

# Elizabeth Posthuma Gwillim

## Simcoe, a Lady of means

By Mary Beacock Fryer

During her visits to London, Elizabeth Posthuma Gwillim formed what was to become the most important friendship of her life. Her friend was Mary Anne Burges, a daughter of George Burges, Comptroller General of Customs for Scotland, and the Hon. Anne Somerville. Like Elizabeth's uncle Admiral Graves, George Burges kept a London house but also had one in Bath.

Of the two girls, Elizabeth was the more self-confident. Mary Anne was shy, and more scholarly. She wrote at least 2 novels, and was well-known for her studies in botany and geology.

Mary Anne Burges frequently visited Hembury Fort House with Elizabeth, and she resolved to make her home in Devonshire. The two girls enjoyed staying up all night on what they called "vigils", often reading and conversing in Spanish.

As young girls, neither thought she wanted to marry, but Elizabeth later succumbed to the charms of Admiral Graves' Godson, Col. John Graves Simcoe.

The handsome soldier had

come to stay at Hembury Fort House in the Autumn of 1781 to recover from wounds he had sustained during the North American campaign against the rebelling Thirteen Colonies. Elizabeth Gwillim and Colonel Simcoe were married in December 1782 at Buckerell parish church near Hembury Fort House. He was 30; she was 20.

Using part of Elizabeth's fortune, Simcoe purchased 5,000 acres on the Wolf River, near Honiton, Devon, where he began building the family home, Wolford Lodge. By the time he was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada (to take effect on December 24, 1791), the Simcoes had 6 children - Eliza (b. 1784), Charlotte (b. 1785), Henrietta Maria (known as Harriet) born in 1787; Caroline (b. 1788), Sophia Jemima (1789), and Francis Gwillim (1791).

*The Gwillim Group is now raising funds for a bronze statue to Elizabeth Gwillim Simcoe, to be placed at the Bradford Post Office parkette. For information, contact Mikki Nanowski, 905-775-4011.*

**Governor Simcoe Slent Here**