



Spring 2012 **newsletter** VOLUME 10, NUMBER 1

PREZ SEZ...

Well all is quiet on the home front after a very busy holiday season, I hope you all enjoyed yourselves and have now settle down to a somewhat normal routine. We at the Historical Society took a short break after our AGM in November to regroup and set our thoughts on society activities for the 2012 season.

We have our speakers program all set through to the fall and maybe we might just arrange an outing to some exotic, sorry historical site during the upcoming months. We started off 2012 with our January speaker, Dr. James Opp on the very interesting topic, "The Rideau Canal Timescapes App". See upcoming events for the schedule.

Applications for funding have been completed by our Treasurer, Dick Hegan with Canada Summer Jobs, Young Canada Works and Ontario Summer Experience Program for the summer student interpreter positions for the Blockhouse Museum. Hopefully we will be in a position to open the Blockhouse on a full time basis with a complete staff on our official opening day of June 16th.

In the meantime, Ellen Hackett will start her campaign to recruit volunteers for the weekend staffing with our opening starting mid May. Volunteering in the blockhouse is a wonderful experience, you get to know your fellow volunteers and you also meet a lot of very interesting people who like yourself are interested in the history of the Blockhouse and the village of Merrickville. Just sign up, you don't know what you are missing

A Part of Merrickville History: Happy 100th Birthday Phyllis Walker !!

Phyllis Walker not only has been a long time booster of Merrickville's history, but, she literally is part of it. Her father hailed from Portland and her mother, Evilera Drummond, from Toledo where Phyllis was born in 1912. She came to Merrickville when her father, Doctor Melvin James Walker (MJO) opened his medical practice in the Merrickville area.

Phyllis grew up here during the first third of the 20th century and keenly recalls Village life in those days. Her successful nursing career, including wartime service in Italy kept her away from Merrickville, she and her sister Lura were frequent weekend visitors, buzzing in from Montreal in Phyllis' Hillman convertible.

Almost before Phyllis had her bags unpacked when she retired here in 1972, the persuasive Colonel Douglas was at her door convincing her to become involved in the historical society.

Since then she has been a constant strength and support for the Society. With her amazing memory she is always generous in sharing her encyclopaedic knowledge of Merrickille early days.

We wish her continued good health as she enters her second century. Continued page 2





Phyllis Walker and her friend Ruby Crawford

Commemorating Phyllis' Italian experiences, Sally Wanless last summer organized an Italian Garden party for her where a number of her long time friends gathered to enjoy a special Italian Buffet prepared by chef Janet Cambell.



Italian luncheon, Phyllis in the hat

The War of 1812

Over the next three issues we will present a summary of the War of 1812 and its effect on the Rideau Canal, as narrated by Victor Suthren during the 2007 Rideau 175 Lecture series

The War of 1812 began over unresolved issues between Great Britain and its recent---and now independent---colony of the United States. At the end of the American Revolution, the British government was not forthcoming with full recognition for the infant American republic, partially out of a conviction that the independence they had won might be short-lived, and partially out of a reluctance to admit the defeat that had been inflicted on Crown forces by the rebels and their French allies. Caught in a quarter-century war against Revolutionary and then Napoleonic France, Britain used her control of the seas and her vast economic power to bottle up the French in their European stronghold, and one of the measures they used was an embargo on commercial shipping to Europe, which included American shipping. By 1812, the American Congress saw this interference with their right to trade with anyone as a neutral nation as intolerable, and their sense of injustice was heightened by Royal Navy insistence on the arresting of American vessels on the high seas to remove alleged naval deserters, many of whom were in fact American citizens. Although New England merchants were doing a tidy business trading with the Maritime Provinces and Britain because of the Napoleonic War, the larger issue of "FreeTrade and Sailors' Rights" had become a major irritant and an argument for American legislators who felt was with an obstinate Britain was America's only option.

There were other issues that fuelled demands in Congress for armed action against Britain. Chief among these was a sense amongst western settlers pressing against the Indian lands of the Old Northwest---Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan---that Britain was arming and supporting Indian resistance from its base in Canada. Led by men from frontier states like Kentucky, "War Hawks" in Congress argued that Indian resistance to American westward settlement would only end when British influence itself in North America was ended, and that would come only with a military conquest of British North America, an exercise which Thomas Jefferson stated would be a 'mere matter of marching'. With New England averse to any war with Britain, and western War Hawks clamoring for action, the American government demanded satisfaction from Britain over some of the most contentious issues. Too late, Britain eased its trade restrictions and made conciliatory overtures to America, only to have the War Hawks win the day. In 1812, President Madison declared war on Great Britain, and since the immense power of the Royal Navy denied any possibility of long-term American success on the high seas, the administration turned to a conquest of Upper and Lower Canada as a means of obtaining a bargaining chip in the conflict.

