

The Merrickville and District Historical Society NEWSLETTER

Summer 2007

Volume 5 Number 2

Rideau 175 Lectures A Great Success

Over a year's planning went into the creation of the Rideau 175 lecture series and we are pleased to report it is a huge success. Capacity crowds have attended each of the first three lectures and the presenters, with varied approaches, have each revealed a different aspect of the Rideau Canal's fascinating History .



Professor Emeritus Brian Osborne

Professor Emeritus Brian Osborne from Queen's University began the series in March by taking us on trip through time as he told of the Canal's history from the earliest days of the exploration of it's waterways by British explorers and surveyors to the present day use and future potential of the Canal. Along the way we learned of the early co-operation and help of the aboriginal People, the Algonquin and Iroquois tribes, who had used the Rideau and surrounding rivers as seasonal hunting and fishing grounds for thousands of years and who welcomed the trickle of United Empire Loyalists who came to make its shores home. We heard of the decisions made by Colonel By as he chose the route for the Canal, and, with Irish and French Canadian workers constructed it through stretches of wilderness in only an astounding six years. Although never used for its military intent, the Canal found itself in the right place at the right time for the wrong reasons and became a corridor of commerce and immigration through the first three quarters of the 19th century.

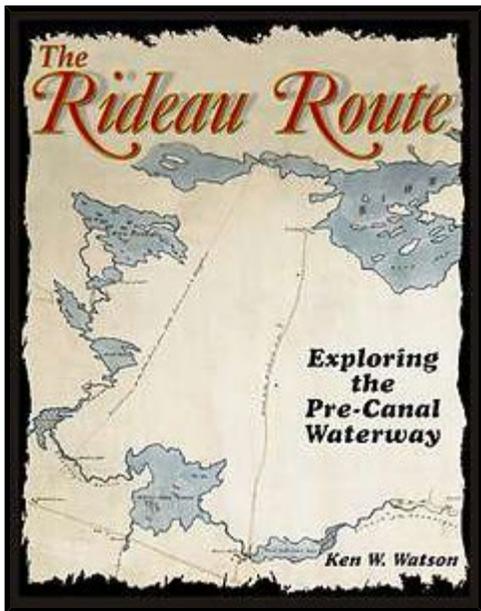
As the railways and other transportation routes usurped the Canal's dominant role, it fell into a period of decline only to be reborn as a favorite leisure attraction.

In concluding his remarks, Dr. Osborne ahead and saw a wonderful future, threatened only by uncontrolled exploitation of its own success. Heads nodded as he warned of "killing the goose that lays the golden eggs."

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

That the early settlers, including William Mirick and Stephen Burrows, generally provided an overnight shelter for natives who passed by on their hunting excursions. It seems they did so, less for compassionate reasons than for self interest. During the harsh winters of early settlement, the Native people supported the survival of the settlers. In fact it is recorded that shortly after his arrival, Stephen Burrows was struck by a fever which confined him to bed. Passing hunters found him and through the winter nursed him to recovery. From that time quarters were always provided by Burrows for passing Native hunters.

The Rideau Route Exploring the Pre-Canal Waterway



The Rideau Route by Ken Watson

In an effort to find new territory for settlement for the growing numbers of United Empire Loyalists the British Colonial Government sent parties to explore the previously unsurveyed Rideau area. In the second Rideau 175 lecture, author and Rideau historian, Ken Watson took the audience on a 1783 canoe trip along the Rideau Route, from present day Ottawa to Kingston, revealing the rapids, waterfalls, marshes and lakes that existed prior to any European settlement along the route. This was the year that Lt. Gershom French made the first survey of the Rideau Route, travelling in two birch bark canoes along the Rideau Route, with "seven men of the Provincials, Two Canadians and an Indian as Guide."

