



MERRICKVILLE and DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOX 294
MERRICKVILLE-WOLFORD
ONTARIO, CANADA, K0G 1N0
info@merrickvillehistory.org

Merrickville and District Historical Society Blockhouse Museum Report Summer 2015

November 24, 2015

Summary

This year, the management of the Blockhouse Museum was a shared responsibility amongst various members of the Society. Ann Martin and Andrew McKay interviewed and selected candidates. Ann Martin, Nancy Warr and Michael Whittaker provided training and Michael Whittaker provided daily oversight with the assistance of other members of the Society.

The creation of a “team leader” position within the students also provided additional administrative support throughout the summer. Jacob Dunning, Treasurer, ensured that the cash was deposited on a regular basis.

Thank you to all who played a part in managing the Blockhouse Museum this summer.

As always, the Blockhouse Museum cannot be managed without the volunteer contributions of members of the MDHS in the spring and the fall.

In this regard, we would like to acknowledge the ongoing contributions of Ellen and Art Hackett whose work at finding, scheduling, and re-scheduling volunteers to cover those periods we could not do without.

Visitors to the Blockhouse Museum in 2015 totaled 10,268, up 4.2% from the 9,855 who visited in 2014.

Thank you.

Exhibits

Laura Yates, Jake Nickerson, Karleigh Pitura and Sarah Charette accomplished a brilliant reorganization of exhibits. The students put most of the new English and French artifact labels in place. Some new translations are required and the labeling be completed.

On the first floor, the farm implements and array of machinery are now much easier to see and are grouped according to their functions. The new alignment opens space, treating the eye to the illusion of roominess. The Sergeant Johnston artifacts have been assembled in a single display case.

The second floor is more spacious with the loom, spinning wheel and tools related to working wool have been positioned in the northwest corner, in association with domestic artefacts. Militaria is in a case along the west wall. The kitchen, parlour and bedroom representing the lockmaster's accommodations have been arranged to offer better views of the contents.

The glass-faced wall cabinet now displays five china Merrickville souvenirs, silver napkin rings, a kerosene handlebar lamp and photograph recalling the Merrickville Biking Club and five curious drinking vessels, among other artefacts.

In the northeast corner, the Harry McLean Room saluting Merrickville's eccentric millionaire and benefactor officially opened this year.

Many essential tasks were completed by the students, including the location updated of artefacts moved following the reorganization.

A new notice with the opening hours was designed and fixed to the door of the Blockhouse.

Maintenance

A spring maintenance day was held at the Blockhouse on Saturday May 9, 2015. Artifacts were damp-dusted and the floors and surfaces vacuumed. Light bulbs, now the responsibility of the Society (no longer provided by Parks Canada), were also replaced.

Other maintenance activities included all of the usual verification that electricity, telephone and alarm systems were all functioning and the water was connected in the spring. The telephone connection remains fragile, despite working with the Village of Merrickville-Wolford to have

maintenance done on the line. The phone line may need upgrading/replacement in 2016.

The west window was nailed open slightly to permit airflow through the building. Parks Canada was contacted in October 2015 to ensure that this window is closed and that the water is turned off.

Opening Hours

The Blockhouse was open on the weekends from Saturday, May 16 – Sunday, June 13. June 13 was also the official opening, re-branded as the Blockhouse Festival.

Between opening day on June 18 and Labour Day, September 7, the Blockhouse was open every day from 10:00 – 6:00 p.m.

During the fall, the Blockhouse was open on weekends from September 12 – October 12, with the exception of Sunday, October 11.

The Kawartha Voyageur made four weekday visits during its 2015 season and provided the Society with a cheque for \$250 to acknowledge the contribution of the Society and its volunteers, who make a special effort to open the Blockhouse for the Kawartha Voyageur's passengers.

