

The Merrickville and District Historical Society NEWSLETTER

Spring 2008

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Presidential Address

With the first newsletter of 2008, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself, Nina Donald, as the new President of the Merrickville and District Historical Society. Since moving to Merrickville over seven years ago (I'm a relative newcomer) I have had the pleasure of meeting a number of the village residents through just being out and about and also through the Society.

Over the past few years I have been actively participating as a volunteer with the Blockhouse and was also on the working committee for the Rideau 175 Lecture Series. This year I feel will not be quite as hectic for the Society as we will not have the lecture series and I don't think the Prime Minister will be dropping by again soon, but who knows. And of course the UNESCO World Heritage Site Designation for our wonderful Rideau Canal.



Nina Donald, President

Still we are planning to continue our work with the Historical Archives, thanks to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for their funding, and we are working on a Living (Oral) History Project, where members of the society will be conducting interviews with some of our more senior residents who will be able to enlighten us with their memories of an earlier time in Merrickville and the surrounding areas. This Spring and Fall we will be holding our regular meeting at Ste. Marguerite-Bourgeoys School and a list of interesting speakers has been put together for members and non members alike to enjoy. We look forward to seeing you there.

And, a final reminder, the MDHS operates on a volunteer basis and there always seems to be more work projects than we can handle. We would appreciate hearing from any of our members who would like to lend a hand with a few hours of volunteer work to help keep our Historical Society the splendid organization it has become.

*Nina Donald,
President,
March 2008*

Blockhouse Egged !!

Pat Molson has reported a mysterious Blockhouse incident which occurred last fall. Shortly after midnight on Halloween, Pat received a call from the security company saying that the Blockhouse alarm had been activated and the police notified. It turned out the Blockhouse had been "egged", (in the words of the police) but, thanks to its three foot thick walls and its design to 1832 British military standards, except for a broken window on the south side, its defensive perimeter was not breached. And so, as the good citizens of Merrickville rested peacefully through the night



(except for Pat Molson and the OPP) and after 175 years of readiness, the Blockhouse weathered its first significant assault. This one at the hands of egg-throwing marauders.

Blockhouse with egg on its face

Meanwhile Denis Faulkner reported that lights have been sighted at night in the Blockhouse leading to the possibility there was something supernatural behind the alarm incident. Our more prosaic past president thought it may have been our keen archives staff working late.



**Pat and Andrée Molson,
at the 2007 Rideau 175 Lecture Series**

We are terribly saddened to report the sudden death of Pat Molson, First Vice President of the Merrickville and District Historical Society. Pat loved people and could usually be found at the Blockhouse, greeting visitors and proudly explaining the history of our National Historic site and of our Village. He delighted in discovering and displaying forgotten treasures from our archives and was playing a key role in the preservation of this important heritage collection at the time of his death. With Parks Canada he played a leading role in the creation of our new exhibition panels celebrating . Pat spent many hours administering our annual public School historical essay contest. But he always found the smiles of the proud winners more than full reward for his efforts. He will be greatly missed. He was a colleague and a good friend. Our sympathies are extended to his wife Andrée and all his family.

Alice Hughes Honoured



Alice Hughes (left). Lieutenant Governor Onley & his wife with Alice Hughes (right)

Alice Hughes was recently awarded the **Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award for Lifetime Achievement**. In her quiet way, no-one has worked longer or more relentlessly than Alice Hughes to ensure our local heritage will be preserved. Since her retirement from teaching Alice has spent many thousands of hours delving into the histories of local families. Searching records of church weddings, marriage and death certificates, to find when folks were "matched, hatched and dispatched", as she colourfully put it during one of her presentations to the Historical Society in the year 2000.

By Alice's own admission she really did not set out to create the invaluable record of local genealogy which now resides in the Merrickville Public Library and the Heritage House Museum in Smiths Falls. But she did. All 20,000 pages of it! Nor did she expect to be crawling through the brush of abandoned local cemeteries, transcribing virtually every tombstone inscription. But she did.

Instead this truly remarkable woman had simply began looking into the history of her own McGrath family property and, well, one thing led to another ... literally. From Arnolds to Barbers to McEathrons to Wickwires to McGraths the branches of the tree spread until they touched virtually every family in Wolford. The search had begun and every answer raised a new question. A glance through her records indicates her tenacity. Hundreds of personal hand written letters of enquiry were sent and answered to solve perplexing family riddles. Birth notices and obituaries were carefully filed.



Alice and her brother Sid McGrath

It is hard to imagine anyone more worthy of recognition for a lifetime achievement award. Congratulations Alice.

