



## Summer 2011 **newsletter** VOLUME 9, NUMBER 2

**Alice M. Hughes (nee McGrath) 1919-2011**

This past July all who care about Merrickville-Wolford history lost their greatest proponent. While many have worked diligently to celebrate our heritage, no-one has made a greater contribution than Alice Hughes. Amazing is not too strong an accolade. Her search for the roots of her own McGrath family tree spread to include virtually all of the early settlers in this area. The documentation of her research, contained in some 20,000 pages of family histories, is now housed in the Merrickville Library for all to access. Her work in genealogy led to an undertaking to transcribe the inscriptions on all of the tombstones in Grenville County, a prodigious effort which led to the unearthing of the McGuiggan Cemetery and as President of the Historical Society she led its restoration in 1979. Our sympathy goes to all her family and many close friends.



### **Finally Ken gets his Heritage Award**

You may recall from the Spring Newsletter, that Ken Watson had been nominated to receive our prestigious Heritage Award for 2011. The presentation was to be made at the Spring Dinner. Unfortunately due to an urgent family matter Ken was unable to attend to receive his award at that time, but we finally caught up with him at the Blockhouse Museum in July when David Hammonds belatedly presented the Heritage Award to Ken Watson to finally make it all official.



### **Upcoming Events:**

Our lecture meeting program is fast approaching and we have some excellent speakers lined up

**Tuesday, September 27,**

Our speaker will be Myrtle Johnston, President of the Colonel Edward Jessup Branch of the United Empire Loyalists.

**Tuesday, October 25,**

Our speaker will be David Shanahan, President of the North Grenville Historical Society

**Tuesday, November 29,**

Doug Hendry, Director of the Archives, North Grenville Historical Society, will be our speaker, preceded by our Annual General Meeting.

## Archives Still Homeless

Unfortunately I am sorry to say that work on the Archives has come pretty much to a standstill due to a lack of financial resources this year; just a little tidying up on clerical errors and missing information on files, but no input of new artifacts or items for cataloguing or photographing. Perhaps the quiet winter months will allow some additional activity. We are still very fortunate for the support of the North Grenville Historical Society for allowing us to store our most valuable artifacts in their archival location in Kemptville. We hope to have our own permanent location for our collection but there is little acceptable storage space in Merrickville-Wolford. However if you do hear of somewhere please let us know as soon as possible so that we can investigate the possibilities.

## Merrickville Lockmaster retires

Lockmaster Bill Glover will close the Merrickville locks for the last time this fall as he heads out into retirement. Bill has been with Parks Canada for 35 year, the last 6 of which have been working at the Merrickville Locks. Bill has spent many long days during the summer period, 6 days a week 11 hours a day negotiating the many boats through the canal.



**Lockmaster Bill Glover**

Bill was always there for the visitors along the Rideau with that contagious laugh of his and a willingness to always give a helping hand. Over the years he came to know many of the regular canal travelers and made their passage a friendly experience. Part of his responsibility was maintenance of the grounds and under his direction, the Park grounds have never looked better.

We particularly appreciate how he was always attentive to our own young student interpreters in the Blockhouse Museum. He was always nearby and they knew they could count on him if a situation should arise. We will miss him. Now he will be dusting off the fishing poles next spring to enjoy a summer of relaxation which he hasn't been able to experience for years. Good luck Bill from all of us.

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

**Bill Glover is descended from a long line of respected Rideau Canal Lockmasters. His Grandfather and Great, Great Grandfather, also were lockmasters who operated the locks at Jones Falls Locks from 1832. In those days the passage through the Locks was almost entirely commercial and the Lockmaster was expected to be on duty twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week during open canal season.**

## Bye Bye Blockhouse Staff

Under the watchful supervision of our Blockhouse Managers, David and Gillian Hammonds our interpreter student staff, Cora Heikkila, Emily Paradis and Shayne Savage have all done an excellent job of keeping our many visitors informed; out of trouble and above all help them enjoy their visit to the Museum. They will all be returning to their respective colleges or Universities to continue their studies but we hope that this summer's work experience was fun and will also enhance their future endeavours.





