

The Merrickville and District Historical Society NEWSLETTER

Winter 2005/2006

Volume 3 Number 4

Historical Society Annual Meeting

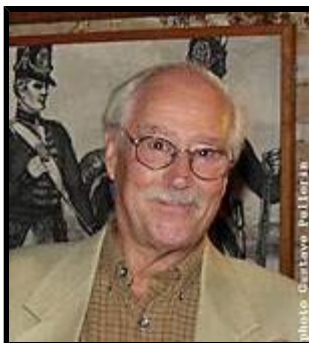


photo by Gustav Pellerin

Denis Faulkner

The annual meeting of the Historical Society saw the election of two new members to the Executive and the retirement of two other members. Long time supporter, Denis Faulkner who has been instrumental in the rejuvenation of the Society over the last five years has chosen to step down as President and take a "sabbatical". Denis has been principally responsible for arranging the speakers for our monthly meetings and will be greatly missed.

Kelly Baatnes whose wise counsel was instrumental as we developed our plan to rejuvenate our archives retired to devote time to her new family and to her job as Curator of the Mississippi Valley Textile Museum. Two new members rolled up their sleeves and joined the Executive. Long time Merrickville resident Wayne Poapst will bring to the Committee valuable insights into the personal histories of the Village. Dick Hegan will bring an important perspective from Burritt's Rapids where he and his wife Mary have built their new home.

All of the rest of the Committee members were re-elected and are listed at the end of this Newsletter.

In his summary comments Denis Faulkner reflected on the interesting year we had experienced. Six monthly speakers led us on insightful pictorial visits to our historical past. Mary Cook reminisced at our spring Dinner of her days growing up in the Ottawa Valley. We heard about the development of Historic Perth from Mary Code. The John Watts & Son Carriage Factory in Eastons Corners came back to life thanks to Angie and Chris Wrona. Richard Tatley described the work he did in documenting the Merrickville Industrial area, prior to its demolition in the 70's by Parks Canada. In October Captain Everett Snider took us on a delightful cruise among the Thousand Islands.

At our last presentation in November, we became exhausted just watching the work George Clarke is doing in faithfully restoring his historic Elgin street home.

Other achievements sited were the commencement of the Archives revival Project, our start at creating an inventory of historic rural sites and another active extended year at the Blockhouse. Thanks were extended to the numerous members who volunteered their time to conduct these activities, and to keep the Blockhouse open for a record number of days before and after the arrival of the summer student employees.

The members voted a special thanks to Denis Faulkner. His will be a hard act to follow.



Captain Everett Snider's "Miss Brockville"

Merrickville Early Newspapers All the News That's Fit to Print

Most of us wait expectantly at the beginning of each month for the appearance of the Phoenix in our mail slots. This helpful monthly publication keeps us abreast of local happenings. But did you realize the Phoenix is following a long tradition of publishing local news. Between 1856 and 1940 Merrickville had six local papers serving the community.

These are described in a 1976 paper presented to the Merrickville & District Historical Society by Merrickville native Wayne Thompson whose Uncle edited the last weekly newspaper in Merrickville, the Weekly Review. The following information is gleaned from that presentation. The first formal newspaper was the **Mirickville Chronicle**, published in 1856. Also known as "*The Mirickville Chronicle and Weekly Advisor.*" (Recall the name in all its usages was not changed to Merrickville until 1860.) It was founded in 1856 and lasted sixteen years serving the townships: of Wolford, Kitley,

Oxford, Montague, Marlborough and Elmsley. According to the Map of Merrickville in the "Historical Atlas of Leeds and Grenville", the office of Hall and Wright, the publishers in 1859, was located on the west side of St. Lawrence St. near the corner of Brock Street. The Merrickville Mirror followed in 1896 It is interesting to see the advertisements of this era. For example:

- "**F. A. Tallman**" General Insurance, Pianos, Organs and Bicycles
- **J. C. Postlewaite** , Barber: "12 shaves for \$1.00-- payable in advance."

