

The Merrickville and District Historical Society NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2005

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Trillium Ceremony

A reception was held, August 25, 2005 by the Merrickville and District Historical Society in the Blockhouse Museum to acknowledge receipt of a Quinte, Kingston, and Rideau Region, Ontario Trillium Foundation grant in the amount of \$14,800. The grant is for equipment and resources to preserve archives in digital form, to establish secure accessible virtual archives and safely store valuable paper documents. Supplemented by the bequest from Thomas Manning, this grant will allow the Historical Society to achieve its long held objective in ensure safe preservation and improved access to the Museum's important collections.



photo by Gustave Pellerin

Bob Runciman, Denis Faulkner, Chalmer Conn

The presentation on behalf of the Trillium Foundation was made by Robert Runciman, MPP, Leeds-Grenville and Chalmer Conn, Trillium volunteer to Denis Faulkner, President, Merrickville & District Historical Society.

Clowes or Clowes?

One of the least visited locks in the Merrickville vicinity is Clowes Lock. Located between Upper Nicholson's and Merrickville, this small picturesque station, accessible only from the north side of the Rideau River (some would say "west") has its own unique history and one very relevant to our Community.

The site was first suggested by Samuel Clowes, a canal surveyor and civil engineer who in 1824 visited the site where 1000 meters of rapids descended some 3 ½ meters towards Andrewsville. On that survey, Samuel Clowes would assuredly have met James Clowes (who was no relation) who had earlier settled in the vicinity and who operated a successful limestone quarry there. It is understood much of the stone for the early Merrickville and Burritt's Rapids mill foundations and stone buildings came from "Clowes Quarry".

Originally quarryman James Clowes was given the contract for the construction of the controlling spillway, downstream dam and the locks. However, he was relieved of his contract in 1828 by Colonel By. While acknowledging the quality of the quarry's cut stone, Colonel By was much less satisfied with James Clowes' construction skills. Colonel By wrote to General Mann that the dam construction was commenced in "so unworkmanlike a manner, that I broke his (James Clowes) contract on the 13th instance . . . being of the opinion he had not the ability to conduct such a work." The job was then re-contracted to Alexander Hays who finished the job.

The first lockmaster at Clowes, appointed by Col By was a carpenter, Daniel Buck. Thomas Newman succeeded him as lockmaster in 1843. During canal construction, Newman had served with the Sappers and Miners under Sergeant John Johnston who in 1836 became



photo courtesy of Lenore Newman

Lockmasters Thomas Newman (center) and John Newman (left)

1907. Frequent contributor of presentations to the Historical Society, the late Dr. Leonard Newman was born in 1881 in the small stone cottage visible from heritage highway below the locks and the Newman name continues to be prominent in the Community.

Merrickville Lockmaster. Thomas Newman's brother John also an ex-Sapper, became Lockmaster at Nicholson's Locks in 1847. Undoubtedly there would have been an affinity between the Newman brothers and Johnston and the Clowes, Nicholson and Merrickville locks they managed.

Thomas Newman served as lockmaster until 1871 when he was succeeded by his son, John Newman who served until

Reference: Turner, Legget, Watson

*******Oh yes, Clowes or Clowes? *******

Although it would be more agreeable to think the locks were named for the surveyor Samuel Clowes who laid out the site in 1824, it is more likely the locks took the name of discharged and disgraced quarryman James Clowes. Incidentally, it is pronounced Clowes, like cows.

The Battle of Merrickville

"It was within sight of McGuigan's Cemetery that the Battle of Merrickville was fought. This is the name still given to a rowdy fight which occurred during the building of the Spillway at Clowes locks. During the work on this lock, some lumber was cut on the farm of a Mr. Mosher but was not paid for as promptly as he wished. He therefore summoned the Sheriff Sherwood from Brockville, to come and arrest the men on a charge of trespassing. Mr. Sherwood came to the lock and looked things over, but, decided that discretion was the better part of valour and returned to Brockville to get some necessary assistance.

He swore in about a dozen deputy sheriffs and came back to make the arrests. He was met by a large group of navies working on the canal, all Irishmen, whose dander was aroused by this legalistic action. Armed with pick handles and clubs, they were successful in putting the sheriff and his men to complete rout.

Captain Burritt, from Burritt's Rapids was then called out with a company of the Grenville militia. They came up the River and managed to make the necessary arrests. The whole gang of workers were then taken to Brockville under guard, and brought up in court to answer for their actions, but, with the loyalty you might expect from aroused Irishmen, none would testify against his fellow.

It was impossible to get any evidence of the trespass and the case had therefore to be thrown out of court. The navies then celebrated with a few bottles of "mountain dew" and returned to their camp at Clowes Lock in extremely good spirits".

Reference: Rideau Waterway - Robert Legget

Nerd News

We're Looking for a web master The Historical Society has developed a web site which you can visit at www.merrickvillehistory.org . It is our intention to further develop this site by establishing linkages to other Merrickville and Rideau sites. Ultimately we want to make available much of our archive material to members and visitors. Andrew McKay has done a credible job in getting us started, BUT, if the site is to remain interesting and relevant it will have to be periodically updated. If you have skills in web site management and would like to volunteer a few hours of your time to the Historical society by acting as our "web master"., please contact me by email at johncowan1@sympatico.ca

You've Got Mail !

Or soon can have. Many members, particularly those who live outside the Village, have expressed an interest in receiving notices of meetings and events by email . A number of members who provided an email address on their application forms apparently are also interested in this form of communication. We now have the capability to use email to keep current members informed. If you would like to receive information by email, please contact us at mdhs_secretary@merrickvillehistory.org We promise not to waste valuable ether by sending junk and will not provide your address to any other party without your specific approval.

Merrickville-Wolford Historic Sites

In our previous newsletter we described a new Historical Society project to create an inventory of rural sites in our district. In the text of the write-up I commented that little work had been done in this area. This was a slight to a great number of people who over the years have done much work in this area. In particular I would like to apologize to Alice Hughes, whose lifetime of work on the genealogy of many pioneer families, her research on schools, cemeteries and industrial sites has become a valuable resource for our Community. It was for these reasons Alice Hughes was one of the first people recognized in our Heritage Awards of Merit.

What a Shame !

Recently there was an estate auction sale of the contents of the home of one Merrickville's long time residents. It attracted many interested "antique hunters" from near and far. I am sure the auction was successful. But! I was disappointed to see so many personal photo albums and family scrap books included in the sale. Photos of family members and the scenes of the Village going back to the early 1900's. To me these were important portraits of our history and would have been precious acquisitions for the Historical Society archives.

If you have family photos or early records you want to preserve for future generations, please consider donating them to the Historical Society archives. They will be much appreciated and will add to our knowledge of our Heritage.

Membership Matters

The annual membership fees for 2005 are now over-due. To continue your support as an annual or life member, and to ensure you continue to be updated on our activities, please send your cheque of \$5 per person or \$10 per family or \$50 per person for life membership to MDHS, Membership, Box 294, Merrickville, K0G 1N0. Thanks for your help.

Set Sail for October 25

Our next speaker's night will feature a photo presentation by Captain Everett Snider who will speak on "TALES OF THE ST. LAWRENCE RIVER DURING THE 50'S & 60'S. He will also recall a harrowing experience, when, as a young man, Everett survived the explosion of the J. B. King, in which 30 other men lost their lives. Tuesday, October 25, 7:30 pm. at Ste. Marguerite Bourgeoys School In Merrickville. All are welcomed.

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John Cowan, Editor

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