

The Merrickville and District Historical Society NEWSLETTER

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Merrickville Archives in the Library

The Merrickville & District Historical Society was pleased to be invited to participate in the new Public Library by operating a special room devoted to genealogical study and to archival storage. As well as containing the 20,000 pages of family records developed in the Alice Hughes papers, the room will contain a computer terminal on which the public will be able to search and view thousands of documents and records now digitally stored thanks to funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation as well as a private grant from the estate of the late Thomas Manning. This will be achievement of a four year project undertaken by the Historical Society to make the important records of local history and heritage more accessible to the community.

The "English Church" - 100 year celebration.



**Itinerant Preacher
by C.W. Jeffereys**

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Merrickville "Church of the Holy Trinity", but not of the arrival of the Anglican Church in Merrickville. With the building of the Rideau Canal and the influx of British soldiers and settlers to the district, as early as 1829, the area was served by roving Church of England missionaries who visited the Merrickville and area.

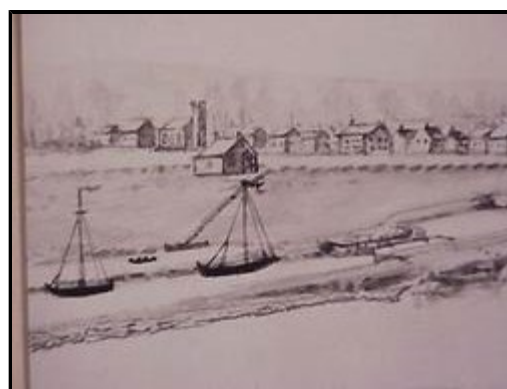
Like all missionaries of the time these itinerant preachers covered huge areas, traveling along trails and through woods by horseback to visit their parishioners. Servicing Merrickville from a base in Kemptville, Reverend Hy Patton was an appointee to the townships of Wolford, Marlborough, part of Montague, Oxford, and North and South Gower.

Initially services were held in various homes and later in the Minto School

(now the Legion Hall) and after 1833 in the Merrickville Blockhouse. By 1837 the congregation had grown and a wooden Church, in the style of Burritt's Christ Church, was built on a rise of land towards Collar hill, in approximately the same location as the present Church. Some early historic drawings show the prominence of the Church to travelers through the Canal.

In 1869, the "English Church" was enlarged with the addition of Transepts and Chancel and in 1887 an attractive red brick rectory was built next door.

The Church as it appeared c 1900 is pictured below.



**Canal at Merrickville with English
Church in Background circa 1850 detail
W. Clegg , National Gallery**



**The Original Merrickville
Anglican Church circa 1900**

Anticipating growth both of the Congregation and the Village, the original Church was torn down and replaced by the graceful stone building this year celebrating its 100th year. The new stone Church with interior designed on a crucifix form, was built in a collegiate Gothic style which exuded grace dignity and solidity. Local citizens contributed to the project with the Jakes, Magees and Merricks donating the triple lancet windows.

****** the Blockhouse is Re-Located ******

Early maps show the Merrickville Blockhouse was originally intended to be located not adjacent to the upper canal locks, but further East on a hill overlooking the River; in fact on the site of the present Anglican Church. All of the other Blockhouses on the Rideau were located on heights of land to give commanding views of the Canal, but, on the flat field where the Blockhouse is located, there is no good view in any direction up or down the Canal.

Why was its location moved? By the time the Blockhouse was to be built, money was tight, and the war threat was diminished. And Col By was under increasing pressure for cost over-runs. Further, the Rideau Canal Act did not allow expropriation. Perhaps Colonel By frugally used land the Crown already owned rather than purchasing additional property. A further complication could have been that the favoured land was owned in part by William Merrick and we have learned he was not very co-operative to Colonel By and his canal, to say the least.

