

Glengarry's storied history recounted in new dictionary

BY SCOTT CARMICHAEL
News Staff

Local history enthusiasts will soon have the most comprehensive record of Glengarry's past ever compiled, in one complete source.

Painstakingly researched and written by Alexandria native, historian and retired university professor Royce MacGillivray, and published by the Glengarry Historical Society (GHS), the *Dictionary of Glengarry Biography* consists of 1,600 biographical entries covering the lives of "anybody and everybody who helped make Glengarry Canada's most storied and most celebrated county."

The 800-page hardcover book not only encapsulates the accomplishments of such prominent former residents as Elda Rouleau and "Big Rory" McLennan, but also those of more obscure local historical figures as well, including Cato Prime, a black Loyalist who was among the first settlers of his race in Glengarry in the late 18th century, and Joseph "Joe" Choquette, who ran the long-defunct Alexandria Wood Products, a supplier of hockey sticks to a great number of NHL and other professional hockey players, in the 1940s.

No living individuals are depicted in the biography.

Special advance orders for the book are being accepted at *The News* office until March 15, with delivery to take place in April.

Williamstown resident David A. Anderson, a local historian, member and past-president of the GHS who is responsible for the typesetting and overall formatting of the book, calls it "an astounding, well-researched work" that will serve as the ideal complement to another of Mr. MacGillivray's books, the *Bibliography of Glengarry County*, published in 1996.

"The bibliography consists of 3,000 annotated entries of publications related to the county...and just as it was the best county bibliography in Canada at the time of its publication, this biographical dictionary will have a similar import," he explained recently.

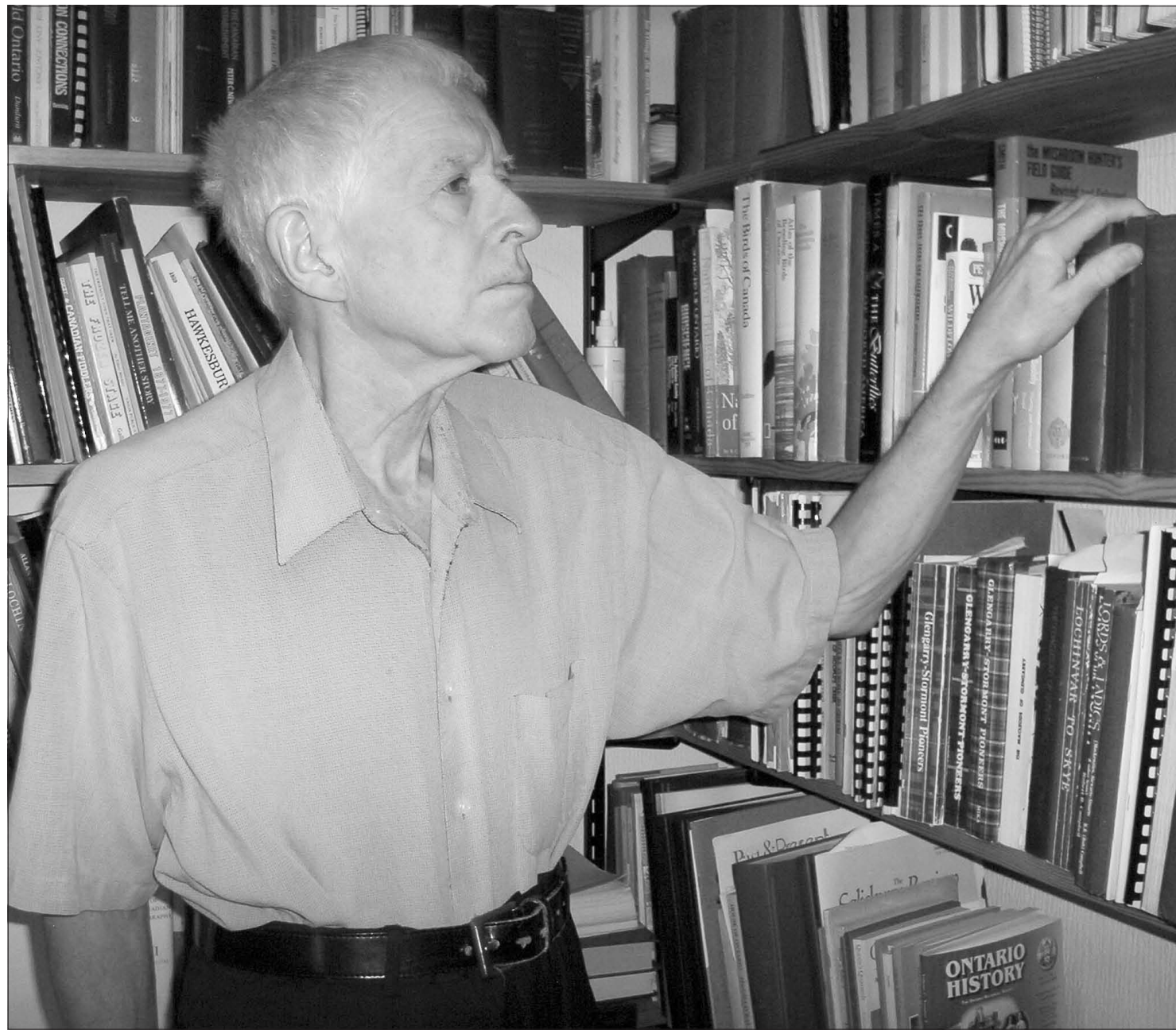
Another GHS member, Dane Lanken, is impressed by the tome's historical significance as well as its sheer breadth of coverage.