With a remarkable collection of slides, Ken Watson revealed what French, as well as later Rideau Route surveyors, such as Lt. Joshua Jebb in 1816 and Samuel Clowes in 1823/24, would have seen on their journeys. Using many illustrations from his

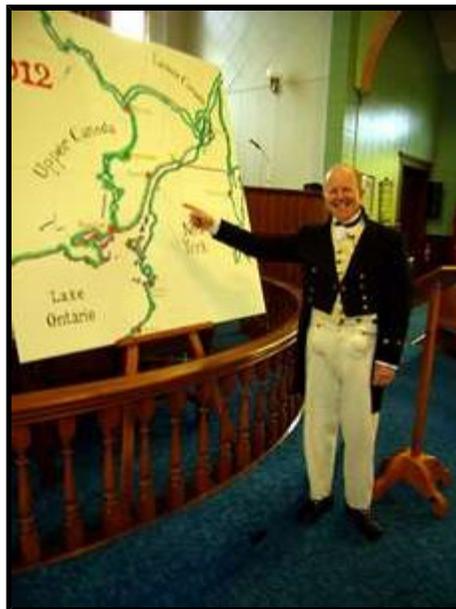
book, "The Rideau Route" Ken described and showed the un-revealed world that lies below the waters of the Rideau Canal – the drowned landscape of the original Rideau Route.

The Rideau Canal Waterway that we see today is a flooded environment, created by the building of canal dams, in 1826-31, to form a slackwater navigation system. In the pre-canal era, the Rideau Route spanned three watersheds, those of the Rideau River, the Gananoque River and the Cataraqui River. It was a wild place of lakes, marshes, canyons, rivers and sinuous creeks, the latter two often interrupted by rapids and waterfalls. Colonel By's amazing canal forever transformed the land to form the Canal we enjoy today.

The War for Canada – 1812 Whew, That was a Close One

Without the war of 1812-1814 between Canada and the United States it is safe to say there would be no Rideau 175 Celebration, no UNESCO Rideau world heritage site, in fact, no Rideau Canal. It was built solely in response to the threat to British sovereignty posed by this widespread war that revealed the vulnerability of Canada to an enemy that, amassed a mere throwing distance away, could completely sever essential supply lines by simply controlling the St. Lawrence River.

In the third Rideau 175 Lecture Victor Suthren, historian, author and authority on British colonial navy history, took us through the battles of the war that threatened to end British rule in North America and indeed, Canada itself. Immersing himself in the role, Victor, dressed as an 1812-14 Royal Navy Lieutenant described the critical sea-saw battles of the war, wherein at numerous stages, one side or the other given more competent leadership, could have won. We heard of the fall of the brave and daring General Brock and of the crucial role played by Native warriors, led by their wise and noble Chief Tecumseh. Towards the end, the turning point came with the



Victor Suthren

battle in the woods of Chateauguay south of Montreal and the battle on the fields of John Crysler's farm near Prescott. Massively outnumbered in both battles, these Canadian victories were the final frustration of the American political leaders and led to the final peace treaty in 1814.

Following the war, the Duke of Wellington, who had never been to North America, in reviewing the battle reports remarked that had the Americans cut off British supply through the St. Lawrence, or if they were to do so in future hostilities, the British would lose. As a consequence he gave direction that an alternate route between Montreal and Kingston be determined and that instruction was the genesis of the Rideau Canal. In Victor's words, "It is one of the pleasanter ironies of history that an undertaking originating in the prosecution of war should have at no time been involved in such activity, but became instead a vital artery for the peaceful creation of new communities in Upper Canada."

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

The critical Battle of Crysler's farm was conducted on November 11, another day to Remember, this one in 1813. Poorly led and poorly trained, the American troops numbering close to 4,000, battled Morrison's corps of 1200. Despite the Americans' overwhelming numerical superiority and after close to three hours of hard fighting, the Americans withdrew from the field leaving 400 casualties - killed, wounded and captured - and beat a hasty retreat to the U.S. side of the river.

**Prime Minister Stephen Harper
Officially opens the Blockhouse Museum
Behind the Scenes , June 16, 2007
*Personal reflections by John Cowan***

Back in the early spring when the Historical Society executive was planning the June Blockhouse Museum opening, we were looking for something significant to celebrate 40 years since our official opening, the 175th anniversary of the Rideau Canal and the designation of the Rideau as a UNESCO world heritage site. All major events. It was Sheena Cowan who suggested we invite Prime Minister Harper to do the honours. After the laughter subsided we decided, "nothing ventured, nothing gained; all he can do is say no", so in March we wrote and asked if he would so honour our occasion.

