

The Merrickville and District Historical Society NEWSLETTER

Winter 2004

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A Walk Down Memory Lane

An overflow audience was led by Lenore Newman on a photo trip through time to the streets of historic Andrewsville. This once thriving village, now a quiet hamlet has been almost forgotten, except by the few lucky families that live there.

Our guide could not have been more qualified. Not only did Lenore spend most of her youth in the area of "the Flats" (as Andrewsville was known by Merrickville residents), but, her ancestors were early pioneers in the area. The Newmans farmed along the north side of the Rideau between Merrickville and Burritts Rapids near the Village of Andrewsville. Her Grandfather John Newman became Lockmaster at Clowes Lock and her father Dr. Leonard H. Newman, born at Clowes Locks in 1881, was a frequent contributor to the Historical Society.

In a presentation in 1967 he remembered as a boy taking grist of wheat to be ground into flour at the Cooks Mill in Andrewsville. Cooks Mill was the successor to the mill originally built by Rufus Andrew.



SS No. 1 Montague

On the Heritage highway we saw a picture of the school, SS Montague No. 1 where Lenore attended as a child. (The school was destroyed by fire many years ago). A little to the east, of the road leading to the Village the attractive stone "Loyalist cottage" of Rufus Andrews, after whom the Village was named still stands. A short walk down from the highway brought us to the centre of the Village where we saw photos of homes, most



Rufus Andrews Home

now gone , but some surviving, that formed the heart of what was once a thriving village of 200 residents.

As we approached the river we imagined we were walking out on the bridge and looked back at the Cooks Mill, dominating the scene to the east of the present Rideau River overpass.



John Newman & Ab Davis

A little further up river we could almost see Lockmaster John Newman posing with his young assistant Ab Davis by the winch at Clowes lock.



Cooks Mill, Andrewsville

Many of us, who are recent arrivals in the area felt privileged to be able to hear this wonderful first hand account of "the Flats". When driving over the old bridge at Nicholsons lock to Andrewsville, I am sure, like me, many have asked, "I wonder what was here?" Thanks Lenore for the recollections and for bringing this area back to life for us.



photo by Gustave Pellerin

**Denis Faulkner with Lenore Newman &
Andrewsville photos**

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

The original saw mill built by Rufas Andrews at Andrewsville eventually was converted to an electrical power plant which supplied supplementary power to Kemptville until 1930 when high spring floods destroyed it. Only a few stone parapets from the power house dam are now visible west of the present Andrewsville bridge. Of Cooks Mill there is nothing remaining but a few stones just downstream from the bridge, but, if you travel to Upper Canada Village you can see the original mill stone used in the Cooks mill.

Do You Think You Have it Rough ?

We all know of the hardships faced by early pioneers, many of them United Empire Loyalists who founded the Lower Rideau settlements. Kim Abbott described their lives in this 1967 presentation to the Historical Society.

Most settlers came with the clothes they had on their backs and the few personal possessions they could carry.

They were dropped off at various points on the river adjacent to the land that had been set aside for them, and they were given meager and inadequate equipment to begin their arduous task of living off the land. Just stop for a minute and imagine their situation. Their equipment was practically non-existent. Some had old army tents, but many simply slept under the stars or under lean-tos. The settlers had been supplied with axes, obtained from the Royal Navy, with small handles that made them little better than barnyard hatchets.

Even striking a fire was a major project, for the match as we know it wasn't invented until about 1829, and once started the fire had to be kept going. The first job was to make a small clearing, build a log shanty for warmth and prepare a small patch of soil for a garden. Nails, windows, shingles and sawn timber, were luxuries that few were likely to obtain. Most of the log shanties consisted of a small room with an earthen floor, no windows, and a hole in the roof to let the smoke out. As hinges were not available the doorways were often covered by old blankets or skins.

The cracks in the logs were chinked with clay, and in some cases where clay was not available moss or similar material was used. Food was an equally difficult problem. At the beginning the government supplied small rations of hardtack, flour and pork, which could be supplemented to some extent from the rivers, lakes and forests but it was a meager living, and it was common for meals to consist of hardened cornmeal cut into slices and fried. When the government discontinued the rations in 1789 there was a wide

spread famine which resulted in terrible misery and suffering. It was strictly a question of survival of the fittest and the weak didn't last very long.

Many had come from the towns and cities of New England, and were facing the rigors of the frontier for the first time. The St. Lawrence was their means of transportation, and most tended to cling to it, as it provided the direct links with the larger centres of Montreal and Kingston. Few ventured into the interior as the backwoods areas seemed to emphasize and intensify the lonely frustrations that had been imposed upon them.