## 2011 Student Essay Awards

Several years ago your Historical Society began an annual contest for all of the students of Merrickville-Wolford elementary schools to compete in an essay writing contest for rewards and recognition. All essays are to be based on some aspect of Merrickville's history. The program has been very successful in its objective to raise an interest in the local history among the young people of our Community. This year has been no exception with 17 winners declared in various categories.

All of the essays were meritorious and those selected as for prizes are listed below.

### essay contest winners 2011

#### grades 7 - 8

1st prize **Sarah Telford**

- the Telephone in Merrickville

1st runner up **Jacob Nickerson**

- William Merrick-founder of Merrickville

2nd runner up **Mitchell Koch**

- Workers on the Rideau

Honourable Mentions

<b>Sarah Charette</b>	the Old Town Hall
<b>Emma Bates</b>	Merrickville Essay
<b>Maddie Cirka</b>	the Woollen Mill
<b>Jacob Cram</b>	Merrickville Woollen Mill
<b>Rachel Surowiak</b>	Lamira Dow and Bradish Billings Eulogy

#### grades 4, 5, 6.

1st prize **Grayson Eadie**

- the Merrickville Fire Department

1st runner up **Tanner Johnston**

- the Settling of Burritts Rapids

2nd runner up **Matthew Telford**

- the Merrickville Pool Hall

Honourable Mentions

<b>Olivia Montgomery</b>	Malleable Iron Works
<b>Abbey Johnston</b>	the Blockhouse
<b>Selena Breithaupt</b>	Blockhouse Museum (English and French)
<b>Claire Hastings</b>	William Merrick
<b>Yanina Woywitka</b>	Lamira Dow and Bradish Billing

#### High Schools

Only one submission in this category was received, but such a nice article we wanted to recognize it  
Honourable Mention

**Emma Telford** Old Methodist Church

**the quality of the submissions has been truly exceptional. As testimony see the essays of the two elementary school winners printed here**

All of next years winners, will be on display in the Merrickville Blockhouse Museum



### Historical Society essay contest winners receive their awards at the official Blockhouse opening, June 18, 2011

Mayor Struthers, Victor Suthren, Gillian Hammonds, Nina Donald, Dick Hegan are the members officiating

## The Telephone in Merrickville Number Please?

By: Sarah Telford, 1<sup>st</sup> prize grades 7-8

Have you ever decided to have a chat with a friend so you picked up the phone and dialed their number? Have you ever forgotten something at a friend's or relative's house and just called them to let them know? Well, this wasn't always so easy in Merrickville.

It all started in 1876 when Alexander Graham Bell invented the first successfully operating telephone. Bell left school to work on this invention that could turn sound into electricity and back again because this was quite a difficult task. It took him many years of experimenting and many different machines. One of his first was the Gallows Frame Transmitter. During this time of experimentation, he enlisted a young Merrickville girl named Mary Pearson. She was rather proficient at playing the piano and a student at The University of Toronto so he asked for her help in finding out whether the early telephone could transmit the sound of a musical instrument.

Before the telephone came to Merrickville, many people of the town were very isolated. They had little communication with the outside world. In the late 1800's, the first Bell Telephone Office opened in our town. It did not need much room, only enough space for a switchboard and a desk so people could pay their bills so they rented space in the same building as another business. The "office" had quite a few locations over the years, all on St. Lawrence Street. The back of Corbett's Drug Store (now the Knock Knock shop).

... continued

## Number Please? continued

The front of Jim Sword's Shoe Repair shop (now Ross Ayling's property) and the North West corner of the building now called Mrs. McGarrigals were all places from which the telephone office operated.

