



Spring 2013 **newsletter** VOLUME 12, NUMBER 2

Introducing Andrew McKay **President, 2013** Merrickville and District Historical Society

We are pleased to introduce to our members our new President, Andrew McKay who was elected President for 2013 at our Annual Meeting November 27 of 2012.

Andrew comes to us with significant experience in the affairs of the Historical Society. He was among the volunteers who stepped forward to answer a plea for help over 10 years ago and has been a valuable member of the Executive serving as, Membership Chair and Secretary-Treasurer until employment opportunities in Kingston and Brockville drew him away from us.

Returning to the Ottawa/Merrickville area last April, Andrew again responded to our plea for help in conducting the affairs of the Association and volunteered to serve as Treasurer. Due to the ease of rising to the top in a volunteer position, and responding to Nina's gentle persuasion, Andy found himself the new President.

"What Just Happen?" Andy was heard to exclaim. What happened is that the Society is very fortunate to obtain an excellent new President and worthy successor to Nina and those who preceded her as guardians of the history of our wonderful Village.

Andy McKay President



President's Report

Well, what is happening at the Historical Society this spring as we all emerge from our winter?

This is my first newsletter article as President of the Historical Society and as I mentioned in my Christmas message following the likes of Nina Donald, John Cowan and others is a challenge.

First we are preparing for the Annual Dinner in April. We are also looking forward to the June opening of the Blockhouse for the summer season, and the schoolchildren's essay/art contest, and I believe that we are also getting close to the 50th anniversary of the Blockhouse Museum. So we shall have to plan something special when that happens and find a suitable celebrity to commemorate that event. Does anyone have connections with Royalty? Perhaps we could invite William and Kate and Princess "??".

Even further down the road is Canada's 150th anniversary and we will need to start planning for that event as well. Something as excellent as the lecture Series would be appropriate. (In addition to our regular monthly lectures.)

The Archives has relocated to the Burritt's Rapids Community Hall and Nina is getting things organized. Perhaps we can look at an open house in the near future? What do you think Nina?

All of this makes it plain to me that it is time we had a good look at what we are doing and prepare a Strategic Plan II to allow ourselves an opportunity to take stock of where we are and where we would like to go. Many of you will recall Strategic Plan I that John Cowan initiated. That plan has brought us the Archives and the Website among other things.

So if anyone happens to ask you what the Historical Society does, you are now prepared to engage that person in a lively conversation.

Have a great spring everyone!

Andrew McKay

President

Alice Hughes Collection

The Historical Society along with the Merrickville Public Library is pleased to announce that we been honoured by the family of the late Alice Hughes (1919-2011) to receive the balance of her collection of historical and archival documents.



Nancy Hughes Dulmage, daughter of Alice, acquired this vast collection on her mother's passing, and after many, many hours spent reading, sorting, arranging and listing each and every item, she finished up with twelve boxes of documents consisting of photographs of historic building of Wolford Township, members of the communities, manuscripts, articles, newspapers, books, family genealogy records, schools of Merrickville-Wolford, scrapbooks, the list goes on.

[Kate Lapden, Merrickville Public Library, Nancy Hughes Dulmage and Nina Donald, MDHS, review the Alice Hughes collection](#)

Nancy and her family presented the collection to the Library and Historical Society on January 24, 2013, now librarian Mary Kate Lapden, with the help of Society volunteers, has the daunting task of sorting out any duplicated material that will be handed over to the Historical Society to be added to their collection. All of the material will be digitized by both the Library and Society Archives and added to the existing Hughes collection.

We should all be proud and honoured that we had a person like Alice Hughes, who had a passion for history and a love of the community that she lived in to spend her life researching and documenting material so that future generations might never forget our ancestors.

To Alice and the Hughes family we thank you.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Annual Spring Dinner - April 30th: The MDHS will be holding its Annual Spring dinner which this year will be held at the Merrickville Legion Hall, 229 Main Street West. Cocktails at 6:30pm, dinner at 7:00pm. The guest speaker will be Carole Goddard and the topic will be the "British Home Children." Reservations are required by April 19.

Blockhouse Museum - May 11th: Clean up day at the Blockhouse Museum, 10 am to 12:30 pm. Volunteers are welcome.

Blockhouse Museum Unofficial Opening - May 18th: The unofficial opening of the Blockhouse Museum's shoulder season, operating on Saturdays and Sundays only, from noon to 4pm. The museum is staffed at this time by Society volunteers, so expect a call from the volunteer manager, Ellen Hackett to see when she can slot you in.

