

GWENDOLYN (LAZIER) BRAIDWOOD

Inducted 2005

Headlines in the *Intelligencer* recently under the 'Remember When' column read - "*Belleville teen rides horse into international history*". This article written by Benzie Sangma is accompanied by a photo taken in 1924 showing 18 year old Miss Gwendolyn Lazier on her mount "Tip" offering an invitation to President Calvin Coolidge on the grounds of the White House. The invitation which she had delivered was from His Worship Mayor W. C. Mikel of Belleville asking that the President attend the 140th anniversary celebrations there in June to commemorate the arrival of the United Empire Loyalists in the Quinte area.



Gwen was born in Belleville on June 28, 1905, the third child of Stephen Dunbar Lazier and wife Florence May Lingham. An older sister and brother, Alice and Fred, and a younger brother Stephen made up the Lazier family. Gwen's maternal grandmother was Mary Alice Weller, one of the children of William Weller who owned and operated a stage coach service, established in 1830, between York and Prescott. Mary Alice Weller had married Fred Lingham, an engineer who worked with Cecil Rhodes at that time in South Africa. In 1880-81 during the Boer War, Gwen's mother, Florence May Lingham who was an only child, was taken prisoner along with her mother & father at the siege of Johannesburg, South Africa. Gwen's ancestors on her paternal side were the Laziers. Various spellings of the name have occurred, originally it was "Le Seuer", their family came to North America from France in 1635.

Nicholas Lazier, Gwen's great-great-grandfather was born in 1781, and built a beautiful cut stone house located between Northport and Demorestville on the lower road, Prince Edward County. The home has been restored in recent years.

Growing up as a young girl in Belleville, Gwen had difficulty yielding to her mother's expectations that it was necessary for a young girl to learn 'social graces'. There were times when participation in outdoor games with her brother and his friends was more appealing. Her education was received at St. Agnes School, Belleville, Bishop Strachan private school in Toronto, Belleville Collegiate and Ontario Business College. It was in 1923 when attending Belleville Collegiate that Gwen was picked to run for Canada in the Olympic Games in the 100 yard dash. Her dream of an Olympic medal was abandoned when it was learned her father was not willing to pay the fare for her trainer.

It was on her return home from Toronto one weekend in early spring when Gwen heard the news that the Mayor of Belleville wanted someone to ride a horse to Washington DC to advertise the 140th anniversary of the landing of the loyalists. As a young 18-year old, Gwen thought she was up for the challenge and when asked, her father agreed she could go. He knew his daughter had never ridden a horse, but he also knew she was determined to answer the Mayor's request. As Gwen will tell you, her father never believed she would make it past Shannonville. Arrangements were made for a trial ride on her horse "Tip", an older and gentle mount, however, her instructors horse set out to race, "Tip" followed his lead and left

Gwen hanging on for dear life. Gradually their pace slowed and her question to the instructor was "well can I ride". As you know, the rest is history.

Gwen and "Tip" did go further than Shannonville, delivering invitations at towns all the way to Washington. Wherever they stopped either the Mayor or members of council would offer entertainment, food and lodging. Everyone back home was following her progress; there was a certain group who had a particular reason for doing so. The organizers of the ride to Washington decided they needed more publicity other than that of the newspapers, so it was falsely reported that the pair were lost en route. As a result reporters on radio, then in its infancy, picked up on the news and reported such, this proved to be great advertising. Gwen did not know until she returned home that bets were being placed on her chances of arriving at her Washington destination. Their trip consisted of stops in Kingston, Fonda, Troy, West Point, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York City and Washington, riding 800 miles over 28 days averaging 25 to 45 miles per day. Her treasured autograph book which President Coolidge signed and a collection of newspaper clippings about Gwen's historic ride into history books as a great young ambassador are in the Archives of Queen's University, Kingston. Many more details of the 140th anniversary to honour the arrival of the loyalists and the dedication ceremonies for the unveiling of the Loyalist Monument in 1924 can be found in a book called "Belleville History" written by W. C. Mikel K.C.

Following her early escapades, Gwen later worked as a stenographer in Toronto. She was married to Jack Braidwood following WW2. He was an avid yachtsman and had sailed around the world. Gwen also had a love for sailing. They retired to the Quinte area in 1965. In 1975 he established the Jack Braidwood Trophy Race, still held annually on the Bay of Quinte. Jack passed away in 1984.

Gwen continued to be active in the Quinte community, volunteering with the Picton Hospital Auxiliary, Meals on Wheels, and became a Life Member of the 7th Town Historical Society.



Brian Tackaberry, Gwen Lazier Braidwood, June Dafoe, 18 June 2005

She was inducted into the Bay of Quinte Branch Loyalist Hall of Honour on June 18th, 2005 by June Dafoe and Brian Tackaberry, shortly before her 100th birthday on June 28th.

Gwen died in Belleville on October 5th, 2007 at age 103.