Merrickville's "other" Entrepreneur

When the words "Successful Entrepreneur" are mentioned in connection to Merrickville the name Harry Falconer MacLean comes readily to mind. This giant of engineering and construction ingenuity literally put the name Merrickville on the map. But did you know there was another entrepreneur, before MacLean, who began his business in the basement of his family home on Elgin Street and built it into a leader in its field with over 1000 employees and over \$100 million in sales.

The story began with the marriage of Hiram Crain to Margaret Langford on Dec 24, 1862. Hiram Crain had been born in Maitland in 1832, a son of United Empire Loyalist David E. Crain and his wife Mary Pepper. Hiram moved with his family to Wolford Township, just south of Merrickville, where as a young man he began a construction company. In the course of his work, young Hiram would no doubt have encountered Samuel Langford who was a master builder in the Merrickville area. Most of the prominent stone buildings in Merrickville are attributed to his building skill. including the Stephen and Aaron Merrick homes as well as the Old Town Hall. At some point, Hiram met Samuel Langford's daughter Margaret and on December 24, 1862, they were married.

As a wedding gift, Margaret's father Samuel Langford, donated the property at (now) 306 Elgin Street where he had built the beautiful cross gabled Ontario Gothic home still located on the property. Hiram and Margaret Crain had seven children, but it was their second born, a

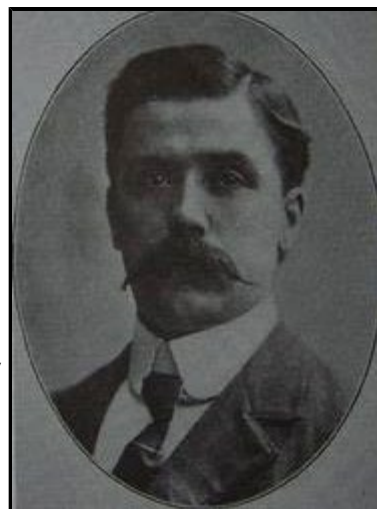


Samuel Langford home built for Hiram & Margaret Crain
Copy of drawing by Graham Thomas

son Rolla Law Crain, born in 1865, who would begin the business which would become R.L. Crain Inc., a leader in its field of printing specialties.

From an early age Rolla showed exceptional enterprise and ambition. After early education in Merrickville at 17 he joined his father's construction company as a bricklayer but with layoffs due to weather he found that his earning potential was influenced by factors beyond his control. Snowfall in March of 1883 meant another late spring and another late start at building. It also meant no bricklaying for at least a month, and no income. Completely frustrated at these periods of unemployment he turned to his new hobby, setting up a crude printing press in the cellar of his home on Elgin Street and purchasing used type which he learned to set by hand. His first advertising card, "The Merrickville Cheap Printing Office" became his first order. The beginning of what was to become the multi-million-dollar corporation of R. L. Crain Inc.

His business immediately grew and he was forced to expand from his basement, first opening a printing shop in Richmond and then in order to be closer to a larger population, he began a factory in Ottawa. Significantly, he dropped the "Cheap Printing" moniker and in his advertising became "the Neat Printer". No doubt his early business departure from Merrickville together with his inherited Methodist modesty is primarily responsible for the fact his enterprise and the success of his businesses, with its beginnings in Merrickville, is little known.



Rolla Crain 1902

No overnight success, Rolla Crain continued to energetically expand his business and enter new partnerships while diversifying into book-binding, posters, specialized printing forms, business systems and ultimately the continuous printing forms for which the company became renowned. Rolla Crain died in 1947 at the age of 82 and was succeeded by two sons who continued to run the company, and build printing and bookbinding plants across Canada. By the time of its sale in 1989 to an international conglomerate, after 94 years in family hands, Crain's sales were over \$100 million and employed over 1000 people.

Not bad for a Wolford farm boy!

******* the Good Templars *******

It is not unlikely the enterprising Rolla Crain inherited his hard working, straight shooting modest character from his father. About 1845, Hiram Crain came to Wolford Township with his family, settling on a farm just south of Merrickville. As he developed his construction business, Hiram Crain was upset to witness so much drinking in the Community and, with his strong Methodist background, decided to do something about it. With the help of a few kindred souls he organized a "Good Templars" Society which

grew and thrived until in 1874 they were able to build their own "Hall" which became known, as "Carley's Church", located just south of Merrickville at Carley's Corners beside an 1865 school. (still surviving as a private home.)