Summer Staff

Twelve applicants responded to the advertisement placed in the April issues of the Merrickville Phoenix and the Young Canada Works website. All students were interviewed by Ann Martin and Andrew McKay. The Society was able to offer four students positions based upon the funding received by Young Canada Works (3 positions) and Canada Summer Jobs (1 position).

The four students were:

Sarah Charette (Interpeter)
Jacob Nickerson (Interpreter)
Karleigh Pitura (Interpeter)
Laura Yates (Team Lead)

The students performed extremely well over the summer. All scheduling and administrative tasks (daily visitor counts and sales) were handled by the team lead and distributed electronically to staff.

This year the students took a pro-active role in re-arranging the exhibits, re-labelling the exhibits, conducting an inventory of all artifacts in the

blockhouse, liaising with the Village of Merrickville-Wolford and discussing maintenance issues with Parks Canada. This team was exemplary and made for a “hassle-free” summer. All would be welcome back to the Blockhouse Museum.

Opening Day

Opening Ceremonies were June 13, 2015 with a variety of re-enactors and heritage participants. The Blockhouse Festival poster for 2015 has been attached as an appendix.

The presentation of the winners of the art and essays contest was made by MP Gord Brown, MPP Steve Clark and MDHS President Ann Martin.

The Blockhouse Festival was a colourful celebration of the Blockhouse Museum’s 50th anniversary and local history. More than 240 people explored the museum. Most of the visitors discovered the festival because Merrickville is a destination in itself.

Other than Eastern Ontario, visitors came from Gatineau, QC; Lacombe and Grande Prairie, AB; and West Nipissing, ON. Identified Americans visited from Cedar Rapids, IA; East Earl, PA; Clarence, NY; and central New Jersey.

Visitors enjoyed the heritage exhibit under the marquee, the military displays on the grounds, the boatmen’s camped and music.

Fourteen organizations from Eastern Ontario, two from Quebec and one from Northern New York demonstrated a broad swath of our history and traditions.

Visitors thrilled to the boom of muskets from the Grenville Militia, the crew of the Red Wing and rifle crashes from the Brockville Infantry Company.

Music punctuated the day courtesy of the Kemptville Legion Pipes and Drums, the Hoolies and the Rosedale Singers.

The children were not forgotten. The Fort La Présentation Association from Ogdensburg, NY offered an active display of traditional toys and games. Kids took up the association’s wooden muskets to be drilled by the militia.

Exhibits from the Watson’s Mill Museum, the Brockville Museum, Heritage House Museum, the Arthur Child Heritage Museum, the

Spencerville Mill Museum and the Limerick Forest Association delved into the heritage of Eastern Ontario.

Statistics

Adults **9100**
Children **1168**
Total attendance: 10,268

MDHS Revenue from the donation box was as follows:

| Item | Price per unit | # Units Sold | Total |
|------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Building an Empire | \$20 | 13 | \$260.00 |
| Merrickville Remembers | \$5 | 3 | \$15.00 |
| Walking Tours | \$2 | 7 | \$14.00 |
| Blockhouse Booklet | \$0.50 | 73 | \$36.50 |
| Total | | | \$365.00 |

This is up significantly from the \$73.50 reported in 2014.

Village revenue from the donation box was \$2,988 up 7.25% from the \$2,786 collected last year.

Parks Canada Maintenance and Liaison

Relations with Parks Canada through the lockmaster, along with the full-time and casual personnel under his charge are positive and we are grateful to the support that our students and volunteers receive throughout the summer.

With respect to maintenance, however, the Society continues to have its challenges. A significant crack in the north-east corner of the Blockhouse was reported to Parks Canada in the spring of 2015. No follow-up from Parks Canada has been received. This is part of a larger pattern of having difficulty determining the correct process for submitting our maintenance "tickets" with Parks Canada. Work continues on this front as we enter the fall "shut down" period.

Parks Canada did let a contact for the painting of the buildings along the Rideau Canal and the Blockhouse was painted during the summer of 2015 as part of this process.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ann Martin and Michael Whittaker