

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR – 2024

What a year 2024 has been! Lots of changes, new things, new people, new projects, exciting times.

Probably the biggest change has been the creation of a Municipal Museum Services Board – and the Village of Merrickville-Wolford now managing the Blockhouse Museum. This has been in the works for a few years – but MDHS has realized that the day to day management of a Museum needed to be in the hands of the Municipality. This new partnership has successfully navigated through its first year with minimal difficulties. The Village hired a Museum Manager for the season and this worked well. Attendance was below where it has been pre-pandemic but still a good year. We hosted a number of large private tours to outside groups which provided a new source of revenue.

In 1965, when there was talk of demolishing the Blockhouse, a group of concerned citizens banded together to save it and establish the Museum. The Blockhouse Museum, a Museum Services Board and the Historical Society were all created by one By Law. Thus for the past 60 years we have been attached as one entity. Now as we evolve as a Historical Society no longer consumed with the job of running a Museum, we have more time to pursue other ventures. To be clear – the Collection still belongs to MDHS, and certainly we are involved with the Museum, just not the grant writing, hiring staff, staff management, payroll, working with Parks Canada etc.

On to other news – our Lecture Series – managed by Donna Ross and Peter Szmidt for the past few years has been once again hugely successful. Seven Lectures this year, attendance anywhere from 30 – 60. We now have a donation box out front and are generating revenue which helps offset the honorarium we pay to the speakers.

We did get a new Constitution written and accepted by all. A dedicated team worked long and hard to get that done (almost on time as mandated by the Provincial Government). Thank you to those who attended our General Meeting.

Our membership continues to grow – 127 in 2024 – do not forget to renew! Thank you Karen Finstad for all your hard work on this! Irene Chaley looks after Social Media and it is great to have Facebook and our Website updated regularly.

Of course we have been having great fun raising awareness of Harry McLean and fundraising for the life size bronze sculpture that will be created. Our own local Gather Brewery and Glassworks has brewed a signature BIG PANTS Pilsner in Harry's honour. We will get some proceeds from the sale of that beer. We had a very fun dress up event at Gather in June to celebrate and fundraise. Many newcomers to our Community still do not know about him. We decided to have Harry in the Xmas In Merrickville parade this year (Thank you Yves!) Our float was decorated by a keen group of volunteers and we had many walkers handing out gold coins in the parade. It seemed fitting as Harry gave a lot of money away and was very generous to people in Merrickville. Stay tuned for more events.

New projects and initiatives –

We were asked to help the Kemptville Quilters Guild and North Grenville Historical Society in the promotion of an annual book of quilts. The 2024 edition has 7 of MDHS quilts from our collection and we have the books for sale (at the Blockhouse and online).

A new initiative – we are calling the Great M-W House project. Working with the Library and Lions - we are planning on converting the huge Alice Hughes collection (currently in dozens of binders at the Library and in our Archives) into digital format that can be more accessible (and will protect old paper). Information, photos and stories of many houses all over our area. We get many requests weekly of people wanting to know about homes they have just purchased or looking for information on their heritage.

We have lots more ideas – and with a new board and keen volunteers on working committees we have lots to do and we will keep you all informed as things progress.

Thank you all for your interest and support.

Jane Graham

Chair MDHS