



# Fall 2011 **newsletter** VOLUME 9, NUMBER 3

## Prez Sez . . .

“Well here we are again enjoying a wonder Indian summer. This fall weather has given us all a little extra time to get those nasty chores done in and around our properties before the cold of winter sets in.

This warmer weather allowed our Blockhouse Manager, David Hammonds to work with crafted tradesmen to repair and restore three of our display cabinets in the blockhouse. These antique cabinets were in poor condition and rather than remove them and purchase new cabinets, the Executive decided these beautiful pieces needed to be restored.

Due to the time of year and that the work had to be done after the blockhouse was closed to the public, this warmer weather proved to be a godsend for those having to work in what could have been very cold conditions. . . . . continued page 4

## Blockhouse Museum Changes:

Over the past twelve months the blockhouse has acquired two or three new items for display. On the ground floor we have a fine primitive pine corner cupboard, Donated by the Provost family estate, it is dated around 1850's and came originally from the Dillabough Farm on Bolton Road,



**Primitive pine cupboard    Antique Log Cabin quilt**

And on the second floor, on loan for the summer of 2011 from Peggy Harrison of Merrickville, we were able to display a very colourful hand sewn Log Cabin Pattern quilt .This quilt was made with cloth from gentlemen's used clothing and is believed to be from the late 1800's or early 1900's. We thank Peggy for letting us display the quilt this summer and are very pleased she has told us we may keep the quilt for display again in 2012.

Another great find was a darling little child's bed that we actually found tucked away in a corner of our archive room when we were moving the archives back in February of this year. *Continues . .page 2.*

## New Historical Society Executive:

The Annual General Meeting of the Society was held on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011. The following were elected to serve on Committees.

### **2012 Executive and Committee members**

#### **Executive**

- President, Nina Donald
- 1st Vice President, David Hammonds
- 2nd Vice President, Ellen Hackett
- Secretary/Treasurer, Dick Hegan
- Past President, John Cowan

#### **Committee Members**

- Bookkeeper, Sharon Parkinson
- Blockhouse, David and Gillian Hammonds
- Archives, Nina Donald
- Hospitality, Janet Graves/Jane Anne McIntyre
- Volunteers, Ellen Hackett
- Communications, Connie Rosebush
- Lecture Program, Marion Fuller, Chris Slattery
- Membership, Art Hackett
- Agriculture/Fair Liaison, Wayne Poapst

#### **Members at Large**

- Gillian Gray, Spring Dinner
- Hope Gray, Essay Contest

## Blockhouse Museum Changes: *continued*



If you have an opportunity to examine this small treasure, you will see it has rolling casters hidden and built into in each leg for ease of movement. A nice example of early craftsmanship.

### Antique Rope Bed, sans ropes

## Lockmaster Returns to the Blockhouse

A very special item, a print of an original oil painting, is now located on the ground floor in the left hand side display cabinet.



© H. M. Queen

The faintly visible caption, upper right reads:

*Lighting a Grenade, C.S. J. Johnstone*  
**Royal Sappers and Miners**

In 1831, the newly crowned King, William IV, was anxious to record recent changes in the uniforms and weapons of the British Army. The French society painter, Alexandre-Jean Dubois Drahonet, (1791-1843), was commissioned to carry out the work. Over the next three years, he produced more than ninety portraits.

The subjects, ranged from the grandest of officers to soldiers of the lowest rank. Colour Sergeant John Johnston, who had recently returned to Britain after five years' work on the Rideau Canal, was chosen from the ranks of the Royal Sappers and Miners to pose for the artist. Johnston later returned to Merrickville as lockmaster in 1836, and initially lived with his family upstairs in this blockhouse. The entire set of oil paintings is in the collection of Her Majesty The Queen and is normally housed in the Private Apartments at Windsor Castle. See "Connecting Windsor" page 5

## Upcoming Events

There will be no meeting in December, but for the JANUARY lecture, we are pleased to have Dr. James Opp from Carleton University who will enlighten us on *"History in Your Hands."* - *Visualizing the Historic Rideau Canal through Smartphone Technology*, as he takes us on a virtual tour of the Rideau Canal, fusing historical photography with today's smartphone technology.

- In FEBRUARY, we will conduct a *"show and tell"* wherein we will ask members to bring something of historical interest (besides themselves) and tell us a bout it.
- For the MARCH Meeting we are extremely pleased to have Kevin Gray of Merrickville speaking on *"glass blowing down the ages"*.
- In APRIL, following our Spring Dinner, John Scott, a master stone masonry expert at Perth Algonquin Heritage College, will speak on 19<sup>th</sup> century stone structures,
- Our MAY gathering will feature Larry Cotton, author of *"Whiskey and Wickedness"*, speaking on, guess what, . . . whiskey and wickedness in pioneer days.
- JUNE will be a particularly important Blockhouse opening. It will be our 45th annual opening.

Look to the Phoenix and local advertising for places and times.

## the Merrickville United Church

Following the American Revolution of 1776, a growing stream of United Empire Loyalists flowed into Canada. Most settled along the border with America but the more adventurous worked their way north into only recently opened settlement areas. The Lower Rideau Settlement was such an area. Although loyal to the British Crown, many if not most of the new immigrants were of the Methodist faith.



