

# Rideau Township Historical Society

## Newsletter

January 2021

Preserving and Promoting Local History for the Former Rideau Township

### January Meeting Details

#### A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR MEMBERS

I know that many of you have artifacts, memories and stories to share. This is your opportunity. How about digging out your treasures to show to the RTHS membership

at our virtual ZOOM meeting on  
**January 20, 2021, 7:30 p.m.**

In order for the meeting to run smoothly and to allow presenters time to display items, we ask that you register your intention to participate by notifying [dorothygray@gmail.com](mailto:dorothygray@gmail.com) giving a bit of information about your precious possessions or tales.

Looking forward to a good turnout for this.

Non-members interested in attending this event are asked to register with Susan McKellar ([susanmckellar68@gmail.com](mailto:susanmckellar68@gmail.com)) in order to receive the login instructions prior to the meeting

### RTHS Christmas Party - 2020

Our annual Christmas “party” (although ZOOM get-together might be a more accurate description) took place on Wednesday December 16th with about 25 people signing in for the virtual meeting.

Susan McKellar began by welcoming all who were able to attend. She then thanked those who were stepping down from their posts for their hard and dedicated work over many years - Ron Wilson as our Newsletter editor, Webmaster and book editor, Brian and Pat Earl as Dickinson House representatives, and Dorothy Gray as Program director. She also thanked everyone else for their work and support in various areas during the past challenging year and going forth in the months ahead. We would be remiss if we didn't also thank Susan for the many hours of dedication she has contributed particularly during this challenging year. A slate of officers for the coming year will be presented at the AGM in January.

We began with some of our members sharing some favourite Xmas mementos, memories and talents. Dorothy Gray read “Twas the Night Before Christmas - 2020” which of course related how Santa visited in a sterile and sanitized environment as he made his

rounds. His final message as he drove out of sight was “Merry Christmas to all – and we'll all be alright” – hope springs eternal for a return to normalcy.

We were then treated to a lovely medley of songs with Pat Earl on the piano and Brian accompanying on the trumpet. First came *O Come All Ye Faithful*, followed by *I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas*. Brian related how this song was very special to them as it was the song that was playing back in 1963 at the Royal Military College Christmas Ball when Brian asked Pat to wear his college pin, apparently equivalent to a proposal. She said yes! and the rest is history so to speak. Their last song was *Till We Meet Again*, which he suggested could be a theme song for RTHS, especially this year!

Dennis Osmond followed this up by showing a favorite Christmas memento - a cardboard “Father Christmas” which hearkened back to Victorian times in England. The cutout has survived 3 generations in his family, with the 4th and 5th generations waiting in the wings. He pointed out the Christmas tree (used as a walking stick) and the various toys in his sack, including a sailboat, baby doll and bugle along with 2 puppets tucked into the palm of his hand and a holly bush with 2 robins in it. This Father Christmas had a kind and gentle demeanor which, as Dennis described, embodies the true spirit of Christmas.



Jane Anderson had a ceramic Christmas tree which was very popular in the 70's era. This particular one was obtained in 1973, and commemorates her and Ed's first year in their home on Bridge Street in Manotick. It has endured the test of time, and a replenished light bulb ensures it will be glowing for many years to come.

Maureen showed one of the popular handcrafted Christmas spider ornaments which were sold in their gift shop this year. She read the “Legend of the Christmas Spider”, a folk story from Germany and the Ukraine which recounts the charming story of a group of household spiders and how their desire to see all the



pretty ornaments on the family Christmas tree led to the tradition of hanging tinsel on Christmas trees.

Bill Tupper then recounted a treasured memory of a Christmas spent in Spain back in 1966 with his young family travelling and living in a Volkswagen van. Crossing over the Pyrenees to Barcelona was an adventure in itself due to the presence of 8 feet of snow and a precarious road. They stayed in a campsite on December 24th and Georgie decorated a branch of a palm tree - Christmas trees don't have to be fir or pine! They spent some time on the beach and planned to go to a bull fight that afternoon but got the times wrong and joined the crowd as they were leaving the arena. A missed opportunity! On December 28th they went to Almaden where they were to go to visit a mercury mine the next day. Georgie was surprised to see a man on a mule peeking in the window of the van watching her getting dressed. What a memorable adventure they had that year!

Sue Gibson showed us some chenille (pipecleaner) Santas which once hung from hubby Dave's grandparents' tabletop Christmas tree. After doing some research she found that they were made in occupied Japan after the Second World War between 1945 and 1952. She also showed decorations made by her sons at school (a paper candy cane and a spoon Santa) which have also stood the test of time and bring back fond memories of Christmases past - no doubt we all have some of these treasures packed away in our Christmas boxes.



