

Author's new book released during Heritage Week

By MARK HOLMES
Special

It seems appropriate, more than coincidence, that Heritage Week In Mississauga is concomitant with the release of the fifth book penned by intrepid Port Credit author Verna Mae Weeks.

The diminutive writer epitomizes history, having lived through a good portion of it and researched and written about considerably more.

Her diligence in scouring dust-laden government documents that haven't seen the light of day in up to 250 years, or more, is legendary. Weeks' rummaging of old newspapers, diaries, circulars and even university theses has given her a unique perspective on history — a perspective virtually unknown among many historians.

She embarked on her history writing career when her granddaughter asked for help with a history report. Weeks' help did not go unrecognized, and it wasn't long before local schools were asking for her stories and anecdotes from the past.

Weeks' first book, *Villages Of Mississauga*, has sold out in three separate printings and requests are still coming in from as far as Australia and Alaska.

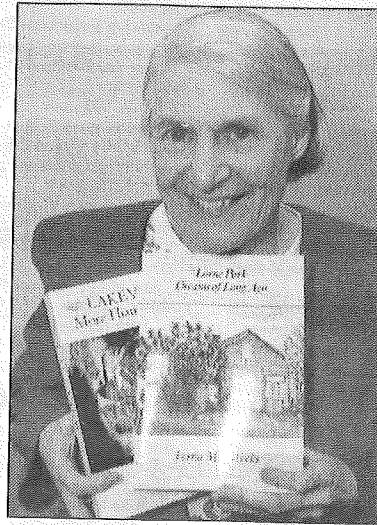
Her latest book, *Port Credit: A Glimpse Of The Past*, begins in the mid 1700s, when the Credit River Band of native Canadians probably met the first Europeans — French fur traders — making their forays into the area.

Living in a permanent settlement on what is now the Mississauga Golf and Country Club, the band of between 200-300 people traded furs for copper kettles, blankets, hats, guns, ammunition and whiskey.

Weeks was born in 1919, not too far from the native village and close to the first permanent building erected, The Government Inn, constructed by militia in 1798 where the Ports Hotel now sits.

Settling the Port Credit area was anything but romantic for the first pioneers, most of whom were United Empire Loyalists fleeing persecution following the American Revolution of 1776.

Those arriving in Port Credit



VERNA MAE WEEKS

found low-lying swamps and a fierce mosquito problem in summer.

"Not many people realize the effort that went into settling the area," said Weeks, who observed there was little in the way of equipment aside from a strong back,

picks and shovels to fill in the soggy areas where the present marina, library and St. Lawrence Starch now sit.

The lure of free land and farm implements offered by the Upper Canada government brought more and more settlers to Port Credit where they built humble shelters, fenced off their property and began to form a village.

That, said Weeks, was the beginning of the end for the Indians. Cut off from their traditional hunting grounds and with much of the wild game gone, they had little to do but indulge in alcohol.

The reputation of lazy and undesirable was undeserved by natives, said Weeks, who added that by the mid-1800s, the band picked up and moved to the Six Nations reserve in Brantford.

Throughout the 19th century, lumber and grist mills flourished, a small oil refinery produced coal oil for lamps, shipping, a brick works and St. Lawrence Starch formed the commercial basis of the community of Port Credit.

Heritage Week In Mississauga

has been proclaimed Feb. 20-25 with several special events, including a book signing by Weeks at the Mississauga Civic Centre from 4-6 p.m.

As well, there are eight local restaurants joining an event called Savor The Flavor. Patrons can enjoy historical ambiance while dining in heritage buildings.

The annual Heritage Showcase, featuring displays and presentation by local heritage groups, returns to the Civic Centre Feb. 20-24.

And Feb. 24, the Curator's Challenge offers the opportunity for people to have their heirlooms and relics identified and appraised by a panel of experts.

For further details on Heritage Week Activities call 272-1432 (between 8:30 a.m.-10 p.m.).

PEEL BIOGRAPHY

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The Miss. News Feb. 15/95