Sylvia Comstock Merrick

Recently we were challenged by a website visitor who wrote, >"Why is there no mention of William Merrick's wife, Sylvia Comstock<" in the writings on Merrickville? Good question. Although Merrick's wife Sylvia worked together with William in conquering the Rideau wilderness to found our Village, there are few references to the role she played. And yet, she must have been a remarkable woman in her own right. Married while barely out of childhood and joining William at the new settlement with three infants she would have managed all of the household duties in their first (likely) humble log home and later in their first stone home, still standing just downstream from their final more prominent dwelling now generally referred to as "the William Merrick house".



**the first Merrick Stone house c 1820
photo retouched by J Cowan**

***the following story is stitched together by the author from the few various references found (below) and with a few reasonable assumptions. JC*

Sylvia Comstock was born March 23, 1774 (3) and upon the death of her father and her mother's re-marriage she became the step-daughter of Ephraim Eyres. During the Revolutionary Wars, Ephraim Eyres was a Loyalist spy and for his efforts in support of the British he was captured and jailed in Albany NY. (1) It appears during his imprisonment, his wife was allowed "go forward" with some of her property and family perhaps as far as Lunenburg, Ontario (Stormont Township, near Cornwall). Following the peace settlement in 1783, Ephraim escaped prison or was released and he headed north to Canada arriving to join his wife in 1784 at Stormont which at the time was a "staging area" for new United Empire Loyalists awaiting receipt of land claims and entitlements. (1)

Meanwhile millwright William Merrick arrived in Canada at Sorel, Quebec during the summer of 1788 (2) and traveled up the St. Lawrence from Sorel to Lunenburg where the same year he encountered and married Ephraim's daughter Sylvia Comstock. Perhaps with several of own children, Ephraim was anxious to get his step daughter off his hands for Sylvia appears to have been only 14 or 15 years old at the time of her marriage to 28 year old William !! (3) Merrick, who was a late arriving Loyalist with no apparent record of service on behalf of the British in the American Revolution, had nothing but a basic property claim to look forward to, whereas Sylvia as the daughter of a British Revolutionary war hero was entitled to petition for a substantial land entitlement.



typical 19th century grist mill
- Wikipedia free encyclopedia

Ephraim Eyres himself was granted property in Elizabethtown (1) and Sylvia and William followed to the burgeoning settlement which would become Brockville. But millwright William Merrick was determined to find a sight for a new mill and as early as 1790 he began to explore the country north of the St. Lawrence with a partner Roger Stephens (also a 1776 war veteran with substantial land entitlements). Together they struck the Rideau from Irish Creek, traveled down river to the "Great Fall" a sight they chose for their first lumber mill and soon a grist mill.

Meanwhile back in Elizabethtown Sylvia was occupied with a new family and by the time she joined Merrick at his new mill probably about 1796, she had given birth to three children, Charlotte, 1791, William Jr. 1793 and Charles, 1796. She was now 23 years old. While she had probably often traveled to her husband's Merrick's Mills it appears she continued to live in Elizabethtown, at least during the winters.(2).

Sylvia and William Merrick had 7 children who survived to adulthood, and who as a family continued to build mills and develop the successful Village which became Merrickville.

William Merrick died in 1844 and Sylvia followed a few years later (1848). They are both buried , together with their eldest child, Charlotte, and her husband, in Merrickville in the old cemetery at the foot of Collar Hill. They were interred under Welsh style stone crypt and grave markers.

Sylvia Comstock Merrick must certainly have been a remarkable woman. Aside from raising seven children, she was apparently of strong



William & Sylvia Mirick graves in Collar Hill Cemetery

support to William, who was a dominant, strong-willed, determined and at times difficult individual. He was also opportunistic, generally allying himself with others who were in position to receive greater land grants and allocations than he was; all traits that made him successful as a pioneer and developer of Merrickville. But he probably was not the most gentle of men to live with.

