

## BIFHSGO ANNUAL REPORTS 2019–2020

### **PRESIDENT—DUNCAN MONKHOUSE**

It has been another successful year at BIFHSGO. Operations were normal until March 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic changed our lives. As a result, we have now entered the online world. Our excellent program of presentations continued via Zoom and has drawn similar attendees (120–150) as our regular meetings. BIFHSGO membership remains steady at around 550. Our special interest groups—Colonial British America, DNA, Scottish and Writing—are strong and well-supported by the volunteers who organize them. They continue to grow, showing an expanded interest in these specialized areas of our genealogical research.

### **Conference**

A profitable and well-received conference, *Family History: Past, Present and Future*, was held in fall 2019 with international speakers Blaine Bettinger, Cyndi Ingle, Audrey Collins and Nancy Loe participating, as well as exceptional local speakers. Unfortunately, this year's conference, *Irish Lines and Female Finds* has had to be postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Board is considering whether something smaller, and online, will take its place.

### **Board**

There was one change to the Board membership mid-year as Education Director Alan Cutler found himself overcommitted and could not fulfill his BIFHSGO duties to his satisfaction. Maureen Amey agreed to take on that role but, unfortunately, had to step down at the end of June. Three other people are scheduled to leave the Board at the upcoming AGM. Duncan Monkhouse has completed his two-year term as president and we are searching for his replacement. Mary-Lou Simac (Outreach/Publicity) and Kathy Wallace (Membership) have both reached the eight-year limit allowed as a director. Ann Burns has agreed to run for Membership Director at the upcoming elections but we are still looking for someone for the Outreach position. Mary-Lou and Kathy have been valued and productive members of the Board the past eight years and will be missed.

### **Volunteers**

We continue to be blessed with a core group of active volunteers who make possible the many benefits enjoyed by all members. That said, many BIFHSGO activities, involving a wide range of time commitments, need volunteers to make them happen. If you are looking for an opportunity to volunteer in some capacity, please consider BIFHSGO. Simply email/speak to one of the Board members.

### **Strategic Planning**

Eighteen months ago, the Board worked through a Strategic Planning exercise. A number of goals were set for the Board to work on during the upcoming years. Some are simple, some are not. Some have been accomplished, like our vision, mission and values statements; volunteer position “work descriptions”; and a welcome plan for new members. Others, like the recruitment of new volunteers for key roles, remain a work in progress which we hope to complete in the coming year.

### **Partnerships**

The Ottawa Public Library showed how much they value their partnership with us by asking us to continue to co-sponsor their “Discover Your Roots: Family and Local History Fair.” We also continue to partner with the City of Ottawa Archives, by providing assistance to Archives users on the third floor of 100 Tallwood Drive, and, in return, receiving the use of meeting rooms in the building at no charge.

**SECRETARY—GILLIAN LEITCH**

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way the Board meets (now online); diligent record keeping is essential. As secretary, I have occupied myself with the management of agendas, minutes and reports for the monthly Board meetings, distributing them to the Board as required and filing them in Dropbox for easy access by Board members. I organized an online/mail-in vote for the Best Talk by a Member and Best Before BIFHSGO Talk by a Member for 2019–20. The winners of these awards will be announced at the next AGM. I am also responsible for the corporate registration of the Society which I completed in May 2020.

**PROGRAM—DIANNE BRYDON**

This year's program featured several excellent talks on a wide variety of topics, delivered by members as well as invited guests.

From September 2019 to February 2020 we held our meetings in the Chamber at Ben Franklin Place, 101 Centrepointe Drive, Nepean. In March, the Board decided to cancel the meeting just before the Covid-19 restrictions on meetings came into effect. We used the month to make plans for delivering our talks online as webinars. The program schedule was adjusted to accommodate speakers who preferred to postpone their talks until we could confidently plan to hold in-person meetings, and the gaps thus created were filled by others who offered to give a virtual online presentation.

