



Winter 2013 **newsletter** VOLUME 12, NUMBER 1

PREZ SEZ

Highlights from the President's Speech at the AGM November 27th, 2012

We were extremely fortunate once again in receiving funding from the Village of Merrickville, the Ontario Ministry of Culture, Ontario Summer Experience, and the Federal Government through the Canadian Heritage and Canadian Museum Association. Without their support and funding, we at the Society would not be able to provide the services to those visitors that come to Merrickville to enjoy the Blockhouse Museum and to bring tourism to the local economy. Again our Blockhouse Managers, David and Gillian Hammonds did an outstanding job of overseeing the day to day operations, and the management of the student interpreter staff. David was also instrumental in having two of the antique display cabinets on the upper floor of the museum refurbished prior to the opening, and I am happy to say they look just grand.

Thanks to the members who volunteered their time in the blockhouse for the annual spring cleaning and to act as interpreters during the pre and post period when the students are not available. Also the old archive room was emptied, cleaned and prepared to be transformed into another exhibit area. Unfortunately time ran out for the volunteer crew, but we will be ready to go back next spring to complete the project.

At our Blockhouse opening this year, along with our student essay contest we introduced a new theme, a student art contest, which was a great success. The students were very responsive and I do believe we have some up and coming new artists in the village. The winning arts and their artwork are displayed on Page 2. Congratulations to all of the participants of both contests. The Society also used the occasion of the Spring Opening to present one of our long time members, Mr. Wayne Poapst, with the Heritage Award of Merit.

Our lecture series was extremely well attended this year, which is a tribute to the wonderfully interesting speakers who made presentations. They included: Kevin Gray who talked to us about glass-blowing, Larry Cotton, Whiskey and Wickedness, James Opp, History in your Hands, John Scott captivated us with heritage stone masonry, William Knight, An Introduction to Environmental History, Joy Forbes, One Room Schoolhouses, Doug Hendry, 93rd Sutherland Highlander, and Wayne Poapst, who hosted our Show and Tell night.

With financial support from the Village, we were also able to settle into a permanent new home for our Archives, which are now located in the lower level of the Burritt's Rapids Community Hall. We welcome visitors to the Archives but as we are still, shall we say, a work in progress and rely on volunteers from the Society.

We finally managed to erect the new sign this summer at the Wickware Brickyard and Tannery which is located on Highway 16 between Merrickville and Easton's Corners. And we were also fortunate to host a small gathering for the crew of the Lois McClure, a 1862-class replica sailing canal schooner. She was moored in Merrickville for two nights in August and her museum was opened up to the public.

I am saddened to say that this year the society lost some important long time members – these were Phyllis Walker, Kevin Gray and Carol Ann Skelding. Their families made known their wishes that donations in memoriam could be made to the Historical Society amongst other recipients, and we thank them most sincerely for their continuing support.

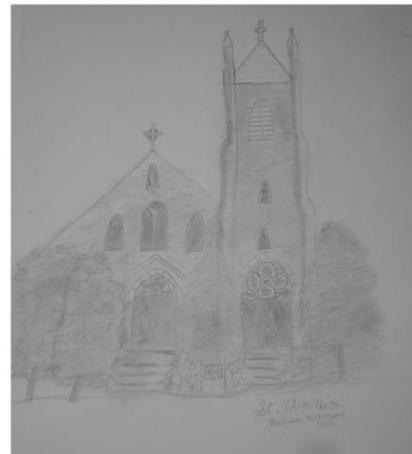
I am very pleased to announce that we had a very enthusiastic response to our appeal for volunteers. In addition to volunteers from new members to join the Society's Executive, several other new members have volunteered to become members at large and assist with other important services which the Society provides to the community. It is difficult to express how very grateful we are for this tremendous vote of support from our community.

As I am now stepping down as President, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Executive for their support over the last five years. For their perseverance, patience and friendship in keeping me on the straight and narrow, and their assistance in advising me on my erroneous ways and working together on solutions when situations arose. Apart from the Executive, where would we be without the volunteers, who are the workers within the Society. They work diligently without question and give of their time freely, and without them we would not be able to provide the quality of service to our membership, community and visiting public.

Lastly, thank you all for your support and, although I am not going anywhere as I will stay on the Executive as Past President, I will really miss being called Madame President; It has been a great honour to serve you all.

Thank you.

WINNERS OF THE ART CONTEST - 2012



Top row left to right: Josh Nickerson - Xan McMullen - Melissa Nickerson
Bottom row left to right: Maxwell Mulrooney Cote - Dorion Wrong - Sarah Telford

FRIENDS OF THE MERRICKVILLE TURBINE

97-year-old Turbine saved in Merrickville

On August 28, 2012 the Friends of the Merrickville Turbine assumed ownership of the 97 year-old Merrickville Turbine. The Turbine - a turbo-generator - which began generating power for Merrickville in 1915, was rescued from the scrap yard in 1992-3 through the initiative of Merrickville residents. They included the late Miss Phyllis Walker, the late Dr. Robert Nicholls, and the Heritage Merrickville Foundation, which had earlier saved a number of heritage buildings in Merrickville.