We were then treated to some wonderful entertainment from our guest, Chris Rodgers, who sang and played the guitar for some favourite Xmas songs and golden oldies. After a minor technical glitch, transmission was restored, and we all settled down for a lovely 'concert'. He began with *The First Nowell*, followed by *Must Be Christmas Tonight*

and *Angels We Have Heard On High*. Gordon Lightfoot entered the mix with the song *Song for a Winter's Night*, which includes the lyric, "I Could Only Have You Near" (don't we all wish that this year?!), and next *Ghost Riders In the Sky* for his buddy Jack. He paid homage to Easterners



Chris Rodgers -- Our Christmas Minstrel

Bill & Georgie Tupper and Mary Jane Maffini with the classic *Farewell to Nova Scotia*.

Then it was back to Christmas music with *The Little Drummer Boy* (I think I heard son Cameron jump in on some of the Rum Pa Pum Pums), & *Silent Night* (always an inspiring addition to any Xmas repertoire). At this point Chris invited us all to join hands with anyone near at hand or virtually with those near and far as he

closed with *Auld Lang Syne* and *Away In a Manger*. Thank you, Chris, for your gift of music which never fails to lift our spirits and restore our hope.

This brought the end to a wonderful night of camaraderie as we wished each other a "Merry Christmas" and signed off.

## From the Archives

This uplifting article (found in papers donated to the Archives by Helen Dunbar) seemed appropriate to the season, and especially this year. The article was published in *The Ottawa Journal* on February 26, 1949 and is about a man called Harry F. McLean (1883-1961), a wealthy construction tycoon who lived in Merrickville. A book (a copy of which is at the Archives) entitled *Building An Empire - "Big Pants" Harry F. Maclean and His Sons of Martha* by Theresa Charland adds further insight into this rather eccentric but generous individual. Theresa Charland was a guest speaker at the RTHS meeting in September 2010. The article reads as follows:

### Where It's Christmas Every Day

Written for the Journal by Joan Finnigan

This is the story of a man about whom you all have read. You have read of his money-flinging escapades. You have read about the taxi-drivers who have gone home with \$500 to their wives because of him. You have read about the soldiers and sailors who spent Bagdadian leaves, because of him. And you have read about the silly, little chorus-girls whose fur-coat dreams came true -- because of him.

You have read about his ostentatious, irresponsible gifts but I should like to tell you the tales of his charity that never make the headlines.

This millionaire, for millionaire he is, is a great, lonely man who lives in a stone house on top of a hill, a house that looks down a river towards the sunset. He lives in Merrickville - a little town that is going nowhere but is content to sit in the sun on the banks of the murky Rideau River. He lives there when he could afford the showplaces of the earth, because that is the place where he began his career as a hulking young immigrant from North Dakota.

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He has travelled the earth, partaken of its fruits and sorrows and this is his home.

But it is a home without children and lonely, lonely. It is a tragic thing to have piled life upon life as he has done and to come to the end of the road alone. Money here is to no avail but he has not shut the blinds on his house and crawled into seclusion. Where he cannot give to his own, he gives to others, and Christmas in the small town where he lives is his day.

The doors of his house are thrown open to the children of the town. The lights from his Christmas tree are a bright beacon to the youngsters as they troop up the hill. Beneath his Christmas tree there is a gift for every child in the town, toys for the little ones

and ski shirts and plaid skirts and sweaters and socks and mitts, a veritable department store array.

This is his simple creed, and I have heard him say it often, "We must be good to one another".

A Christmas turkey goes out from his house to every house in the town. If the family is big, the turkey is big; if the family is small, the turkey is smaller.

Not every year, but some years, there is a Christmas party for the whole town in the Armories. There will be an orchestra from a big town far away and a kiltie band, for this party is the gift of a Scot. And food. And drink. And a prize for the prettiest girl at the dance. And a visit from the host himself.

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The millionaire on the hill is not just a Christmas giver. His desire to help others manifests itself throughout the year in a hundred little ways.

The Anglican church at the corner needs a new organ; the manse of the Catholic priest has been destroyed by fire; The United Church minister's wife is rushed to the hospital for a serious operation. As if by magic the new organ appears, work is begun on a new manse, the doctor bill is paid. This is the giving of a great heart that denies the very existence of religious differences.

Young Billy Hodgkins, son of the town clerk, wanted to be a doctor, but the family had no money for such an expensive education. Yet, Billy is at McGill in his third year, and he knows who to thank for his opportunity.