### original Merrickville Methodist Church

Land was obtained from Thomas Merrick at the crossroads of St. Lawrence and Main Streets and Merrickville's second Methodist Church was dedicated on January 23, 1890. It became a United Church at the union of three branches of Methodism in 1925



### Itinerant preacher.

C. W. Jefferys, L.A.C

Following close behind the pioneers were itinerant Methodist preachers who traveled long distances on horseback through barely surveyed land to serve their parishioners. There are records of such preachers visiting the Merrickville area as early the 1790's

The Merrickville United Church grew from the roots planted by these hardy clergymen. At first services were held in private homes but as the congregation grew services were held later in the Blockhouse and in the Minto School.

In spite of their early history the Methodists were not the first to erect Churches in Merrickville. Following the completion of the Rideau Canal and with the influx of Irish settlers and decommissioned English soldiers, both the Catholic and Anglican Churches had been built in Merrickville by 1837.

By 1855 the Methodist congregation had grown to some 200 and the first Methodist Church was built on the north side of the river. This handsome somewhat austere building was actively used until, with a rapidly growing congregation, in 1881 plans were made to build a bigger, more accommodating church. Unfortunately this historic building, standing on the property of Grenville Castings is in sad need of repair, but still maintains its quiet solid and austere dignity.



### Merrickville United Church from post card c 1940

The new church building incorporated a "theatrical" gospel style interior, beautifully ringed with stain glass windows. Dominating the front of the hall is a magnificent pipe organ



### Interior Merrickville United Church

## Merrickville United Church . (continued)

The organ was installed in 1909, some twenty years after the Church was built. One half of the cost being covered by the *Carnegie Foundation*, the balance by the parishioners. Over the years the Percival family, strong supporters of the Church, and major valued customers of Carnegie Steel, were able to approach the Carnegie Foundation for support for installation of the beautiful organ. Converted it is still in operating condition today.



**United Church Pipe Organ**

This Church still serves the spiritual needs of its Congregation and as well has become a familiar landmark to area residents as it lends an air of quiet dignity to the historic landscape - a silent witness to the history of the village.

\*\*\*\*\* did you know ? \*\*\*\*\*

**The first church erected in the Village was a small wooden one built shortly after 1832 by the Roman Catholics. In 1842 a stone church, the first in the Village was built and in 1902 the present church, St Ann, was built. The first Anglican Church was built in 1837 on the site of the present church which was erected in 1908. The Presbyterian Church, known as Knox Hall was erected in 1861 and is currently in private hands.**

*Note: The previous article was drawn primarily from a United Church Merrickville Church Session, "Merrickville History since WW2" by Mary Pearson Archives, Merrickville & District Historical Society*

## Prez Sez More: continued from pg1

“ . . . Come the spring we hope to be able to get back into the Blockhouse Museum to make some changes to the upper floor where we have a small room that was used in the past as an archive room but now is just used for storage. This might be an ideal location, after cleaning up, for displaying additional artifacts that we have in storage, or to display period costumes, or to focus the Harry McLean memorabilia in one room. This will take some planning and may require the services of a professional to advise us on just how we should go about this to ensure that we do justice to our Blockhouse Museum. We will keep you posted of our progress. You should also be aware the cabinet refurbishment project would not have been possible without the donation of the RBC Blue Water Advisory Panel Member, Mr. George Yap. I would now like to take this opportunity to thank all of our many volunteers who worked so diligently through the shoulder season periods in the Blockhouse. The start and end of the season can get pretty cold in an old stone building like the Blockhouse, you can put on a few extra layers but some days it can be teeth-chattering. Still the cold seems to bring out the best in us all and I would like to thank Ellen Hackett for arranging and coordinating the volunteers - all of our people seem to have fun and enjoy the conversations with our guests visiting from all over the world. Our thanks go out to Janet Glaves, Jane Anne McIntyre, Dick and Mary Hegan, Art and Ellen Hackett, Nancy Warr, David Watson and his team, Margot Allen, Angela Beking, Sharon Parkinson and of course David and Gillian Hammonds.

On a parting note, this newsletter is mostly about the Historical Society and its members so if you have a little ditty or story that you would like to share with us all, just send it through to me [ndonald@growthconnections.com](mailto:ndonald@growthconnections.com) and we will print it in our next issue. I promise I won't let the editors delete all the juicy parts.”

Nina Donald

### Connecting Windsor Castle with Merrickville

The connection is none other than Sergeant John Johnston of the Royal Sappers and Miners born, 1792 in County Caven, Ireland,. After commanding his company of Sappers during construction of the Rideau Canal at the Ottawa Locks, Johnston returned to his base in England, in early 1832. In 1836 he returned to Canada as third lockmaster in Merrickville and was resident in Merrickville from 1836 until his death in 1869. But what did he do in the four years between 1834 and 1836 while away from the Rideau? Among other things, it is considered that he was selected to pose, in his Sappers uniform, for a leading portrait painter of the day.