Society Lecture Meeting - May 28th: Guest speaker John McKinty will present a talk on the quintessential Canadian bicycle manufacturer, CCM. At Ste. Marguerite Bourgeoys School, 7:30 pm. Light refreshments provided.

Blockhouse Opening Celebrations - June 15th: The Blockhouse Opening Celebrations, starting at 2:00pm with the official ribbon cutting, followed by an afternoon of activities.

Fall Lecture Series commences - September 24th: The speaker will be Ann Shropshire, Curator of the Smith Falls Railway Museum. MDHS lecture meeting are open to the general public, 7:30pm at Ste. Marguerite Bourgeoys School. Light refreshments provided.

Andrewsville Bridge Reopens.

After closing in May 2012 due to a rather unfortunate traffic accident, we are pleased to announce that the Andrewsville Bridge has been re-opened to vehicular traffic as of Friday March 15, 2013. Prominently posted signs announcing new height restriction barriers of 2.4m and a load limit of 5 Tonnes should prevent any misunderstanding of the traffic restrictions and a re-occurrence of the last accident.

Many thanks have gone out to those whom worked so diligently to advise the authorities of the need to repair the bridge rather than a complete closure. Without the support of the Lanark County Public Works, UCL, councillors, and the many volunteers, perhaps the "Save the Andrewsville Bridge" committee would still be working to raise the awareness and funding to complete this project. However, much more fund raising will need to be done for future maintenance and structural repairs. More information is available at andrewsbridge@hotmail.com.

The Industries of Merrickville – Part Two Submitted by John Cowan

The Industrial Revolution comes to Merrickville

When United Empire Loyalist, William Merrick built his first mill, the destiny was set for the Town that came to be named for him. But success came neither quickly nor without tribulation.

The first ill-fated attempts to establish saw and gristmills at Merrickville became embroiled in the business quagmire he inherited from Roger Stevens, so much so that he actually abandoned the thought of locating at Merrickville and attempted to obtain mill property at Andrewsville. Finally after almost interminable troubles with the government he was successful in obtaining title to the land at Merrickville and was able to finally construct his mill. One is left with the impression that Merrick was an exceedingly patient, plain-dealing, hard-working man who was also imbued with a sense of willingness to take major risks. It is gratifying to find that in the end his perseverance was rewarded and that he had the double satisfaction of erecting successful mills, and also founding a village that now bears his name.

Historian Richard Tatley summarizes the struggles to bring the Merrick mills into production in his text below.

*"The years 1792 to 1845 may be considered the formative years in the history of Merrickville. With its splendid water power, it's fairly close proximity to the St. Lawrence, and it's not-too forbidding hinterland, the site proved a magnet for millers and settlers from a surprisingly early date. Though the initial attempt by the Merricks and Roger Stevens to open saw and gristmills became bogged down and ultimately failed, William Merrick was finally successful in re-acquiring the property and -- by 1803 -- erecting the two mills the settlement so badly needed. Much later he also built a carding mill. All these entities stood on the north shore near the present dam and bridge. It can thus be said that sawmilling, gristing and some primary woollen manufacturing were all firmly established in Merrickville by the 1820s, but that no other (*manufacturing*) industries were represented in the pioneer period, except blacksmithing." (Note reference to early potash production elsewhere in this edition*

"The construction of the Rideau Canal (1826-32) suddenly converted Merrickville from a small hamlet into a prominent village, gave it convenient access to Kingston and Bytown, and put it directly along the main corridor of commerce from Montreal to Upper Canada.

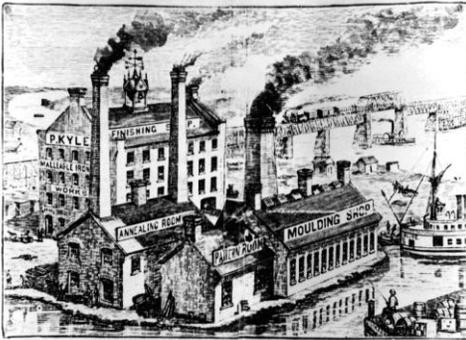
The pioneer mills seem to have benefited immensely, especially the gristmill which apparently had to be rebuilt around 1829. Except perhaps for the island gristmill of 1839 none of the industrial buildings from this period have left any visible traces."

"All in all, Merrickville's early history is most remarkable for its great antiquity (by Ontario standards), and its early pioneer mills have the distinction of having been the first ones erected anywhere on the Rideau watershed, and amongst the first to appear anywhere in the province."

While William Merrick and his sons can be credited with beginning the Merrickville industrial era with their successful lumber, grist and carding mills the next phase of development following his death in 1844, was led by a new breed of industrialists, not yet born when Merrick built his first dams. In the decades following Merrick's death these new entrepreneurs advanced Merrickville industrial development from the processing of raw materials, wood, grain and wool, to the manufacture of complex finished products.

