

# Merrickville and District Historical Society

## Archival Update, Spring - 2016



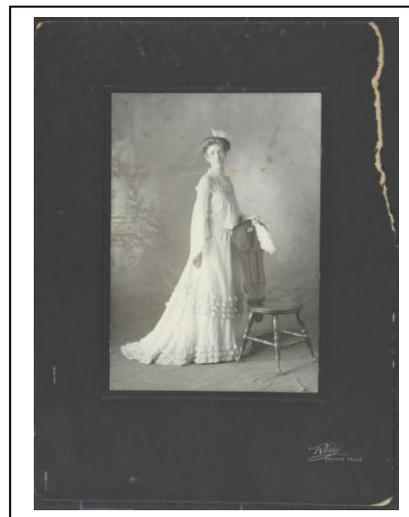
Spring must surely be around the corner, we have been teased with some wonderful warm days and some not so warm. Some wet and, of course, some snowy days. But have faith, spring always arrives, even if only in her own sweet time. Of course, tell that to all those lovely crocus, daffodils, and hyacinths that are braving the chilly nights!

### Merrickville Celebrates Women

On Saturday June 11<sup>th</sup> 2016 Merrickville will be hosting a "Merrickville Celebrates Women's" day at the Merrickville Community Centre, from 8:30am to 6:00pm. This is a one day event and the Historical Society will be participating with the registration and displaying these two photographs along with others from the Archive Collection. These two lovely young ladies are dressed in their finery no doubt to have their photographs taken.



Mrs. Laura Bedall



Anna Watchorn

The following descriptions of these wonderful photographs were taken from the Archive files. When an item is donated and received by the Society, as much information is gathered at that time from the donor. This information is then, in turn, given an accession number and entered into the computer system along with a photograph. These two particular photographs were both donated in 1981.

Mrs. Laura Bedell, wife of Col. Bedell, is posed on a wicker chair, circa 1918.

She is wearing a dress with fur trim, two rings on her left hand, and a pendant of sorts around her neck.

This photograph was donated by Misses Phyllis and Laura Walker in 1981. Archive accession No. 981.65.2

Anna (Henrietta) Watchorn, a descendant of the early founders family, Watchorn of Merrickville.

she is wearing a white dress with lace detail around her shoulders and at the neckline and posing/standing behind a chair. A matching bow is in her hair and she is holding a white fan.

Donated by the Watchorn family 1981. Accession No. 981.57.9

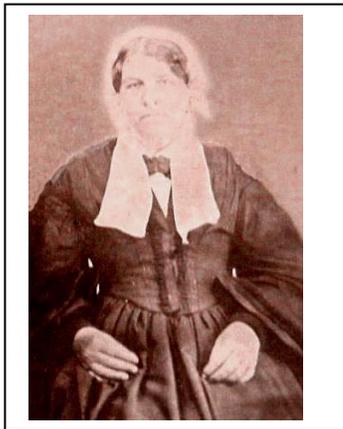
These dresses were no doubt made of the finest materials available and would have only been worn on special occasions rather than as day to day wear.

On the other hand, we might want to think more on the lines of dress code with these other two ladies, one a school teacher and the other the working wife and mother of lockmaster Sergeant John Johnston. Very practical clothing indeed, but not quite as elegant, although Lamira's has a look of silk about it.



Lamira Dow Billings

Lamira Dow was born in 1796 in Cambridge New York. She and her family moved to the Merrickville area in 1805. At the age of 16 Lamira was given a teaching position at Merrickville's first school, which would make her one of the pioneer teachers in Upper Canada. Shortly thereafter she met a young man by the name of Braddish Billings whom she married in 1812 and subsequently had seven children. She lived at the Billings Estate in Ottawa until her death in 1879 at the age of 83.



Margret Jemina Blair Johnston

Margret Jemina Blair was born in Davenport England in 1804. Married to Sergeant John Johnston on September 2 1824 and, at the age of 30, she moved with her husband, daughter Mary Ann and their three sons to Merrickville. As the lockmaster, the family were entitled to live in the blockhouse where they had another 5 children. A new stone house was eventually built on St. Lawrence Street where their last child was born, totalling 10 in all. She remained in the house until her death at age 83 in September 1887.

