

# Historian Jean Hutchinson

NOV 12 - 1997 <sup>SA</sup> passes at 87

With the passing of Jean F. Hutchinson on November 7, Wellington County has lost its senior historian.

Born on October 1, 1910 in Amaranth Township, about three miles northeast of Grand Valley, she was the eldest of the three children of William J. Black and his wife, Kate McFadzean.

Jean Black received her primary education at SS 21 of Amaranth, and attended the Grand Valley Continuation School from 1924 to 1928. Her first teacher, Ina Porter, exerted a strong influence, encouraging Jean's natural writing ability and her interest in nature.

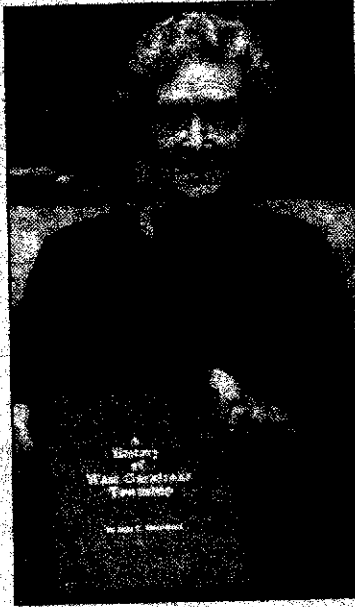
Ina Porter was responsible for Jean's first published piece, "A Trip to the Maple Bush in Springtime," which appeared on the Young Canada page of the *d* Toronto Globe.

Jean Black completed her education at the Toronto Normal School, graduating in 1929. She taught for four years, at Metz and Carmel schools in West Garafraxa Township.

In 1933 she married J. Wilbert Ferrier, who farmed on Concession 4 of West Garafraxa. After marriage she abandoned teaching and assisted with the farm work, driving the tractor, milking the cows, raising hens, and tending the vegetable garden.

Her interest in writing intensified through the 1940s. Often using the pseudonym Belle Wood, she published articles in the *Family Herald*, the *Farmers' Advocate*, the *Canadian Countryman*, and the *Ontario Farmer*. She received much help and encouragement from Ethel Chapman, an accomplished writer and editor of the period.

With the death of Wilbert in 1950, she was left a widow at the



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age of 40. She sold the farm to Wilbert's nephew, Jack Henderson, and moved to an apartment in Fergus in 1954.

In 1955 she married Thomas J. Hutchinson, who farmed on Concession 8 of West Garafraxa, south of Simpson's Corners. Active in the community, Tom Hutchinson served as councillor and reeve in the early 1950s, on the Grand River Conservation Authority, and as a worker for the Progressive Conservative party.

The Hutchinsons farmed until 1974, when they sold the property to Brian and Donna Bessey, and moved to Woodside Street in Fergus. In the meantime, Jean had also become more active in the community, contributing much to the Belwood Women's Institute and to St. John's United Church in Belwood.

Though she had been a writer for years, Jean Hutchinson's pre-occupation with local history did not begin until the 1960s. In 1962 she became the assistant

curator of the Belwood Women's Institute Tweedsmuir History, and a representative to the Wellington County Historical Research Society.

In 1964 she took over the duties of curator of the Belwood Tweedsmuir History, and became 1st vice-president of the Historical Society. She assumed the position of president in December of 1964, and served in that position until 1966. She remained an active member of the Historical Society executive for the rest of her life.

Jean Hutchinson began her historical research in the mid-1960s, when the West Garafraxa Council asked her to compile a history of the township as a centennial project. This resulted in a 67-page booklet published in 1967, and a huge pile of research notes which she decided to use for a larger, more comprehensive study.

Assisted by her husband until his death, work on *The History of West Garafraxa Township* occupied much of her time through the 1970s and 1980s as she searched for information on each farm and family. A large format, 400-page book, it was published in 1990.

Meanwhile, Jean continued her duties with the Wellington County Historical Society. She coordinated publicity for many years, and was the founding editor of the society's newsletter in 1972, continuing in that capacity until 1989. She championed the annual essay contest of the Historical Society. A few years ago it was named the Jean Hutchinson Essay Contest to honour her contributions to the organization.

Jean was always delighted to encourage new writers and historians. She willingly shared her

information and research, and would often suggest other sources when her own notes did not hold the answers. Over the years she answered countless requests for information. An obsessive clipper of magazines and newspapers, she regularly brought envelopes of published materials to the Wellington County Museum, where they continue to be accessible to researchers in the Archives.

In recent years Jean's time had been fully occupied with her most ambitious project, *The History of Wellington County*. Her energy and dedication were inspirational, in view of Jean's failing health. She suffered from heart disease, and arthritis which first appeared in 1947 became increasingly severe. To write she had to tap at an electric type writer with pencils held in her hands.

At the time of her death she was correcting the final proofs of *The History of Wellington County*. It is sad indeed that she did not live to see the publication of this volume, which was the focus of her life in her last years.

Her funeral, held at St. John's Church in Belwood on November 10, was largely attended by her many friends, colleagues, and admirers. Historians and genealogists of generations to come will be indebted to Jean Hutchinson and her tireless efforts to preserve and document the history of West Garafraxa and Wellington County.