

Merrickville and District Historical Society



So here we are in the middle of yet another cold winter, still cooped up trying to keep warm and with perhaps a little time on our hands. Which brings us to our request in the last issue for any old photographs you may have in the attic (actually it might be a little cold up there right now), or any old shoe boxes, or in the bottom of that old chest that you have been meaning to tidy up. If you think you might have any photos of the village or surrounding areas, old buildings, business, houses or any of the town folk, the archives would love to have you either donate them or we can pick them up and then very carefully have copies made and then return them to you. Please let's not lose our history.

Some of the items on display in the archives are these rather old and rusty looking hand irons. They are made of cast iron and are quite heavy. One would have held hot water, another would be either hot bricks, coals or a metal slab, and one just a straight flat iron. The small iron would be used for tricky little areas around buttons and fasteners; unfortunately it is missing its handle. The archive records do not indicate the dates when these irons were made.

In most Canadian households the laundry was traditionally done over a two day period. Monday would be wash day and the ironing was done on the Tuesday, where the stoves would be well stoked up to keep the irons hot or, if using water, the pot boiling on the stove

Flat irons, sad irons

Blacksmiths started forging simple flat irons in the late Middle Ages. Plain metal irons were heated by a fire or on a stove. Some were made of stone, earthenware and sometimes terracotta was also used from the Middle East to France and the Netherlands.

Flat irons were also called sad irons or smoothing irons. Metal handles had to be gripped in a pad or thick rag. Some irons had cool wooden handles and in 1870 a detachable handle was patented in the US. This stayed cool while the metal bases were heated and the idea was widely imitated. Handles stayed even cooler in asbestos sad irons.



The “sad” in sad iron (or sadiron) is an old word for solid, and in some contexts this name suggests something bigger and heavier than a flat iron. Goose or tailor's goose was another iron name, and this came from the goose-neck curve in some handles. In Scotland people spoke of gusing (goosing) irons.

You'd need at least two irons on the go together for an effective system: one in use, and one re-heating. Large households with servants had a special ironing-stove for this purpose. Some were fitted with slots for several irons, and a water-jug on top.

At home, ironing traditional fabrics without the benefit of electricity was a hot, arduous job. Irons had to be kept immaculately clean, sand-papered and polished. They must be kept away from burning fuel, and be regularly but lightly greased to avoid rusting. Beeswax prevented irons sticking to starched cloth. Constant care was needed over temperature. Experience would help decide when the iron was hot enough, but not so hot that it would scorch the cloth. A well-known test was spitting on the hot metal, but Charles Dickens describes someone with a more genteel technique in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. She held "the iron at an alarmingly short distance from her cheek, to test its temperature..."

Box irons, charcoal irons

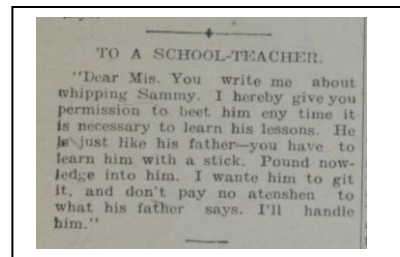
If you make the base of your iron into a container you can put glowing coals inside it and keep it hot a bit longer. This is a charcoal iron which would have had a hinged lid and air holes to allow the charcoal to keep smouldering. These were sometimes called ironing boxes, or charcoal box irons, and may have come with their own stand.

For centuries charcoal irons had been used in many different countries. Where they had a funnel to keep smoky smells away from the cloth, these may have been called chimney irons.

Some irons had shallower boxes and had fitted "slugs" or "heaters" - slabs of metal - which were heated in the fire and inserted into the base instead of charcoal. It was easier to keep the ironing surface spotlessly clean, away from the fuel, than with flat irons or charcoal irons. Brick inserts could be used for a longer-lasting, less intense heat. These were box or slug irons, also known as ironing boxes. In some countries they were called ox-tongue irons after a particular shape of insert.

Late 19th century iron designs experimented with heat-retaining fillings such as water. Designs of this period became more and more ingenious and complicated, with reversible bases, gas jets and other innovations. By the 1900's there were electric irons in use on both sides of the Atlantic.

Upon doing a little research recently on the Merrickville Railway Station we came across this notice in the Merrickville Star, dated January 5th 1905, and for those like myself that are a little long-sighted, the following is a transcription.



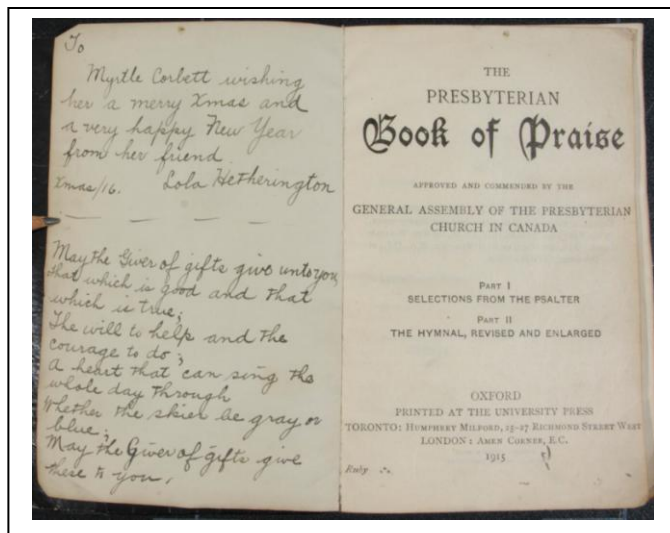
“TO A SCHOOL TEACHER”

“Dear Mis. You write me about whipping Sammy. I herby give you permission beet him any time it is necessary to learn his lessons. He is just like his father—you have to learn him with a stick. Pound now-ledge into him. I wante him to git it. and don’t pay no atenshen to what his father says. I’ll handle him.”