The operator, who was in charge of the switchboard, was referred to as "Central". She/he was the "go to" person for all important village information. If there happened to be a death, a fire or another sort of emergency or exciting news, he or she knew about it and would pass the information along. Ethyl Rodgers, who worked as an operator for 14 years, once told a story of when there was a fire. She claimed that all of the plugs in the switch board all fell down at the same time! Everyone with a phone it seemed wanted to know where the fire was. She ended up having to answer the calls six at a time in order to give everyone the news. The office ran 24 hours a day so someone was always on duty, creating the first shift work in Merrickville. Once, after staying up to listen to a hockey game on the radio, a young boy phoned in to check the time. "Central" replied "It's time that you were in bed."

The operator always answered the telephone with the words "Number please?" The caller would then recite the number of the person who they would like to speak to. If the caller happened to be #3 and the other person was #13, then the operator would connect their two numbers on the switchboard. If they looked down and the number you were wishing to call was already connected to another number, "Central" would reply "That number is busy, please call again."

The rural areas surrounding Merrickville were all serviced by "Party Lines". There were also some in town. Being in a Party not only saved numbers on the switchboard, it was also much less expensive. In a Party Line, you shared your telephone line with one or even a few other households near you. You had to be careful with these lines though. The caller had to be sure to listen to ensure no one else was talking when they lifted the receiver before they could place a call. You could also pick up the receiver and listen to conversations if you didn't have anything else to do. You could always tell when certain people were listening by the distinct tone of their clock. If you did happen to hear that person listening, a common way of dealing with the matter would be to point that factor out and embarrass them. For instance, if someone enjoyed baking, you could say that you thought you smelled their cookies burning. In these rural areas the telephone was a large wooden box with a receiver on one side and a handle on the other. In the middle of the box was a mouthpiece which you spoke into. Each phone in the Party Line was given a number, or code. You used the handle and the button on the side and turned it to make the correct number. This way, you could call anyone within the Party Line without using the assistance of the operator.

Back in those days, the phone book was solely for Merrickville and the rural areas closely surrounding it. It was rather thin compared to the massively heavy books that we use nowadays.

Any number that was out of town was considered a long distance call and had to be completed through the operator. Easton's Corner's had a telephone company of their own. It was operated by George Polly, his wife and their daughter Joan. They were required to maintain their own lines and office since they were not connected to Bell.

By the early 1960's the Telephone Office was closed. It was replaced by an automated dialing system using a rotary phone. Bell relocated to their current "station" on St. Patrick Street to monitor its telephone system. The operators with their "Number please?" were heard no more in Merrickville and surrounding areas.

## Merrickville's Industrial Area

The Historical Society this summer congratulated the Friends of the Rideau for a new book-on-CD entitled; "Industries and Industrialists of Merrickville 1792 - 1979" by author Richard Tatley. This CD was produced by the Friends of the Rideau and will be available for sale in The Depot, Blockhouse Park.



Historical Society blockhouse museum co-manager, David Hammonds receives on behalf of the Historical Society a copy of the Tatley CD on the Merrickville industrial area from Hunter McGill, President, Friends of the Rideau

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

**William Merrick and his enterprising family wasted no time establishing their settlement. By the time the Canal was opened in 1832, the community had a population of some 500 and boasted a lumber mill and grist mill, a blacksmith, a general store, harness shop and livery and an assortment of required services. . . .**



MDHS Photo enhancement by Dieter Rath

**Merrickville Hame Factory 1896**



**Around the core of the Merrick industries, grew other factories; a foundry and stove works, a carding mill, harness and carriage manufacturers and of course, -- a distillery.**

**With later brick yards, a tannery, blacksmiths and metal works in the vicinity, it was already the most significant established Village on the Rideau between Bytown and Kingston at the time the Canal was built.**

**But, by 1970, the industries had fallen victim to new technologies and the entire area, except for the complex of the Pearson foundry had fallen into disrepair. The decision was made by the Department of Transport to demolish the shaky structures. Parks Canada employee, Richard Hatley was hired to document the existing structures and to record as much as was known of the industries that existed there.**

**The Friends of the Rideau have done a great historical service by converting his research entitled "Industries and Industrialists of Merrickville 1792 – 1979" to CD and making it readily available to the public.**



**The Watchorn Woolen Mill, 1978,**  
Photo by Richard Hatley

## **The Merrickville Fire Department**

**By: Grayson Eadie,  
Grade 6, Merrickville Public School**

"Beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep! Merrickville Fire Department... we have a report of a structure fire at 1234 Anyplace Avenue...report is structure fully involved...Fire Dispatch out 1721hrs." No one wants to hear this kind of message. It means a fire. If this happens in our town, there is only one place to call, the Merrickville Fire Department.