To quote his great-great-great grandson Kimble Abbott who spoke to the Merrickville & District Historical Society in 1967, *"I can only give you my impressions drawn from the family and the little research that I have been able to undertake. I don't think that he was a popular man. After all he was running things here and it wasn't called Merricks Mills for nothing. He was a man with a vision and determination born from survival in the wilderness. There is nothing in the background from his family to suggest that he would let anything stand in the way of his objectives."*

References:

(1) Marilyn Sapienza, (2) Kim Abbott, (3) Merrick Family web site www.merrick-mirickfamily.com

Honorary MDHS Membership for Alice Hughes

From the anticipation and formation of the Historical Society in the early sixties, to the creation of the Blockhouse Museum and its furnishing, Alice Hughes has been at the leading edge of the Historical Society's efforts to explore, protect and preserve the history and heritage of Merrickville-Wolford. No-one has worked more constantly nor consistently to ensure the lives of the pioneer families of the district are recognized and remembered.



Alice Hughes with her extended family at the spring Dinner

It is for this reason that the Merrickville & District Historical Society presented to Alice Hughes its first and only honorary membership. Surrounded by loving and proud members of her extended family, Alice received the recognition and recalled the first official opening of the Museum in the year 1967, when Lieutenant Governor Earle Rowe rode to the Blockhouse in the McGrath courting gig, a McLaughlin carriage which for many years was a



Alice Hughes receives certificate from John Cowan Recognizing her as the first Historical Society Honorary Member

popular attraction of the Museum and which now has been returned to the McGrath family. Congratulations and thank Alice you for your unstinting support!

Membership Matters

We are extremely pleased and grateful for the support of our members in our activities. Over the last few years our membership has re-grown to levels experienced in "the early days". As of this moment we have 131 current paid members 48 of whom have chosen the convenient (and bargain) life membership option.

If you have received with this issue a friendly reminder, it means you have been a paid member in the last two years, but that we have not recorded your membership for the current year. If you would like to renew your membership we invite you to do so now.

Of course, you are not required to be a member of the Merrickville & District Historical Society to attend our regular Spring and Fall lectures, but, with the increased cost of mailing, we will in the future only be able to send this newsletter to currently paid-up members. (If you are computer savvy and patient, you can read the newsletter at www.merrickvillehistory.org Our popular website has had over 30,000 visits, and all 17 newsletters have been published there.

To date we have been able to maintain our membership dues to a modest \$5 per person or \$10 per family with life membership at \$50.

Sheena Cowan, Membership Chair

Night Navigation on the Rideau Canal

In the early 1900s, night navigation became more common on the Rideau Canal and was aided by light from kerosene gas lanterns. The Department of Railways and Canals entered into contracts for servicing the lanterns for each section of the canal. From the early 1900s to 1913 when night navigation ended, the contract for the section between the lock stations of Old Slys and Merrickville, was awarded to W.B. McCaw, who farmed north of Edmonds lock at Rainbow Valley Drive, Montague Township. Using

his motorized dory, "Jenibee", every afternoon during the navigation season, he would visit each service platform and top up the fuel reservoir of its lantern.

His grandson, noted wood-carver John Byron Garton of Smith's Falls, refurbished the brass wheel and propeller of the vessel and mounted them on a handsome board of American walnut, shaped like the dory. Having done that he was left wondering where it might be displayed to advantage. His daughter Deanna approached the Merrickville Historical Society and a suitable location was found in the canal section of the Blockhouse Museum, where it is now displayed, together with a photo taken at the time and an article on the history written by his wife Jenny Garton.

The exhibit was formally accepted by President Nina Donald at the end of the formal Blockhouse opening ceremonies on June 14, 2008.

Submitted by Gillian and David Hammonds Co-Managers, Merrickville Blockhouse Museum



Ships propeller and wheel from the dory "Jenibee" used by W.B. McCaw who lit the kerosene gas lock lights between Old Slys locks and Merrickville.

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John Cowan, Editor

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