

The Merrickville and District Historical Society NEWSLETTER

Summer 2004

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Blockhouse Opening

To the Piper's refrain and the Town Crier's proclamation, the Merrickville Blockhouse Museum was opened for the summer by Mayor Douglas Struthers on June 19. Many of the crowd on hand were present to hear the results of the school historical essay contest which were announced shortly after the opening ceremonies. There were a record 56 entries, all from Merrickville Public School and a total of 16 prizes awarded. The first prizes in categories, grades 4,5, 6 and grades 7,8 respectively went to Mark Cornelisse and Leyna Sanger. We are very pleased with the interest of the children in this program which is designed to raise awareness of the history and heritage of our Community. Special thanks to Merrickville Public School Principal, Lorraine Allen and teachers Cathy Porter, Wendy Stashick and Elizabeth Telford for encouraging their students to participate. (For full results see below)



Town Crier, Cy Drake



**Denis Faulkner and Pat Molson
with historical essay winners**

In the evening, the Historical Society held its third annual fundraising reception and Heritage Award presentations. The Awards, are designed to recognize individuals in the Community who have made significant contributions to maintaining and celebrating the Heritage of the Community. The period refrains of Celtic Spice were background to the award presentations which this year first recognized the late Jim Pendergast, soldier, history buff, archeologist and raconteur extraordinaire for his community involvement and for the presentation of his research findings to the Historical Society.

It is widely recognized that Merrickville owes its appeal in large measure to its attractively preserved historic buildings. The Historical Society with its 2004 awards recognized four individuals who have greatly contributed to sustaining that appeal. Heather Dallaire and Daniel Wood were recognized for a heritage restoration which revealed the 1840's stone façade on the historically designated Holden general store. Donald Lockhart was given award for recognizing that owners who acquire a heritage home also acquire a responsibility to protect and preserve it, not only for their own use, but for the enjoyment of the ages. Gary Clarke has been directly involved in several Merrickville heritage preservation projects, including the Sam Jakes Inn and has been a strong advocate for cultural heritage in Merrickville.



Heritage Merit Award Recipients
Left to right: Don Lockhart, Heather Dallaire,
Phyllis Walker accepting (for the late James
Pendergast), Gary Clarke

Village Official Plan

At a public meeting June 17 Merrickville-Wolford unveiled its new Official Plan. This plan will guide development over the next 10 years. In January of 2003, the Historical Society made a submission to the planners urging that the official plan protect the heritage of the Village. It is the common thread that loops through and binds together all of the Village interests. We urged that the plan recognize this reality and include in its recommendations concrete guidelines for development which will preserve the core qualities of our "Jewel of the Rideau".

We are pleased that most of our concerns have been recognized in the official plan. Of prime importance is the area within the historic core of village to be protected with a "special heritage policy". Ironically there is no mention in the plan of the Blockhouse itself, nor any determination to protect and ensure preservation of this Village icon. Other than this glaring exclusion, and a suggestion that the height limitation on new buildings be four stories, (instead of existing three) the plan seems to state a strong intention to maintain the heritage character of the Village. NOW, the key is to be sure the fine objectives of the report are supported by bylaws and regulations to convert these "good intentions" to results. We will be watching with interest on your behalf. The entire report can be viewed on the Village website, which is at www.village.merrickville-wolford.on.ca .

*****Merrickville 1856 Mystery*****

A grizzly discovery was made in 1856 when the dissected body of a young woman was discovered in a sack on the river bank near Merrickville. The episode was reported in the Merrickville Chronicle, June 14, 1856. Investigation led to charges being laid against a Doctor Ault, (Burritys Rapids), a Doctor Thibido and George Whitmarsh. Apparently, the young woman, identified as Catherine Connors of Burritys Rapids had died of a "remarkable disease" and her body had been removed from the grave for medical investigation. The Bathurst Courier of the day noted. "The doctor, for the sake of common decency at all events, should have re-interred the remains after dissection, instead of sewing them in a sack and throwing them in the river". At a trial in October, 1856, the men were found "not guilty"

National Library, Public Archives per Joe Loepky, 1978

Historical Society Archives

We are very fortunate to have accumulated an invaluable record of the history of our Village and area. It is one of the prime objectives of the current Historical Society executive to first, index the material in the archives to make them more accessible to interested researchers, and to find a more appropriate storage area for these important documents. Attractive as the Blockhouse Museum is, its absence of heating, ventilation and humidity control make it impractical, even dangerous for the storage of historic documents. WE DESPERATELY NEED A SECURE SPOT, ABOUT 100 TO 150 SQUARE FEET, WITH ADEQUATE TEMPERATURE AND HUMIDITY CONTROL WHERE WE CAN STORE THESE IRREPLACEABLE DOCUMENTS. If you can help us, please contact Denis Faulkner, President of the Merrickville & District Historical Society, 269-3067. As an example of the important information we are anxious to preserve we are quoting excerpts from a paper the late Dr. Newman presented to the Historical Society in 1967

