



## SUMMER 2013 **newsletter** VOLUME 12, NUMBER 3

### **President's Message**

Well summer is finally here. Or is it? At any rate it is summer for the Historical Society. We have had another successful Blockhouse Opening party, our 48th Blockhouse Opening Ceremony. Many thanks to David and Gillian Hammonds for their efforts at organizing this event and for their efforts in managing the Blockhouse operations on behalf of the Historical Society. As well Nina Donald and Ellen Hackett had another great essay writing and art contest.

Things have been busy with the Blockhouse Opening and many other activities since our last newsletter. I won't mention everything that we are doing; you will need to read the newsletter to find out. But the highlights include the improvements to the Archives, the recent Spring Dinner and the Harry McLean room that we are developing. The opening will be announced in the near future.

Sharon Alger, our new Treasurer, was successful in applying for grants from the Federal Government to fund the Blockhouse operations for the summer. She has also recently applied for an Ontario Grant for Heritage Organizations which will allow us to continue to provide things like this newsletter. Thank you Sharon for your valuable efforts on behalf of the Historical Society. Sharon also does lots of behind the scenes work such as completing our annual report to the Canada Revenue Agency and helps us to maintain our status as a Charitable Organization.

As a final note I would like to add that everyone should visit the Blockhouse and try out the bench that has been installed and dedicated to Pat Molson, a long time Historical Society member and supporter whose Walking Tours were always fascinating.  
Happy Summer.

Regards,  
Andrew McKay, President

### **Blockhouse Clean Up**

A dedicated group of volunteers assembled at the Blockhouse on Saturday May 11<sup>th</sup> for the annual clean up of the museum. Each winter the blockhouse becomes the home for many little critters looking for a home out of the elements, you can't say out of the cold as for those of the volunteers who arrived with bucket and broom in hand found out, the

building can be extremely cold. All of the artifacts are very carefully dusted and wet wiped, windows washed, cabinets cleaned and the whole building vacuumed. With a great working team this can usually be completed within the morning, but it should be noted that the Blockhouse Managers, David and Gillian Hammonds are usually in there a couple of times to do the initial removal of dust cloths covering the artifacts and to start the first of the many vacuuming.

Thanks go out to David and Gillian Hammonds, Art and Ellen Hackett, Nina Donald, Dick Hegan, Nancy Warr, Fred Grodde, and Shelagh Peever for all their efforts. Unfortunately everyone was just too busy to gather together for a photograph or even a coffee break.

### **Things are Ramping Up at the Merrickville Blockhouse! ... Submitted by Paul Galipeau, Ontario Waterways Unit, Parks Canada**

What happened to the blockhouse ramp they say?

Well Parks Canada is pleased to announce the upcoming installation of a brand new pedestrian ramp at the Blockhouse Museum in Merrickville.

Last fall, Rideau Canal engineers studied and replicated the design of the existing ramp structure at the blockhouse in order to create drawings for a new ramp. From these drawings, the Rideau Canal Gateshop team, working out of their facility in Smiths Falls, were able to build a ramp that works in harmony with and respects the style and historic context of the building.

In April, a new concrete landing pad was poured for the ramp and installation of the ramp will occur in time for the navigation season starting Friday, May 17, 2013.

Built in 1832-33 by the Royal Engineers under the command of Lt. Col. John By and designated a National Historic Site of Canada in 1939, the Merrickville Blockhouse is the second largest blockhouse in Canada, and the largest defensible structure on the Rideau Canal. The Blockhouse Museum has been welcoming visitors within its fortified walls since 1966.



The Blockhouse in the winter 2012

The Ramp under construction in the spring 2013

## The MDHS Annual Spring Dinner

This year's annual spring dinner was held at the Canadian Legion Hall, in the historic Old Town Hall on Main Street in Merrickville. On hand for this year's festivities was the society President, Andrew McKay, Mayor Doug Struthers and his wife Andrea and fifty seven members and friends.

President Andrew McKay welcomes all to the Annual Spring Dinner



All enjoyed a wonderful buffet style dinner prepared by the ladies of the Legion. This included a choice of either roast beef, (which we hear was to die for) or a wonderful roast chicken breast, stuffed with asparagus and cheese, all the trimmings and salad, and a desert of pies followed by tea or coffee.

The speaker for the evening was Carol Goddard who spoke on the topic of "British Home Children". Carol gave an interesting and enlightening talk where she told some of the stories of the more than 120,000 impoverished children who came to Canada between the 1860's and the 1940's.



