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Couple are leaving their stamp on local history

By ANNA SAJECKI
Special

The Gibsons are living history, and their living-room is testimony.

Bookshelves are packed with works by Margaret Atwood, Robertson Davies, Pierre Burton. The walls support muted images of Inuit art and a vibrant painting of historical Port Credit harbour.

"Most people in Mississauga say 'oh there's no history here' because they don't see the Grecian columns and the pyramids," said Marian Gibson, who with her husband Eric, is an expert on Mississauga history.

"But every community has a history, it's just that sometimes people don't write it down."

The Gibsons have made it their goal to find that past. Recently, they've been giving presentations on the city's history from the standpoint of postage stamps.

The couple emigrated from England to Longueuil — a suburb of Montreal — in 1964, and it was the historical significance of the area that first peaked an interest in Canadiana.

"I picked up a book called *The White and the Gold* by Thomas Costain and that was my introduction to Canadian history," said Eric, about a prevailing book on the French regime in Canada. "However, I didn't really get interested until we moved down here and Marian turned to Mississauga's history."

The Gibsons moved to Port Credit in 1979, and Marian started to explore her community immediately.

"I became interested in the names of the streets and where they came from and started researching them," said Marian.

It didn't take long for her to bump into local historians, and soon Eric and Marian were members of the Mississauga Heritage Foundation. Now Marian is the president, a title previously held by Eric.

"The foundation is a very rich resource, we have a database of over 7000 items," said Marian. "There's always somebody or other doing research."

Eric and Marian have used the database for their own publications, which include *Mississauga Moments* (a book of local legends and tales) and chapters in the heritage book, *Mississauga The First 10,000 Years*.

"I love giving people the realization that there's history here, a lot of history," said Marian. "They just need to know what history means."

One definition can be extended to postage stamps.

The Gibsons have a collection of over 60 stamps that have a connection to Mississauga. It will be the topic of their presentation to the Streetsville Historical Society tomorrow night.

"There are so many connections to Mississauga in stamps," said Marian. The Gibsons' collection shows a cross-section of history; images of 18th century Iroquois and Ojibwa mingle with more modern images of airplanes and jazz pianist Oscar Peterson.

And each stamp has a story: A postage stamp of William Faulkner connects the Mississippi author with a stint in the Royal Air Force during the First World War. The training base for pilots was at the Long Branch Air Field, now the Lakeview Generating Station. There Faulkner learned theory of flight.

"However, there was no flying at that time," said Eric. "Although, he spun quite a few stories about his flying experiences later."

The oldest stamp in the collection is from the 1930s. One of the newest is an Austrian stamp of Mississauga resident Oscar Peterson commemorating the 175th anniversary of the country's famed piano company Bosendorfer.

Another familiar face in the collection is a former protector of Canada and namesake for a national chocolate shop.

"Laura Secord is the daughter of the first Government Inn keeper Thomas Ingersoll," said Marian, referring to the first inn in Mississauga, built after John Simcoe made a recommendation. The Waterside Inn now sits on the same site, at the mouth of the Credit River.

Although both Marian and Eric are retired, Marian is a former teacher and tutor and Eric worked as an aircraft engine designer, neither plans to slow their dedication to history.

Marian is editing a book called *In the Footsteps of the Mississaugas* and Eric is working on publishing a book on the history of railways. The Gibsons are also planning a sequel to the *Mississauga Moments* stamp presentation.



Historians talk — Marian and Eric Gibson use their stamp collection in their talks about the heritage of Mississauga.

Staff photo by Fred Loek

Eric said he remembers explaining his continued interest to someone from Cairo, who was convinced the pyramids had more history than Mississauga.

"I tried to explain that every place on this earth has the same amount of histo-

ry," Eric concluded. "It's just, in some places it has been recorded better than in other places...we're trying our best to dig up history from this local area."

The Gibsons will give their talk at Village Hall in Streetsville at 8 p.m.

GIBSON, Marian and Eric