

The Rideau Township Historical Society

Preserving and Promoting local history for the former Rideau Township

December 2011 Newsletter

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

The RTHS Christmas Dinner

Date: Wednesday December 14, 2011
Time: 6:00 pm for dinner at 6:30 pm
Place: Manderley on the Green,
5920 Prince of Wales Drive,
North Gower.

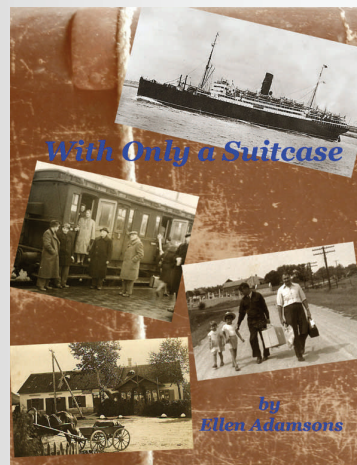
You are all invited to the annual RTHS Christmas Dinner which is being held at Manderley on the Green, 5920 Prince of Wales Drive, North Gower, on Wednesday, Dec. 14, at 6:00 p.m. with dinner at 6:30. There will be a roast turkey buffet at a cost of \$25.

Christmas music following the meal will be provided by local musician Rowena Pearl.

This Month

1. The November Meeting
2. The Dickinson House
3. News from the Rideau Archives
4. Coming Events
5. Publication News
6. Minutes of the November meeting

Bring a friend



Ellen Adamson's book *With Only a Suitcase* is now available. See inside under "Publication News"

Notice of Motion

The following motion will be put forward at the January AGM.

"It is moved that the strategic plan as presented at this meeting and outlining the Mission, Vision, Values and Key Result Areas for the Rideau Township Historical Society be adopted as the Strategic Plan for the Society covering the period 2012 to 2017."

Nominations for the RTHS Executive for 2012

- Do You Have New Ideas for the Future of Your Historical Society?
- Do You Enjoy Challenges and Making Friends While Influencing Events?
- Are You looking for an Opportunity to Shine and Make a Contribution?
- Take up an Executive Position in the Historical Society in 2012!

- If you would like to take a position on the executive, please contact a member of the Nominating Committee.
- If you wish to nominate another member for an executive position (with their permission!), please contact a member of the Nominating Committee.

Nominating Committee:

- **Marguerite Rogers** - smrogers5560@hotmail.com - 613-692-3802
- **Owen Cooke** - oacooke@gmail.com - 613-489-3962
- **Lucy Martin** - lucy@voiceworksnorth.com - 613-489-4005

Please note that there will also be an opportunity to make a nomination at the annual meeting on Wednesday, 18 January.

A Christmas Greeting

Your president and executive wish you a very merry Christmas and a happy and healthy new year. We wish also to express our thanks for the support you have given us throughout 2011 which has made our efforts both worthwhile and enjoyable.

The Development of the Tank, and Canadian Armoured Activities in Italy in 1944

Presentations by Scott Cameron and Owen Cooke

Article and Picture by Lucy Martin

17-year-old Scott Cameron is not RTHS's youngest member. But (thus far) he's the youngest featured speaker at our monthly meetings. Cameron teamed up with a slightly-older Owen Cooke for a joint presentation on tanks before an appreciative crowd of 30 at the Mill Carriage Shed.

Remembrance Day made November the logical month for a military-themed talk. Cameron said he suggested the presentation as a way to 'give back' for all he's gotten out of RTHS activities.

Tanks sort of began as steam-powered tractors that used tracks instead of wheels as transport vehicles in the Crimean War (1853-56). A sort of armoured car was used in the Boer War. Interesting, but hardly transformative. Tanks (as we think of them today) only became important beginning in the 20th century.

The horrific trench-war stalemate of the Great War provided a pressing need to develop something like the tank – a way to move, and do damage, while staying protected. Tanks came along late in that morass, but the new device did help end the war, by November of 1918.

As Cameron explained, tanks represent a sort of all-purpose balancing act – an iron triangle, if you will. They must incorporate the right combination of firepower, mobility and armour. As happens with most military technology, anti-tank weaponry constantly improves too, creating a back and forth in research and development.

Along the way, nations saw that early tank flops could be re-designed to overcome many obvious flaws. By World War II, tanks had become decisive weapons of engagement – able to do more, with ever-smaller crews (a trend that continues to this day).

Tanks remain an indispensable element of the all-round combat team, especially when they can deliver their firepower while being protected by infantry from such threats as enemy in close country - built-up areas or jungle - or from roadside explosives as so often encountered in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Cameron's presentation was both detailed and expansive. Rather than recount an entire history of tanks (and the many versions made) in this article, interested readers would do well to read an over-view, such as can be found in old-style encyclopaedias, or on-line summaries, such as Wikipedia.

Cameron's keen interest in military history comes naturally, as his father and Grandfather are also military history buffs. World War I is one of Cameron's passions, for a variety of reasons, starting with the incredible human sacrifice endured by so many, including some of his relatives.