Next came the Merrickville Star in 1899, later the Star Chronicle which carried the optimistic insight in its banner

"WE'LL GET BRIGHTER AS WE GET OLDER"

The circulation of the paper for 1912 was 1,160. (It is also interesting to note that within the next three years the village population was to decrease from 1,100 to 993.) In this issue

- **Go. W. Elliott, Merchant**, advertised - Toupees, of interest to the bald-headed man. and, Flowers for Mother's Day. (e.g.) Roses at fifty cents and one dollar a dozen

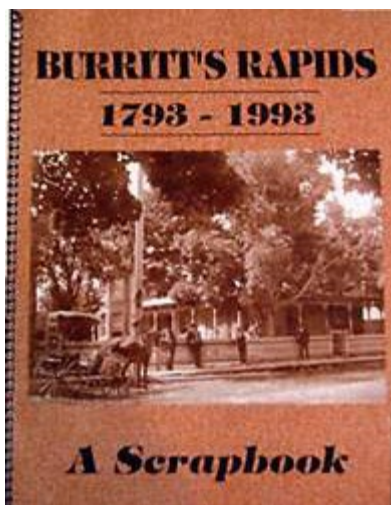
The **Merrickville Post** began publishing in 1915 It sold for \$1.50 per year, payable in advance. The last weekly published paper in Merrickville was the Weekly Review which was founded by Thompson Printers came to life in 1940. At that time, the population was recorded at 778, reflecting the decline which was occurring in the Village. The weekly Review was a tabloid format which ran until 1944. It was the last exclusively Merrickville weekly.

Local Newspapers are a great reflection of the communities they serve. For this reason, some of the first Historical Society archival material to be copied in digital form are the newspapers. Soon you will once again you will be able to use a computer to leaf through the weeks events at the turn of 1900.

Return of the Burritt's Rapids Scrapbook

Those of you who have been unable to find a copy of "the Burritt's Rapids Scrapbook" published in 1993 will be pleased to know Olivia Mills and Renee Smith have re-published this excellent record of the sites and founding families of Burritt's Rapids.

It is full of interesting historical facts about the founding



families and photos of buildings no longer seen. The book costs \$20 is available now at the Burritt's Rapids General Store. All proceeds will go to care and nurturing of the Burritt's Rapids Community Hall. The book will have its official unveiling later in the year at a special meeting in the recently refurbished Community Hall in Burritt's Rapids. All members of the Merrickville & District Historical Society will be invited attend

The Nicholls of Merrickville

Merrickville is losing two of its strongest heritage supporters as Robert and Nora Nicholls return to Montreal. Virtually from the moment they arrived in Merrickville in 1981 Robert and Eleanor have been deeply involved with the preservation of Merrickville's important cultural and built heritage. Their first project was their own Mill Street home.

One of the oldest surviving structures in the Village, the house appears on plans drawn during the construction of the canal. Working with historical renovation expert, Nigel Hutchings, the Nicholls turned the modest stone structure into an exemplary showpiece of modernization combined with preservation of historical integrity.



Nora and Robert Nicholls

Active and long time members of the Historical Society, members of LACAC and founding trustees and supporters of the Heritage Merrickville Foundation, this outspoken couple has been a constant voice for the protection of the historical character of the Village.

The continued existence of the earliest church building in the Village, the old Knox Presbyterian Church, the rejuvenation and preservation of the old Town Hall and of Sam Jakes home, now the Sam Jakes Inn, are examples of the projects owing their existence to Nicholls and other members of the Heritage Merrickville Foundation. Recognizing these achievements Robert and Nora Nicholls were in the first group of Citizens recognized with a Historical Society Award of Merit in 2002.

As a contribution to the broader knowledge and awareness of the historic Rideau region, researcher Robert Nicholls prepared much of the material for the book on Colonel By, "For King and Country", which was authored by Mark Andrews and published by and available from the Heritage Merrickville Foundation.

The Nicholls held forceful views, not all of them popular, but, their passion in working to maintain the heritage character of the Village was unquestionable and unrelenting. Together they have become part of the History of the Village. They will be missed.

Sappers and Miners

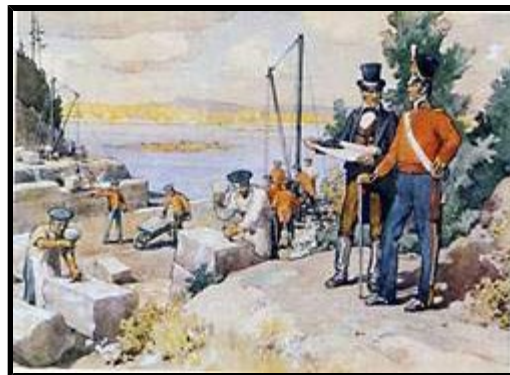
The Sappers & Miners: What on earth is a Sapper? Colonel By was a Military engineer and his role in the Canal design and construction is well know. But, who and what were the "Sappers" who also worked with Colonel By on the Canal? In the aforementioned book "For King and Country, researched by Robert Nicholls, we find the answer.

