Nelles Manor Museum could be made to our annual operations or to an endowment fund that would support our major capital needs, or where the income supports our annual preservation, maintenance and operations costs. Please consider being a legacy donor and consult your lawyer or accountant as to how to provide this type of support.

### **Become a Sponsor**

Sponsor an event or our annual season. We have several sponsorship levels.

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## Thank you to our sponsors!

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If you would like to support Nelles Manor Museum as a sponsor, contact us at [info@nellesmanor.ca](mailto:info@nellesmanor.ca).

All donations to Nelles Manor Museum of \$20 or more are tax deductible and a donation receipt for tax purposes will be issued.

For more information on our events and activities visit  
our website [www.nellesmanor.ca](http://www.nellesmanor.ca)