She spoke often of both the needs during the First and Second World Wars to have children placed in a safer environment in Canada and of the servicemen who served for their country.

A presentation was made to Carol of the booklet "Merrickville Remembers", a tribute to the men who gave their lives for our freedom. Joyce McKay, a long time resident of Merrickville who served on the publishing committee back in 2002, made the presentation of this treasure of a booklet.

## Blockhouse Opening Ceremonies

And what a beautiful day it was indeed. It was a warm sunny summer day and a crowd gathered to participate in this year's official opening of the Blockhouse Museum. President Andrew McKay and Mayor Doug Struthers were on hand to welcome visitors and officiate the ribbon cutting and to announce the Blockhouse officially open for 2013.

There was some wonderful entertainment in the Blockhouse Park. Bagpiper Michael Durant was on hand to open the ceremonies, and although he is just a young fellow as they say, his bagpipes are certainly not, they date back to, and were being played during the Battle of D Day in Normandy France, June 6<sup>th</sup> 1944. And I am sure they sounded just as magnificent then and were as encouraging to the troops, as they are today. Also the artisans on hand to demonstrate their skills were the rug hooking ladies of the Rideau Valley Boots and Baskets, including Joyce McKay, Laurie MacCraken, Pat Reid, Cathy Ivory, Marie Amyot and Eleanor Muscroft. New this year were Mary Donnally busily carding and then spinning wool on her spinning wheel; Terri Whittaker and Chris Nicholson who demonstrated late 18<sup>th</sup>, early 19<sup>th</sup> century quilting and who dressed in period attire, circa. War of 1812. Regular participants, Rope maker Don Green and Blacksmith Scott Cluett completed the pioneer atmosphere. The wonderful Celtic sounds of the Maplewood Ceilidh, including musicians Doug Hendry, Marcia Phillips, Glenna Hunter and Ursa Meyer rounded out the afternoon's entertainment.

This year once again we were fortunate to receive Government funding to hire summer students as interpreters for the museum and they were on hand on their first day to help with the celebrations.



Karleigh Pitura, Eileen Barlow and Laura Yates, 2013 Blockhouse Museum Interpreters

## Student Essay and Art Contest Winners

As most of you are aware, changes were made at the Merrickville Public School in 2012, 2013 school year where the students in grades 7 and 8 were transferred to the new High School in Kemptville leaving the grades 4, 5 and 6 behind. This unfortunately meant fewer participants in the Essay and Art Contest. All of the schools in the area were contacted by Ellen Hackett the contest organizer, as is the norm, but it would appear that the changes seem to have disrupted the thought process of some of the students so consequently the response was diminished slightly. Still that didn't stop the rest of the students from sending in some wonderful essays and art submissions. We had over 28 participants. The prizes were handed over to the winning students at the Official Blockhouse Opening on Saturday June 15<sup>th</sup> with Mayor Doug Struthers making the presentations. And never wanting to miss a photo opportunity, pictures were taken of the students receiving their prizes from the Mayor.



The Essay Contest Winners were:

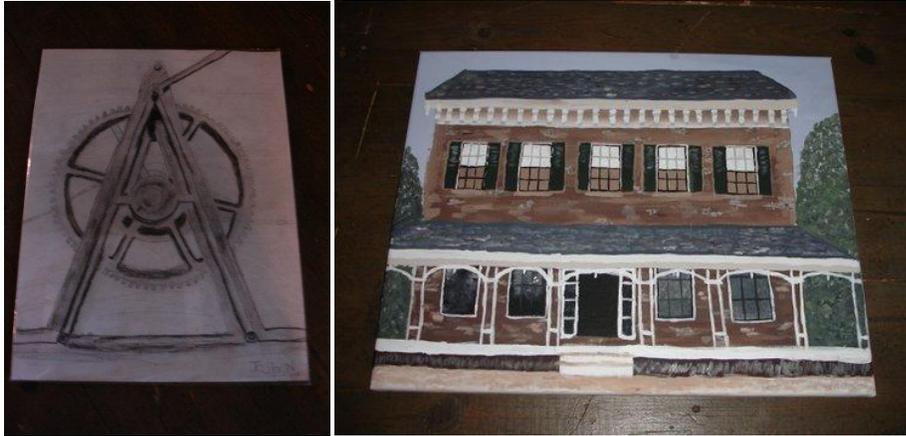
Grades 4 and 5 - 1<sup>st</sup> place, Niklas Althoefer-Hasting, "The Merrickville Iron Works" – 2<sup>nd</sup> place Lauren Larabie "McGuigan Cemetery – 3<sup>rd</sup> place Julie Cavanagh "The History of Schools in Merrickville".

