

The Merrickville and District Historical Society NEWSLETTER

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The Historic Rideau Steamers

The only cruise ship operating today that traverses the length of the Rideau, the Kawartha Voyager has been designed to exactly fit into the length of a Rideau lock. To do this, it pulls the neat trick of folding up its bow. Passengers on board are treated to great hospitality, wonderful food and of course the terrific scenery of the Rideau on the five day (one way) cruise between Kingston and Ottawa.



photo by Ken Watson

Kawartha Voyager

The Kawartha Voyager is a modern day reincarnation of the "palace steamer"; passenger vessels designed to fit into a Rideau lock. A vessel has to be less than 111 feet in length to allow room for the gates to swing inside the lock. At 120 feet long the Kawartha Voyager would never fit. But with the bow raised, its length is reduced to 108 feet, allowing it to traverse the locks with ease.



photo by Lenore Newman

Ottawa c 1930

The glory days of Rideau cruise ships were in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when "palace steamers" plied the route. In 1887, a five day round trip aboard the Ella Ross, from Montreal to Ottawa, down the Rideau to Kingston and then back to Montreal on the St. Lawrence cost \$18.00 (a cabin and meals were included in the price). The last of these steamers, the Ottawan, did its final run in 1935., *ref Coral Lindsay*

These steamers were designed to take maximum advantage of a Rideau Lock. The Ella Ross was 99.2 feet long by 27.8 feet wide, the Kathleen was 105.4 feet long by 26.4 feet wide, the Rideau King was 107 feet long by 23.4 feet wide and the

Rideau Queen and the Ottawan were both 108 feet long by 24 feet wide. *reference Ken Watson, Rideau-info.com*

Be sure to attend the Rideau 175 lecture series presentation by Coral Lindsay, for more on the wonderful photos age of Rideau Steamers. (see information below)

Historical Society Annual Meeting, November 2006

At the annual meeting of the Merrickville & District Historical Society, Treasurer Andrew McKay reported on the financial strength of the Society. Revenues were strong, expenses were on budget and our reserve comfortable. Blockhouse manager **David Hammonds** then described the extremely successful season at the Blockhouse Museum with

attendance and donations at record levels. The decision to open seven days a week, and the support of volunteers who kept the Museum open 23 extra days on weekends in the early spring and fall were major contributors to the success. In total the Blockhouse

Museum was open a recent record 101 days. Following these reports, President **John Cowan** presented a summary of activities as follows. "This was another good year for the Historical Society. As you have heard we have had the most successful summer at the blockhouse in recent years, and have managed to keep our fiscal house in order."

But the year has been successful in many other ways. Membership Chair **Sheena Cowan** has reported membership is up over 20% and we are particularly pleased to have 14 new life members this year. We are grateful not only for the payment of dues, but for the participation of membership, in attending our meetings and serving as volunteers for Blockhouse duty and other tasks.

We are always looking for folks to help out in numerous ways, and I urge you to speak to **Pat Molson**, who among other duties is responsible for volunteer activities. It is important to repeat that volunteers made it possible to open the Blockhouse on weekends in late Spring and early Autumn for a total of 23 days over and above the regular Summer opening of the Blockhouse. This activity involved 16 different Society members, most of whom did multiple duty and contributed importantly to the record attendance and level of donations at the Blockhouse in the 2006 season.

Our archive documentation and preservation project has also made excellent headway this year under **Dieter Rath's** management and just this October, we have secured environmentally appropriate space in our new archives quarters, in the lower level of the Old Town Hall. Here we will not only be able to access the records year round, but, we will move a step closer to achieving our objective of making them accessible to our members and visitors.