Between 120 and 175 people attended our in-person meetings and about 120 participants joined our webinars—an encouraging start. About 20 percent of online participants were non-members (we do not track that statistic at our in-person meetings) and several people from outside Ottawa attended the webinars.

We partnered with Ontario Ancestors to deliver our first online talk and we are grateful to them for their help and advice in getting us started on our own. We plan to continue using the online format in lieu of, or in addition to, in-person meetings, as the occasion warrants, and to make all meeting formats more interactive.

Honoraria were offered as follows: a full monthly meeting talk received a \$100 honorarium; Before BIFHSGO talks, \$50; and the Great Moments talks, \$25 to each speaker. In some cases, speakers who could not accept honoraria requested that we make a donation in lieu to an organization of their choosing.

The Program Director did double duty for the first part of this year, securing and liaising with speakers for both Before BIFHSGO sessions (normally the responsibility of the Education Director) and Main Talks up to the February meeting, as the Education Director was unavailable for the first three months and then resigned from the Board in December. Collaboration with the new Education Director has been excellent.

Beginning in May, we introduced Throwback Thursdays. Each week, BIFHSGO members receive an email profiling one of the many resources from the bounty housed in the Members Only section of our BIFHSGO website.

In addition to organizing the monthly program, finding speakers, and attending monthly board meetings, the Program Director also: collected abstracts of the speakers' talks and short biographies and ensured they were posted on the website; provided program information each quarter to the Editor, *Anglo-Celtic Roots* for publication in the journal; liaised with the publicity and communications directors regarding

their promotion and with the treasurer for payment of speakers; liaised with speakers in preparation for their talks, at times coaching them in format and content; and introduced and thanked the speakers at the monthly meetings.

Date	Speaker(s)	Title of Talk(s)
BEFORE BIFHSGO 14 Sept 2019	Emily Potter/ Sara Chatfield  Susan Davis	Early Immigrants, Co-Lab and Collection Search: New and Updated Tools at Library and Archives Canada  25 Years of Storytelling
BEFORE BIFHSGO 12 Oct 2019	Wendy Sims-Schouten  Sandra Adams	Hidden Lives Revealed: Mental Health and the Children Looked After by the UK Waifs and Strays Society (1881–1920)  Quakers in the Family: My Dickinson Ancestors of England and Jamaica
BEFORE BIFHSGO 9 Nov 2019	Glenn Wright/ Ken McKinlay  Dominique Boulais	Live Q and A: Finding Military Records in the UK Archives  The Commonwealth War Graves Commission: In Perpetuity
BEFORE BIFHSGO  Great Moments 14 Dec 2019	  Maureen Amey Gil Croome Glenn Wright Wilf Tarbet	Christmas Social  The Sail Maker's Palm Treasures in the Attic Far From Home—Mission Accomplished I Was There—Living Through the Great Depression in North England
BEFORE BIFHSGO 11 Jan 2020	John McConkey  Lynda Gibson	BIFHSGO Databases  Using Family Lore, with a Grain of Salt
BEFORE BIFHSGO 8 Feb 2020	Marianne Rasmus and Susan Davis  Cathy Enright	British Colonial America, Special Interest Group  Captain Power MBE, Halifax Harbour Pilot 1906–1954
14 Mar 2020	Meeting Cancelled due to Shelter-in-place directive	
11 April 2020 Webinar	Dianne Brydon	Emma Maud Lampman: First Woman to Work in Parliament
9 May 2020 Webinar	Pam Coburn	Hitch, Hockey's Unsung Hero: The Story of Boston Bruin Lionel Hitchman
13 June 2020 Webinar	Marianne Rasmus Sally Doherty Brian Glenn	A Battle of Wills Alexander Laing's Travels The Elmer-Leonard James Brickwall: Were They Related?