In 1856 an advertisement in the Merrickville Chronicle the complexity of products being manufactured is indicated:

"William H. McGee & Co., IRONFOUNDERS, Manufactures of Ploughs, Double Mold Board Ploughs, Cultivators, Road Scrapers, Stoves, &c."



The early development of the foundry business and the presence of lumber mills, skilled trades and tradesmen as well as an availability of ready power and the access to markets via the Rideau Canal had thus made Merrickville attractive for a large variety of industries. In today's terms it would be called a "Centre of Excellence", a water-and coal-powered Silicone Valley.

Percival Plow and Stove Company Works, ca. 1900

Ref: Sketch of R. C. Percival and Son Works, North Shore. Artist unknown. (Rideau Canal Interpretative Office, Smiths Falls.)

While the stories of William McGee, Roger Percival, William Pearson and the Watchorns are often related, the story of self-made industrialist Patrick Kyle (1838-1911) is less well known. He was born in Ireland and came as an infant to Merrickville where he learned the blacksmith trade from his father. By the age of thirty he was operating his own blacksmith shop in Merrickville and shortly thereafter he and partners began to build carriages in Merrickville under the name of "Lingenfelter and Kyle" at the north-east corner of St. Lawrence and Drummond Streets, (the present location of Miller's Antiques) where he also built his home.

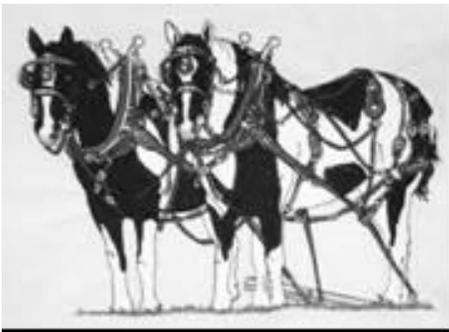
By July, 1881 Kyle was in a position to buy the iron works property from Mrs. Mary Merrick, along with the water power privileges connected with it. (Now the eastern portion of the Alloy Foundry Company's property and shown in the illustration in the last Newsletter.) In 1890 he had purchased the western portion of Mrs. Merrick's lands and now had custody of the north shore sawmill and flour mill and other buildings along with complete control of the water flumes from the dam to his enterprises. Through the balance of the 19th century, Patrick Kyle and his son Thomas continued to add to their holdings. Few of the stories of Industries in Merrickville at one time or another did not mention his name. One reference although minor on the scheme of Kyle's activities was a small manufacturing operation he set up as a supplier to support the important evolving carriage business.

Merrickville Hame Factory, 1888

In an era when "horsepower" was a literal description, horses were employed in pulling anything from plows to carriages. The harness which controlled the horse was a complicated and specialized system. (And still is). Hames are a pair of

curved wooden and metal frames lying on the horse collar of a horse harness, taking the pull from the attached traces and helping to optimize a draft horse's comfort and effectiveness. Little has changed over the centuries, these device are still sold today and used in the same way for horse harnesses.

Draught Horses in Harness Hames *Ref: www.mydraffhorse.com*



The making of full harnesses was a skilled trade and important in support of the local carriage manufacturing businesses. Quality hames were an important component of harnesses and apparently difficult to procure locally.



So important in fact, that in 1888, Merrickville Council voted to approve a grant amounting to the sum of One Thousand Dollars to assist in establishing a business to manufacture hames. Quick to take advantage of this Government largess the enterprising Patrick Kyle established "The Merrickville Hame Co" (Limited) in 1888. Further, Kyle was to enjoy ten years' exemption from taxation but only if his Company provided employment to at least 20 skilled workmen.

Merrickville Hame Co. employees c 1897

*Merrickville Blockhouse Museum, Archives *Note this original historic photo was digitally restored by MDHS member, Dieter Raths.*

A photo in the Merrickville and District Historical Society archives, dated c 1897, shows 22 proud employees of the Merrickville Hame Company, indicating that for at least nine years, the company met its employment conditions and benefitted from the tax free grant. Perhaps not surprisingly, there is no record of the Hame factory existing beyond the ten year grace period after 1899. Patrick Kyle was undoubtedly a shrewd operator.