Meanwhile the sale of intoxicants had fallen off so much that the liquor interests became alarmed. Letters were written to Mr. Crain that his buildings were likely to go up in smoke, if "he did not leave off temperance activities". About that time he tied his horses in a shed in Merrickville, and found when he was ready for home that his good set of harness had been cut to pieces. But none of these things deterred him and opposition seemed only to add to his determination to advance the temperance program. "Carley's Church" thrived and remained active until 1966 when its Congregation in block voted to go to the Merrickville United Church.

Carley's Church was later destroyed by fire and although nothing now remains of the historic Church, its dated cornerstone is in the collection of the Merrickville & District Historical Society Blockhouse Museum.

References:

"Historical sketch of Easton's Corners United Church"
Mrs. Jennie Earl, Mrs. Alice Hughes and
Mrs Donald Empey, July, 1959

Slavery on the Rideau?

It is a little-known and sad reality that African slavery came to Ontario in large part with the United Empire Loyalists who emigrated here after the American Revolution, some bringing slaves with them or purchasing them on arrival.

In Ontario in 1793 Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe, reacting to the forcible removal to the United States of an enslaved Black woman, passed legislation that prohibited the importation of slaves into Upper Canada and set terms that limited slavery here. This "Act to Limit Slavery" which was the first anti-slavery act in the British Empire, signaled the diminishment, but not the end of slavery in Canada.

There is no evidence to indicate the pioneers and frontiersmen who challenged the wild new territories of the Rideau in the late 1700s, such as the Stevens, Burritts or the Merricks brought with them any slaves. But it is a certainty that slavery existed along the shores of the St Lawrence and Lake Ontario in the more "progressive and prosperous" settlements. For Simcoe's 1793 "Act to Limit Slavery" did just that; it did not completely ban the practice of owning slaves and using them in domestic service.



The Grenville County Historical Society newsletter, the *Sentinel*, reports that in 1796 several local Loyalists, wealthy enough to already own slaves did not want to lose their "possessions". These society stalwarts, including the highly regarded Dr. Solomon Jones, a medical officer in Jessup's Rangers and a leading member of Grenville's aristocracy, sent a raiding party to the U.S. in pursuit of "a number of negroes who had deserted their masters". The raiding party caught up with the escapees in the company of a number of Oswegatchie Indians who had sheltered them, and ordered that they "return to their master's homes, which they refused to do".

Apparently in this case, with the support of the Indians who refused to release them, the slaves stayed and the raiders returned empty-handed.

Finally, in 1834 the inhumane practice of slavery was totally abolished across the British Empire, and, much later, in 1863 Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation set American slaves free and in doing so, ignited the bloody American civil war.

References:

Heritage Matters, Ontario Heritage Trust, August 2007,
The Grenville sentinel, Grenville County Historical Society, Apr/May 2007, no. 223

Membership Matters

As always we are very grateful for the support of our members and of the community in general, and are pleased to bring you glimpses of our local history and heritage.

Membership in the historical Society is renewed annually from January to December at a present cost of \$5 per person or \$10 per family. Last year a number of members joined through our \$50 life membership per person category. If you have not already done so, please renew your membership with a cheque payable to the Merrickville & District Historical Society, and send to the address below. Also, if you are interested in keeping in touch via email, be sure and send us your current email address.

It is not a requirement to join the Historical Society to attend our monthly general meetings. They are open to all members of the community. But it helps us to defray costs.

Upcoming Events

This year, following the very successful Rideau 175 series, the Historical Society returns to its regular program of monthly lectures.

Tuesday March 25 "For King & Country", The Military history of Eastern Ontario, by retired Major Harry Needham, at Ste. Marguerite Bourgeoys School, 7:30. Everyone welcome. Refreshments.

Tuesday April 29 Spring Dinner & Speaker

One of the regular highlights of our year is our annual Spring Dinner, to be held this year in the Kilmarnock Room of the Sam Jakes Inn. The event will begin with an open bar at 6:30, followed by dinner. A special delicious dinner has been laid on by Sam Jakes chef, Tom Riding, consisting of an appetizer of soup or salad, a choice of braised beef or salmon, followed by desert, lemon tart or crême caramel. The cost is \$35 per person paid in advance or \$40 at the door, reservations required in any case. Jill Gray, 269-4236

Following dinner, Rideau author and historian Mark Jodoin, will present the story of, Stephen Burritt. "Stephen Burritt, - Soldier, Settler, Spy".

Most of us know the story of Stephen Burritt (U.E.L) and his role in founding the Village named for the Burritts. Less well known is his heroic story of loyalty during the American Revolutionary war, fighting for the British under General Burgoyne and later acting as a daring spy for Rogers Rangers.

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