During this year we worked with Parks Canada in improving Blockhouse Museum displays to emphasize the National Historic site which is the Blockhouse, just in time for the celebrations surrounding the 175th anniversary of the Rideau Canal, and the likely UNESCO designation as a world heritage site. With **Fred Grodde's** direction, **Janet Glaves** and **Jane Anne MacIntyre** enjoyed tracking down and documented some 52 historically important properties in rural Merrickville-Wolford. This work, which will continue next year is the basis for our better understanding of our important history and heritage, beyond the Village. **Beverley Burpee** was a big help in this area also. In the area of Easton's Corners, Jasper and Kilmarnock **David and Gillian Hammonds** are similarly documenting important rural properties as well as forgotten transportation lines and routes.

During the year, your executive committee met nine times with **Dick Hegan** recording minutes. We presented, with **Denis Faulkner's** continuing help, eight interesting monthly speakers meetings. Beverley Burpee as hospitality chair ensured our facilities were arranged and our members were well received. The newsletter was produced three times and our web site, funded by Minto Foundation and generously created and supported at no cost to us by **Ken Watson** is a great success. Even we were surprised at receiving over 1000 "visits" per month to our web site. At our Spring dinner, we presented Heritage Awards of Merit to **Liz and Garth Wallace** and, **Lenore Newman** and, posthumously to Lenore's father **Len Newman**.

In all, as the song says, "It was a Very Good year".

As we look forward to 2007 we see another busy and interesting year. There are three major focuses for 2007, in addition to the regular activities of the Society. The first involves the reconfiguration of the Blockhouse Museum to more clearly display the military intention of the Blockhouse and its importance as a National Historic site. This will involve the layout and rearrangement of some of the present exhibits. We will be looking for help here. In particular, First Vice-President, **Pat Molson**, head of volunteers

is looking for someone to carry the 378 lb Percival stove upstairs.

Although the International Plowing Match to be held in Crosby in September 2007 does not directly effect us, we are planning to have an historical presence at this important event. **Wayne Poapst** and **David Hammonds** will be our key players in this event.

I would like to express appreciation to two retiring directors. **George Yap's** clarity of thought and perception were essential in our creation of our ten year vision statement and plan, and **Frederick Martin** who has worked tirelessly on behalf of the Historical Society as we have continued our rebuilding program. **Gustave Pellerin's** excellent photography, we hope will continue, beyond his term as a key member of the Committee.

Much as we will miss these three able Volunteers, we are pleased to be recommending two capable additions to the Executive. **Gillian Gray** who has already great past experience with the Historical Society is returning to harness, and will look after ticket sales for the Rideau 175 lecture Series and **Nina Donald** will help **Denis Faulkner** with publicity for the event

Merrickville Women's Institute

In Merrickville, during the first two thirds of the 20th century, an association of active women played a major role in the welfare of the people of the Village. Formed in 1910 before the days of social systems of comprehensive welfare and health care, a group of dedicated women, the Women's Institute, worked diligently to meet the needs of the Community.

Adelaide Hoodless, the Institute's founder whose young child had died turned her personal tragedy into a uniquely Canadian public movement. From its rural Ontario roots in 1897 the Women's Institute grew into a worldwide organization. The Merrickville Chapter, the first of several in the District, was formed in 1910, with its founding President the redoubtable Mary Pearson.

Although its original purpose aimed at educating young rural women to work in domestic service, it quickly evolved to focus on emerging social issues and became one of the first women's advocacy groups. For 80 years from 1910 until 1988, one of its most active branches was here in Merrickville. In the early years, courses were held in cooking, sewing, home nutrition, childcare and handicrafts. The format was a lecture with a demonstration, followed by a question period. Later broader social issues were discussed and petitions prepared for Government. Because each Woman's Institute operated at the community level, each was able to quickly adapt to fulfill the specific local needs.

During the first and second world wars, the Institute undertook the administration of "Red Cross" parcels and, in 1931 acquired the property for the Merrickville cenotaph and erected the Cairn to Commemorate the soldiers serving and lost in battle between 1914 and 1918.

While the Women's Institute continues to exist and now has over nine million members in over 70 countries, the Merrickville Chapter was discontinued in 1988, perhaps the victim of increased Government involvement in social systems which tended to replace the importance of Volunteer services. Whatever the reason for its demise, during the some 80 years of its existence, it formed an important part of Merrickville's history.