A permanent concrete plinth was built in the Merrickville Ruins, adjacent to the rebuilt OPG power station, and the saved turbine was erected on it. However, because of incomplete documentation on ownership, the turbine was not properly painted and had slowly become disfigured by rust.

In 2011, the Friends of the Merrickville Turbine was formed by individuals concerned about the Parks Canada plan to scrap the turbine forthwith. The Friends was incorporated under the aegis of the Ontario Historical Society and a successful application was made to the Canada Revenue Agency for charitable status. After several months of see-saw negotiations with Parks Canada, ownership of the Turbine was finally transferred to the Friends. It now leases the land on which the Turbine stands and it is responsible for its upkeep.

The Friends has begun a fund-raising campaign with the objective of restoring the Turbine to its former glory. The campaign will target Canadian and overseas organisations associated with the development of electric power in Canada, as well as other recognised funding agencies active in Eastern Ontario. One substantial donation has been made by a concerned citizen and a second major donation has been promised.

Key to the plan is the installation of informative signage outlining what foresight the original builders had in 1914, when they seemed to understand that the future lay with renewable "green" electric energy. Several monographs on the history of the development of waterpower and electricity in the region have also been drafted for publication and a website is under consideration.

The Friends expects the work to be completed by mid-2013 and a celebration event is planned for the centenary of its commissioning, in June 2015.

For information Contact Friends of the Merrickville Turbine Phone 613-269-2832

Email: david.hammonds@sympatico.ca

Did you know...

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

Receipt for cold from Mrs. J. B. Riley

One pound of liverwort put into four quarts of water and boiled down to one quart; add, while warm, a quarter pound of ball liquorice and a quarter pound of loaf sugar; when cool add a half pint of gin. Dose – half a large wineglass, half an hour before each meal.

To Preserve Eggs from Mrs. G. Wyllie

One pint salt, two pints fresh lime, three gallons water mix well and put in eggs without cracking the shell; they must be kept covered with the brine.

Ironing

To keep starch from sticking to irons rub the irons with a little piece of wax or sperm.

To Prevent Red Ants.

Put one pint of tar in an earthen vessel, pour on it two quarts of boiling hot water and place it in your closet.

Watch for more cures for smallpox, hydrophobia, prevent contagion from eruptive diseases and to restore from stroke of lightning.

Then and Now

The Campbell house

Perhaps we have here the Campbell family enjoying a leisurely Sunday afternoon family gathering on a magnificent porch.



Alas, the front porch has disappeared over time, along (I think) with the summer kitchen.

The Campbell house was built c.1845 by William Campbell, a Scottish surveyor, who laid out the village of Burritt's Rapids. Campbell had a large family and he employed Irish domestics – a mark in those days of a “genteel” standard of living. He was considered by his neighbours to harbour “Whiggish sentiments” and he was burned in effigy by his solidly Tory neighbours during the Crimean War. He died in 1867 and was buried in the cemetery attached to the village Burritt's Rapids church. (Written by then owner - Jinny Whitehead.)

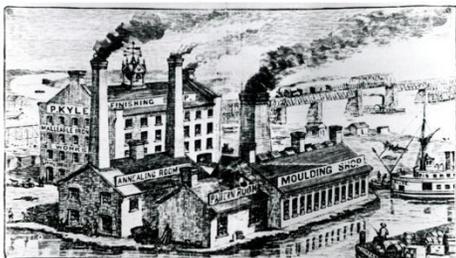
The house is presently lovingly cared for by Art and Ellen Hackett and is registered as a Designated Heritage Property.

The Industries of Merrickville

With Merrickville proudly declaring itself “the Jewel of the Rideau” it is easy to forget that at one time Merrickville was a “mill town” with all that implies. It was no jewel then but rather a successful booming industrial community, the Hamilton of its day. Dominated by the Merrick family and employing hundreds of working townfolk, Merrickville had a reputation for successful enterprises that allowed its entrepreneurs to build the magnificent homes tourists and locals now admire. When William Merrick, Sr. died in 1844 he left behind a sawmill, two gristmills and a carding mill. Within about six years his sons were to rebuild most of the above and also open a machine shop, shingle mill and a large woollen mill. Other entrepreneurs would establish numerous other industries after 1850: Iron foundries, brickworks, an axe factory, a carriage works, cabinet makers, metal casting and names we barely know: a snath works, a hame factory, a cooperage, a tannery, and even a Chinese laundry - all of the requirements to satisfy the needs of a self sustaining growing village including, of course, a distillery and pub.

Now of course, nothing of this crucial period of our history remains but a few skeletal reminders of past glory days. Technology and transportation gradually and inevitably brought about the demise of these pioneering ventures, and by the time the decision was made to tear down the dilapidated structures in the late 1970's, of the original industries, only the Alloy foundry, now Village Metalsmiths remained operational, as it had been for 160 years.

Fortunately, before demolition, the Government engaged historian Richard Tatley to photograph the progress of demolition and later in 1979, to research and publish the history of Merrickville's industries. His massive research was published by Parks Canada, National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Manuscript Report 423,



“Industries and Industrialists of Merrickville 1792-1979”.