Our Fire Department was founded in either 1854 or 1858. We're not sure because a lot of the early Fire Department records were destroyed. In those days it was called the Merrickville Fire Brigade.

The first Fire Hall was on the ground floor of the building that now has the Legion Hall in it. Here they kept Merrickville's first fire truck, but it wasn't really a truck. It was a horse-drawn, wood-fired, steam powered pump, mounted on a wagon.

Someone had to check it day and night to make sure the fire never went out. It's ironic that they used fire to put fires out. When a fire call came, they'd go and get the horses from the stables, and bring them to the hall to take the fire wagon to the fire. There were no fire hydrants in those days. All the water to fight fires had to be sucked out of the river using long hoses, and then pumped to the fire. Chimney fires were very common then, so every building in town had to have a ladder long enough to reach its chimney, for the Fire Brigade to use.

In 1937, the Merrickville Fire Department got a brand new pump truck, made by American LaFrance. It was the newest and best fire fighting truck available. It was the same kind of truck that you would find in a big city like Toronto, Chicago or New York City. There is no record that the Town paid for this truck. It is rumoured that Harry McLean, Merrickville's richest person, gave the truck to the town as a gift. There was once a wildfire in the town of Lanark that threatened to burn down the entire town. The Merrickville Fire Brigade took its pump to Lanark to help their Fire Brigade. They say that our pump truck saved the town. Another time, there was a big fire in Smith's Falls. Our pump was the only one powerful enough to reach the third floor windows and put water through them. Our pumper stopped the fire from getting out of control. That pump truck was the number 1 truck in the Merrickville Fire Department for over 25 years, until they bought a new pumper in 1962.

Since then they have added a Tanker truck, another Pumper, 2 Water Trucks, a Rescue Van, a Medical Emergency Van, a Water Rescue Craft, and a 75 foot Ladder Truck, plus lots of other rescue equipment. After hearing this list, just imagine what it must have been like to use a steam powered wagon pulled by horses.



**Merrickville Fire Hall, c 1940 (in front of Blockhouse)**  
(copy postcard, MDHS Archives)

In the early 1940's, the Fire Department moved to a new hall in front of the Blockhouse, by the canal. In the mid 1970's, the Fire Department moved its present location on Brock St., near the Community centre. The first part of that hall was paid for by the Fire Fighters. They gave up their pay for two years to pay for the construction! The next part of the Hall was built in the early 1980's by inmates from the Burritt's Rapids Prison Farm. That last part of the Fire Hall was built in 1988 by the Fire Fighters themselves, including my classmate Owen Eagle's Dad and Grand-dad, Ron and Bill Eagle.

For a long time, the head of the Fire Department was called a Fire Warden. In 1957, Wilf Seeley became Merrickville's first Chief. He was Chief until 1962. After that there was Chief Ron Rosser (1962-1966), Chief Ray Billings (1966-1968), Chief Clarence Johnston (1968-1969), Chief Mike Murphy (1969-1980), and Chief Wayne Barr (1980-1985). The present Chief is Ron Barber, who took charge in 1985.

The Merrickville Fire Department is a Volunteer Department. That means all the Fire Fighters are regular people from our town, who offer their time to help keep our town safe in emergencies. They meet on their own time, every 2nd Tuesday, and train how to fight fires, rescue people in trouble, and respond to any other emergency situation. One of the Volunteer Fire Fighters is my Dad, Simon Eadie. He has been on the Department for 5 years. He has been to all kinds of fires and other emergencies. I'm sometimes concerned about my dad's safety, but I am glad that he helps people.