Cameron is also intrigued by that conflict's technological side. In conversation after his presentation, he put it this

way: "The pure military advancements that came out of the war were just phenomenal. The tank is just one example. Flame throwers were largely created in the First World War. Air war was pioneered in the First World War, as was the use of mechanized vehicles. It was basically setting the stage for what was to come in modern history."

Asked if he hopes for a future in the military, Cameron said he is applying to the Royal Military College after high school, but it's too soon to know what else may happen. If he does end up in uniform, he knows he'd prefer to serve in some branch of the artillery. As Cameron explained: "I



have a fascination with tanks, but really, I just love the big guns, everything about them! I feel that's where my heart lies." Cameron recounted that two first cousins are currently serving in the Navy, but thanks to a tilt toward sea sickness he'll stay a land lubber.

Independent researcher and author Owen Cooke is a former chief archivist at the Directorate of History, Canadian Department of National Defence.

Cooke's talk concentrated on the 5th Canadian Armoured Division's involvement in breaking the Gothic Line during Italian campaigns (July, '43-January '45) of World War II. Cooke feels in some ways that was the epitome of Canadian armoured action as well as a terrible time in the history of Canada's military, in terms of difficulty and losses.

After Italy withdrew from the Axis in August in 1943, Cooke says the remaining Germans fought a delaying action there. (Both sides wanted to tie up opposing troops, in anticipation of D-Day and the fight for other European theatres ahead.) The Canadians were part of an alliance system, meaning they were deployed to front lines in different places. The Germans fiercely defended every ridge, river and bridge.

Cooke recounted that of the 93,757 Canadians who served in Italy, fully one quarter were either killed (5400), wounded, captured or went missing. Cooke's own Uncle,

Harold Dixon, was only there for a few days before he was killed by artillery fire. Dixon is buried in Cassino, Italy.

Cooke made particular mention of Major General B.M. Hoffmeister, a self-made, successful businessman from Vancouver, who commanded the 5th Canadian Armoured Division in Italy. Hoffmeister's leadership style was to build consensus and then allow subordinates to get on with the job. Cooke reported that "everyone was under strength" in those Italian campaigns, so when Hoffmeister needed another infantry brigade, he had to cobble one together from this unit and that.

Cooke's presentation was also too detail-rich to repeat here, but in the "small world" department, the commander of the First Canadian Corps, Lt. General Tommy ("Smiley") Burns, later retired to Manotick. The only Canadian Air Force Squadron in Italy at that time was commanded by Burt Houle who later became a fire chief in Manotick.

In the easily-forgotten dept., Cooke mentioned that tanks require significant daily maintenance. (Cleaning the guns, opening the armoured covers over the engines, cleaning air cleaners, fixing the tracks – all with hand tools, like crowbars). Everything is dreadfully heavy and the upkeep cannot be ignored.

Some of the nicknames for armoured tactics sound quaintly amusing, from the safety of a peace-time lecture: reconnaissance scout cars might "sneak & peek", more heavily armoured vehicles went out to "shoot & scoot" (draw fire to reveal enemy positions and retreat), others still got busy doing "mix and mingle".

Who won the Italian campaigns is well-known, but it is difficult to fully appreciate the challenges that entailed. We thank Cameron and Cooke for expanding our awareness of tanks in general and their role in some of World War II's most difficult fighting.

(End note: the pair's participation was also a splendid example of the talent vested in our members. All members are invited to consider presenting a favourite subject at some future meeting, after our up-coming Christmas dinner and January's ever popular "bring and brag" smorgasbord!)



Photo courtesy Owen Cooke

Sherman Tanks Undergoing Maintenance

Publication News

With Only A Suitcase

by Ellen Adamsons
Book Launch

After many years of work, "*With Only A Suitcase*" by RTHS member Ellen Adamsons was launched at the Latvian Cultural Center, Toronto, November 27. Rather than a usual book signing, but in keeping with Latvian hospitality, the subjects of the book and their families were honoured with a traditional Latvian sit down dinner and a book presentation.

Ellen introduced the book by thanking the elders present for trusting her to tell their story of escape from Latvia during World War II, life in the Wurzburg displaced persons' camp, and re-establishing lives and families in Canada.

Informal speeches of congratulations and a thank you gift basket were presented to Ellen Adamsons, author, and Maija Adamsons, translations and copy editor. A standing round of applause for Ron Wilson (in absentia) demonstrated a thorough appreciation for his digital production and photography editing.

Maija Lava Matchkars, upon receiving her volume, recalled the judge's words in 1953, when she was presented with her Canadian citizenship certificate, "If you were a good Latvian you will be a good Canadian." She proudly looked

at the audience and in English and Latvian said, "I understand now that the judge was correct."

An Ottawa book launch will be held at the new City of Ottawa Archives building in late April.

Copies of With Only A Suitcase by Ellen Adamsons are available from Ellen Adamsons at Box 54, Kars Ontario, K0A 2E0. Telephone: 613 489-2350 or Rideau Branch Archives, North Gower, Tuesdays 9:30am - 4:30pm. Cost: \$30.00



Kars on the Rideau

Kars on the Rideau has been reprinted and is once again available for sale. Please note that it would make a wonderful Christmas gift for both new and long term residents of the area.

