

# The Rideau Township Historical Society

*Preserving and Promoting local history for the former Rideau Township*

## April 2011 Newsletter

Newsletter Editor: Ron Wilson (rideauarchives@ottawa.ca)

### ***Next Meeting,***

**Date:** Wednesday, April 20, 2011  
**Time:** 7:30 p.m.  
**Place:** Knox Presbyterian Church  
5533 Dickinson Street  
Manotick, Ontario



***Topic:*** ***The Dickinson House***

***Speaker:*** ***Coral Lindsay***

The April RTHS meeting will feature a presentation by Coral Lindsay and Brian Earl on the Dickinson House. The meeting will be held at Knox Presbyterian Church in order that members can be treated to a tour of the house itself following a shortened meeting.

The evening will begin as usual with a short business session. Coral will then give a brief presentation on the house, what has gone on there over the past 3 years, and our plans for the 2011 season.

Members will then be escorted to the house where we will break into groups for tours conducted by Dickinson House volunteers. The volunteers will be in period costume.

Exhibits in the house are mainly for the period 1860 to 1900. The Society owes a debt of thanks to Mark Jodoin and Coral Lindsay who have provided the bulk of the furniture and other artefacts on display.

***Bring a friend***

***Light refreshments***

### ***From the Pen of the President***

An air of excitement is flowing through the halls of Dickinson House as preparations are being made for a new season. Part of this excitement builds on the success of the previous three years, and part on developments related to adequate funding, thanks to the City of Ottawa heritage funding and generous DSHMI support. In addition the exterior of Dickinson House will be painted, and we will be initiating a series of craft demonstrations one weekend per month during the summer.

To meet these new challenges we need more volunteer help. Dickinson House will be open from 11:00 to 4:00 on Saturdays, Sundays and Holidays from May through November. There are two shifts, from 11:00 to 1:30 and 1:30 to 4:00 which requires more volunteers but reduces the individual time commitment for each.

There are a number of volunteers required, such as greeters, welcoming visitors to Dickinson House, raconteurs to tell the story of the Dickinson family and their impact on the social and economic growth of Manotick, and describe the historic significance of the furniture and artefacts in each room. We have discovered that all of this can be both interesting and fun.

This is an invitation to join us as a volunteer guide at Dickinson House. Consider encouraging a friend to join you. No previous experience is required. We are having an orientation session at Knox Church,

### ***This Month***

1. The March Meeting
2. From the pen of the President
3. News from the Rideau Archives
4. The Dickinson House
5. Coral Lindsay presents Martha Burritt
6. The Beckett's Landing Show and Tell
7. Stu Rogers on the myth of 1492

## *From the Presidents Pen (continued)*

Manotick on Sunday May 1st at 3:00 P.M. which will be followed by a tour of Dickinson House. There will be two training sessions, May 9th at 7:30 P.M. and May 14th at 10:00 A.M. to introduce volunteers to their roles, also at Knox Church, Manotick.

Come to the orientation session on May 1st and decide if this appeals to you. If you require further information, call

Coral Lindsay (613-489-2029), Brian Earl (613-692-2371), Sandy Truman (613-491-4663), or Bill Tupper (613-489-3792).

## *The Beckett's Landing "Show and Tell"*

On Saturday April 2, the Beckett's Landing Community Association hosted a "Show and Tell" event at the Long Reach Restaurant in Beckett's Landing. Coral Lindsay "told" about the Elighs of Eligh's Wharf, a Beckett's Landing stop for the steamboats on the Rideau.

Included in the presentation was a story about the Roberval, a large steamboat that operated on the Ottawa and St. Lawrence rivers and in Lake Ontario. Peter Eligh, who was born and grew up in Beckett's Landing, was the Captain. In 1912 the Roberval was delivering a cargo of lumber from Cape Vincent to the Diamond Match Company in Oswego when a severe storm was encountered. The Roberval was hit by several very large waves and foundered. The captain and crew of 8 were thrown into the water and 2 crew were drowned. Of the other seven, three managed to launch a lifeboat and four managed to hang onto enough boards to keep them afloat until they were rescued the next day.

There were a number of other presentations making for a fun and interesting afternoon for all. In addition we managed to sell 5 copies of *Kars on the Rideau*.