It doesn't matter if they're using horse-drawn wagons or fancy trucks, the Merrickville Fire Department and it's volunteer Fire Fighters have been keeping us safe for over 150 years.

## Last Word from the Prez,

President Report,  
By Nina Donald

Due to the tardiness of my submitting my report, I have been relegated to the back page, I'll know better next time.

What a glorious summer we have had this year. Our Blockhouse opening this past June was a great success as we had a wonderful sunny day which brought out many visitors and of course the Essay Contest students who all patiently waited to hear the results of this year's winners, and of course to collect their prizes.

This summer we organized a boat tour on the Rideau King, from Merrickville to Becketts, Landings. The initial response was very encouraging but alas we didn't receive the numbers we needed to make it economically feasible to go ahead with the tour so unfortunately we had to cancel the event. The timing may have been inappropriate as the summer months are a very busy time for a lot of people, perhaps we could try it again next year, a little earlier in the season or into the fall when people are not quite as busy. If anyone has any suggestions or ideas of other venues we could arrange to keep the membership active in the summer months when we don't have our lectures series, please feel free to send me your ideas and we can see what we could arrange. I did think about a golf tournament although I don't golf, a day trip to Upper Canada Village, Fort Henry in Kingston, Fulford House, or even visit some of our local Historical Society Museums, the possibilities could be endless. We do need time to arrange such events so the sooner we can get feedback the sooner we could start to make plans.

We have arrived now at the time of year when our Blockhouse will be operated on weekends only by our dedicated volunteer staff. We do still have a few dates open for anyone with a few hours to spare. Come and get involved with your fellow members. Its fun, rewarding and you get to meet a lot of very interesting people. Just get in touch with Ellen Hackett and she will talk to you about just what is involved and the dates that are still vacant.

Ellen can be reached at 613 269 2621 or by email to [thehacketts@sympatico.ca](mailto:thehacketts@sympatico.ca).

I would like to remind you that our Annual General meeting will be held on Tuesday November 29th at Ste. Marguerite Bourgeoys School at 7.00PM. Apart from the reports from the President, Treasurer and Blockhouse Manager, a list of the nominees for the upcoming Board Executive Directors is presented and voted upon.

My husband and I moved to Merrickville just eleven years ago and soon after my arrival I became a member of the Historical Society. In 2006 I joined a Historical Society committee formed by our then President John Cowan to prepare for the Rideau 175 Lecture Series, (which by the way was a tremendous success) and subsequently I became a member Board Executive Committee of the Society. I have been President for the past four years. All this to say, that being a member of the Executive has been a wonderful experience and I have met and worked with some very talented, resourceful, interesting and yes funny people, and I have also made many, many friends within the community, some or most of whom I would not have met without being a member of the society and having the opportunity to serve and work with the Society Executive.

The Society is often stretched to the limits with the number of tasks that need to be done to keep the Society functioning so successfully. We are always in need of a helping hand, for such items as writing, editing and producing the newsletter, keeping the membership up to date, arranging for speakers for our lecture meetings, writing and submitting advertisements for those lectures, public notices, student grant applications, submitting reports to governing agencies, and liaison with those same agencies, arranging the spring dinner, student essay contest, cataloguing of archival material. The list goes on.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to come forward and join us on the Executive Board, or volunteer with any of the various tasks that need to be done on a regular basis. Like myself you will meet many wonderful people, some of whom you may know already, while serving to promote the interests of the Historical Society.

Enjoy the rest of the summer. We look forward to seeing you at the next lecture meeting, Tuesday September 27th.

### Membership Matters

**2011 Memberships in the Historical Society are now overdue. If you want to maintain your membership and if you have not already submitted your 2011 dues, please do so by cheque mailed to: MDHS Membership, Box 294, Merrickville, ON K0G 1N0**

Published with assistance from Ontario Ministry of Culture  
by the Merrickville & District Historical Society

Merrickville & District Historical Society  
Box 294, Merrickville, Ontario, K0G 1N0  
2011 Executive  
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