To be continued next issue

The Battle of Merrickville

Although not directly involved in any battle of the War of 1812, Merrickville none the less is able to lay claim to a ferocious battle deriving from that conflict. Sort of.

Gallant soldier though he was, Adiel Sherwood, of Brockville, who was the high sheriff of Leeds and Grenville for 35 years, knew enough to turn tail and go seek reinforcements when confronted by a superior force in 1829, during the building of the Rideau canal.

Trouble arose between the canal construction crews and farmers in the area.

Timber was being cut on the Mosher farm between Merrickville and Burritt's Rapids, but there was some delay in paying farmer Mosher for the logs. He demanded payment, and when it was not forthcoming, took action to have the logging crews charged with trespassing on his property.

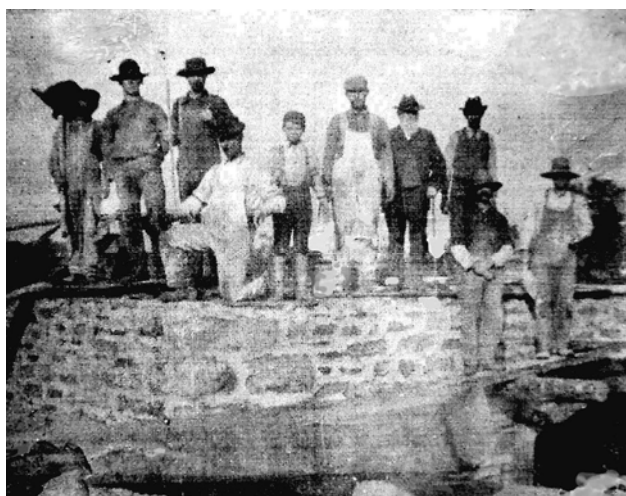


Cutting logs C.W. Jefferys N.A.C.

Sheriff Sherwood responded to the call, but on arriving at Clowes Locks, where the men had gathered, he judiciously decided to postpone action until he had reserves at his back. Accordingly, he rode back to Brockville, rounded up a dozen worthies, and swore them in as deputy sheriffs.

Then he led his posse through the bush to Merrickville and down the Rideau to Clowes.

Meanwhile, the Irish "navvies" working on the canal had decided to resist arrest. Rum-happy, well fortified and well armed, these doughty Irish warriors met Sherwood's men in hand-to-hand combat.



**Canal workers Clowes lock
photo Lenore Newman**

The happy warriors from Ireland were armed with clubs, shillelaghs and pickhandles, and they routed Sherwood's posse with ease. To his credit, it must be admitted that Sherwood did not want to kill any of his attackers and his men did not use their guns.

The sheriff shepherded his battered force back to Brockville, then called in the militia. Capt. Stephen Burritt and his company of Grenville militiamen responded. They traveled upsteam from Burritt's Rapids by boat, swarmed ashore and rounded up the unruly workers.

Carted off to Brockville, the now sobered up navvies were put on trial. But no one would give evidence against them, and none of the accused would admit any illegal action or testify against each other. So the magistrate threw the case out of court.

It is reported the celebrating canal workers held a party on Brockville's main street, then went back to work on the canal. In the annals of the Rideau Canal, this affair has been called "The Battle of Merrickville" but descendants of the participants say that no action ever took place in *Merrickville*. All the skirmishing was confined to the Clowes Lock area east of Merrickville.

Harold Painting, Recorder Times, Sept 13, 1985

45th Official Blockhouse Museum Opening

This year the blockhouse museum opening on June 16, 2012 will be something special. It will mark the 45th consecutive June official opening for the Village's most important historical site. But it was not the first time the villagers had a chance to see collection of artefacts which had been donated or loaned to the museum. In 1966 a Museum Board, chaired by George P. McMullen was established by the Village of Merrickville and on June 22, 1966, the Museum was first revealed to the public. The following year, on June 21 the Blockhouse Museum was officially opened by the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, The Honourable John Keiller MacKay, and Federal MP Jack Pickersgill. Since then it has become a harbinger of Spring and eagerly awaited by Villagers and visitors alike. As well as marking our 45th official opening, this year we will be celebrating the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812 and your Historical Society is working to make it a very special celebration. Watch for details to come !

Then and Now

This property, poor dear looks like she has seen better days, this photograph was taken back in 1962 when it was purchased for taxes after being abandoned in the 1950`s.