Merrickville's Remarkable Foundry History (part one)

The story of Merrickville's industrial history is



Merrickville's Alloy Foundry

generally told in terms of its successful mills; the lumber, shingle, grist and woolen mills begun by the enterprising Merrick family. Lesser known is the remarkable story of the Merrickville foundries which formed the core of its industrial complex and were largely responsible for the surge of growth that made Merrickville one of the most successful industrial complexes in Eastern Ontario in the mid to late 19th century. Not only did the foundries supply components for the some 30 other Merrickville factories,, but their agricultural and domestic products were shipped all over Canada. In today's jargon, the foundry was the centre of excellence around which other manufacturing operations located and prospered.

Now, the water powered mills which produced prosperity have gone and in the old industrial complex all is quiet . . except for one remarkable business, a foundry, now operated as the Alloy Foundry and Village Metalsmiths by Karl and Linda Feige. The latest link in a continuous chain, dating back to 1840, it is the oldest continuously operating foundry in Canada and still produces quality metal products, some from original 19th century moulds.

Merrickville's foundry business grew out of the blacksmith trade which always was one of the earliest pioneer services in every settlement. But the blacksmith mainly worked at bending, and shaping metal rods. It was not until the Rideau Canal provided easy access to pig iron that the foundry business really caught fire. (in some cases literally). Pig iron made it possible to melt and cast large agricultural and domestic implements, products for which Merrickville became known.

The most well known and successful of the several foundries that existed in Merrickville was The Percival Plow and Stove Company. It evolved from several earlier partnerships and in its hey day shipped its agricultural and domestic products all over Ontario.

An early foundry industrialist was Henry Dolfus Smith. Born around 1821 on a farm in Wolford, he apparently came to Merrickville around 1853 at which time he acquired a foundry in the Village perhaps buying out the earlier foundry of Messrs. Lilly and Hogg. By 1861 his foundry operated in the location of the present liquor store.. He also had an interest in the foundry of William H. Magee on the North side of the Rideau River. One of the most prominent men of his time, by 1861 he also owned a blacksmith shop and a tannery located on the southeast corner of Lewis and St Lawrence. He became the Reeve of Merrickville and was a controversial member of the Provincial legislature.

It appears, however that as his business interests broadened, he lost interest in the foundry and by 1859 William Pearson, who had been a bookkeeper for Smith at his foundry had joined William Magee to form Magee and Pearson Foundry Co operating in the same location as the present Alloy Foundry. Their business clearly prospered with Pearson purchasing the fine stone home of William Merrick, (now fittingly owned by Karl and Linda Feige), and W. Magee building an impressive red brick home north of the River, now the Millisle Bed & Breakfast.

After almost 30 years of successful operation, Mr. Magee died (in 1887) and the business was sold to Roger C. Percival, who created the next link in the chain, eventually with his son, renaming the business "The Percival Plow and Stove Company."

Mr. Percival was born in 1837 on a farm about three miles east of Burritt's Rapids in what we used to call the Percival Settlement. He continued to farm until 21 years of age when he established a small foundry in Kemptville. After three years he moved to Pembroke where he started another foundry which specialized in stumping machines and ran successfully for a number of years.

Then late in 1887 he heard that William Magee had died and the Magee and Pearson works in Merrickville was for sale. Immediately he returned to Merrickville, came to terms with William Pearson and Magee's heirs and bought the property. He then sold his business in Pembroke to the Delahey Bros. and moved with his family to Merrickville. By the terms of the agreement dated 30 December 1887, R. C. Percival was awarded the entire Magee and Pearson foundry works including buildings, machinery, water power privileges and right of way plus one acre of land in North Merrickville for \$16,000.

The Percivals apparently prospered from the beginning owing in part to the fine foundation laid by their successful predecessors. From then until 1913, the Percivals, Roger C. and his son, Tomas Henry Percival developed the company which became known as the Percival Plow and Stove Company, employing 100 men, into the major manufacturing facility in Merrickville.