## *Stu Rogers Challenging Myth of 1492*

*Article and Picture by Ron Wilson*

The speaker at the last of the winter's Watson's Mill Presents series was Stu Rogers, a member of the RTHS. His subject? "Challenging Myths of 1492".

What exactly does "Challenging the Myth of 1492 mean? We wondered too. Stu explained that our history tends to teach us that not much went on in North America until it's "discovery" in 1492 by Columbus. Many of us were left with the impression that North America was sparsely populated and mostly empty with little history to consider.

Stu's challenge was based on a long period of research over most of the eastern and mid-western parts of Canada and the US. His research has turned up a multitude of artefacts that indicate visits and periods of residence by cultures not generally know to have been here many years earlier than is general accepted.



The lecture was well attended and a very interested audience posed questions and participated in discussion for 45 min after the end of the talk.

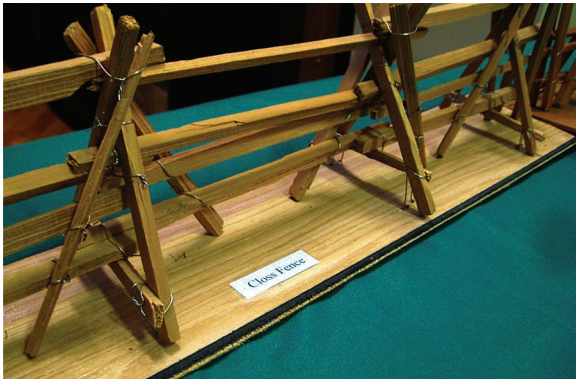
# 400 Years of Log Fences

Presenter: Eugene Fytche

Article by Lucy Martin

Many perfectly familiar things get overlooked and taken for granted. Fences may fall into that category. Noticed or not, fences mark boundaries, secure livestock, and contribute to our visual landscape. Traditional log or rail fences are also eye-pleasing reflections of Ontario's pioneer past.

Retired electrical engineer Eugene Fytche began thinking more about fences when he began two decades of farming sheep in Almonte. There were five different types of rail fences on his land, all in need of upkeep or repair. To his surprise, there wasn't much information available on that subject. Those who knew, knew. Everyone else was left to wonder, or re-invent the wheel on their own.



*Log fences come in many styles depending on whether post holes can be dug, how much land can be given up, availability of materials and a variety of other considerations.*

Fytche gathered what information he could and made a point of seeking out people who still built old-style log and rail fences. Eventually, those findings, photos and sketches became a small, self-published book "400 Years of Log Fences". The first edition came out in 2008 and it was updated in 2010. Besides addressing the subject of where log or rail fences evolved, and why, Fytche includes practical descriptions and drawing of how to construct a dozen such fence types.

Fytche addressed an attentive audience of 27 at RTHS's March meeting at the Rideau Archives branch in North Gower – having already put in a long day at the Ottawa Valley Farm Show! He also brought along charming models (some are pictured here) made by Alex Bowes and kindly loaned by the North Lanark Regional Museum in Appleton at 667 River Road.

Not surprisingly, log and rail fences developed out of frugality and sheer necessity. The first European settlers

came well before wire was invented or readily available. What they had were trees, trees, and more trees. (Depending on location, innumerable rocks could be involved too!) All of which demanded back-breaking work, clearing crop land – just to eat. Once cleared, the felled logs had to be burned or used. With labor as the only cost, up went the fences, using patterns first developed in the U.S. Colonies, a well-established skill that later came to Ontario with Loyalist settlements.

Log and rail fences have some advantages. Depending on the style used, many are self-supporting and can be built on uneven terrain. Before post hole diggers, and in rocky land, not having to set posts was a huge savings of labour. These fences could be made to varying heights, moved, or taken down, as needed.

They had disadvantages too. Zig-zag styles waste cultivation area and end up with shrubbery growing outward in an ever-expanding mass. The stacked types could tumble down with a good push from a cow looking for greener grass on the other side. Farm life inherently presents real physical danger. Fence-climbing children were sometimes hurt or killed by falling rails. Careful builders might notch and set the logs or rails to reduce that hazard.



