

**MDHS**



MERRICKVILLE DISTRICT  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## **Merrickville and District Historical Society**

### **President's Report**

**November 1, 2020 – October 31, 2021**

Another year has come and gone for the Society. As long-time members will know, our year-end is October 31 and what a year it was! While it was disappointing to not be able to resume our lecture series or open the Merrickville Blockhouse Museum safely in 2021 due to COVID-19, MDHS volunteers were busy behind the scenes.

#### **Response to Parks Canada**

In spring of 2021, the Executive Committee submitted a formal response to Parks Canada's process of updating its Rideau Canal Management Plan. This is significant, because, for the first time, the Merrickville Blockhouse National Historic Site will not have its own management plan, but, instead, will have its plan folded into the larger Rideau Canal Management Plan. I encourage those of you who have not done so to visit [RideauPlan.ca](http://RideauPlan.ca) and review Parks Canada's latest version of the document. While Parks Canada promised MDHS further discussions regarding revising the objectives and targets for the Merrickville Blockhouse, MDHS has not been contacted by Parks Canada since March 2021.

#### **Coaching Opportunity with National Trust for Canada**

Also in spring 2021, MDHS was informed that we were successful in our grant application to the National Trust for Canada and, as a result, received 20 hours of free coaching thanks to its Launch Pad Grant. Sonja Kruitwagen, National Trust for Canada and Jonathan Wade, Social Delta, provided the Executive Team with coaching to prepare for a renewal of the organization and its mandate – more about below!

#### **Membership**

In 2021, MDHS had

1. 17 individual or family membership in 2021 (+1 from 2020)
2. 46 Life Memberships (+7 from 2020)

for a total of approximately 75 individuals.

## **Executive Committee**

The Executive Committee consisted of:

Ann Martin, President  
Chris Eyton, First Vice-President  
Angela Beking, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President  
Jane Graham, Secretary  
Rod Fournier, Treasurer  
Elizabeth Robinson, Member at Large

## **Hardworking Volunteers**

Our records indicate that despite our not opening the Merrickville Blockhouse Museum in 2021, our Society members and volunteers spent over 1,500 hours on Society activities this year! Thank you to all of the members (and friends) of the Society who donated their time and talent during the past year.

Many of our activities were related to processing documents and objects in our collection. Highlights include:

- Three hundred and three (303) objects were accessioned - primarily from a collection of correspondence (both personal and business) belonging to Harry McLean. These items were found in the attic of his house when the next owners moved in some 50 years ago.
- Seventy (70) found-in-collection objects were accessioned. Many of these objects were discovered in the Blockhouse when the inventory was conducted and completed in the summer of 2021. Many thanks to the Bruce Kemp who assisted us in the completion of the inventory by taking 646 photographs which have been attached to the applicable accession records.
- The Blockhouse inventory is now 100% completed with the help of students and volunteers. It was a four-year project with every object accounted for (photographs, condition reports, locations, dimensions, descriptions, etc.).

Special note of thanks goes to Nancy Warr, head of our Collections Committee, whose dedication and enthusiasm keeps our artifacts and records safe and accessible for future generations.

## **...and a Hardworking Intern**

Thanks to a Young Canada Works – Building Careers in Heritage Grant from the federal government, we were able to hire an emerging museum professional, Lauren Ulbricht. Lauren came to us from the Billy Bishop Museum in Owen Sound, Ontario. As the Digital Archives and Collections Manager, Lauren is overseeing the migration of our records from a stand-alone computer to “the cloud” and updating our website. This means researchers will have access to MDHS’ information about its holdings 24/7 365 days a year from anywhere in the world. She has been ably assisted by Society members who are reviewing each of the records in our database prior to their being uploaded into our Public Access module. We are looking forward to finishing this work in spring 2022. Stay tuned!

## Research Requests

MDHS responded to several dozen research requests throughout the year based on its knowledge of the area and the documents and artifacts in our collections. Some are genealogical in nature, while others are curious about the built heritage (buildings) in the Village of Merrickville-Wolford and Montague Township. Other requestors are curious about past events. All are answered to the best of our ability and represent our volunteers' commitment to share our organization's knowledge with the community.

