



Spring 2014 Newsletter Volume 13, Number 1

President's Message

So spring is almost here. The calendar one and the real one. Gardening season, sunshine, blockhouse cleanup day and the Blockhouse opening day. All of this is just around the corner. Snow will soon be just a bad memory.

Bobbie Cardwell has placed the advertisement in the Phoenix for the Blockhouse Interpreters and applications will be arriving soon. They will be evaluated and interviews will be set up so that the staff will be ready to start on June 14th. Sharon Alger has submitted all of the grant applications and she hopes to receive a favourable response back from the various governmental agencies. Ellen Hackett will be looking for volunteers for May weekends in the blockhouse, and Gillian Gray has finalized all of the arrangements for the upcoming Annual Spring dinner. We have a great speaker lined up.

Perhaps this might be a good time to thank all of our Committee Chairpersons and Volunteers who have worked so diligently behind the scenes to ensure the continued operation of the Society.

There is still much to be done though and if you would like to become a new volunteer we will make room for you on our team as we get started on a new spring here in Merrickville.

See you at the Blockhouse.

Andrew McKay

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 25th MDHS Lecture - St. Marguerite Bourgeoys School, 7:30 pm, guest speaker Amy Mackie presents "Mother Barnes; The Witch of Plum Hollow" All are welcome, refreshments will be served.

April 29th the MDHS Annual Spring dinner held at the Merrickville Legion Hall, 229 Main Street West. Cocktails at 6:30pm, dinner at 7:00pm. Guest speaker Mr. Dan Black will enlighten us with "Old Enough to Fight", Canada's Boy Soldiers in the First World War.

May 10th clean up day at the Blockhouse Museum. Volunteers required.

May 17th Unofficial opening of the Blockhouse Museum's shoulder season, operating on Saturdays and Sundays only, from noon to 4PM. The museum is operated at this time by Society volunteers, so expect a call from the Volunteer Chairperson, Ellen Hackett to see when she can slot you in.

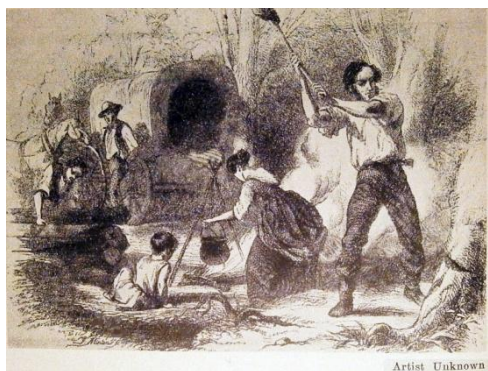
June 14th is the Blockhouse Opening Celebrations, starting at 2:00PM with the ribbon cutting officiated by Mayor Struthers and MDHS President McKay, followed by the announcement and presentation to the winners of the Student Essay and Art Contests. An afternoon of activities celebrating our pioneer heritage is also planned.

The Industries of Merrickville: Part Five: The Carriage Industry Submitted by John Cowan

This is the fifth article drawn from the work of Richard Tatley and others. It focuses on the industries that grew to support the Horse which was the “engine of work and transportation” of the day.

The earliest wave of United Empire Loyalists before 1790 had settled along the shores of Lake Ontario and thanks to favourable land grants and communal efforts they quickly established living comforts comparable to those they had enjoyed prior to the American Revolution of 1776.

However many later immigrants arrived with only the barest of essentials to support life in the new settlement parcels north of Lake Ontario. One of the areas established for settlement was the Rideau corridor where immigrants from the U.K. and from the United States arrived in the early 1800's with little more than an axe and a hoe, a metal bucket, a few days' rations, and perhaps some planting seed.



Setting up a New Home Ref: *Early life in Upper Canada*

Once settled and established early settlers seldom had need to leave their farm. They grew or made what was needed and had little surplus produce and virtually no cash to take to market. And if they did, they walked there. Sometimes remarkable distances.* Farm tools were primitive; a wooden hoe, planting and gathering by hand, later, if afforded a plough horse or a rugged ox and its clumsy cart.

