

The Merrickville and District Historical Society NEWSLETTER

Summer 2003

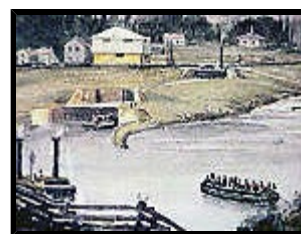
Volume 1 Number 1

A Busy Year

It has been a busy two years for your Merrickville & District Historical Society. Your Committee has worked hard to restore the Society to it's past levels of activity. And, although we have a way to go, we are pleased with what we have accomplished so far. The traditional Historical Society's events have been maintained and strengthened and new programmes added. On a fine June day the Blockhouse Museum by the busy Merrickville locks was officially opened.

*******For the Record*******

If you think the Canal locks are busy now, did you know that in the year 1847 alone, some 97,000 passengers passed through the Merrickville locks? That's over 350 per day of open canal season. They were mostly British and European immigrants crowded on steamer towed barges and heading for a new life in Canada West. In fact, if you hail from west of here and if your ancestors arrived in Canada between 1835 and 1850, there is an excellent likelihood that they saw the Merrickville locks long before you did!



The operation of the Blockhouse Museum remains the prime responsibility of the Merrickville & District Historical Society, but, to the traditional June afternoon opening celebrations we have added an evening wine and cheese fundraising reception which has quickly become a much anticipated event. A fledging school essay contest with cash prizes to the winners has encouraged interest in the history and heritage of the Community. The first prize winner this year went to Roxane Harvey Leclerc with runner up recognition to Maxime Leduc and Danielle Chagnon. Honourable mention was given to Joshua McElroy, Tara McRae, Catherine Gauthier, Megan McKee and Brian Lavergne all from Ste Marguerite Bourgeoys. The successful essays were on display at the Blockhouse opening. Next year, we hope to have participation from all of the public schools in Merrickville-Wolford.



In addition to the regular historical re-enactments and pioneer displays, this year's opening featured a commemorative collectors' postal cover, arranged by our Postmaster, James Skelding and celebrating the 210 years since William Merrick and his mill set the foundation for the Village of Merrickville, or, Merricks Mills, as it was then known.

*******For the Record*******

Did you know that William Merrick's family in 1638 had been the founders of Springfield Massachusetts, and that later family members in the mid 1700's established the first "Merricks Mills" in the wilderness of western New York state near Saratoga?

The fundraising reception on the evening of the Blockhouse opening saw our presentation of the new Heritage Awards of Merit to several worthy recipients. As a life long supported of the Historical Society and its objects, Phyllis Walker received the

Award of Merit. The Merrickville Remembers committee members, Jack Jessop, Joyce McKay, Peter McKenna and Jack Wilcox were recognized for their efforts in creating a booklet commemorating the lives of those lost in the last 100 years of war, and so helping to preserve the contemporary military history of the Community.

For their efforts in maintaining the architectural and historic integrity of the Village in their renovations, the Society recognized Martha Dulmage and Christopher Whitehead for their home renovations and Bruce Stackhouse for the preservation of the character of the historic Henry Dolphus Smith house in its rejuvenation as the Wood-N-Feathers.



Through the fall and spring seasons, the monthly Historical Society meetings have remained popular. Last year among the more interesting presentations was by life member Phyllis Walker who described from personal recollection life in Merrickville in the early decades of the 20th century.

Other interesting presentations were; Kim Robinson speaking on the History of the Blockhouse,- its construction, its inhabitants, its near demise and its restoration; the Settling of the Rideau from Burritt's Rapids to Bytown by Coral Lindsay; the History of the Jakes-McLean Block by Dave Ellis; the Hidden Architectural Treasures of North Grenville by Laura Bishop; and our annual April dinner which featured as a speaker, Brian Anthony, Executive Director of Heritage Canada Foundation. Who talked of Saving Canada's Built Heritage.

On a cold March evening we sponsored a concert in the historic United Church where we were warmed by a programme of the rousing voices and energetic antics of the Osgoode Township Male Choir .

*******For the Record*******

Did you know that the fine old stone building boarded up at the top of Mill street at the junction with Broadway was built as the meeting hall for the Methodists, predecessors of the United Church. Built around 1855 it served its congregation until the construction of the present United Church in 1889. Now on the property of Grenville castings, the historic old Methodist Church is crying out for restoration. Any volunteers?

What's on tap?

As we approach another busy autumn season, we look forward to presenting another interesting series of monthly lectures. The first will be on Tuesday September 30th at the Blockhouse where Don McKay of Parks Canada will tell us about 1840's social life along the Rideau. The next meeting will be at the Sam Jakes Inn on Tuesday, October 28 when Barbara Humphreys will describe a "Legacy in Stone" in the Rideau corridor. Everyone is welcome at these meetings, but of course, we hope you will take out membership to support the Historical Society. In November we will hold our stimulating annual meeting (constitutional requirement) at which we will elect the new Executive. All are invited to attend and participate. The Blockhouse Museum will stay open six days a week until Labour Day, manned by our competent summer staff and after that on weekends, manned by volunteers until Thanksgiving.

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John Cowan, Editor

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