The Dickinson House

This past weekend, December 3-4, was the last weekend of operation for the Dickinson House in 2011. It was a successful weekend with 56 visitors on the Saturday and 92 on the Sunday. The total for 2011 was 3460 visitors. This is slightly down from last year but a very respectable total by any measure.

This past Saturday and Sunday was a good weekend for the square with the Mill open for the Christmas craft sale, the Carriage Shed hosting the Art Show, some very good carollers visiting the venues, and horse and wagon rides passing through.

We continue to be encouraged by the number of our visitors who tell us how important they think it is to maintain the house as a living element of our history for now and the future. We certainly agree.



Coming Events:

Christmas Open House

There will be a Christmas Open House on Saturday, December 17 from 1:30 to 4:00 at Coral Lindsay's home, 6836 Rideau Valley Drive S., Kars, weather permitting. Snow date – next Spring.

There will be carolling, piping, food and a house tour. Count the Christmas trees. No prize. No RSVP expected.



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).*

The Rideau Township Branch of the City of Ottawa Archives was involved in the celebrations surrounding the 120th anniversary of the North Gower Public Library on November 19th. Guests were served refreshments and a piece of the celebratory cake in the reading room, waited on by hosts dressed in period costumes. It is worth noting that the North Gower Town Hall was the first home of the library from 1891 to 1902.

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

Minutes of the Rideau Township Historical Society Meeting

Wednesday, November 16, 2011

Opening: The Rideau Township Historical Society (RTHS) met in the Carriage Shed, Manotick. The President, Bill Tupper, opened the meeting at 7:30 p.m. There were 30 members present.

Minutes of Previous Meeting: The Minutes of the October 19 meeting had been included in the November RTHS Newsletter. They were approved as circulated.

Finance: The President reported on behalf of the Treasurer, Colin Wright, that the bank balance as of November 8, 2011 was \$19,884.16. This included \$6,329 in the General Account; \$6,698 in the Publications Account (from which another approximately 2,000 would be expended for reprinting Kars on the Rideau, leaving \$4,698); and 6,857 in the Dickinson House Account (from which \$2,500 would be required for exterior signage, leaving \$4,357). The available balance following planned expenditures was expected to be approximately \$15,384. It was noted that:

- the General Account would not grow in the immediate future and would require some expenditures, such as for the Christmas party;
- the Publications Account would grow quickly with expected sales of the reprinted book; and
- the Dickinson House Account would be frozen until grants were received in 2012.

It was moved by Marguerite Rogers and seconded by Ron Wilson that the Treasurer's report be accepted. Carried.

Membership: The President stated that there were almost 100 annual members. He reminded everyone to confirm over the next month that their 2011 membership was valid.

Publications: Ellen Adamsons reported that the Publications Committee was looking forward to the recommencement of work towards republication of Cheese Factories in Rideau Township. She said that her own book, *With Only a Suitcase*, was at the printer. Book launches were planned for November 27 in Toronto and for the month of April at the Ottawa Archives.

Communications and Digital Applications: Ron Wilson stated that the website was up to date.

Dickinson House: The President reported that the Business and Financial Plan had been integrated into one document with an Executive Summary. The contents had

not changed from what was outlined for members at the September meeting. The document had been approved by the RTHS Executive on November 7 and was to be used to start a dialogue with Councillor Moffatt and the City of Ottawa. It was noted that if members had questions or would like to see a copy of the plan, they could ask a member of the Executive.

Strategic Planning: The President noted that the newsletter had included a report on the comments made at the October strategic planning session and a new proposed strategic plan. The Executive was recommending that the plan be adopted at the Annual General Meeting in January, 2012. The President stated that while the revised plan was necessarily a compromise, it was his impression, as well as that of the Executive, that this was a document of which the Society could be proud. He said that this was thanks to the work of a lot of people.

Program: Susan McKellar reported that the RTHS Christmas Party would be held at Manderley on December 14, starting at 6:30 p.m. The cost was \$24.95 per person. A signup sheet was circulated.

Evening Program: The President invited Scott Cameron to come forward, noting that it was a very special night for the Society to have a senior high school student and RTHS member as its lead speaker.

Scott gave a presentation on "Tanks: The Weapon that Changed Warfare". The second presenter of the evening was Owen Cooke, who spoke on "The Canadian Armoured Forces in Italy in World War II, the Fifth Canadian Armoured Division".

Following the presentations, Scott and Owen took questions from the audience.

The President thanked both speakers, referencing the enormous effort that had gone into research on the topics and the very professional manner in which the material had been presented.

Stuart Rogers announced that the Watson's Mill lecture series would be recommencing on November 30 with a talk by Dr. Michael Oelck on bio energy. Stuart was also scheduled to speak on "Challenging Myths of Columbus" at the Ottawa Historical Society meeting, to be held on November 25 at 1:00 p.m.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m. for refreshments.