In 2011 The Friends of the Rideau, with the approval of Parks Canada produced a digital version of this manuscript and made it available for sale. This commendable effort, with its formatting and search capability greatly enhanced the accessibility of the information about our early industries and is the source upon which our following comments are derived.

Merrickville Iron Works, ca. 1900

Sketch of Patrick Kyle's Malleable Iron Works, North Shore.

Artist unknown. (Blockhouse Museum, Merrickville.)

Over the next few issues, your “Historical Society Newsletter” will briefly describe some of these pioneering ventures. We hope your curiosity about Merrickville's Industrial history will be sufficiently stimulated to read the full research report, (Available in the Parks Canada Library in Smiths Falls) or more conveniently, purchased as a DVD digital version produced by “The Friends of the Rideau” at info@rideaufriends.com, www.rideaufriends.com

Merrickville Potash Industry

Potash and pearlsh manufacturing started off as a byproduct of land clearing by the early settlers, who could thus make a little money while getting rid of the timber cluttering from their new farms.

Clearing land presented a major problem for Merrickville area settlers, because it was difficult to get rid of stumps and roots. One of the most effective ways to remove them was by burning. The ashes were then carefully collected, and placed in a sieve over a trough. Hot water was then run through the ashes to drip down to the trough and collected. This process was repeated until the water was strong enough to be lye, which was then boiled down in an iron pot until there was a residue of brownish ash. This substance was "potash" or black salts. Not only was the land cleared, but potash was then an item that farmers could barter for needed items or even sell for cash. Cash was easier to obtain for potash than for wheat particularly in the Rideau Corridor where the soil was sparse for wheat, but rich in timber. In many settlements, representatives of potasheries would come around and buy ashes which the farmers had saved up.



Clearing the Land

C. W. Jefferys (Library and Archives Canada)

When potash was put into an oven and continuously stirred, it would eventually become "pearlash" which was worth far more than potash. It was used in the manufacture of pottery, china, and soap, all products in great demand in pioneer Eastern Ontario. Converting potash to pearlash was time-consuming, and demanded constant attention. It was generally too large a task for domestic farm production, but soon commercial operations were set up to manufacture this valuable product. Both potash and pearlash had to be handled carefully and packed in wooden barrels for transportation.



In the 1820s and 1830s, with demand high in Europe and the United States, the ash trade was one of the most important trades in Canada, and worth a great deal of money. Getting ashes to market in Montreal for export, however, was a major undertaking because roads were poor and watercourses commercially un-navigable. The construction of the Rideau Canal changed that.

Boiling Potash C. W. Jefferys (*Library and Archives Canada*)

The first reference to potash and pearlash factories in Eastern Ontario is found in the census of 1842, and one historian has found evidence of eight asheries in the Rideau corridor. Merrickville possessed one ashery around mid-century according to the census of 1851-52. It was set up at a cost of £50, and could produce 20 barrels a year. Presumably it had the vats or large barrels for leaching the potash to purify it somewhat. The owner of this enterprise and the site where it stood are unknown, but apparently it was somewhere above the locks. In 1846 Lockmaster Johnston noted the departure of 14 barrels of potash from Merrickville to Bytown by canal in September and October of that year.

As important as its potash production was to early settlers, by 1900 references to this industry in Merrickville had vanished. Local lumber supplies dried up as timber had been cut down on every potentially farmable piece of property. Further, during the 1880s large new natural potash deposits were discovered in Germany, and the nature of the world industry changed. More lucrative and ready potash manufacturing opportunities became available to supply the need of a growing market for manufactured soap, glass and porcelain products. Commercial production of potash and pearlash apparently ceased in Merrickville around this date. Little record has been found as to the owner of the local asherie. But whomever he was, he was among the first of Merrickville's successful industrial entrepreneurs.

References,

Industries and Industrialists of Merrickville, 1792-1979, by Richard Tatley, 1979

Parks Canada Manuscript Report 423 – Digital Edition, Friends of the Rideau, 2011

Pioneer Life: The Potash Trade, Eastern Townships Heritage Web Magazine

<http://townshipsheritage.com/article/pioneer-life-potash-trade>

Historical Society New Executive

The Annual General Meeting of the Society was held on November 27th, 2012.
The following were elected to serve on the Committees

2013 Executive and Committee Members Executive

President, Andrew McKay
1st Vice President, David Hammonds
2nd Vice President, Ellen Hackett
Treasurer, Sharon Alger
Secretary, Nancy Warr
Past President, Nina Donald

Committee Members

Art Hackett, Membership
Nina Donald, Archives,
Marion Fuller, Lecture/Program
David & Gillian Hammonds, Blockhouse Managers
Janet Graves/JaneAnne McIntyre, Hospitality
Ellen Hackett, Volunteers,
Wayne Poapst, Business Liaison

Members at Large,

Gillian Gray, Michael Whittaker

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 per individual. 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
First Vice President – David Hammonds
Second Vice President – Ellen Hackett
Treasurer – Sharon Algers
Secretary – Nancy Warr
Past President – Nina Donald

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