

# The Merrickville and District Historical Society NEWSLETTER

March 2004

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## This Old House

On a cold January evening we were warmed by the heartfelt presentation of Derry Thompson describing the evolution of one of the Village's most historic homes at 105 Mill Street. Built after 1840 by Merrick descendents the stately but relatively simple 1½ story brick home, was acquired in 1867 by pioneer foundryman, William Henry Magee. He lived there until his death in 1887.



Each generation of owners added its own touch to the character of the home. By the turn of the 20th century the Magee home, known then as "the Maples", was a centre of Merrickville's social activity. Byron Magee, son of William Magee, added a turreted third story and numerous attractive Victorian architectural details including beautiful stained glass elliptical and Palladian windows. To accommodate his love of music, Byron had a music pavilion built into the corner of the wraparound veranda, and on a quiet summer evening you can still imagine the sounds of the music he loved coming from his personal concerts there.

Each subsequent generation of owners has contributed changes to "the Maples" and it is a tribute to their taste and sensitivity that the present structure, operated today by Derry and Kathleen Thompson as the elegant Millisle Bed & Breakfast, demonstrates such attractive architectural continuity. It is clearly one of the most beautifully preserved homes in the Village.

\*\*\*\*\*For the Record\*\*\*\*\*

In 1856 the first regular local newspaper, the "Mirickville Chronicle and Weekly Advisor" was published and was available by subscription for \$1.50 per year. For 12 years it served the Townships of Wolford, Kitley, Oxford, Montague, Marlborough and Elmsley.

The July 25th 1856 issue showed an ad which read,  
"William H. .McGee & Co. IRONFOUNDERS  
Manufacturers of Ploughs, Double Mould Ploughs, Cultivators,  
Road Scrapers, Stoves etc"  
Mirickville, C.W.

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## The Merricks (part 2)

***William Merrick: Where did he come from? How did he get here? What did he accomplish? And what was he like?***

In the previous segment, Mr. Abbot. A great-great-great grandson of William Merrick, told us about his Merrick ancestors. They were a frontier family who, following the

American Revolution, migrated to the new British frontier in the wilds of Upper Canada. In this segment we hear of William Merrick's search for an ideal location for his lumber mill on the Rideau. (Excerpted from Mr. Abbott's presentations to the Merrickville & District Historical Society, 1966 & 1993)

During the summer of 1788, William Merrick traveled up the St. Lawrence from Sorel to Lunenburg in the County of Stormont, near the present town of Morrisburg. He didn't find the land he was looking for, but he met and married Sylvia Comstock, the daughter of Welsh settlers. He was twenty-nine and she was eighteen. He had a United Empire Loyalist land grant in the Elizabethtown area but he was looking for something out of the ordinary. As a trained millwright he intended to establish his trade in the new land, and this required water power and a suitable location for a saw mill and grist mill. He hadn't found them at Stormont. Perhaps they would be found further west. Early the next year, he and Sylvia moved on to Elizabethtown, now Brockville, to scout out the land. Again he found available land unsuitable. The Merricks came from a long line of New England frontiersmen who were accustomed to shifting for themselves, and though he was a loyalist he shared the North American spirit of independence, and intended to see for himself a suitable location before putting his roots down.

Later that year, accompanied by Roger Stevens, a friend who became a constant companion in the early Merrickville days, he made his way up the Indian trail which led overland to Irish Creek, near the present village of Jasper. When they reached the Rideau, an essentially unexplored stream in those days, they probably constructed a raft to explore the river from Kilmarnock to the rapids where the present town of Merrickville now stands. Here he found what he was looking for. An ideal location for a mill.

The water drop was about fourteen feet and a small dam could raise it to twenty feet or higher. Also, he was impressed by the surrounding area which seemed suitable for agriculture, and there were excellent stands of mixed timber for a sawmill. He and Stevens spent some time in the area.

They explored the river and its water sources, laid out a tentative dam site, and selected a location for a cabin on the north shore, returning to Elizabeth for the winter.

The following year he erected a cabin, began construction of the dam, and made extensive surveys of the river. To be certain he had the ideal site, as late as 1799, he and Roger Stevens explored the Rideau Falls at the junction of the Rideau and Ottawa rivers, the site that would later become Bytown. They had been rafting lumber down to Montreal and probably had some interest in the Rideau Falls as a mill site. It appears to have been an unattractive location at that time. (Years later a government advisor suggested that the Gatineau be developed as a penal colony.)

Unfortunately, Rogers Stevens was drowned during one of these trips at the mouth of a small stream near the present village of Kars. Since that time it has been known as Stevens Creek. It was a sad ending, and a great loss to Merrick. Editor note: While it is an intriguing speculation, there are no facts to support the "foul play theory" of the death of Roger Stevens.

#### **\*\*\*\*\*First Merrickville Fatality\*\*\*\*\***

The first recorded death in Montague Township was a man named Nicholas Haskins who was fatally injured by falling timbers during the construction of William Merrick's grist mill in 1801

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### **Nominations for Heritage Award of Merit:**

Two years ago the Merrickville & District Historical Society began a programme to recognize individuals, organizations and businesses that have made a significant

contribution to maintaining the heritage and history of our area.

If you would like to submit a nomination for the 2004 awards, send information telling the reasons for your suggestion to: Merrickville & District Historical Society, Heritage Award, PO Box 294, Merrickville K0G 1N0

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## **New Technologies for Old Records**

In previous issues we have spoken of the need to find a safe and environmentally secure location for our archives. This remains one of the Historical Society's highest priorities. At the same time, in order to make the archives more accessible we have begun a programme, headed by Archives Chairperson, Janet Johnston, to organize the archives and produce a computer index of the contents.

Handwritten records will be copied to digital images, and printed material will be scanned and edited to produce accessible copies. The photos in the archives merit particular attention. Many are faded almost to obscurity. The historical Society is fortunate to have on its executive, Dieter Raths who has been able to wave a magical digital wand over these faded reminders of days past and bring them back to life.

For example, see below the before and after photos of the 19th century Merrickville "the Hame Factory".



**The Hame Factory photo c 1890 - before restoration**



**The Hame Factory c 1890 photo – after digital restoration**

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

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