*Eugene Fytche and Ellen Adamsons discussing Eugene's book on log fences.*

The arrival of wire (circa 1870's) led to more secure arrangements and it's the rare rail fence today that doesn't combine wood and wire for a more secure hold.

Fences go by different regional names – what is called the snake fence here is known as the Virginia fence in the U.S. Fytche guesses that was probably the first one developed, going all the way back to early settlements like Jamestown.

In pioneer days, logs were split into rails using wedges and mauls (sledgehammers) – back-breaking work Abraham Lincoln famously endured in his hardscrabble youth. Long-lasting cedar is a preferred wood for fence rails, though chestnut was also much used before its decline, due to blight. Some hold that old-growth cedar lasts twice as long (100 years or more) as what is generally available today. But a 50 year fence isn't bad either.

Asked to name the most durable style, Fytche said he favors the patent fence, though any life-span is dependent on the wood employed. He recommends using as much heartwood as possible, as sap wood tends to rot away more quickly.

Is it possible to prove which region can boast the most log and rail fences? Fytche champions his own Lanark Township for that honour, though it may be a matter of debate.

Fytche is also the author of “May Safely Graze: Protecting Livestock from Predators” and “Wild Predators? Not in My Back Yard!”.

Perhaps inspired by his book's practical, how-to instructions, post-talk sales of the latest edition of Fytche's “400 Years of Log Fences” were brisk. We expect to see some nice fences erected in members' yards in 2011!

## *Coral Lindsay as Martha Burritt*

The New Horizon Club in Burritts Rapids was treated to a presentation on the life of Martha Burritt by Coral Lindsay, a member of the Rideau Township Historical Society. One member of the audience was Mary Surtees who is a descendant of Steven Burritt, the founder of Burritts Rapids. Surtees herself could tell many a story about her family but still managed to learn something about them from Coral's presentation.

For the presentation Coral dressed and spoke as Martha Burritt. Martha was the daughter of Roger Stevens, the first settler in the former township of Marlborough. Roger Stevens was a one time spy and secret agent for the British during and after the war of independence. In any case Martha faced many hardships as a wife and mother as her husband, Stephen Burritt, had responsibilities that frequently took him away from the homestead.

Coral, with her long interest in and broad knowledge of local history, brought the character of Martha Burritt to life for the audience and provided a fresh look at the history of Burritts Rapids.



*Coral Lindsay (centre) and members of the New Horizon Club for her lecture on Burritt's Rapids.*

## *Coming Events:*

### **May 18 – Home Children in Rideau**

The late 19th and early 20th century saw many children sent to Canada from Great Britain; children in difficult circumstances. They found a new life here, with new families, and made a great contribution to their new country. A local woman, Elsie McNiece, worked at Fairknowe Home in Brockville; she helped place children with families in the North Gower/Manotick/Kars area. Some of their descendants still live in this area. We will hear some of their stories at the May meeting, at the Pierce's Corners hall. Guests are welcome at this meeting, especially those with a connection to a home child.

### **June 18 – Excursion to Fulford Place, Brockville**

On Saturday, June 18, we plan to travel by bus to Brockville to visit Fulford Place and have lunch. We are exploring the possibility of visiting another heritage site in the area as well; stay tuned! The cost will be modest. A sign-up sheet for this excursion will be circulated at the April meeting, or you may contact Susan McKellar at [susan.mckellar@rogers.com](mailto:susan.mckellar@rogers.com) or 613-489-3961. A magnificent Edwardian mansion overlooking the St. Lawrence River, Fulford Place was built around 1900 by Senator George Taylor Fulford. It contains original tapestries, paintings, statuary and ceramics and is surrounded by elaborate gardens.

## *News from the Rideau Branch, Ottawa Archives*

***Hours:*** *The Rideau Archives is open every Tuesday from 9:30 am to 4:30 p.m., and at other times by appointment. (613-489-2926).*

Members will recall that the Ottawa Archives have been in the process of moving to their new building at 100 Tallwood Drive at the south-west corner of Woodroffe Avenue in the Centrepointe area. While the building is not completely finished, the staff have moved and are working in the building. They are looking forward to being able to accept visitors and clients there in the near future.

The RTHS gratefully acknowledges the financial support received from the City of Ottawa