"Military engineers in England can be traced back at least to 1066, when William the Conqueror specifically organized them within his forces. Their chief role was to design and construct fortresses, and to assist in destroying enemy fortifications. Their role took on new importance, however, as gunpowder was developed and guns were brought into use. The use of cannons to break down fortifications led to a more sophisticated form of siege warfare and to a long tradition of a close affiliation between military engineers and the artillery.

In order to manage better the needs of both the artillery and the engineers it was decided that a new organizational structure was needed. In 1716, therefore, a Royal Regiment of Artillery was formed along with a Corps of Engineers. . . . In 1741 the Board established the Royal Military Academy for the training of the officers of the artillery and the engineer corps.

The permanent engineering officers needed to recruit civilian workers to execute required projects during both war and peace. This was proving to be problematic since a reliable and trustworthy workforce was rarely available when needed by the engineers. To overcome this, the first permanent Company of Soldier Artificers was formed in 1772.

The primary function of field engineers was to engage in the art of siege warfare against fortifications. Breaches, that is holes in fortress walls through which infantry could assault, were achieved by mining underneath and then exploding large gunpowder charges or by battering them down with heavy cannon fire. In order to get close to the fortifications, the engineers would need to dig trenches toward the walls. With the constant threat of gunfire over their heads the trenches certainly could not be cut in a conventional fashion. Typically they were excavated in a progressively deeper, zig-zag pattern known as 'sapping'. The lead sapper would dig a shallow trench from the end placing excavated material in a 'gabion' basket which he then hoisted over his head to the top of the trench to provide additional cover from gunfire. Each subsequent sapper would follow the previous by digging the trench to progressively deeper levels.



Colonel By strikes a stately pose with the contractor, while the Sappers supervise dressing and laying the stone.

- C. W. Jeffreys Nat Archives

In 1808, at the beginning of the Peninsular War, it was quickly realized that although the Royal Engineers and the Military Artificers were brave and resourceful they were not nearly as well trained as their French counterparts. Their lack of field training and experience was apparent. The Duke of Wellington insisted that he needed better trained men if he was to reduce losses and win battles. He demanded that a Corps of Sappers and Miners be formed immediately." Ref "*For King & Country Mark Andrews*

Thus was formed the Military Corps of Sappers and Miners that was so crucial in the construction of the Rideau Canal. Following the defeat of Napoleon and the end of the Peninsular Wars, this highly trained group of construction experts became available for civilian projects. Projects like the construction of the Rideau Canal. Not only did their trenching knowledge come into full play in the construction of the locks, but as a Military

unit, they served to police the somewhat unruly Irish and French Canadian workers who did the hard trenching, quarrying and construction on the Canal.

Colonel By had two companies of Sappers, the 7th and the 15th totaling 162 men, under his command. Because of their military training and construction skills, many Sappers upon completion of the Canal were chosen as Lockmasters. In fact of the 22 early lockmasters on the Rideau, more than half were ex- Royal Sappers and Miners, including Merrickville's own John Johnston and from Clowes and Burritt's lock stations the Newmans and Thomas Jenkins

"The lockmaster and his men at Merrickville received in 1835 four shillings per day from the British Government; the lockmaster receiving his pay for the year, but the labourers for only the navigational season. For many years after the opening of the canal in 1832, there were two shifts of men, one for day and one for night duty. The British uniform was worn by the lockmaster until 1854."

Miss Mary Pearson, the Kemptville Advance, December 5, 1935.

Website Update



website banner by Ken Watson

We are very pleased with the progress that has been made in constructing an informative web site for the Merrickville & District Historical Society, www.merrickvillehistory.org. We are greatly indebted to Ken Watson, author of "A History of the Rideau Lockstations", who responded to our call for volunteers to help develop the sight. Thanks to Andrew McKay's initiative and Ken's expertise and energy we feel we have really developed an important tool to convey to the broader public, information about the history of our area. The web site contains Information about the Society, News about upcoming events, Projects past & present, Historical notes (including a photo gallery), information about the Blockhouse Museum and a copy of the Walking Tour brochure. Linkages to other sources of information about Merrickville and the Rideau are also included.

While already well advanced, we continue to update our web site to make it even more interesting and relevant to our members and friends.

