

CULTURAL MOMENT FOR AUGUST 10, 2026 CELEBRATES THE GREAT KENILWORTH GATOR ESCAPE

Over the years, several unique animals have wandered the Kenilworth countryside. However, one of the most unique occurrences took place in July 1933 when the *Arthur Enterprise News* reported "Alligator at Large in Arthur Township."

Prompted by curiosity or bragging rights, a 20-year-old H. Gordon Green imported two six-foot-long alligators from South Carolina. He thought it would be fun to be the first in perhaps all of Canada to raise alligators.

Green kept the alligators safely chained up at his parent's dairy farm on the edge of Arthur and fed them a diet of fish and liver, explaining they would only eat on hot days and they would lie dormant during the winter. It is unclear what his parents thought of him raising alligators, let alone how the resident dairy herd felt about their new companions.

Early in 1933, Green moved to Kenilworth to a rented boarding house while he worked at becoming a tanner and fur dealer, and he decided to bring one of the alligators with him. It was that July that the female gator made her escape from her garden enclosure.

Word quickly travelled through the township, but not as quickly as the gator. Alligators had evolved over 36 million years to become skilled and instinctive hunters, as well as to be patient and well camouflaged. Needless to say, she vanished.

The locals kept a close eye on their livestock, pets and young children. The male alligator mate left in Arthur was brokenhearted by the separation of its mate and continually made a mournful call all day and night, which was noted to be heard for miles. He was promptly shipped to the Stratford Normal School to be used for zoological studies.

Meanwhile, the female gator steadily migrated along the Arthur Township creeks and streams southward. If reports from the *Kitchener Daily Record* are to be believed, she would soon find a more suitable habitat in the Grand River marshlands near Waterloo.

According to an article in the July 27, 1935 issue of the *Record*, two locals - Alvin Weber and George McCrea - were emphatic in their claims that an alligator about six feet long, mostly green with a foot long chain around its neck had been seen across from the Seagram race stables on Bridgeport Road. Concerned for public safety, officials scoured the properties along the wetlands but found no footprints or other evidence of a large reptile. Police Chief Clarke declared the alligator sightings a hoax.

Throughout the rest of 1935, humorous references of the reptile were in the local newspaper but residents in the area remained on high alert. It may have been that the alligator felt unwelcome in Waterloo, so she moved on downstream to Breslau where numerous reports of a strange, mammoth monster was invading the placid waters of the Grand River near their homes.

These many sightings happen 4 years after Green's gator escaped. This information stirred the souls of area sportsmen. That June, a half-dozen prospective big game hunters landed in Breslau armed with poles, fresh meat, rifles, shot guns, hatchets and every other conceivable object that might be used in landing the monster. The alligator lived to see another day!

In conclusion, the fate of the alligator from Kenilworth is still unknown – alligators can survive in the wild for up to 50 years, if not more - but new laws and regulations that control the importation of wildlife throughout municipalities have made alligator sightings in Southwestern Ontario a thing of the past.

Submitted by Bonny McDougall, Wellington North Cultural Roundtable.