Excerpt from "Andrewsville and Adjacent Properties" by LH Newman to the Historical Society, March 28, 1967

"Andrewsville lies midway between Merrickville and Burritts Rapids on the north side of the Rideau River in the township of Montague, county of Lanark. At present it consists of [a few] houses and no industries, but, at one time, it was a thriving little village. In 1880, the population was over 200, while it could boast a well built grist mill, a shingle mill and a saw mill. It also had a store and a post office, in the days before the advent of Rural Mail delivery. There was also a cheese factory, a thriving tavern and a blacksmith shop"

[Dr Newman recalls as a child in the early days of the 20th century, taking grist, grown on his farm, to be ground into flour. Says Dr Newman, "In those days, baker's bread at 5 cents a loaf was too expensive and otherwise unacceptable. . . The method of payment for these grists was by what was known as "Toll" - that is, a percentage of the flour produced was kept by the miller. A common amount to keep was 1/10 th. At one time the miller let it be known that henceforth he would deduct 1/15th instead of 1/10th, a suggestion that was violently opposed by his customers who argued that 1/10 th was sufficient."]

"The grist mill was built in 1861 for Rufas Andrews, who owned the adjacent farm, [and] from whom Andrewsville got its name. Mr. Andrews apparently was quite optimistic regarding the future of the Village as he had it surveyed and laid out in 40 foot streets with lots 100 feet by 100 feet. [But] with the passage of time, the development of large scale milling enterprises gradually pushed these smaller mills out of business and in due course, the Old Andrewsville Grist Mill came to be included in the casualties.

[Having passed to several owners from the Andrews . it was dismantled in 1917. Similarly the Carding mill which had been situated just west of the Grist Mill closed for lack of sheep, the Andrews saw mill was converted briefly to a harness hame factory, then in 1899 converted into an electric power plant.]

The Blacksmith shop in Andrewsville was operated by Wm. Quinn, who eventually moved to Merrickville where he converted an old building into a workable shop and where he carried on almost to the time of his death. . . The old tavern, long the centre of social activity, closed its doors about 1900, not as a result of lack of patronage, but because of economic changes peculiar to the time. From then on the Village was never the same, according to some of the older patrons."

[Dr. Newman tells of other Mills and early residents of the area, such as. "Mrs. Keating who lived mostly on tobacco and charity. She was a good hearted old lady who seemed to have a particular attraction for the younger generation. Perhaps her cookies had something to do with it." Dr. Newman continues.]

"There were many other characters in this area. . One can recall the annual visitation of the gypsies who used to camp "up the Quarry Road." Tramps were also frequent callers

in those days, and it was not unusual to find one in the hay mow in the morning. The itinerant peddler with his huge sack of needles and safety pins, shoe laces and cheap kitchenware was also a regular visitor.

Then there were the Indians, who emerged each spring from their abodes situated somewhere in the back woods with their large hand made sleighs loaded with baskets of all shapes and sizes. But all these people gradually disappeared with the arrival of the automobile and less exacting times."

******* did you know ? *******

The lovely Nicholson Locks in Andrewsville (the "Flats" for you long timers) . . "are named for Robert Nicholson Sr. who was farming near Albany NY when the American revolution broke out.. For widely proclaiming his refusal to join "the damn Rebels", as he called them, he was thrown in jail and his lands confiscated. From Albany he was taken to Sopers NY, from which place he escaped. He made his way to Canada, joining the Royal Ranges under General Burgoyne where he served with distinction. After 1784 when the Corps was abandoned, Nicholson was granted a lot in Augusta township. From there he moved to the Rideau River, on the north side. Upon his death in 1829 he was buried in McGuigan Cemetery."

Dr. L. H. Newman 1967

****** did you know why? *******

The first meeting of the Council of the newly incorporated Village of "Mirickville" in May, 1860 was not held in the Town Hall, but rather in the City Hotel, (now still operating as "the Goose and Gridiron"). Although the Langford designed and built "Old Town Hall", the 3 story stalwart stone structure on Main Street, had been built in 1856, it had been built for the use of the Township of Wolford and was not turned over to the Village for use until later in 1860. Apparently municipal and township jurisdictional rivalries are not new.

Heritage Quilt Fundraising Lucky Draw

Heather Dallaire, owner of the Knock-Knock Shoppe and Artiques Floral Gallery in the Village has generously donated a beautiful hand made double ring pattern "wedding quilt", King size, complete with two pillow cases, to be the prize in a Heritage lucky draw. The winner will be drawn at the Blockhouse at the end of the fall season. Tickets will be \$2 each, 3 for \$5 and be available later this summer at the Blockhouse, (where the quilt will be on display), and from the Knock Knock shop, the Artiques Gallery, as well as members of the Historical Society executive. All proceeds will go to the Merrickville & District Historical Society. Thanks to Heather and Daniel Wood for their generosity.