Grade 6 - 1st place Callum Gauthier, "The Merrickville Home Co. and Patrick Kyle" - 2<sup>nd</sup> place, Katie Taugher, "Life as a Kid in the 1920's" - 3<sup>rd</sup> place, Alexander McMullin. "William Mirrick".

The Winners of the Art Contest were:

Grade 4 - 1<sup>st</sup> Prize Joshua Nickerson, pencil sketch of "Crab winch used to open the canal gates"

Grade 7 - 1<sup>st</sup> Prize, Melissa Nickerson, painting of "Sam Jakes Inn"



All of the student's submissions are on display in the Blockhouse Museum on the second floor for the summer season. Copies are also placed in the Merrickville Public Library and the Society Archives for everyone to view and read. Our thanks go to out the judges of both the essay and art contest and to the teachers for their guidance to the students. Congratulations to the winners and to all the students who took the time to participate. You are all winners.

### Dedication to Pat Molson

After the official opening of the Blockhouse on Saturday June 18<sup>th</sup>, a ceremony took place in the Blockhouse to honour the late Mr. Pat Molson with the dedication of a church pew in his honour. Pat passed away very suddenly while on vacation in Europe with his wife Andree in the spring of 2008. A long standing member of the Historical Society Mr. Molson started with the Executive Board as a member at large and proceeded to work his way through the responsibilities of Chair of the Volunteers and 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President. He, along with Denis Faulkner, was responsible for the Student Essay contest and he spent many years judging those essays. His love of the children and the essays they submitted, his volunteer work in the Blockhouse and his timeless efforts put into the Society Executive were a true pleasure for him, he loved every minute of the activities they presented to him. He was certainly not a man of few words as he loved to be in the blockhouse and greet the visitors and explain the history of the building and the artifacts in the museum. He was often seen riding his bicycle to and fro around the village, a great form of transportation he thought, and a wonderful opportunity to be able to stop and talk to people. He also found time to tend to his garden, which he also loved with its array of flowers and vegetables.

After his passing the Historical Society voted to honour Pat with a bench that would be placed in the blockhouse where he would have been able to sit and talk to visitors. Finding just the appropriate one took some time, but the opportunity arose when the United Church in Merrickville had a bench they wanted to remove to make more room in the church. It turned out to be one half of a rather large circular bench that was in need of quite a bit of restoration work. Hence the bench was put on hold for some time while

a search went out for an individual or individuals that would be able to help with this work. Fred Grodde was instrumental in first finding the bench, helping with the moving and storing, and then found and convinced Kemp McMeekin to work on the restoration. And what a magnificent job he did. It is

now finished and a brass plaque has been placed on the bench in memory of Pat, and sits proudly in one of Pat's favourite spots - right in the front doorway of the Blockhouse. Pat would have been proud.



*Pat and Andree in 2007*



On hand for the dedication were Mrs. Andree Molson, Kemp McMeekin, Mayor Doug Struthers and President Andrew McKay (missing from photo). Fred Grodde did an admirable job officiating.

### **The Industries of Merrickville – Part Three      Submitted by John Cowan**

The woollen textile industry also made its modest beginnings in Canada during pioneer times. It started out as a cottage industry, centred on the family spinning wheel and loom. Consequently many pioneer homesteaders tried to acquire a few sheep, from which they derived raw wool which could be turned into cloth. But several processes were required between the sheep and the cloth. The first after sheering involved the picking and sorting the wool fleeces, then washing to remove dirt and lanolin. Next came "carding" (i.e., combing with two wire brushes to get rid of more dirt, mats and short fibres, and to get all the strands running roughly parallel to one another), and finally, spinning the fibres into yarn. From here the pioneer housewife could proceed to the secondary phases, which meant weaving the yarn into cloth, then "fulling" (i.e., washing the cloth in warm water and alkali, combined with stretching and wringing it out, to clean and shrink the cloth), and finally -- if desired -- napping the cloth to produce a suitable downy surface for blankets or the like. The last step was turning the cloth into garments.

