



## **Merrickville and District Historical Society**

### **President's Report**

**November 1, 2019 – October 31, 2020**

Another year has come and gone for the Society. As long-time members will know, our year-end is October 31 and what a year it was! While we were not able to finish our spring lecture series or open the Merrickville Blockhouse Museum safely in 2020 due to COVID-19, your Executive has been hard at work preparing for summer 2021 – and beyond.

Prior to the pandemic, we held our one, and only, public lecture on February 25, 2020 when Merrickville author Dan Black discussed his new book, Harry Livingstone's Forgotten Men: Canadians and the Chinese Labour Corps in the First World War. This event was well attended with the approximately 40 people at the Merrickville Legion.

With the Blockhouse Museum closed for the summer, we took advantage of the pause to re-connect with Parks Canada and the Village of Merrickville-Wolford. As a result of our actions,

1. Parks Canada agreed to cap the chimney in the kitchen on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Blockhouse Museum. This means that we will no longer have the moisture from the snow in the museum during the spring.
2. The village of Merrickville-Wolford has agreed to be the point of contact for the alarm monitoring system.

Our relationship with Parks Canada also means that we can expect a copy of the Rideau Canal National Historic Site of Canada and UNESCO World Heritage Site (including Merrickville Blockhouse National Historic Site of Canada) Draft Management Plan for comment when it is released later in 2020 or early 2021. While the Merrickville Blockhouse National Historic Site used to have its own stand-alone management plan, it is now being incorporated into the larger Rideau Canal Management Plan. We anticipate that there will be changes that accompany this change in focus by Parks Canada.

### **Membership**

Our records indicate that we had 16 individual or family memberships in 2020 and 39 Life Members for a total of approximately 75 individuals.

The Executive Committee would like to communicate more, and more often, with our members. To do this, however, we need some more hands who are willing to attend a monthly executive committee meeting (via ZOOM, for the moment) and put together a newsletter on our MailChimp newsletter. We would also like to be able to distribute this information via our social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter) as well. If this is a place where you think you can make a contribution to the MDHS, please let us know.

### **Executive Committee Changes**

During the first six months of our fiscal year, Cynthia Waldie resigned her position as First Vice-President and Andrew McKay resigned as Treasurer. I'd like to acknowledge Andrew McKay's many years of service to the Executive Committee in a variety of roles spanning several decades including President, Treasurer and Past President. Due to the pandemic, we worked with a vacancy with respect to the First Vice-President and are grateful to Rod Fournier, who stepped into the role of the Treasurer in the spring. Together with myself as President, Jane Graham as Secretary, Angela Beking as Vice President. Our Constitution allows for 4 Executive committee members to form a quorum, so we have been operating "at the edge" for this year. It is our hope that we have an expanded Executive Committee in 2021.

### **New Processes and Procedures**

The realities of public health directives during the pandemic meant changes to the way MDHS conducted its business during fiscal year 2020.

1. The monthly Executive Committee meetings were held using ZOOM video conferencing. This proved to be quite effective and engage with some of our emerging professionals who remain passionate and committed to our work, but find themselves living in Ottawa, Toronto or beyond.
2. MDHS Executive Committee approved the move to fully electronic banking. This reduced our monthly bank charges and allowed us to accept membership dues electronically. Many thanks to Treasurer Rod Fournier for seeing these changes through.
3. The process of acknowledging our new and renewing members transitioning. Our past practice of distributing membership cards and tracking contact information will need to be changed as we go forward to ensure that all of our members are acknowledged, and their email addresses added to our MailChimp distribution list.

### **Looking forward to 2021**

## Blockhouse Museum

We're sharpening our pencils and filling in the grant applications to have at least 2 youth available to work during July and August 2021. Our plan is to have the Blockhouse Museum open at least 5 days a week (Thursday – Monday) and by appointment.

MDHS Collections are going digital!

In this changing world, MDHS is exploring the possibility of moving all of the information regarding our artifacts and archival holdings on-line. This would mean that anyone, anywhere in the world, could have access to the information about our collections. In addition, it will allow us to mount virtual exhibitions. The good news is that our 2015 PastPerfect Project means that most of our information is already in a format that can be moved to the PastPerfect Web Edition (in the cloud). We are pleased that a team of half a dozen MDHS volunteers have already agreed to sign-on to make this project a reality.

## Blockhouse Museum Planning – Beyond 2021

As with many organizations, this time of COVID-19, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Black Lives Matter and other societal forces have challenged us to re-think our museum and how we engage with our public(s). We are not alone in these challenges and are watching how other galleries, libraries, archives and museums (known as the GLAM sector in museum-speak) are stepping up. We would like to contemplate that this work will lead to a review of our interpretation of the building, which has not altered substantially in 52 years. Parks Canada, too, is considering a refresh of its messaging along the entire canal as part of its new Rideau Canal Draft Management Plan. We have applied for a Launch Pad Grant from the National Trust for Canada and hope that access to free coaching will help begin this journey.

I believe that 2021 will be equally as challenging a year as 2020 for all cultural institutions and I remain hopeful that there is enough support for the Merrickville Blockhouse Museum and the Merrickville and District Historical Society to find human resources that we require to renew our organization as we move forward into this (hopefully) post-pandemic world.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ann Martin,  
President, Merrickville and District Historical Society