But in these surroundings of difficulty and adjustment, there were a few men and women who stood out from the others, and who seemed to be at home in these new surroundings. For them this was not a new experience, but a continuation of the westward expansion that their families had been caught up in since the early days of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. They were the New England frontiersmen, the Burritts, the Stevens, the Eastons, the Merricks, the Wards and others whose names are still familiar in this area. They brought with them the spirit of independence and the qualities of fortitude that were so necessary for survival in the wilderness of Upper Canada. They were the people who rolled back the wilderness, and established the Lower Rideau settlements that have grown to the communities we have now come to enjoy.

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

At the beginning of the War of 1812, William Merrick was asked by the Government to build the stockade for Fort Wellington at Prescott. He hired a group of carpenters and axemen and the stockade was erected quickly. They hadn't forgotten their Indian fighting days, and knew how to protect themselves.

- J K Abbott, 1967

2004 Annual Meeting and Summary

The annual meeting of the Merrickville & District Historical Society was held on November 30, at Ste. Marguerite Bourgeoys School. The Society thanks this school for the facilities it has regularly made available for our meetings. Denis Faulkner, President, reported it has been a very busy and successful year for your Society. Our membership has jumped to 149 members, including 21 Life members. We like to think these statistics reflect a satisfaction with the programs we have provided. He expressed thanks to all the committee members and volunteers who worked to make the year so successful.

The season officially started in January with an enthusiastic presentation by Derry Thompson on the historic William McGee house, now the Millisle B&B. In February, celebrating Heritage week, we held a joint meeting with Heritage Merrickville at the historic Old Town Hall, at which heritage consultant Carl Bray expounded the positive practical advantages of preserving "Heritage".



The Merrickville Band in front of the Old Town Hall – 1886

In March ex-Merrickville postmaster (and budding actor) Jim Skelding showed how Merrickville's history has been captured in postcard images. Attendees at our spring dinner in April heard Kelly Baatnes, Historical Society Committee member and curator of the Mississippi Valley Textile Museum, describe the

"Rise & Fall" of the Textile Industry in the greater Lanark area.

Our Blockhouse Museum was officially opened by Mayor Doug (red hat) Struthers on June 19. At the opening we awarded to students of Merrickville

Public School our third annual prizes for the school historic essay contest. Upstairs in the Museum we were treated to quilting and rug hooking displays and displays from neighboring museums and historical societies. Outside, presentations by the Parks Canada Riflemen and Blacksmith entertained visitors. In the evening our fundraising reception featured presentation of the 2004 Heritage Award certificates to Gary Clarke, Heather Dallaire and Daniel Wood, Don Lockhart and, posthumously, to James Pendergast.

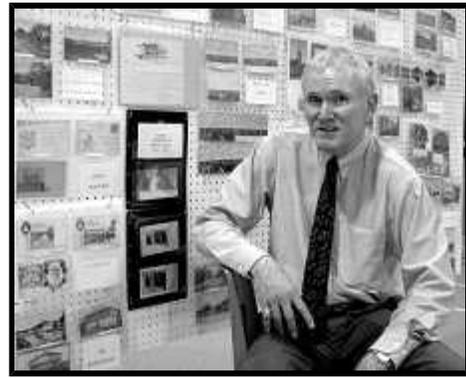


photo by Gustave Pellerin

Jim Skelding in front of his historic post card display

The fall sessions were equally interesting, starting with Lenore Newman's September presentation on "the Flats" (see above), and continuing with Nancy Dulmage's, "Dear Old Golden Rule Days - A History of the One-Room Schools in Wolford Township". Finally Brian Reid closed out the monthly lecture series with a presentation on the Military tradition in Grenville county.

Among other achievements were, the publication of the newsletter, the creation of a popular walking tour brochure, a start at preservation of the archives and a number of fun activities conducted by the volunteers (see below). Also at the November Annual Meeting, the members heard from Treasurer Andrew McKay of the healthy state of Historical Society finances, thanks to the generosity of our members and donors. The official meeting closed with the election of directors and officers.



photo by Gustave Pellerin

2005 Merrickville & District Historical Society Executive
Back row - Gustave Pellerin, Beverly Burpee, Andrew McKay,
Fred Grodde, Pat Molson, Frederick Martin
Front row - George Yap, Denis Faulkner, Sheena Cowan, John Cowan
Absent from photo - Janet Johnston, Kelly Baatnes, Dieter Raths.

Thanks to MDHS Volunteers - 2004

Our members, who volunteer their time in support of the Historical Society, are deserving of a special note of recognition for all their efforts in 2004. Not only do their contributions make it possible to pursue the objectives of the MDHS generally by organizing activities to enhance its visibility and engendering interest in the history of the Village and surrounding region, but they also play a significant role in sustaining the financial viability of the Society. This "volunteerism" takes many different forms,

including serving on the Executive Committee, working to improve and preserve our archives, creating photographic records of our activities, evaluating student essay contest submissions, conducting walking tours in the Village, assisting in the organization of events such as our monthly talks or annual wine and cheese reception, preparing and disseminating the newsletter, participating in Blockhouse and McGuigan Cemetery clean-up and maintenance projects and staffing the Blockhouse Museum on weekends in the Spring and early Autumn.