At first, every phase of the work had to be done at home. Only gradually were some portions of the process taken over by mills. Of all the phases of woollen manufacturing, the most tedious and time-consuming were scouring, carding and fulling. Hence, it is not surprising that the first phases of the operation to be mechanized were carding and fulling, and that the first mills set up to make the process simpler were carding and fulling mills.

The Merrickville carding mill was the third and final milling enterprise undertaken by William Merrick. Although its story is sketchy, it was believed to be built around 1817. By all accounts it was a small operation, and served basic preparatory functions of treating wool prior to weaving until 1848 when Stephen H. Merrick built his impressive stone mill on the island. One of the largest factories in the country at the time, it was built of coarsed limestone with a very regular and symmetrical design and from the start it had four-and-a-half stories.

On 8 July 1848 the Prescott Telegraph carried a report that Stephen H. Mirick was about to build a new cloth factory "to manufacture satinetts, doeskins, tweeds and other cloth with the exception of broadcloth". Merrick and his partners operated the mill with considerable success but with the death of Stephen Merrick around 1861 there followed several years of difficulty while the surviving Merricks, who lacked Stephen Merrick's energy and expertise, attempted to continue operations. It was not until Thomas Watchorn and his son, Robert leased the mill from Henry Merrick in 1874 and bought it outright in 1885 that it returned to form. The coming of the Watchorns represented the beginnings of a family dynasty that would manage and run the Merrickville woollen mill for nearly 79 years, through three generations. Robert Watchorn ran it with energy and success until about 1921 when his son Judson Watchorn took over.



**"Watchorn Mills" painting by Jonas Robinson.**

During its prime, the Watchorn Woolen Mill was a main employer in the Village, its bell ringing the beginning and end of the long work day. It was hard work but the many Village employees who worked there were very loyal to the Company. A long time Merrickville resident recalls:

*"We worked regular ten hours a day. . . Sometimes we would have to go back and work a couple of hours after supper, to get out whatever the quota was. If it had to be shipped, if it had to*

*go at a certain time, we would have to go back and do it... I've spent many a two hours after super, hemming blankets and helping to pack them."*

As had been its history from the beginning, fires again damaged the mill in 1930 and 1941 but it continued to produce woollen blankets for the war effort. But, changes in manufacturing methods and technology as well as demand force closure of numerous small woollen operations in Ontario. One of those that succumbed was the Watchorn mill. After more than 100 years of operation under that names Merrick and Watchorn Merrickville's woollen mill's outdated



machinery was stilled. The Merrickville mill was then the oldest surviving woollen factory in Ontario but its time had come and in 1954 the woollen mill that had been the life of Merrickville had to be closed.

**"Watchorn Woollen Mill during 1970's demolition (Photo Richard Tatley)"**

Although the mill buildings fell into disrepair, it is a sad page in Merrickville's heritage that in the 1960's the Federal Department of Transport which had jurisdiction over the canal where the mill was located determined that the structure was unstable and unsafe. It was demolished in 1970. All that now remains of this once proud edifice are some crumbled stone ruins and a piece of original masonry above the original main door, which declares "S. H. Mirick, 1848".



"Stephen Merrick Monogram"



:  
Merrickville Industrial Ruins 2012

*(Merrick/Watchorn mill is now the main skeleton rising in the present Merrickville Industrial ruins. While destroyed with the rest of the Industrial park in the 1970's, this once proud building still retains the mark of its maker "S H Mirick" carved above the original main entrance.)*

*Sources: Industries and Industrialists of Merrickville, 1792-1979, by Richard Tatley, 1979  
Parks Canada Manuscript Report 423 – Digital Edition, Friends of the Rideau, 2011, pgs 80-83*

**Back in 1981, The Historical Society created an Oral History Project to conduct interviews with some of the local residents. These are presently in the Archives and consist of about 27 interviews, some of which have been transcribed from the original. The following is one of those interviews, transcribed exactly as it was originally written, complete with typos and grammatical errors.**

#### INTERVIEW OF MRS. EVA WALKER

26 June 1981

Interviewer: Lori Maxwell

Transcriber: Annette Bradley

LM: Eva Donaldson, Mrs. Eva Walker, was born in 1904 in Kinburn which is located in Fitzroy Township. She moved to Merrickville in 1920. Mrs. Walker went to public school in McNab Township. High school she started in Kinburn and completed it in Merrickville. Her teacher in school in Merrickville was Miss Clement. The Principal was Mrs. Sinky.