Finally, thank you to the members for their willingness to share their stories. Likewise, we are grateful for their comments and suggestions. This feedback is vital; the BIFHSGO Program is richest when it is relevant and responsive.

## **EDUCATION—MAUREEN AMEY**

I joined the Board as Education Director in January 2020 following Alan Cutler's resignation. I had barely started in the role when the Covid-19 crisis disrupted our planned program. We are not currently holding Before BIFHSGO educational sessions online. However, I have worked with Dianne Brydon and other Board members to determine how and when we can offer these sessions again and what topics we should include for future meetings.

Although I have many ideas and much enthusiasm, I found it necessary to step down from the Board at the end of June. The Board would appreciate hearing from any member interested in taking on this role or helping to shape this program into a vibrant part of our program delivery. Please contact Duncan Monkhouse at [president@bifhsgo.ca](mailto:president@bifhsgo.ca) or Barbara Tose at [pastpresident@bifhsgo.ca](mailto:pastpresident@bifhsgo.ca).

## **OUTREACH/PUBLICITY—MARY-LOU SIMAC**

### **Participation at Events:**

On 16 May 2019, BIFHSGO was present at the LDS Church's annual *Voices from the Dust* event. The event attracts church members, genealogists from the Ottawa area, and people just starting out with their family history. There are free talks and rebroadcasts of Roots Tech sessions, as well as an exhibit hall. Membership Director Kathy Wallace staffed our table.

Although we did not have a booth at the Ontario Ancestors annual conference, held 21–23 June 2019 in London, Ontario, 500 BIFHSGO annual conference brochures were provided for a delegate bag insert.

We were present in the Marketplace at the 8 August 2019 "DNA and Online Resources Day" featuring Daniel Horowitz of MyHeritage and other speakers. It took place from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the Chamber at Ben Franklin Place. Conference 2019 brochures were available at the table, as well as membership info, the Fall 2019 monthly meetings flyer, info on the Special Interest Groups (SIGs), research projects, etc. Mary-Lou Simac staffed the table; over 100 of the 200+ participants stopped by. Quite a few non-members and people new to genealogy who attended this event expressed considerable interest in our activities.

A BIFHSGO information table was set up in the Atrium at Ben Franklin Place during our 25th annual conference, 27–29 September 2019. Membership info was distributed, as well as the Fall 2019 monthly meetings flyer, info on the SIGs and our research databases, surplus copies of the quarterly journal *Anglo-Celtic Roots*, and mini Union Jacks and Welsh flags (left over from the BIFHSGO Pub Night held at the OGS conference, June 2017). The information table was a worthwhile endeavour that bears repeating at future conferences.

*Hogman-eh!*, the New Year's Eve celebration organized by the Scottish Society of Ottawa at the Aberdeen Pavilion at Lansdowne Park was our last event of 2019. BIFHSGO had a table in the "Hall of Origins." It was an excellent opportunity to interact with the general public, especially families, and to promote BIFHSGO. Mary-Lou Simac, DNA SIG Coordinator Susan Courage, Scottish SIG members Joanne Kidd and Jill Thompson, and Jill's husband Alastair Speirs (a non-member, but a Scot!) staffed the table, and spoke with 136 people during the course of a very successful evening.

*Heritage Day*, organized by Capital Heritage Connexion and the City of Ottawa was held on 18 February 2020. This is a general public event which brings together heritage-related organizations in Ottawa. The weather cooperated and we spoke with about 30 people who stopped by our table. Mary-Lou Simac and Program Director Dianne Brydon represented BIFHSGO.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic effect on our ability to participate in other events. We had been scheduled to participate in the Irish Society of the National Capital Region's St. Patrick's Day Parade on March 14th, Ottawa Branch's Gene-O-Rama on April 3–4, the LDS Ottawa Stake's family history conference on May 9th, and the Ontario Ancestors annual conference June 5–7. These events have been either cancelled, postponed or delivered without opportunity to promote our society.