One of the factory workers in the castings plant is killed in an industrial accident and leaves a wife and three small boys. One day the big, black Packard drives up to the door of the widow's home and the grey-haired giant from the house on the hill gets out of the car and goes into the house. When he comes out again there is a big, happy grin on his face.

The Wender girl is being married today. All is a flurry and hush in the house, and at first they do not hear the car honking at the front. Santa Claus calls for the bride - although it is the middle of June - and she comes out, her hair in curlers and cold cream on her face. When she looks at the bit of paper that has been pressed into her hand, she discovers it is a cheque for \$300.

Timmy O'Hara lives in a little limestone house by the river and every day he pushes his wheelchair down the hill to his shoe repair shop and crawls over the doorstep. He hasn't been much good since he lost his legs in a lumbering accident in the Black River district. But then - he hasn't been hungry or cold or without shelter. Even his wheelchair has been a gift from the house on the hill.

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Every year just after Christmas the lights go on on the rink that the great-hearted giant keeps up for the young hockey stars of tomorrow who are growing up in the little town. Every year a man is paid to supervise and keep in repair the big toboggan slide and the ski run which were built for the townsfolk and which are used by both the young and the not-so-young.

A small part of the shore of the weedy Rideau has been dredged to make a safe swimmin' hole for the boys and girls and the tennis court that belongs to the big house on the hill is at the disposal of all who wish to use it.

Roses go out from this man's garden to the sick, and kindness goes out from his pocket to the needy.

In the little town it is Christmas every day.

The End

## How to Connect with RTHS



[www.facebook.com/rideautownshiphistory](http://www.facebook.com/rideautownshiphistory)



[rideautwphistory@gmail.com](mailto:rideautwphistory@gmail.com)



<https://twitter.com/RideauTpHS>

## Dickinson House Museum



[www.facebook.com/Dickinsonhousemuseum](http://www.facebook.com/Dickinsonhousemuseum)



[dickinsonhousemuseum@gmail.com](mailto:dickinsonhousemuseum@gmail.com)

## 2021 Membership Fees Now Due

It's that time of year again ... time to renew your RTHS membership!

Because Covid is keeping us physically apart, we have made it easier to pay, through e-transfer. Details are on the membership form which you will find at the end of the newsletter. You can also submit donations to RTHS by the same method. Receipts for paid memberships will be issued when we are able to meet face-to-face. Tax receipts for donations will be issued annually.

## RTHS Recruitment Drive

RTHS members know Society membership is a great way to explore the people, places and events that shaped the foundations of the communities and culture we all enjoy today. They also know and appreciate the opportunities membership provides to spend time in the company of interesting, like-minded people pursuing common interests.

The RTHS Executive feels the time is right to launch an initiative aimed at fostering greater awareness of RTHS and the benefits of Society membership.

The poster below is intended to encourage both existing and prospective members to consider RTHS as not only a means to learn about history and heritage, but also as an opportunity to contribute their knowledge and skills toward the achievement of shared goals.

Feel free to share the poster – and newsletter – with anyone you feel might have an ember of interest in joining us.



**The  
Rideau Township  
Historical Society**

**Wants  
YOU**

We move with the times,  
while looking back on the past!  
Become an RTHS member and  
join our monthly Zoom presentations.  
**Enlist on our web site below.**

<https://www.rideautownshiphistory.org>

Ottawa

# Sign me up as a member of RTHS



Members of the Society enjoy:

- Monthly meetings featuring engaging presentations, followed by refreshments
- Group excursions to historical points of interest in Eastern ON
- Local books published by the Society, and a monthly newsletter
- Opportunities to participate and contribute as volunteers

For more information visit <https://rideautownshiphistory.org> and [facebook.com/rideautownshiphistory](https://facebook.com/rideautownshiphistory).

Please **mail** this form with a cheque for membership dues payable to: Rideau Township Historical Society, Box 56, North Gower, ON, KOA 2T0, or pay by e-transfer to [rideautwphistory@gmail.com](mailto:rideautwphistory@gmail.com) and email a scanned copy of the form to the same email address.

Name:

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Address:

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City & Postal Code:

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Telephone:

Email:

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Date:

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Are you a new RTHS member? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Individual Membership \$15 \_\_\_\_\_ Life Membership \$100 \_\_\_\_\_

Family Membership \$20 \_\_\_\_\_  
(2 adults & school-age children) Donation \$50 \_\_\_\_\_

Other Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Receipts for paid memberships will be issued when we are able to meet face-to-face, but tax receipts for donations will be issued at the end of the year.*

**Thank you for supporting RTHS!**