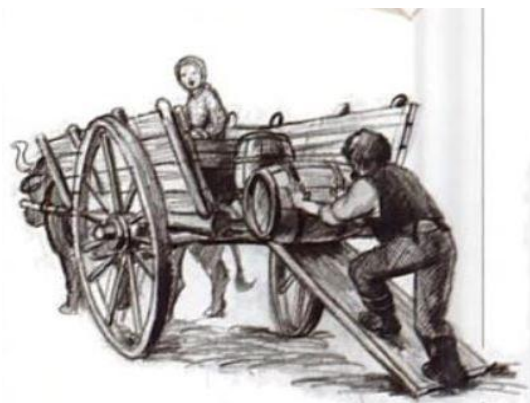
Musk ox cart

Text copyright 1994 by Barbara Greenwood, Illustrations copyright by Heather

Ref: A Pioneer Sampler: The Daily Life of a Pioneer Family in 1840

* (see the story “Blue-edged Bowl”, Thomas McCrea’s 60 km jaunt from Merrickville to Brockville and back carrying a-half bushels of wheat on his back to exchange for needed supplies and for his wife, one “luxury” item . . . a Blue-edged Bowl.

see <http://www.rideau-info.com/canal/tales>



Gradually however, successful farmers expanded their operations and had produce to sell or trade in the not-always-nearby communities. These same growing communities offered an increasing number of needed products to buy. Churches were established in all communities and it was virtually compulsory to attend, if not for spiritual, then for social enrichment. At the same time, tradesmen found the isolated farmers to be hungry markets for the newest luxury products and gadgets. Initially roads were mere paths in the bush, but gradually improvements were made by laying logs across bogs and bridges. These corduroy roads were crude by our standards but, for the pioneer were a significant improvement and made travel by horse and buckboard more practical.



Travelling by Buckboard on Corduroy Roads

Ref. Reflections of Canada 1873 Carlyle and Martindale

In short, the self-reliant pioneering community was reaching out and began to be on the move. Horses which had already established themselves as essential for farm work were now sought as a swifter form of distance transportation.

Having been the main beast of burden and engine of transportation in the Rideau colonies, by about 1840 the horse began to be used extensively in the Rideau settlements for purposes beyond work. Horses had become more than power on the farm. They were becoming essential for moving freight and goods in urban settings, delivering mail, visiting neighbours, picking up supplies and, importantly, were highly preferred for courting. In short they became an integral part of just about every undertaking in the pioneer community. And their utility and practical necessity supported a whole new and growing set of industries.



Jasper - Merrickville Daily Mail Delivery

Ref. Merrickville and District Historical Society Archives

Commonly grouped as “Carriage works” these industries grew from earlier successful foundry and wood processing industries. Blacksmithing and harness making were already established but wheelwrights and carriage trimmers were new specialist skills needed and were soon developed. Because of the earlier development of these foundry and woodworking factories in Merrickville’s industrial complex, carriage manufacturing was a natural development. Like the cabinet shops, carriage works benefitted from a developing, more mature, better-established and more affluent society. The carriage in its many configurations became not only a means of conveyance but its new acquisition became a source of considerable family pride, much akin to the automobile of today.

Throughout the latter half of the 19th century and well into the 20th it was an era when the horse was king. Even after the automobile coughed its way into the community the horse remained essential. The late Phyllis Walker’s father was the Merrickville doctor and he kept a horse at the livery on St Lawrence St. The roads outside the Village

at the time were poor and in the winter and spring were pretty well impassable with an automobile. Ms Walker recalled as late as the '20's being bundled in a blanket, riding in a horse drawn cutter with her father to visit patients in Burritts Rapids. It was not until the late '30's that roads were improved sufficiently for the horse to give up his role as an essential means of transportation.