She said she took all of the usual subjects at school. French, geography, spelling, history, arithmetic. Mrs. Walker said that they didn't go on field trips like students do today. She remembers one very special outing while at high school in Merrickville. Her teacher took her class to Ottawa by train. In Ottawa they went to the old Russel Theater to see a Shakespearean play. She didn't remember which play it was for sure but she thinks that it might have been "The Merchant of Venice". It was full day's trip. They left at about eight and returned at about midnight. She didn't remember exactly where the funds came from but she thinks they all paid their own way.

Mrs. Walker lived on a farm outside of Merrickville on the way to North Augusta. Because of the distance, Mrs. Walker boarded in town at Mary Armstrong's, so that she could go to school during the winter. She made her own meals and went home on weekends. When she returned on Monday for school she brought food from the farm. She often drove in and out of town with the horse and buggy for school in the fall. She was at home all summer.

On the farm they had cows, pigs, hens...an ordinary farm said Mrs. Walker. They grew potatoes, corn, beets, carrots, tomatoes, onions, turnips, the most basic of vegetables. She used to go picking berries, mostly raspberries. These were preserved in sugar, also when fresh they were used in pies. Her mother preserved crabapples as well. Mrs. Walker's mother made biscuits and ginger cookies for regular use. They used to can beef and pork was salted in crocks. She also used to make head cheese from the pigs head and the hocks. She would cut them up and put them out in the summer kitchen to gel.

At Christmas they always had a big Turkey and her mother made plum pudding. She tied the pudding up in a piece of cotton and boiled it. She would then make a butter sauce to top it.

At Easter they used to eat as many eggs as they possibly could. The hens didn't lay all winter long, so they would store as many eggs as they had in grain. These were mostly used in baking. Mrs. Walker's mother used to make all of the men's work shirts and often some dress shirts. She knitted all of their work socks and mittens. She did her washing with a tub and washboard. She made soap for the laundry, both hard and soft soap. Hard soap was in bar form and soft soap was about the consistency of porridge. I asked her if the soft soap was used for dishes. She said no, she couldn't exactly remember what it was used for. She said that it wasn't used for dishes because her mother didn't believe one should use soap on dishes, just lots of hot water.

She bought a bar soap for their own washing purposes and later bought sunlight soap for laundry, when she quit making it.

They used a wood stove for both cooking and heating purposes. They had oil lamps and they received their first telephone around 1912 or 1914.

Her mother used to trade eggs and butter in town at Erritt's store or lately at Lisson's store. She didn't have a butter print, so she made the butter into cylindrical rolls to sell.

They used to come into town on Friday nights. In the winter they would skate and in the summer they would walk down street and look around. Every once in a while there would be a film in the building where the liquor store is now. They always came in to see the Christmas and New Years plays that were put on by the churches.

## New addition to the Blockhouse Collection

In June of this year the Historical Society was extremely fortunate to receive a wonderful donation of a piano from Paul and Lori Sutterlin. The manufacturer of this magnificent piano was Fredk Oetzmann & Sons, "by Special Appointment, Makers to Her Majesty and the Royal Family". Located at 151 Regent Street, London, UK, they operated at this location between 1855 and 1895. This particular piano is a Pionoforte (circa 1855) which has a wooden frame. The piano was probably among the last to be made with a wooden frame as steel or cast iron frames, which allow a piano to keep in tune for a longer period of time, became almost universal after the early 1860s. The first owner of this particular piano was Clowes Quarry Lockmaster, Mr. Thomas Newman who acquired it in 1855.



## Upcoming Events

Merrickville and District Historical Society monthly lectures are held on the last Tuesday of the month at the Ste. Marguerite Bourgeoys School at 7:30 PM. Light refreshments are provided. Family and friends and non members are invited to attend.

**September** - Anne Shropshire, Curator, Railway Museum of Eastern Ontario. The balance of the lecture series are to be advised.

## Membership

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. You can mail your Membership payments to: **MDHS Membership, Box 294, Merrickville, Ontario, K0G 1N0**

Your membership will assist us in continuing to celebrate the history and heritage of our community. Thank you for your involvement.

## Executive Committee,

### 2013 Executive:

President, Andrew McKay  
1st Vice President, David Hammonds  
2nd Vice President, Ellen Hackett  
Treasurer, Sharon Alger  
Secretary, Nancy Warr  
Past President, Nina Donald

**Newsletter Volunteers:** Nina Donald, John Cowan, Sharon Parkinson, Phil Colwill