Rideau Canal 175th Birthday in 2007

The year 2007 will mark the 175th anniversary of the official opening of the Rideau Canal in 1832 and it will be a very special occasion. All of the Communities along the Rideau are planning special celebratory events to mark the anniversary. Also widely anticipated for 2007, is the designation of the Rideau Canal as a World Heritage Site.

Those of us fortunate to live in Merrickville will find ourselves right at the hub of activities. Parks Canada is encouraging all communities along the waterway to arrange celebratory events. The Village is coordinating efforts to be sure the expected influx of visitors see us in our best light. Members of the Chamber of Commerce and the Arts community are actively working on arrangements to take advantage of the opportunity presented by the expected increase in visitors. On the Historical Society, we are planning activities which will highlight the interesting history of the Merrickville area. The history

of the Rideau canal, from concept to completion will be the main focus of our monthly meetings.

Some residents, with reasonable cause, may resent the intrusion of so many visitors. For them ours is a precious oasis and one they would just as soon keep secret. If properly managed and coordinated however, it is felt the negative impact on the Village will be minimal and the positive benefits substantial. As plans proceed, we will keep you informed.

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

The Rideau Canal System was substantially completed in the fall of 1831 and the official opening was to occur in the fall of that year when Colonel By planned to pass a steam boat up the Rideau as far as Burritt's Rapids. Silver cups to be presented to the main contractors were inscribed with the date 1831.

However, our own William Mirick threw a spanner in the works by raising his dam height, presumably to make mill repairs, thus lowering the water level further down river and making navigation impossible. Colonel By was reported to be furious with Mirick and was forced to delay the opening until the spring of 1832.

There was considerable speculation that our Mr. Mirick, unhappy with the disruption of his mill operations and the compensation he received for use of his dam and property, intentionally and spitefully lowered the water. Whether the accusation was right or wrong, it is evident William Mirick was a tough customer, and one not lightly crossed nor easily thwarted.



William Mirick's Mills circa 1835

Burrows & Clegg (part) Library Archives of Canada

Help Wanted

If you have read this far you must have an interest in the fascinating history of our area. If so, why not share your interest by becoming more active with our Society? Pat Molson who is responsible for volunteer activities is looking for folks to conduct visitors on **walking tours** of the Village. After a training walkthrough you will find it an enjoyable experience. Or, perhaps you can spend a few hours hosting visitors in the Blockhouse museum. It's a great way to meet interesting people and to learn more about our historic properties. Watch for a "volunteer training session" in May.

Perhaps "**sweat equity**" is your contribution. If so, bring a broom and come meet us at our spring Blockhouse cleanup or help us mend the fence at the McGuigan Cemetery.

One of the shortages in our present volunteer talent bank is in **genealogical research**. Each year we receive enquiries from folks who want to trace their ancestors from this area. A few hours of research in Alice Hughes' files or a visit to the local cemeteries usually yields answers for grateful descendants.

Or, why not share your research into the history of your house, or family by making a presentation at one of our monthly meetings? Or undertake to **research and present** a paper on one of our influential Merrickville families; the master builder Samuel Langford, the Percivals or the Watchorns or furniture maker John Mills?

However you choose to get involved, we can practically assure you your efforts will be rewarding and be much appreciated.

Upcoming Events

Once again we will have an interesting program for members and guests. On January 24, we will hear a presentation by Victor Suthren on the War of 1812 and its impact on the Rideau Canal and on Merrickville. On February 19, we will celebrate Heritage week with Heritage Merrickville in the Old Town Hall. On March 28, Wayne Poapst will present a paper he has researched on the remarkable Sam Jakes. In April we will present this year's heritage Merit awards at our spring dinner

(look for posters or newspaper notices or our web page for specifics, or, if we have your email we will send a notice)

Membership Matters

The annual membership fees for 2006 are now due. For the moment, our membership dues are unchanged at \$5 per person, \$10 per family and \$50 per person for life members. Please send your cheque to the address below.

Merrickville & District Historical Society
Box 294, Merrickville, Ontario, K0G 1N0
2006 Executive
President - John Cowan
First Vice President - Pat Molson
Secretary /Treasurer - Andrew McKay

Committee Members : Beverly Burpee, Sheena Cowan, Fred Grodde, Gillian Hammonds, David Hammonds, Gustave Pellerin, Dieter Rath, George Yap, Wayne Poapst, Dick Hegan

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