The most common family buggy from 1870s onward was the "Democrat" – the "Dodge Caravan" of the day. A very simple single horse buggy served as personal transportation and was popular for quick trips between towns or for delivery of goods or mail (As shown above). Small loads or luggage could be carried in the flat buggy bed. Because it had no top or cover, in cold weather the driver and passengers used heavy lap robes and sometimes a metal foot warmer, filled with fire coals. Until restoration in 2007 the Merrickville Blockhouse Museum housed such a "Democrat" which had been donated by the Porter family of Merrickville. Occupying most of the ground floor of the Museum, it was disassembled to clear way for Parks Canada exhibits and is in storage on the McGrath family farm.

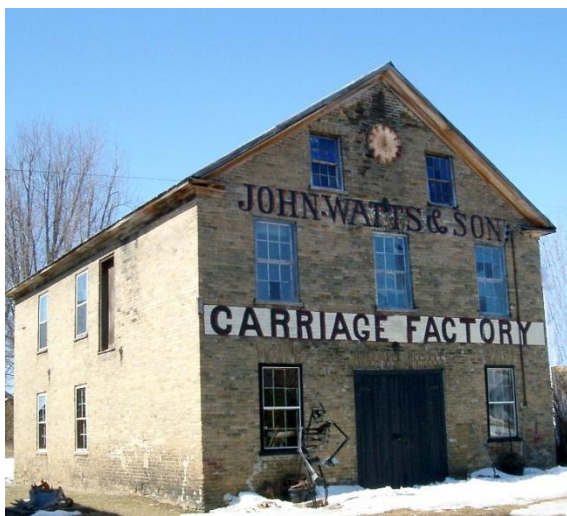
The Merrickville Democrat

Ref. Merrickville and District Historical Society Archives

By the 1850s There were carriage works all along the Rideau corridor. Larger communities such as Ottawa and Kingston had several but even smaller communities along the Rideau had carriage shops to service local demand. Merrickville was no exception. One of the more prominent carriage and wagon-makers in Merrickville was Obadiah Read, who was operating as a wheelwright in town as early as 1848. And by 1860 he was building carriages as well. Highly respected as a man of business Obadiah Read had a street named for him when, following the death of William Merrick, the land north of the River was sub-divided. The District Health Centre, the Merrickville Community Centre and the L'ecole Ste. Marguerite Bourgeoys are located on Read Street .



Another name famous in the area was Robert G. Eastman who started off at Easton's Corners in the 1850s, but soon moved to Merrickville and by 1871 was running a shop employing five men to make wagons, buggies, cutters, sleighs and the like products. His carriage factory in Easton's Corners was taken over by John Watts and Sons who continued to operate into the 20th century. Their carriage shop was recently restored as an antiques shop and is now the only physically remaining carriage works in the district.



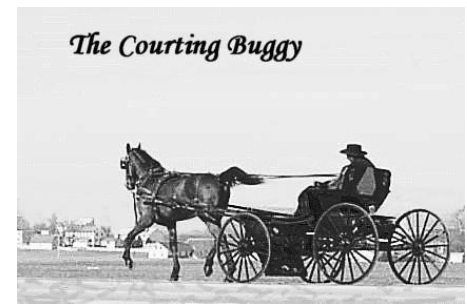
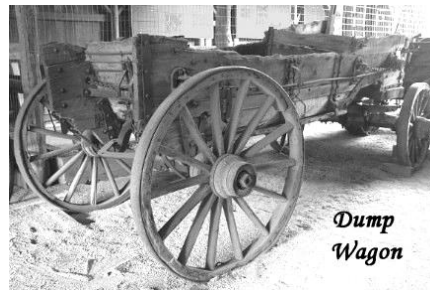
Easton-Watts Carriage Factory

Photo Merrickville Historical Society Archives

The Walling map of about 1860 indicates another carriage shop on west Brock Street owned by John Curry and as late as 1895 one James Ryan was still building wagons at Merrickville. This operation was conveniently located across the street from the Mills Furniture factory (last issue). Not to be outdone, two of the village's leading industrialists discussed in earlier portions of this series, William Henry Magee and Patrick Kyle both appear to have made their starts in business by making carriages.

