

# Merrickville and District Historical Society

## Archival Update, Summer 2015



images C.W. Jefferys



Flint & Steel



Candle Box



Wheel Tinder Box



Pocket Fountain



Candle snuffer



## Exciting News from the President

On May 23, 2015, the Merrickville and District Historical Society was pleased to receive a cheque for \$9,000 from Heritage Merrickville Foundation for the Society's latest archives' project to improve the community's access to its archives and collections. The MDHS currently has in excess of 6,500 items in its archives that it would like to make available on the internet. The grant money received from Heritage Merrickville Foundation will allow us to replace our aging computers and migrate all of the information about our collections to a new, user-friendly, museum-industry standard software, PastPerfect 5.0. This software is used by several historical societies within the region including the Railway Museum of Eastern Ontario in Smiths Fall. Upgrading our digital infrastructure for the archives will allow us to share information about our archives and collections on-line as well as mount virtual exhibitions.

To ensure that we can manage the project successfully, a grant has been approved by the provincial Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to hire a Project Coordinator for twenty-six weeks who will be responsible for managing the conversion project from start to finish. We are anticipating a start date in July/August 2015. Part of the conversion work involves software training for approximately half a dozen members of the Society.

If you are interested in learning more about this project or would like to put your name on the training list, please contact Ann Martin by email at [acm.mapletale@gmail.com](mailto:acm.mapletale@gmail.com) or 613-269-2042. Training will take place in the fall of 2015.

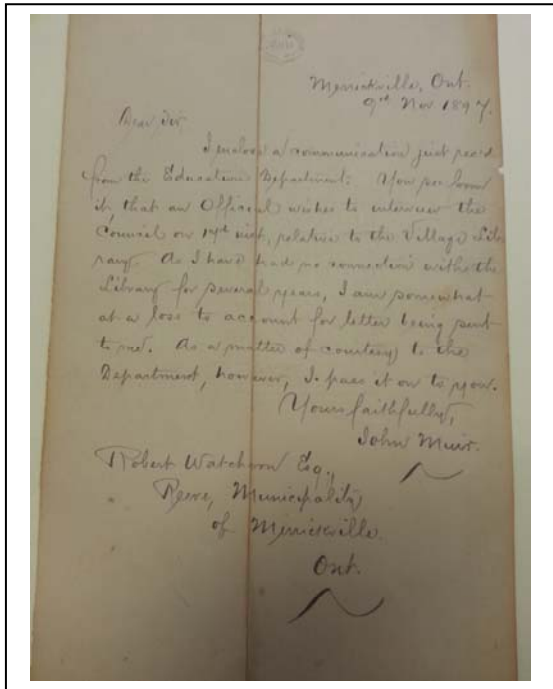
Ann Martin, President, MDHS, receiving a cheque from Sally Wanless and Lou Birta, Heritage Merrickville Foundation, May 23, 2015



I'm sure you will agree that hearty congratulations are in order to the President for her foresight into submitting a proposal to the Heritage Merrickville Foundation for this grant. This will enable the Archives to move forward both in terms of technology and upgrading the related computer skills of new volunteers and myself.

## A letter from 1897

This interesting letter was found recently in the archives. Unfortunately it is showing signs of deterioration, in fact it is torn down the middle and presently it is being carefully stored in acid free tissue in an acid free box in the Society Archives. The following is a transcript of how it was actually written, as it is difficult to read from a photograph.



Merrickville,  
Ont.  
9<sup>th</sup> Nov 1897

Dear Sir:

I enclose a communication just rec'd from the Education Department. You see from it, that an Official wished to interview the Council on 17<sup>th</sup> inst., relative to the Village Library. As I have had no connection with the Library for several years, I am somewhat at a loss to account for letter being sent to me. As a matter of courtesy to the Department, however, I pass it on to you

Yours faithfully,  
John Muir.

Robert Watchorn Esq.,  
Reeve, Municipality  
Of Merrickville  
Ont.

## Another interesting item from the Archives

This little gem is referred to as a "Bank Torch Kit"  
It is a well oiled box, which is 31.5 x 23 x 20.2cm.  
Two metal hinges on the back side and one metal Clasp on the front. It also has a metal carrying handle.

Inside the box contains ten torches which are hung from nails along both sides of the box. The torches are metal, each one with a handle to hook onto the side of the box. There is a wick in each of the torches and there is also an extra ball of wick to be used as refills.

This box was donated by Mrs. Reid Walker in July 1974. There is no indication of where it came from or what year it might have been made.



Not sure where the reference to "bank" comes from except that they may have been used in a bank. Can anyone shed any light (no pun intended) on these torches? We would like to be able to update our archive files.