*Ref L. Newman, 1969 and R Tatley, 1976
Next time, the story of Percival Plow and its successors.*



Percival Plow and Stove Co c 1895

Rideau Lecture Series Update

The preparations are over and the 175 Lecture series is about to begin. Over a year ago your Historical Society began to plan a lecture series to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the opening of the Rideau Canal. We are pleased to report the Series has been extremely well received by speakers, sponsors, you our members as well as the public in general. We are literally assured of being able to present a memorable affair. The first lecture in the series will be held on Sunday afternoon March 18 in the Merrickville United Church. In it, Brian J Osborne, Professor Emeritus, Queens University and past President of the Ontario Historical Society presents an overview of how the Rideau Canal has functioned continuously for 175 years, albeit with shifting priorities.

In Professor Osborn's words, "The Rideau was constructed in response to the military contingencies arising out of nineteenth century continental geopolitics. However, its story is also about how it came to function as an important element of economic and social connections, and how it has established itself as an important element of local, regional, and national heritage."

This opening presentation will address several questions. What was the rationale for the Herculean effort required to link Montreal with Kingston? What are the principal elements of the innovative technology of the Rideau Waterway? What have been the several agencies of imperial, colonial, and federal control as the Rideau encountered shifting priorities? What are the opportunities and challenges to be encountered as the Rideau aspires to greater national and international attention as a heritage site meriting world attention?

By "Approaching the Rideau" in this way, Professor Osborne will set the scene and context for the several themes to be explored over the next ninth months of this important commemorative year. With the first lecture just over three weeks away, the nine lecture series promises to be an event which will make Merrickville proud.

Help Wanted – this means YOU!

In this busy celebratory year, we are looking for volunteer help in several areas. It would be great if you can help us make our plans a big success.

Blockhouse Re-Arrangement. March-April-May The new layout of the Blockhouse Museum will require moving and re-arranging most of the existing artifacts to accommodate the new Parks Canada Blockhouse and Canal History exhibits. It's a sweat equity job, (although sweating is unlikely in the frigid Blockhouse) and the payoff is you will be among the first to see the new Blockhouse Museum layouts. If you can help, please call Blockhouse Manager, David Hammonds. 269-2832

Blockhouse Spring Cleaning Each year it is necessary to evict the flies, spiders, smudge and dust that have taken up winter residence in the Blockhouse. This year the cleanup will be on May 12, 2007. Bring a broom and windex and join the work party. Call or just show up about 10:00 AM. David Hammonds. 269-2832

Rideau 175 Lecture (9 Sundays, March through November) Given the number of people expected to attend the Rideau 175 Lecture Series we will need a number of helpers in two areas. Ushers, Marshals, ticket punchers, lecture set-up etc. call Denis Faulkner, 269-3067. And hospitality and refreshments and cleanup call Bev Burpee, 269-2772

Blockhouse Visitor Reception Weekends May 19 to June 17 In order to accommodate visitors prior to the hiring of summer students we are looking for people who will spend a few hours on a weekend welcoming visitors to the Blockhouse. It is really fun to meet folks from all over the world, and don't worry, we'll tell you all you need to know. Call Pat Molson 269-4092

Upcoming Events

Once again we will have an interesting program for members and guests.

Rideau 175 Lecture Series, Merrickville United Church, 2:00 pm

March 18 The Historic Rideau – Brian Osborne
April 15 the Rideau Route – Ken Watson
May 27 the War of 1812 – Victor Suthren
June 17 Building the Canal - Mark Andrews

April 24 Annual Spring Dinner & Merit Awards

, Special Guest Sir John A MacDonald and Lady Agnes Mac Donald



**Sir John A. And Lady Agnes
MacDonald
Depicted by Brian & Renee Porter 5**

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Merrickville and District Historical Society
PO Box 294
Merrickville, Ontario K0G 1N0

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