Essay Contest

As reported earlier, the school essay contest was great fun and a great success. Runner up prize winners in the grades 4,5,6 category were Robert McNaughton and Chelsea Gray and for grades 7,8 Mark Simonyi and Nick Hanson. Honourable mentions in 4,5,6 went to Patrick Steele, Brennan MacDonald, Paul Simonyi, Ryleigh Calvert and Harrison Hitsman. For grades 7,8 Honourable mentions went to Heather McTavish, Jessica Ayoub, Ariel Bonneau, Adam Gallaro and Rachel Bleackly. Congratulations to all



photo by Gustave Pellerin

**Denis Faulkner with some of the
Historical Essay winners**

the prize winners and all the participants. The essays, which show great imagination and talent are available for viewing over the summer in blockhouse. Be sure and drop in and see the work of these imaginative and talented youngsters.

Thanks again to Gustave Pellerin for the great Blockhouse Opening day photos. Gustave is a hard working volunteer for the Society and in real life, a professional photographer.

The Merricks (part 3)

William Merrick: Where did he come from? How did he get here? What did he accomplish? And what was he like? (conclusion – part three)

In the previous segments, Mr. Abbott, a great-great-great grandson of William Merrick, told us how frontiersman Merrick together with his partner Roger Stevens explored up and down the Rideau before selecting the most suitable site for their lumber mill. While there is debate regarding the original arrival of Merrick and Stevens at the site which became Merricks Mills, and indeed the nature of their partnership, there is little doubt about the success of their growing enterprise. In this final segment Kim Abbott describes the growth of the Merricks in their new community, and adds personal insights from family records and oral history. (Excerpted from Mr. Abbott's presentations to the Merrickville & District Historical Society, 1966 & 1993).

I believe that 1794 is the accepted date for the founding of Merricks Mills, as it was known in those days. The difference of a year or two is of little significance, but the original land title issued to William Merrick in 1810, after the surveyors finally laid out the boundaries of his land, reveals that the steps necessary to obtain land title to crown land were acted upon in 1790.

His family probably moved here later. The three eldest children, Charlotte, William, and Charles, were born at Elizabethtown, and though Sylvia may have spent some time here during the summers, she probably resided at the Frontier [Elizabethtown] until the mid-seventeen-nineties. It took three years to get the saw mill running, and what a day it must have been when the water was finally turned on. The mill was one of the earliest in Upper Canada. By 1800, a grist mill and a saw mill were in full operation.

The Merrick family prospered. William's house was substantial and smacked of affluence. The Aaron Merrick house, which was built later by Samuel Langford, is still one of the outstanding stone houses built in Eastern Ontario. The Merricks had seven children. Charlotte, the eldest, was born in 1791 and married Elisha Collar of Merrickville; William Jr, my ancestor, was born on March 28, 1793, and married Judith Roche the William Roche



William Roche Merrick & wife Jane c 1870

Merrick & wife Jane c 1870 daughter of William and Ann Roche of County Cork Ireland; . Charles born on January 10, 1796, moved to Carleton Place, and then lost contact with other members of the family; Aaron born on October 1, 1800, married Mary Burritt of Easton Corners; Lavinia born on August 20, 1803, married Abel Ward of Smiths Falls, a town originally called Wardsville; Stephen, born on June 4, 1807, married Margaret Ardele; and Terrance born on July 11, 1813, married Amelia Sherwood of Brockville. According to my count, William and Sylvia had forty-five grandchildren which, on its own, was a substantial contribution.

William Merrick died in 1844. His wife Sylvia followed a few years later. They are both buried here [in Merrickville] in the old cemetery at the foot of Collar Hill, together with their eldest child, Charlotte, and her husband. They were interred under Welsh style stone box grave markers.

I can only give you my impressions drawn from the family and the little research that I have been able to undertake. I don't think that he was a popular man. After all he was running things here and it wasn't called Merricks Mills for nothing. He was a man with a vision and determination born from survival in the wilderness. There is nothing in the background from his family to suggest that he would let anything stand in the way of his objectives. Thank God for him, and people like him. They may be difficult to live with, but they get things done.

Henry Dolfus Smith - the first foundry man?

The next time you enter the liquor store at Elgin and Brock street, pause to imagine this fine stone structure as one of the most important early industrial structures in Merrickville. It was built about 1861, (without automatically opening doors) by Henry Dolfus Smith whose earlier wooden foundry building had been destroyed by fire. He had purchased the land from Stephen Merrick in 1855 and on it built 80' by 120' building seen today. Smith had apparently developed his foundry from a Merrickville blacksmith operation in 1851. His early partner was William Henry Magee and working in his office as a clerk was a young William Pearson. While fame and fortune in Merrickville were to come to Magee and Pearson from the development of their foundry operations, Henry Dolfus Smith, after serving as the first M.M.P for North Leeds and Grenville seems to not only have left Merrickville, but has left little mark on the Village.

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John Cowan, Editor

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