[Ref: Industries and Industrialists of Merrickville, 1792-1979, by Richard Tatley, 1979 Parks Canada Manuscript Report](#)

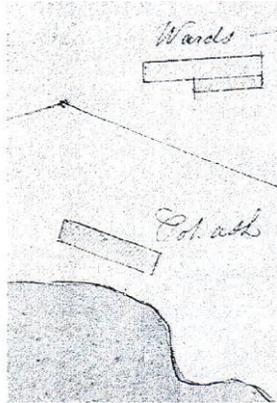
POTASH AND MERRICKVILLE Submitted by David Hammonds, Jan 21, 2013

1. AN EARLY POTASHERY

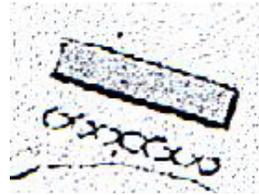
The article in the Winter 2013 issue of the Newsletter notes the existence of a potashery in Merrickville “around mid-century”. However, prior to the building of the Rideau Canal a potashery was active in Merrickville before 1829

This is known thanks to maps or plans, which were prepared to accompany progress reports by officers of the Royal Engineers, during construction of the Rideau Canal. Two maps show the potashery, on a site which was drowned out when the Merrickville Dam was raised in 1914. The first map, dated April 1829, shows a building about 40ft long and 10 feet wide, labelled “POTASH”. A second plan prepared in March 1830, shows the same building with a row of seven circles drawn closer to the river. The left bank of the river is shown close by, on both drawings. As is well known, potasheries were situated close to a river bank so that operatives, affected by a steam blow back of lye, could dive into the water to wash it off and avoid alkali burns.

1829



1830



The approximate location of the 1829 potashery would be about 25 feet south of the present day headpond retaining wall, which runs upriver from the dam, parallel to Water Street. The building labelled "Wards" could be a predecessor structure to Merricks Tavern, built later on Mill Street.

2. POTASH KETTLE

One of the most prized artifacts and possibly the oldest exhibit in the Merrickville Blockhouse, is its Potash Kettle. Embossed on its rim is the equivalent of a precious metal hallmark, which reads "F S-M 8-2-21" (Forges St-Maurice, 8th Feb.1821). This shows it was manufactured by the Forges du Saint-Maurice, located near the Riviere St Maurice in Trois Rivières, QC. It was the birthplace of Canada's iron industry and began operating in the time of the *ancien régime* - New France, in 1738. It continued operating until the advent of the Bessemer process for steel production, in the late 1860s, forced it out of business in 1883. The Merrickville Public Library has available for loan, an English translation of the book which presents an amazingly well documented history, (Ref 3).

The provenance of the Blockhouse exhibit is not known but it was donated to the Museum in 1968 by Mr A.L. Mansfield of Arnprior.

References

1 [Plan of the Works in Progress at Merricks Mills, Rideau Canal, April 1829, Horiz Scale 50 feet to an inch, signed by Lieut E.C. Frome, R.E. Ref NMC13025 item 574 RG84M745/30246 Merrickville.](#)

2 [Merricks Mills, Rideau Canal, March 1830, Scale 100 feet to an inch, signed by Lieut E.C. Frome Ref NMC470/576rg84MT45/30246 Merrickville.](#)

3 [SAMSON, Roch, *Les Forges du Saint-Maurice ; les débuts de l'industrie sidérurgique au Canada 1730-1883*, Ottawa 1998.](#)

Did You Know?

Valuable recipes reprinted from the Home Cook Book, MDHS Archives. Proceed with caution!

Hair Tonic from Mrs. A. M.

One-half ounce sugar of lead, one-half ounce of lac sulphur, one quart of rose water, six tablespoons castor oil.

Cold Cream, Mrs. Anna Marble.

Four ounces sweet almond oil, two ounces of rose water, two ounces of white wax, two ounces of cocoa butter, two of spermaceti; put a bowl in a pan of boiling water; cut the spermaceti, white wax, and cocoa butter in small pieces; put them in the bowl, also the oil and rose water. When melted, stir contents until cold.

To Restore from Stroke of Lightning – Shower with cold water for two hours; if the patient does not show signs of life, put salt in the water, and continue to shower an hour longer.

(I would have to say if all else fails call the undertaker)

We have a correction to our Winter Newsletter, it would appear that the "Then and Now Campbell House" is not in fact a Designated Heritage property. Sorry for our mistake.

Membership Matters 2013

Membership in the historical Society is renewed annually from December to November at a present cost of \$10 per person or \$15 per family. Life memberships are also available for \$100.

We welcome new members and hope present members will want to re-join our Society. If so, it will be helpful if you can submit your cheques early to allow us to fund our ongoing works.

Your membership will assist us in continuing to celebrate the history and heritage of our community.

Thank you

MDHS Membership, Box 294, Merrickville, Ontario,
K0G 1N0:

2013 Executive

President, Andrew McKay

1st Vice President, David Hammonds

2nd Vice President, Ellen Hackett

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