## Harry Falconer McLean Exhibit in the Merrickville Blockhouse

For those that have been unable to visit the Merrickville Blockhouse recently, we are now at last, proud to say that the Harry F. McLean exhibit is open to the public.

In 2012 the society was approached by Teresa Charland, the author of "Building an Empire, Big pants Harry McLean" with regards to all of her research material for her book. She was moving to a new location which did not provide her with the space she required to store all of her research material. She contacted the Historical Society to see if we would be interested in receiving all of her material as a donation to the society and also for safe keeping. We were delighted of course. The many boxes, and I mean many, were picked up and transported to the Archives. About the same timeframe, one of our members, Bill Stevens, donated a three drawer lateral filing cabinet which was perfect to hold most of the files. I do believe there is one more box to unpack and file. (They say a volunteer's work is never done)

Along with our existing archive material and with the files received from Miss Charland, a tremendous amount of documentation went into this exhibit, including many photographs, texts of interviews and manuscripts. These were subsequently gathered together copied and assembled in either picture frames or poster boards on easels. With his expertise, the layout and design was provided by Wayne Poapst. The magnificent cairn plaques were moved from the Blockhouse Archive room and two of the chairs are from the offices of Harry McLean which were, at that time, located upstairs in the Sam Jakes Block. His desk and swivel chair are downstairs on the ground floor of the blockhouse because we couldn't get them up the stairs. These wonderful pieces of furniture were donated by the Heroux family, and the Society is grateful to have received them, and be able to add them to the exhibit.

A work in progress, but then what museum isn't.



The following is a transcript of an announcement that is located on the wall as you enter the exhibit. This is just a very short introduction to the life of Harry F. McLean which provides the visiting public a brief overview of one of Merrickville memorable residents.

This exhibit depicts the life and times of one of Merrickville most notable residents, Harry Falconer McLean.

Born in 1883 in Bismarck North Dakota, Mr. McLean had a varied and successful career starting as a water boy to President of Dominion Construction, building vast railroads and hydroelectric dams during the period of 1905 to 1945. Contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars provided enormous wealth to Mclean but he also created work for hundreds of men during the depression. His generosity to his employees and their families and during the aftermath of the Halifax Explosion earned him a great deal of respect. But McLean was not a man to be reckoned with at 6' 4" and weighing in at around 250lbs, it would have been hard to question his authority. Upon moving his offices to Merrickville, his generosity continued within the community, with his building of a tower and toboggan chute for the children along with ski runs and filled a shed with skis, poles boots and toboggans. In the summer he had a section of the Rideau River dredged for swimming and built a wharf. He also made financial contribution to those families in need and of course Christmas presents for all the children every year.

He has dined with Presidents, Prime Ministers, Politicians, celebrities and the occasional rogue, smoked cigars and was known to have the odd whisky. He had a good life and he passed away in his sleep at his home on April 30th 1961. He is buried in Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery, Montreal, Quebec.

This exhibit could not have been made possible without the generous donation from author, Ms. Teresa Charland, whose vast research material was made available to the society for the use of this exhibit. All of the of interviews, manuscripts and photographs, for the writing of her biography of Harry F. McLean, "Building and Empire", "Big Pants" Harry F. McLean and His Sons of Martha, has been of a great source of information.

We do hope that many of you will be able to visit the blockhouse this summer and take a look at the exhibit.

Nancy Warr (your Executive Secretary) and I have been updating the inventory of items located both in the Blockhouse and the Archives. This project was started last year by the Blockhouse Student Interpreters. Using an earlier inventory list, they went around and checked that everything that was on the list was actually in the blockhouse. Nancy spent much of the winter loading that list into the computer. And the last few weeks we have been reconciling that list with the old files that are in the archives. Needless to say this was a huge undertaking as over the years items have been either relocated, returned to the donor, (in particular the horse carriages that were moved when Parks Canada put their exhibit on the ground floor), or damaged, as well as some new items being received. Nancy hopes to have the catalogue listed and available in the next week. It will be available in the blockhouse to help the students identify any items that the visitor may have questions about.

Don't forget to renew your membership. The annual membership runs from November 1st to October 31st - \$10.00 for single, \$15.00 for family. Life memberships are \$100.00 for a single and \$150.00 for a family. This can easily be taken care of when either visiting the Archives or attending the monthly lecture meeting when our Membership Committee Member Art Hackett will be only too happy to take care of you. Or just send a cheque to the Merrickville and District Historical Society, P.O. Box 394, Merrickville, Ontario. K0G 1N0 and your membership card will be mailed to you.

[Merrickville and District Historical Society Archives – ndonald@growthconnections.com](mailto:ndonald@growthconnections.com)