"It's just one of the most remarkable books I've ever seen...a work of terrific scholarship and terrific (research) application," he said.

"And it's very nicely written too. It's just an amazing accomplishment."

Mr. Lanken, an author and researcher himself, cited Mr. MacGillivray's well-known diligence and thoroughness as two of the main reasons behind the quality of the finished product.

"Royce is a very hard and serious worker," he



KEEPING THE MEMORIES ALIVE: Former Alexandria resident and eminent Glengarry historian Royce MacGillivray, seen here in his London, England home, is the author of the *Dictionary of Glengarry Biography*, an 800-page tome containing the life stories of 1,600 noteworthy Glengarrians from the county's rich past.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROYCE MACGILLIVRAY

said.

"I've heard that when he sits down to work, he sits down for eight hours at a time and doesn't look up, and that's the sort of dedication that would be required to amass, and then put in order, the amount of facts that he amassed for this book.

"Plus, with other biographical dictionaries, there's an editor, and that editor hires dozens of writers to do the work," added Mr. Lanken, "so the fact that Royce did all of this work by himself

really makes this book unique."

In a recent e-mail message from his home in London, England, Mr. MacGillivray explained that the *Dictionary of Glengarry Biography* is the culmination of more than three decades worth of work.

"It has been my settled ambition since the 1970s to write this biographical dictionary, but it took me a long time to get the material together," he stated.

While his research has been an ongoing process

for more than 30 years, Mr. MacGillivray said he didn't begin putting pen to paper until his retirement from the University of Waterloo's history department and subsequent move to the United Kingdom in 1996.

"It's been a wonderful retirement project, seeing me from the age of 60 to the age of 73," he said.

"I had a more-or-less complete draft of the book in printout form by 2007, but after that came a lot of revision, fact-checking and incorporation of ma-

terial that came in late, and suggestions that readers had made.

"I think it's a great topic (for a book), and that the achievements of the Glengarrians included in it well deserve the notice I have tried to give them," he added.

Relying "as much as possible, on good printed or manuscript sources," including *The News*, other newspapers, libraries, government archives and church records to provide the informational foundation for the book, Mr. MacGillivray also drew from the Glengarry bibliography, and other works and personal experiences for inspiration and guidance when putting together his latest project.

"When the late Ewan Ross and I were writing the *History of Glengarry*, which was published in 1979, we made it an uncompromising rule of our research that we were to separate hard fact from legends, folklore, mythology, old stories and so forth...and I have followed the same rule for the *Dictionary of Glengarry Biography*," he said.

"Fortunately, the hard facts often, or usually, turn out to be a lot more interesting than the legends, etc., so that is good.

"Glengarry has been exceptionally rich over the generations in generating old stories, and that is good in itself, but history - real history - has claims which can't be compromised."

Being born in Alexandria in 1936 and spending his early years in McCrimmon West in Prescott County, on Glengarry's periphery, also provided Mr. MacGillivray with an insight that proved invaluable in the creation of his latest book.

"In terms of sources, I can also claim to have had an inestimable privilege or advantage in my own personal life," he recalled, "in that I was (growing up) just in time to see, before it vanished forever, the old-style Glengarry-area farming and the farmers who operated it," as well as other aspects of life.

Mr. Anderson and Mr. Lanken, who serves as the *Dictionary of Glengarry Biography's* copy editor, are currently putting the finishing touches on the book, a project for which the latter can hardly contain his enthusiasm.

"It's getting close now to being completed," said Mr. Lanken.

"This is something that's been bubbling around here for the last couple of years, but it's getting really close now, and that's pretty exciting."

To place an order for your copy of the *Dictionary of Glengarry Biography*, which sells for \$95, visit *The News'* office between regular business hours (8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday), call (613) 525-2020, fax (613) 525-3824, or send an e-mail to office@glengarrynews.ca.