### **Monthly Meeting and SIG Meeting Publicity**

Details of the monthly meetings, as well as the DNA and British Colonial America SIG meetings were posted to BIFHSGO's social media (Facebook, Twitter). Monthly meetings were also publicized via flyers, covering the time periods from January to June 2019, September to December 2019, and January to June 2020. The flyers were distributed to Ottawa Public Library branches, the LDS Family History Centre and other interested parties. All SIGs are also publicized at the various events BIFHSGO participates in.

The monthly meetings were also posted to online event calendars such as Global Genealogy and Ottawa Events and notices also sent to the Ontario Ancestors eWeekly newsletter. They were also often mentioned by bloggers (special thanks to John Reid and Gail Dever), and paid ads in the *Our Town* section of the *Ottawa Citizen* were also used. Capital Heritage Connexion also publicizes our monthly meetings, as does OGS Ottawa Branch.

### **Business Cards**

New business cards were printed in September 2019 and distributed for the first time at our annual conference in the same month. The cards promote the annual conference, the SIGs, the monthly meetings, the website and the new vision statement.

### ***Tracing and Sharing British Isles Family History* brochure**

The *Tracing and Sharing British Isles Family History* brochure is our basic general information brochure. It was updated and reprinted in September 2019 and February 2020. It is available at all BIFHSGO public events and monthly meetings, sent to the Ottawa Public Library branches, the Family History Centre, Library and Archives Canada, and may be downloaded from our website under About Us – Media/Publicity.

### **Radio**

Duncan Monkhouse was interviewed about BIFHSGO by our media sponsor, Austin Comerton, of IrishRadio.ca. This September 2019 interview is available on his site, under Archives 2019. Austin has also interviewed many of our conference speakers over the years. These interviews are available in the pertinent year's Archives section at IrishRadio.ca.

### **Social Media**

Facebook and Twitter continue to be important vehicles to get our message out. Five of our posts to Facebook were seen by more than 2,000 people (many are seen by less than 400), and a key reason is that people "shared" the post to their own followers, thus increasing the visibility. Don't just "like" – please "share", and you will help BIFHSGO. Here are some of the most viewed posts and tweets:

## Facebook

Date of FB Post	Subject	Number of Engagements (actions by user)	Number of Shares	Number of People Reached
May 8, 2019	New BIFHSGO WWII Child Evacuee Database	166	8	3, 854
August 30, 2019	Conference 2019 speaker Audrey Collins' session on TNA records	219	9	2, 138
November 15, 2019	The Primrose Orphan Girls	310	11	3,854
December 12, 2019	New BIFHSGO Home Children Database	1,143	27	4,551
April 11, 2020	Monthly Meeting – first virtual meeting via Zoom.	213	8	2,376

## Twitter

Similarly, there were several tweets that had a sizeable number of “impressions” (number of times a tweet appears to users in their timelines, or in search results).

Date of Tweet	Subject	Total Engagements	Number of Shares	Number of Impressions
May 8, 2019	New BIFHSGO WWII Child Evacuee database	47	6	1,852
July 5, 2019	Conference 2019 registration	16	3	956
December 11, 2019	New BIFHSGO Home Children Database	48	8	1,489

## Thank You!

This is my last report as a director, as I have served the maximum of four consecutive two-year terms on the Board and will be stepping down. Thank you to all of the members who volunteered to help me with the various publicity initiatives over the past eight years. Your expertise, enthusiasm and willingness to give of your time raised our public profile and created some wonderful memories. Many thanks!

## **RESEARCH AND PROJECTS—JOHN MCCONKEY**

In June 2019 I took on the Research and Projects portfolio. Since then I have overseen the addition of two brand new databases to the BIFHSGO website. The Research & Projects section now also sports a “new look”, designed to improve navigation and organize databases and indexes into four distinct categories (Home Children, Migration, Military, and Other Resources).