Welcome to Haldon House and yes it belongs to yours truly. This wonderful property has an interesting past, looking at the deeds, the land itself was originally granted to Solomon Jones in 1822, William Tunicliff Jones 1823, Miles McGuigan 1824, Thomas Jenkins 1839, Sarah Jenkins 1842, Asa Webster 1863 Joseph Kelly 1913, abandoned in 1950`s by the Kelly Family. Extensive exterior restoration was done between 1962 and 1984 by the then owners James and Virginia Hopkirk /Max (Past MDHS President) and Virginia Martyn. Purchased by Al (MDHS Past President) and Jean McKay in 1984, and finally in the hands of Ian and Nina Donald in 2000. It would appear that the only way to own this beautiful house is to be President of the MDHS. What is the caveat saying, ``Buyer Beware``. That magnificent dry stone wall at the front of the property was hand built in 2009 by Master Stonemason John Scott (our April speaker) and his graduate stonemason Jason Macrea, and took three months to build. As the navy I also did a little fetching and carrying and of course served the coffee.

Nina Donald

Upcoming Events

Our next meeting On February 28 will be a little different as we will be holding our very own "Show and Tell" where we are inviting you to bring in your treasured antiques and collectables and hopefully give us a brief history of the item and how you managed to acquire them. Also if there is something that you haven't got a clue of just what it might be, well bring it along and we will all either try and guess or tell you what it is. It sounds like this could be a fun evening.

- For the MARCH 27th Meeting we are extremely pleased to have Kevin Gray of Merrickville speaking on "glass blowing down the ages".
- On APRIL 24th, following our Spring Dinner, John Scott, a master stone masonry expert at Perth Algonquin Heritage College, will speak on 19th century stone structures,
- Our MAY 29th gathering will feature Larry Cotton, author of "Whiskey and Wickedness", speaking on, guess what, . . . whiskey and wickedness in pioneer days.
- JUNE 16th will be a particularly important Blockhouse opening. It will be our 45th annual official opening.

Look to the Phoenix and local advertising for places and times.

McGuigan Cemetery - visitor information centre

Time for a Spruce up !

Come this spring we will be looking at sprucing up the trim on the McGuigan pioneer cemetery visitor information centre. One of the oldest cemeteries in Eastern Ontario this historic property served the pioneer population of the Upper Rideau settlement for approximately one hundred years between 1800 and 1900. A stroll through the cemetery reveals tombstones with names of many families still active in the area.

It is a wonderful place to visit. It is quiet and peaceful and attracts a number of visitors from far and wide who take the time to walk up the long pathway perhaps to see some of the headstones of their ancestors. Most enter our information centre to learn of the history of the cemetery and to sign our guest registration book. If you haven't had the opportunity to visit McGuigan yourselves, we would certainly recommend that you take the time to do so.

Alas as you will see some of the paintwork on the visitor information centre needs a little bit of a touch up. Over the years although the building is stable, the paintwork is beginning to show wear and tear and some windows are cracked. We would be looking for just a few folk to help with this project. I am sure it would just take an afternoon to sand and clean the wood, repair the windows and apply the primer coat and then back the next day with a top coat. Weather permitting of course, we could turn this into a picnic.



For those who wish to volunteer please call 613 269 4289 and we will have your brush ready for you.

Heritage Award of Merit

We will once again this year be honouring one or more individuals for the MDHS Heritage Award of Merit. This award is issued in recognition of the efforts of individuals who have made significant contributions to the preservation, restoration, recognition or celebration of the History and Heritage of the Merrickville-Wolford community.

Award recipients will have made a significant contribution of time and /or resources in one or more of the following areas.

- ▶ Preservation of architecturally and historically important structures in the district.
- ▶ Research and documentation of the history, heritage and culture of the Merrickville-Wolford community.
- ▶ Genealogical study and documentation of the communities founding and early families.
- ▶ Donation of important documents and artefacts for preservation in the Blockhouse Museum or Archives.
- ▶ Sustained and continuous support over a long period for the MDHS and its purposes.
- ▶ Advocacy study and documentation of the communities founding and early families.

Should you know of someone worthy of this prestigious award and who meet these criteria, we would ask that you contact the President at ndonald@growthconnections.com for an email copy of the Nomination Form and for those who would prefer a hard copy, please call 613 269 4289 and a copy will be mailed to you directly.

All nominations have to be received by the end of April to allow time for committee members to review all of the documentation submitted.

This year's award winning presentation will be carried out at the Official Blockhouse opening on June 16th 2012.

Membership Matters

Membership in the historical Society is renewed annually from December to November at a present cost of \$10 per person or \$15 per family. Life memberships are also available for \$100.

We welcome new members and hope present members will want to re-join our Society. If so, it will be helpful if you can submit your cheques early to allow us to fund our ongoing works.

Your membership will assist us in continuing to celebrate the history and heritage of our community.

Thank you

MDHS Membership, Box 294, Merrickville,
Ontario, K0G 1N0:

Merrickville & District Historical Society Box 294, Merrickville, Ontario, K0G 1N0

2012 Executive

President – Nina Donald

First Vice President – David Hammonds

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