Throughout the 19th century, there were as many types of “carriages” as there were uses. The **Dump Wagon** for toting stones and gravel; the aforementioned family utility buggy, the **Democrat**; and the admired **Courting Buggy**; **Delivery Wagons** specially designed for particular goods; the elegant single seat **Road Cart** for swift travel; and for the winter, sleds for hauling wood or the sled **Cariole** for winter transportation.

Throughout the 19th century, there were as many types of “carriages” as there were uses. A few of these are illustrated below.



References: Industries and Industrialists of Merrickville, 1792-1979, by Richard Tatley, 1979; Parks Canada Manuscript Report 423 – Digital Edition, Friends of the Rideau, 2011;

South Yuba River State Park Association <http://www.welcome-to-lancaster-county.com/amish-buggy.html>

Spring Dinner

Spring is just around the corner and once again we will be holding our annual Spring Dinner. This year's event will be held at the Canadian Legion at 229 Main Street West, Merrickville, and as is the norm we would like to request that you contact Gillian Gray at 613-268-4236 for your required number of tickets and your choice of menu. This would be a choice of Spring Salad, and choice of either Roast Chicken or Roast beef, with all the vegetable trimmings and dessert is a selection of fruit pies. All made lovingly by hand from scratch by the ladies of the Legion, and if last year's dinner is anything to go by, you won't be disappointed by either choice. The cost is \$25.00 per person all inclusive. There will be a cash bar starting at 6:30 pm with dinner following at 7:00 pm. As the Legion doesn't have access to credit card facilities, all of the bar charges are on a cash only basis.

The speaker for this Spring dinner's event will be author Mr. Daniel Black, and the topic will be "Old Enough to Fight" Canada's Boy Soldiers in the First World War. This is a collection of stories of the lives of some 15,000 and 20,000 underage youths, some as young as ten, who signed up to fight in Canada's armed forces in the First World War. They served in the trenches alongside their elders, and fought and died in all the major battles.

Blockhouse Museum has a new manager

After the passing of our Blockhouse Manager, Mr. David Hammonds last year and the stepping down of his wife Gillian as Co-Manager, the Executive has elected a new Manager, Ms. Bobbie Cardwell. Bobbie will oversee the hiring of the summer students, the co ordination of the scheduling of the staff, liaison with the different committee Members, government Officials and the Village of Merrickville Wolford.



Bobbie has a great deal of experience working with students and as an educator. Both qualifications make her a very suitable person to undertake the tasks involved as the Blockhouse Manager. She is a retired schoolteacher and as such she is well aware of the purpose of maintaining museums and teaching the present generations, about past generations.

Bobbie is fluently bilingual. She grew up in the Franco-Ontarian community near North Bay and English is actually her second language, although you would not know it speaking with her. She is a relatively new resident of Merrickville, but has already become involved and has grown roots in the community.

Her first job of course will be to join the cleaning crew for the annual bucket and broom party, Saturday May 10th, from around 10:00am until finished. If you don't mind getting your hands a little dirty (we provide gloves and the necessary tools of the trade), dusting and sweeping up all of the flies and anything else you might find but might be too miserable to mention. Enjoy the company of your fellow Society members, coffee, cookies and the gossip we all missed out on during our winter months of hibernation. If you have only seen the exhibits at a distance this is a great opportunity to get up close and inspect them without some person in authority asking you if you cannot read the "please do not touch" sign. So go for it, if you have a duster in your hand, you can touch. Just give Ellen Hackett a call at 613-269-2621 and she will be happy to sign you up.

Ellen is also our Volunteer Chairperson, and she will be busy contacting the membership to arrange for the Blockhouse Volunteer Staff, who are needed to operate the Museum on the weekends prior to the hiring of the summer student interpreters. This will commence on May 19th through until the weekend of June 14th when the students will start their full time positions. Volunteers are required to work on either Saturday or Sunday from noon until 4:00pm. They work in a team of two, one person to greet and assist visitors upon their arrival on the first floor and the other person takes care of the general enquiries on the 2nd floor. No volunteer is asked to work by themselves, and there is an orientation for those newcomers who are not familiar with the museum. Ellen usually arranges for a new person to be scheduled along with an experience volunteer. So here's your chance to play a part as an interpreter in our historic Blockhouse Museum and to share the wonderful collection of artifacts with the visiting public.