Two research inquiries in 2021 were more substantial in nature and represent the depth that the organization offers to the community:

1. MDHS' photographs and documentation were used as part of MDHS' members Donna Ross and Peter Szmidski's successful application for heritage designation for their property, "Spillway Farm" near Andrewsville; and
2. MDHS' documentation pertaining activities of Harry McLean and surrounding the acquisition of the four Deeks Quarry cairn plaques in the late 1960s/ early 1970s and their subsequent restoration by MDHS were used by the Thousand Islands Chapter, Professional Engineers Ontario as part of its presentation to the Village of Merrickville-Wolford on January 10, 2022.

We are pleased that our on-going commitment to acquire, catalogue, care for and provide access to our records is appreciated.

## Thank you to our Partners

MDHS sincerely appreciates the help and skills of our community partners without whom we would not be able to achieve our goals:

Young Canada Works – Building Careers in Heritage  
Merrickville Phoenix  
COBA Print Studio  
Merrickville Legion, Branch 245  
Village of Merrickville-Wolford

## Looking forward to 2022

### Key Positions to be Filled

This year there are two key positions that need to be filled in MDHS' organization:

#### 1. President

After seven years at the helm, it is time for me to step down and let others take a turn. I remain committed to MDHS and look forward to stepping into the role as Past President and providing advice (and maybe a bit of wisdom gained from experience) to others.

#### 2. Blockhouse Manager

This person (or team of people) is responsible for hiring staff and overseeing the running of the Merrickville Blockhouse Museum during the summer months (exact dates are dependent upon grant funding).

MDHS is always looking for engaged volunteers who wish to commit to regular tasks within the organization (communications, social media, cataloguing artifacts, supervising summer staff, coordinating volunteers, managing membership lists.). We need active members to continue to offer programming as we have done in past years.

### **Refined Mandate and Need for New Business Model**

It's been a great run for the last 53 years, but our governance model and underlying financials are due for a review if the Society is to thrive moving forward. The Executive Committee would like to use its learnings from our Launch Pad Grant coaching sessions to move the organization into a position where it can grow in the future. MDHS is planning to hire a consult to bring together options for more robust financial planning and the potential have sustainable staffing capacity in future years. I hope our membership will support MDHS' consultation efforts to clarify its vision, mission, mandate and partnerships in 2022.

### **2022 Anniversaries**

2022 will see the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of WOLFORD Chapel, Easton's Corners and Holy Trinity Anglican Church.

### **And, on a personal note,**

I would like to thank my hard working Executive Committee colleagues – thank you for volunteering your time and skills to this organization.

There are so many other volunteers with whom I have had the pleasure of working alongside since I have been President.

Together, we've been able to accomplish so much over the last seven years:

- instituted a new Collections Management software (PastPerfect) that allowed for public access at the Merrickville Public Library, including managing 6-month Ontario Job Creation Program grant and instituting a Collections Committee (and policy) which has allowed us to rationalize our holdings
- obtained Directors' insurance and general liability for our activities
- established the Friends of the Merrickville and District Historical Society Endowment Fund with the Ottawa Community Foundation. This endowment fund provides a revenue stream of approximately \$1,000/yr to the society annually
- mentored 4 emerging professionals who have been able to use their experience with MDHS to further their careers and have completed countless references for MDHS' summer staff as they move on in their job searches
- written 7 years of grant applications (3 winter internships as well as summer students for the Merrickville Blockhouse Museum and provincial operating grants) resulting in MDHS receiving approximately \$140,000
- brought younger people from the region onto the Executive Committee
- conceived, created and executed two summers of intensive heritage programming in 2017 (Canada150) and 2018 (MW 225)

- developed seasonal, revolving exhibits at the Blockhouse Museum (first time in many years that any of the exhibits were changed) including exhibits on Indigenous people
- re-vamped MDHS' training and orientation program, which Friends of the Rideau used in 2019
- renewed existing interpretive manual to acknowledge existence of Canada's indigenous people in the Merrickville-Wolford region
- re-wrote job descriptions for summer interpreters and instituted process for 360-degree performance appraisals of staff
- created MDHS presence on social media platforms (FaceBook and Twitter)
- re-vamped MDHS website and ported content to wix.com platform
- forged/furthered relationships with other M-W organizations (Merrickville Agricultural Society, Theatre Night in Merrickville, Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Chamber of Commerce, Friends of the Rideau, etc.)
- upgraded our communications systems and created shared on-line library of corporate documents using Microsoft Office 365
- undertaken project to move our archives and collections information on-line (PastPerfect Web Edition)

I can't wait to see what this organization will offer in the years to come!

Respectfully Submitted,

Ann Martin,  
President, Merrickville and District Historical Society