

CHEDOKE'S TEDDY BEARS' PICNIC

By Robert Williamson

As our summer weather diminishes, I recall a Sunday event in August that triggered a Mountain Memory. It was a children's party called "**Teddy Bears' Picnic at Whitehern**" staged by the Hamilton Civic Museums. I thought, "What a wonderful concept to immerse our children in Hamilton's heritage at Whitehern and the life of the famous McQuesten family!"

The theme is based on an orchestral composition written by an American, John Walter Bratton, in 1907. It was used as background music for silent movies. An Irishman, Jimmy Kennedy, wrote lyrics for the music in 1932 when it became a lullaby and theme song for children's radio shows.

The idea of making children feel more comfortable with community institutions and their services, began in 1990 at McMaster University Medical Centre (MUMC). A picnic atmosphere with comfortable teddy bear companions was intended to make the Children's Hospital a friendly place to be. The hospital met the requirements for pediatric, psychiatric and physical disorders such as Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy and speech defects.

The park-like setting of MUMC's affiliated campus at Chedoke Hospital on the west mountain became a gathering place "**for every bear that ever there was**" between 1992 and 2001. Each summer "**If you go down to the woods today, You're in for a big surprise**" because a date was set aside "**for certain because, today's the day the Teddy Bears have their picnic.**"

The entire community was invited and it became the most popular event for families in the region. Each year for several years nearly 10,000 people attended. They came to enjoy a program of entertainment, games and rides. There were: magic shows, dance troupes, bands, singers, hayrides, pony rides, motorcycle rides, fishponds and the annual Police Challenge Bed Race.

***"The little Teddy Bears are
Having a lovely time today,
See them gaily gad about,
They love to play and shout,
They never have any care."***

But a special feature of this picnic was the free Teddy Bears' Hospital. Neighbourhood children were encouraged to bring their bears to the admitting tent. There they received a Teddy Bear Medical Chart and specially trained staff demonstrated the use of real equipment and hospital procedures to treat bear ailments. In 1995 almost 2,000 teddy bears were treated.



*Eric Foulds watches intently as his teddy bear receives medical attention at Chedoke's medical tent.
Courtesy HHS*

At the end of the day everyone went home happy, especially the children.

***"At six o'clock their Mummies and Daddies,
Would take them home to bed,
Because they're tired little teddy bears."***

Mountain Memories, is written by Robert Williamson for the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society and appears monthly in the Mountain News. See the Society's website (Hamiltonheritage.ca) for more information