As time went by and the opening grew closer, with no response we assumed the request

was in the PM's silly file. Mayor Struthers who had stood aside from his customary ribbon cutting honours was optimistic. "At least he hasn't said "No" ".



**Prime Minister Harper
At Merrickville Blockhouse,
June 16 2007**

Then about two weeks before the opening I received a call from the Prime Minister's office indicating he would like to attend, but, given other potentially pressing issues, would not confirm his attendance until, 24 hours before the opening. Further, I was asked to speak to no-one about this possibility, presumably for security reasons until the event was confirmed.

In the meantime we were asked to submit a detailed agenda for review by the PM's events coordinator. Apparently the idea of a relatively informal, "small Village", family oriented ceremony, recognizing the winners of the school essay contest appealed to him. What did not appeal to him was a display by angry protestors.

Thus the secrecy of the arrangements. The next two weeks were spent frantically making preparations. Agreeing on an agenda, and assuring security arrangements. Details were scrutinized for approval, such as comments to be made from the podium, from of dress, "casual, - tell Mayor Struthers", and approval of my 1790's gentleman's costume.

At 6:00 pm on Friday night I received word from the Prime Minister's office that the visit was on and so began a scramble to conduct final program details, work out logistics and security. At noon on Saturday, the RCMP arrived, complete with a bomb sniffing German Sheppard to conduct a final security clearance of the Blockhouse. As it evolved, the "secrecy of the event" was so successful, there was a last minute concern no one would be there!! Fortunately, the Village grapevine worked well and a large crowd attended. Those who were there, I believe, would agree it was a beautiful day. Prime minister Harper, by the itinerary was scheduled to depart right after cutting the ribbon, but instead stayed, mingling with the crowd, having pictures taken with anyone who asked and finishing off with an ice cream cone at the Main St cafe.

Quite a day. Now, what do we do next year? *J. Cowan*

There is Nothing so Rare as a Day in June, EXCEPT, a day in June when the Prime Minister of Canada Visits Merrickville

Brilliant sunshine on the banks of the Rideau Canal, the Merrickville & District Historical Society Blockhouse Museum sporting a new set of illustrative displays provided by Parks Canada, a Scottish Piper, a military re-enactors musket barrage salute, short speeches, even a group of hookers, rug hookers that is. And to add special honour to the occasion, a ceremonial cutting of the opening ribbon by Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

Historical Society president John Cowan and his spouse, Sheena Cowan, Membership Chair, greeted the Prime Minister upon his arrival and escorted him to the Blockhouse for a preview of the new exhibits, to meet Mayor Struthers and assembled dignitaries and, of course, to sign the Merrickville Blockhouse Museum guest book as the first official visitor of 2007.

While the itinerary for Prime Minister Harper called for him to depart following the cutting of the ribbon, he chose instead to stay nearly an hour talking informally with the student winners

of the Historical society historical essay contest and with the friendly crowd of observers. Dozens of children and adults alike will have a splendid souvenir picture of their special encounter with the Prime Minister of Canada.

In the assembled crowd were several of the Village's residents who remembered Lieutenant Governor Earle Rowe arriving by horse and carriage to conduct the first Official Blockhouse Museum, opening assisted by MP Jack Pickersgill forty years ago, on June 21, 1967.

Recognizing the pending 175th anniversary of the opening of the Rideau Canal, and in anticipation of UNESCO World Heritage designation Parks Canada with input from the Merrickville & District Historical Society spent over a year planning and producing a series of displays which would better portray the important military history of the Merrickville Blockhouse and celebrate its prominence as a National Historic Site.

Through a series of illustrative panels and an audio presentations the purpose and function of the Blockhouse and its place within the Rideau system and in the community of Merrickville are demonstrated. From the reaction of the first visitors at the unveiling, the new exhibits are an outstanding success.

Special Guests for the day included Gord Brown, MP for Leeds and Grenville, Guy Lauzon, MP for Stormont, Dundas and South Glengarry, from Parks Canada. CEO Alan Latourelle, Irv Mazurkiewicz, Director of Operations and Juan Sanchez as "a surprisingly well preserved", Colonel By.