The RG17 Index was released in December 2019. It was the first of a set of files worked on by John Sayers and a team of volunteers as part of an agreement established in 2006 by BIFHSGO with Library and Archives Canada. This index was transcribed from a collection of Canadian Department of Agriculture records which were generated in the period 1869–1892 when that department was responsible for immigration. It contains over 14,000 names and is one of the most comprehensive lists of Home Children available.

The “Father Hudson’s Photos” project followed and was released in April 2020. Its source of information was a collection of documents, again provided by John Sayers. Father George Vincent Hudson (1873–1936) was a Catholic priest, based in Birmingham, England, who dedicated his career to the protection and care of homeless children. In the early 1900s Fr. Hudson established a Home for emigrant children in Ottawa and paid frequent visits to it. He also kept track of its progress in an album of 146 photos. The album was digitized and indexed and is the latest database addition to the website.

Work continues on two key research projects. The number of biographies created for the 879 soldiers who passed through the No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station in WW I has exceeded the 60 percent mark. This project is led by Sheila Faure and employs a dedicated team of volunteers. Patricia Roberts-Pichette is also hard at work on an update of her popular Middlemore Index.

A significant portion of my time is devoted to the furtherance of the use of technology by BIFHSGO. I serve as Technical Coordinator (with the assistance of Bob Mallett) for ten monthly meeting presentations and also the annual Fall Conference. The 2019 (25th Anniversary) Conference had a higher than average registration and was highly rated by attendees. Now, with the pandemic restrictions on meetings in place, my focus is on webinars using Zoom Meetings software.

Finally, with reference to my Strategic Planning assignment (“Partnership and Outreach”), I have worked out a journal exchange agreement with the Isle of Wight (UK) Family History Society (IWFHS). The Members Only section of the BIFHSGO website now includes a page containing copies of the IWFHS quarterly journal; the four most recent editions are currently available. In turn, IWFHS automatically receives electronic copies of our journal *Anglo-Celtic Roots*.

## **COMMUNICATIONS—SUSAN DAVIS**

When it comes to the various communications products we produce for the society, we hit some highs this year.

Barbara Tose and her team produced the 100th issue of our quarterly journal *Anglo-Celtic Roots (ACR)*.

Gwen Gibson posted 238 ACR articles to our “25 Years of Storytelling” section on the website.

Sheila Dohoo Faure posted the monthly meeting announcements to our site’s homepage and produced the “rolling screen” of information used as a background at the monthly meetings.

John McConkey updated and improved our website’s research section.

Bob Mallett and Brian Glenn updated our 2019 Conference section.

And a host of other volunteers assisted behind the scenes to provide content for our website.

Unfortunately, two important positions on our communications team continue to be vacant— E-Newsletter editor and Web Manager. These positions are key to providing our members and visitors to our website with timely information. The search for volunteers to fill these positions continues.

**MEMBERSHIP—KATHY WALLACE**

Number of Memberships by Type				Number of Members				
Category	2017	2018	2019		Category	2017	2018	2019
Individual	400	420	421		Individual	400	420	421
Family	74	76	67		Family	148	152	134
Institutions	22	23	23		Institutions	22	23	23
Total	496	519	511		Total	570	595	578

In 2019, 59 new people joined BIFHSGO as individual members and 9 former members rejoined after an absence. Six new family memberships were also established (12 members). Each year some faces change. In 2019 about 70 past members did not rejoin; this figure includes 6 members who died during the year. However, BIFHSGO’s current member retention rate is quite good at about 83 percent.

2019 was BIFHSGO’s 25th year of operation as a Society. Of the first 100 members who joined, 16 are still members.

In the graph below, the top line represents the total number of Society members (personal and organizational) for each year of operation. The middle line shows the number of individual members and the bottom line shows the number of family members. Membership was highest in 2015. Our relocation from downtown to the west end Ben Franklin Place in mid-2015 did lower our membership a little. Some family memberships have changed to individual memberships over time as well.