My, oh my, anyone you recognize?

“The Presbyterian Book of Praise”

This lovely little Presbyterian “Book of Praise” is a delight to have and was donated by Mrs. Sally Wanless when she was on the Board of Directors of the Merrickville Heritage Foundation. When she, along with other volunteers who were responsible for the removing of items that remained in the old “Knox Presbyterian Church” found this particular book, it stood apart from the others. And although this was no doubt not the only Book of Praise left, the inscription on the inside cover is delightful. Once again, for ease of reading, it has been transcribed.



To
Myrtle Corbett wishing her a merry Xmas and
a very happy New Year
from her friend

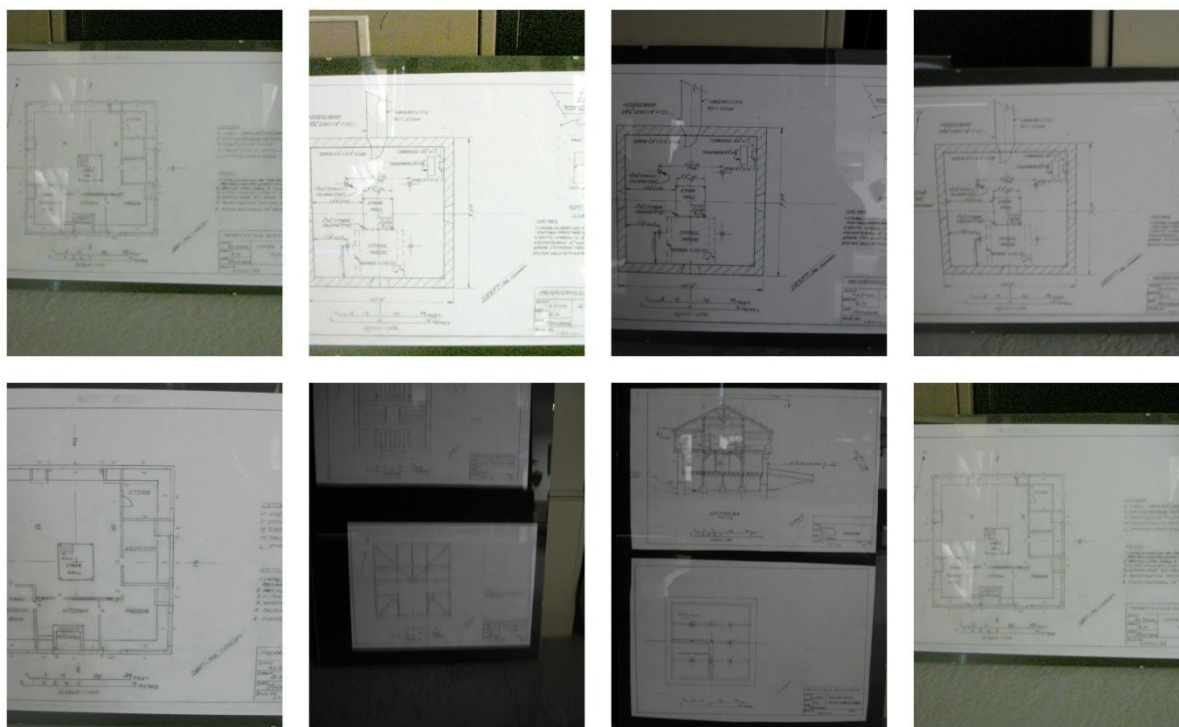
Lola Hetherington

Xmas/16

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May the Giver of gifts give unto you,
that which is good and that
which is true;
The will to help and the
courage to do;
A heart that can sing the
whole day through
Whether the skies be gray or
Blue,
May the Giver of Gifts give
these to you.

Thanks to the kind donation of Mrs. Gillian Hammonds the Archives are now also in possession of two new swivel desk chairs and two upright legal size filing cabinets. The chairs are a great asset when working between the two computers, although I must say we really shouldn't be doing wheelies around the room. The legal cabinets allow us the opportunity to hang documents in folders as they are usually of a legal size for easy access. In the past they have unfortunately been placed in folders one on top of each other as the old cabinets we had were of the standard size. Gillian also offered two beautiful old bookcases but alas we had no room for them. We would also like to thank society members, Art and Andrew Hackett and Ian Donald and the use of a neighbour's truck to move these items. It's great to have the help of volunteers!

Gillian also donated a number of sketches that her late husband David, our former Blockhouse Manager, did of the blockhouse. Being the very precise engineer that David was, these sketches are to scale and are very detailed. They are of the actual structural design of the interior of the Blockhouse and have now been copied and will be installed in the Blockhouse museum this coming spring, upstairs in the archive room.



Unfortunately these pictures are not as clear in print and not all are shown here, but you will be able to review them more clearly in our display this coming summer.