Top: Prime Minister Harper and son Ben cut opening ribbon with Sheena & John Cowan

Bottom: PM Harper signs Blockhouse Museum guest book

Merrickville's Remarkable Foundry History (part two)

In the first part of this article, (Vol. 5 No.1 Spring 2007) we told of the beginning in Merrickville's foundry history from 1840's with the early efforts of Lily and Hogg up to the acquisition of the Magee and Pearson foundry business by Roger C. Percival in 1887 to begin the foundry's most illustrious era the in the name of "The Percival Plow and Stove Company". In this section we examine the Percivals' success and impact on Merrickville.

Roger Croft Percival was born in 1837 on a farm about three miles east of Burritt's Rapids in what used to be called 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 it successfully for a number of years. Then late in 1887 he heard that William Magee had died and the Magee and Pearson foundry 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. During the years in Pembroke

Roger Percival turned more of the business over to his son Harvey, and by the time the business was operating in Merrickville as the Percival Plow and Stove Company, Harvey was in control.



detail – Percival Plow and Stove Catalogue, c 1900

The Percival Plow and Stove Company which succeeded the old Magee and Pearson foundry firm in 1887 remained in business for nearly half a century and for a time it was one of the most eminently successful manufacturing concerns in Merrickville. When at its height the company was the largest single employer of labour in the village, selling plows, harvesting equipment and stoves over much of eastern Canada and even beyond.

****In a presentation to the Historical Society in May, 1969, Leonard Newman describes, from personal experience, the agricultural product line of the Percival Company.****

"The farming articles manufactured by the Percivals bring back memories of the old days of the walking Plow and the 2-furrow or "gang" plow which were horse-drawn implements and which were used almost exclusively until the tractor appeared as a source of power. In the single furrow walking plow class there were seven models; No. 5, a No. 6, a No. 6 Special, a No. 7 a No. 10, a No. 12 and a No. 13. - Numbers 5 and 6 were especially adapted to plowing heavy sod land where the objective was to turn the furrow slice up on its edge in order to facilitate the breaking down process with the drag harrow.

In those far off days many farmers would have only a plow and a harrow with which to work their land and it helped a great deal to have the furrows well "set up."The No. 6 Special was actually a refinement of the No. 6. This plow, like 5. was used widely in plowing matches and by those farmers who took a special pride in their plowmanship. For plowing stubble land or sandy or loamy soils the No, 7 was preferred. This was more of a general purpose plow so was used more by the rank and file. NO. 10 plowed the widest furrow and was popular on farms having particularly light soils. The plow handles in all cases were made of the best local oak.

Following the single furrow walking plows came the 2-furrow or "gang plow." This came to be quite widely used for a time, on some farms. There were four models of this. The Sulky or "Riding Plow" followed with its popular seat as many farmers preferred to ride rather than walk. This type of plow was fairly popular especially on stony land as it could be backed up quite easily. Then there was the so-called "Hill-side" plow with its two reversible mould boards which made it possible to have all the furrows facing "up hill" thus impeding water erosion during the spring run-off. This was quite a unique implement but was not very widely used except in very hilly terrain.

Among other Agricultural implements made by this enterprising company were the diamond-toothed drag harrows, spring-toothed cultivators (four models), and one horse cultivators or scufflers and a special harrow for use among stumps steel rollers and wheel-barrowes. They also made a number of smaller items such as umbrella stands, etc. But it was the fame of the Percival Plows which really put Merrickville on the map."

- Leonard Newman - May 1969

Next time, The Percival Stoves and Merrickville Foundries move from the past into the present.

Published by The Merrickville & District Historical Society
Copyright The Merrickville & District Historical Society, 2007,
John Cowan, Author/Editor

[Return to Publications Page](#)

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

[Home](#) | [About Us](#) | [News](#) | [Publications](#) | [Projects](#) | [History](#) | [Blockhouse Museum](#) | [Walking Tour](#) | [Links](#)

website design donated by [Ken W. Watson](#)

©2007 The Merrickville and District Historical Society