Two activities in 2004 are worthy of particular mention. Four walking tours of the Village were led by MDHS volunteers on separate dates during the Summer.

On the occasion of the "invasion" of Merrickville by the Red Hat Society ladies on July 7-8, four walking tour groups

took to the streets of the Village concurrently and the involvement and support of Mayor Struthers in this event was most appreciated. Given the MDHS responsibility for managing and maintaining the Blockhouse Museum, there is a particular interest in keeping it open for visitors beyond the core summer season (latter part of June to Labour Day) for which we were able to secure funding for summer students. In 2004, 22 individual MDHS volunteers made it possible to open the Blockhouse on 21 weekend days during the "shoulder" seasons (Victoria Day weekend to mid June and Labour Day through Thanksgiving Day weekends). During these periods, there were 1329 visitors from Canada, USA, Europe and even Japan - an average of 63 persons/day - with a significant increase in donations to the MDHS evidenced over previous years.

An ongoing objective of the MDHS is to increase the number of volunteers willing to take on particular activities with a view to spreading the workload as widely as possible - the old adage "many hands make light work" seems appropriate in these circumstances. A special note of thanks to all our 2004 "extra duty" volunteers: Kelly Baatnes, Irene and David Briggs, Beverley Burpee, Sheena and John Cowan, Rhoda and Cy Drake, Ruth and Walter Fahrig, Denis Faulkner, Janet Glaves, Fred Grodde, Gillian and David Hammonds, Janet Johnson, Julie Kennedy, Frederick Martin, Jane-Anne McIntyre, Andrew McKay, Andrée and Pat Molson, Gustave Pellerin, Dieter Raths, Marie Simon, Joan Taylor Smith, Huguette Beaucaire White, George Yap.

- Pat Molson, Chairman - Volunteers

New volunteers to help out with Society activities are very much welcomed and, if you are interested, please contact Denis Faulkner at 269-2136 or Pat Molson at 269-4092.



photo by Gustave Pellerin

Pat Molson inviting "the Red Hats" on a walking tour

Village Official Plan Update

We had previously reported general satisfaction with the new guidelines for development in the "New Official Plan" which will preserve the core qualities of our "Jewell of the Rideau". We are pleased to see the latest draft has specified in its general purpose, the protection of the "heritage qualities" of the Village and the intention to protect the Blockhouse Museum. The recommendation to reduce the building height to three stories (from four) in the historic core was also included. One significant remaining concern is the absence in the Plan of any intention to improve traffic management in the present Village core. Not only does the increased heavy truck traffic represent a safety and noise hazard, but, the vibration caused by these highway vehicles is causing structural damage

to our heritage stone structures. (Two thirds of the 33 designated historic structures are located on the routes followed by highways 43 and 15 through the centre of the Village.) Your executive has made this concern known and is optimistic the traffic problem will be addressed in the final Plan.

Quilt Fundraising Lucky Winner

The winner of the Historic Quilt Draw was announced at the annual Meeting November 30. Wendy Lywood from Richmond Hill, Ontario, was returning with a friend from Montreal with a friend and a fellow L'Arche assistant from Sydney, Australia, when she decided to show her friend the charming Village of Merrickville. After lunch she bought her winning ticket at the Blockhouse. Sheena and John made the presentation to Wendy at the L'Arche home in Richmond Hill. (L'Arche provides a spiritual home environment for individuals with mental disabilities)



Sheena Cowan presents lucky draw Heritagequilt to Wendy Lywood at Richmond Hill

And for an Encore . . . a Preview

Your committee has been working hard on preparing interesting events for next year. On Tuesday January 25, 2005, we will welcome Susan Code who will present an illustrated talk on Perth at Ste. Marguerite Bourgeoys School at 7:30 pm. In mid February our joint meeting with Heritage Merrickville will focus on the work of Merrickville artist, the late Jonas Robinson, who rendered whimsical portraits of local scenes. (His work is now considered important "folk art" and is represented in the Museum of Civilization) The meeting will be at the Moth Gallery in the old Town Hall, on a Sunday afternoon to be announced. The Blockhouse and Canal at Merrickville by Jonas Robinson



The Blockhouse and Canal at Merrickville by Jonas Robinson

On March 24, a highlight of the year will undoubtedly be a presentation at our Annual dinner by author and raconteur extraordinaire, Mary Cook, who will talk to us about her "Memories". The dinner will be held at the Baldechin Ballroom. You

should book early for this one. Please note that it is important to look out for updates confirming the time and arrangements for these events.

Membership Matters

The annual membership fees for 2005 are now due. To continue your support as an annual member, and to ensure you continue to be updated on our activities, (including receipt of this newsletter), send your cheque for \$5 per person or \$10 per family to the address below. Thanks for your help.

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John Cowan, Editor

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