Both of these ladies led very full, busy and hard lives and, although Lamira eventually "married up", as they say, to the wealthy Billings family in Ottawa, she did not have an easy start to her marriage. Their first home was a log cabin. She had many children and having a large family no doubt kept her very busy. In fact they had three homes before the now Billings Estate where perhaps she finally began to enjoy a different lifestyle.

Margret on the other hand must have encountered many more hardship having to live in the Blockhouse which had no facilities to help run a household and must have been extremely cold. (Just ask some of the blockhouse volunteers who work there). The upper floor was divided into five rooms, a kitchen with cooking hearth, parlour and bedrooms. No running water and no latrines. Not perfect but apparently certainly an upgrade to the working men's quarter in town.

What does one think when looking at these old photographs, the ladies never seem to smile, could it be something to do with their lifestyle of hard work? Perhaps it is the fact that one was not to be seen to be too happy and smiling as that might be thought as not being too Christian, or there again it could also be the thought of when the next child might arrive.

Count yourself lucky ladies, times they are a changing.

Two other ladies on display would be Miss Mary E. Pearson and Mrs. Alice Hughes, both prominent women in the community of Merrickville-Wolford.

Mary Emily Pearson was born December 9, 1860 to William and Margret Pearson. Her father, with his partner Henry McGee, founded the first foundry in Merrickville known initially as the Pearson-McGee Foundry, and later as the Percival Plow and Stove Co. She attended school in Merrickville and later attended the Wesleyan Female College in Hamilton. When the telephone was still in the experimental stage Alexander Bell had a connection from the Collage to Brantford as a try out. Mary and a girlfriend played a duet on the piano while Mr. Bell listened in Brantford. She was instrumental in organizing the local branch of the Women's Institute and was Treasurer of the Ladies Aid of the Methodist Church for 40 years. She was also interested in the social welfare of the community and was active in the Red Cross during World War I.



Without ever being married, Mary Emily passed away in Merrickville on February 7<sup>th</sup> 1959 and is buried in the Methodist United Cemetery. Left to mourn was Miss Kathleen Pearson, cousin and adopted daughter who resided with Mary at the time of her death. Miss Pearson donated a house on Main Street East to the Village of Merrickville to be used as the municipal offices and the Library. It is known locally as the Pearson Building.

Born Alice Mary McGrath, February 11, 1919. Alice married Lloyd Hughes, and had a family of four, Marilyn (died May 1942), Nancy, Ron and Linda.

Alice taught school in Wolford Township for more than forty years and in her spare time, if she ever had any, she researched the genealogy of her own McGrath family as well as many of the families in the surrounding townships. There are over 20,000 research documents compiled by Alice in the Merrickville Library. Alice was also instrumental when President of the Society for the Preservation of the McGuigan Cemetery. She was awarded the Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2008 and the Merrickville and District Historical Society's 1<sup>st</sup> and only Honorary Membership Award. Alice passed away on July 29, 2011 at the age of 92 and is buried in the Easton's Corners Union Cemetery.



The volunteers have been very busy this winter, particularly with the continuing verification of the transfer of the records of all the artifacts from our original database to the new PastPerfect system. This is a laborious and time consuming job but lots of fun. It's amazing what the Society has collected over the years, mostly through donations from the local community. Today while working in the Archives we found a few Autograph Albums in one of the many boxes,, dating from the mid to late 1800's. These are lovely little books, usually with decorated covers and small flowers or symbols on the corner of each page, perhaps either printed as part of the book, or hand cut from other books and magazines and pasted on each page. They are fascinating to read as the messages are usually rather short and personal, and there are even some little poems.

I know as kids we all used to try to collect autographs from famous people from around the area and never left home without our autograph book, just in case we should meet some celebrity. Needless to say, they were usually signed by mum, dad, grandfather or some distant relative that came to visit. Did you ever own one?