The well known painter Alexandre-Jean Dubois Drahonet,(1791-1834) worked at the command of the newly crowned king of England, William IV, who was anxious to have a permanent visual record of recent changes in the uniforms and weapons of army and navy personnel. This was just a few years before the invention of photography and the only way to achieve the goal was to commission a portrait painter. It is unclear why less than 20 years after the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, a Frenchman was commissioned. It can only be concluded that he really was a painter of renown. Over the next two years, Dubois-Drahonet completed no fewer than 90 portraits of all ranks of serving man, from General and Admiral to the humblest sapper. Why Johnston was chosen and how the idea of portraying him "Lighting a Grenade" was arrived at, are not known.

Tracking down this painting was not straightforward. In 2008 a black and white copy of the portrait was spotted in the "The Rideau - a Pictorial History of the Waterway" (1981). The caption advised that it had been reproduced "by permission of H.M. The Queen", and that the original was in "Windsor Castle". The quality of the image was such that, after comparing it with Johnston's photo in the Blockhouse, (right) one could not be certain that the former occupant of the Blockhouse was the man in the painting. However, it was later noted that the same book had reproduced the list of 26 Sappers "who returned to England on Disbandment of the Companies", from Bytown in December 1831. Sgt J. Johnston's name is there, second on the list as "Sergeant".

In 1832 the Royal Sappers and Miners were relatively few in number and the likelihood of there being two Sergeant J. Johnstons was judged to be low, so that the balance of probability is that Johnston was back in the UK in time to pose for the painting.

An internet search for more information was inconclusive and research stopped. It was felt that only a trip to Windsor Castle to view the original could resolve the matter. That said, gaining access to the Queen's Private Apartments to see the original was judged to be impossible. Time has a way of helping patient historians and today they are helped by the regular uploading of additional material on the internet. Thus, in early 2011 a renewed search revealed that the "Royal Collection" had recently uploaded all 90 of the Dubois-Drahonet paintings .

An inquiry was made and a fee of £100 was quoted for permanent exhibition of a copy. After explaining that it was to form part of the Society's John Johnston exhibit in the blockhouse, very generously, the fee was waived and payment was made simply for a high resolution image, from which a full size copy was made and mounted on board. It was placed in the Johnston case in the Blockhouse in time for the "Doors Open Ontario" weekend in Sept 2011.

From the time of identification in the book to its



**Lockmaster John Johnston**

installation in the Museum had taken three years. Rigour precludes one from being fully categorical that portrait and photo are of the same man so it is left to visitors to the exhibit to judge for themselves whether our researchers are right.

The Historical Society is grateful to David Hammonds for his research and initiative in tracking down and acquiring this important artifact and for recording these stories of how he accomplished the feat.

## Then and Now

One of the joys of owning an historic home is the satisfaction of washing away years of neglect and seeing the re-emergence as another "Jewell" of the Rideau. There are many examples of this in Merrickville. In fact, one of the prime attractions of the Village and area is the number of such restored properties, residential and commercial.

No better example is evident than that seen in Merrickville's most dramatic stone home, known as "The Manor House"



**The Aaron Merrick House, c 1900**

The original owner of this wonderful home was Aaron Merrick, son of founder William Mirick. It is believed to have been built between 1845 and 1855, by Merrickville master builder, Samuel Langford who built a number of stone homes in the area during that timeframe. The original home was built as a two and a half story, which had a full length regency style veranda across the front of the house and at the front, the ground floor had four beautiful large windows that represented the style of French doors. The main floor free standing staircase was the first of its kind in Ontario. A truly magnificent home for that period in rural Ontario.

Moving forward with the arrival of Harry Falconer McLean in 1922, major changes were made to the home, the veranda was removed and a classical portico was added over the front door, dormer windows were added on the third floor, opening up this living space, and porches were added to each side of the ground floor.

Alas this wonderful home was left empty for a number of years after the death of Mr. McLean in 1961, but has since been operated as a nursing home, then referred to as the "Manor House" and then, recently as an art centre.

In 2009 the property was acquired by a gentleman who has spent the last two years lovingly restoring the house to its original splendour. Perhaps now we may call him the "Lord of the Manor".

by **Nina Donald**

In our archives we have several examples of these "Then and Now" photos. None more dramatic than this one. Many are of residences in and around the village. Others are of commercial buildings. But, we feel certain that you, our members have others which you would enjoy sharing. To start the ball rolling we are showing this fine example and asking members to allow us to borrow old photos to make digital copies which we can then share with our members.



**The Manor House c 2011**

If you have "then and now" photos to share, please call Nina at **269 4289**. Then look for them in the next Newsletter

### Membership Matters

**Membership in the historical Society is renewed annually from December to November at a present cost of \$10 per person or \$15 per family. Life memberships are also available for \$100.**

**We welcome new members and hope present members will want to re-join our Society. If so, it will be helpful if you can submit your cheques early to allow us to fund our ongoing works.**

**MDHS Membership, Box 294, Merrickville, Ontario, K0G 1N0:**

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2012 Executive

President – Nina Donald

First Vice President – David Hammonds

Second Vice-President – Ellen Hackett

Secretary /Treasurer – Dick Hegan

Past President – John Cowan