Ellen is also responsible for the Society sponsored Community Outreach Programme, Essay/Art Contest for the district schools, in which students are encouraged to write and or sketch/paint about an historical aspect of the community. This programme is co-ordinated with the schools, through principals and teachers and upon completion the project is then handed back to the Historical Society, so they might judge all the submissions. The prizes in the winning categories are presented at the Official Blockhouse Opening on June 14th by Mayor Struthers and Society President McKay.

A note from the past

In 1873, Lockmaster Matthew Johnston described the Blockhouse as “Roof is in a very leaky condition. The tin thereon is loose through high winds. The building generally is minus of its original evenness, in consequence of the failing condition of oak blocks at the base, supporting its principal posts. The capacity of the roof is just now undergoing a test. There is a space of about ten inches between the roof and the leading posts, which originally supported the former. There is however yet a sort of union existing between them, effected by a miniature post, with braces, extending from the apex of the roof to a beam into which it is placed and secured, said beam having connection with the main posts. It is therefore self-evident that as the building settles and strain upon the roof is increased. The almost hourly cracking of the whole frame-work convinces the reporter that the edifice is in a dangerous state.”

Ref: Ken W .Watson “A History of the Rideau Lockstations

Christmas in Merrickville

The Historical Society was please to be a participant at the Christmas in Merrickville festivities on December 7th, 2013. We shared exhibit space with a number of other enthusiastic history buffs in the lower level of the United Church. We began setting up our exhibits for an 11am opening and once completed it was interesting to see just what the other exhibitors had on display. We do tend to talk up a storm when we get together, and are very proud of our collections. If any of you were out and about that day you would recall that it was a very cold and windy day, and the turnout was perhaps a little less than expected as most of the families were more interested in the Santa Clause Parade than some stuffy old artifacts.



Nevertheless the visitors we did receive were very interested with the displays and were willing to take the time to stop and chat. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that it was warmer inside than outside and there was free coffee, and when the Maplewood Ceilidh band arrived, well things really picked up, lots of toe tapping, what a wonderful group they are.

We should thank 1st Vice President Michael Whittaker who brought along a number of very interesting primitive tools from his own private collection for display and Nina Donald who searched amongst the shelves of the Society Archives to display a number of items of interest.



Time to re-new your Historical Society Membership

Well here we are in the third month of a new year and for those that haven't renewed their membership, this might be a good time to do just that. Membership Chairperson, Art Hackett at 613-269- 2621 would be more than happy to help you.

Art Hackett, Membership Chairperson

Did you know that your Historical Society Membership entitles you to receive this quarterly Newsletter, and impart, contributes to managing our Archives, the Blockhouse Museum, monthly Lecture meetings, local history sites and projects.

So, all you need do is just slip a cheque in the mail and presto you are a member in good standing for yet another year. We look forward to seeing you soon perhaps at the next Lecture meeting or this summer at the Blockhouse – admission is free so we encourage you to bring along your friends.

Membership in the historical Society is renewed annually from the January to December calendar year, at a present cost of \$10 per person or \$15 per family. Individual life memberships are also available for \$100. Let's give our Society membership a boost!

We welcome new members and hope present members will want to re-join our Society. 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:



**Merrickville and District Historical Society
2014 Executive**

President – Andrew McKay
First Vice President – Michael Whittaker
Second Vice-President – Ellen Hackett
Treasurer – Sharon Alger
Secretary - Nancy Warr
Past President – Nina Donald

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Art Hackett	Membership
Ellen Hackett	Volunteers
Sharon Parkinson	Bookkeeper
Nina Donald	Archives
Bobbie Cardwell	Blockhouse
Michael Whittaker	Lecture Program
Marion Fuller	Events Planning
JaneAnn McIntyre	Hospitality
Janet Graves	Hospitality
Gillian Gray	Spring Dinner

Newsletter Volunteers: John Cowan Nina Donald, Sharon Parkinson, Phil Colwill

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