



# The Rideau Township Historical Society

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

## May 2012 Newsletter

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

### Next Meeting

**Date:** Wednesday, May 16, 2012  
**Time:** 7:30 pm  
**Place:** Pierce's Corners Hall  
3048 Pierce Rd. (at Malakoff)

### This Month

1. The April Presentation
2. Dickinson house
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9. Coral Lindsay: The Titanic presentation

### **Topic:** *The War of 1812*

### **Speaker:** *Robert Henderson*

The Rideau Township Historical Society is pleased to present our speaker for May, Mr. Robert Henderson. As the Former Military Curator of Parks Canada for Ontario, Robert Henderson has been working in the field of heritage commemoration for almost twenty-five years. He also has previous experience as an archival professional at Library and Archives Canada resulting in strong research skills.

Mr. Henderson has created and edits the most visited War of 1812 internet site (Warof1812.ca) and has authored dozens of articles on that war for many publications. His new book "Desperate Bravery: The Last Invasion of Quebec, 1814" will be published in 2012.

For over fifteen years Mr. Henderson has managed a successful business providing heritage solutions to world-class institutions including The Smithsonian (Washington), Imperial War Museum (London), Musée de l'Armée (Paris), and Swedish Army Museum (Stockholm).

Mr. Henderson will speak to us about the War of 1812, with information regarding the history of Fort William at Prescott and its involvement in the War. Look forward to an excellent presentation.

***Bring a Friend, Light Refreshments***

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

On May 1st, I attended the forty-seventh National Prayer Breakfast. This meeting brings together people from all walks of life in a spirit of meditation and prayer for our leaders and the nation. You might ask, is this out of character? Let me explain.

The individual I hired to manage my Hill Office, indicated her desire to work on the National Prayer Breakfast. That led to my office playing a major role in organizing the Breakfast for a few years and we became involved. We met some wonderful people, and Georgie and I enjoyed the opportunity to attend the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C.

The speaker this year was Father Raymond J. De Souza, a Catholic priest whose parish is on Wolfe Island. He is also a Professor of Economics and Education at Queens University, and writes for a number of publications, including a weekly article in the National Post. He has been described as "Canada's finest Catholic commentator". He

spoke on why politicians need some form of religion (the text can be found at [www.cardus.ca/CONVIVIUM](http://www.cardus.ca/CONVIVIUM)). I read his weekly column and valued the opportunity to hear him speak.

Who attends the Prayer Breakfast? Difficult to summarize, but perhaps those who were at my table might be typical of the entire group. They included a lady of Asian ancestry, a Carleton graduate in journalism, and a member of the Bihai faith; a young Sikh businessman; the Dutch Ambassador; David Kilgour, a former Crown Attorney and Member of Parliament, now a human rights activist; two businessmen, a father and son, from Toronto, the father wearing an Order of Canada lapel button; a female public servant; and a mother and adult son, an engineer, from Prince Albert. This diversified cultural and socio-economic group provided a couple of hours of stimulating conversation.

It's special to be among political leaders and not witness any partisan activity, except for some good natured humour.

## *RTHS June Excursion to Prescott*

The excursion will take place on Saturday, June 16th. The cost of the trip (bus transportation included) is \$30.00, and includes:

- Tour of Fort Wellington and visit to The Battle of the Windmill site
- Lunch at the Red George Public House
- Visit to Grenville County Historical Society Archival Resource Centre

- Stopover at the Little Blue Church

We will gather at the Client Service Centre on Roger Stevens Drive at 9:00 a.m. and should be returning around 4:00 p.m.

If you would like to join us, there will be a sign-up sheet available at our next meeting, or you may contact Ruth Wright at

613-489-3886 or e-mail at: [ruthbrianwright@gmail.com](mailto:ruthbrianwright@gmail.com)

## *Presentation, April Meeting Behind the Scenes, "With Only a Suitcase"*

*Article by Lucy Martin*

Most families have a back-story: who they are, where they are from and how they arrived. New or old, many of those stories encompass hardship, drama and eventual success.

RTHS member and long-time Kars resident Ellen (Nagloren) Adamsons was born and raised on a farm in Alberta. She went on to be a teacher of English and history.

Ellen's husband, Karlis Adamsons, was born in a displaced persons camp after World War II, in Wurzburg, Germany. By this point, the Soviet Union had basically annexed Latvia. Going home would risk execution or a one-way trip to slow death in Siberia. So, in 1948, when not yet two years old, little Karlis and his Latvia-born parents came to Canada. Six months later Maija Adamsons was born (in 1949). Virtually penniless, with two children to feed, their father, Janis, and mother, Velta, began life anew, armed with little more than determination. (A third child, Valdis, followed in 1952.)



Artisan houses, Riga

This family saga is thoroughly recounted in "With Only a Suitcase" by Ellen Adamsons, self-published in 2011. (Note: with so many "Adamsons" in this article, I'll use first names, to reduce confusion.)

Aspects of that book were referenced in Ellen's talk. But she primarily focused on the history of Latvia, its people and their aspirations. An overview of the homeland her husband's family was forced to flee.

A capacity crowd of well over 50 filled the Rideau Archives for Ellen's talk, despite competition from a key hockey play-off! Ellen greeted her audience in Latvian and spoke warmly of those who

inspired her to write and publish: Coral Lindsay (neighbor and mentor), Ron Wilson (editor extraordinaire), Susan McKeller (fellow author and archive volunteer), Georgie Tupper (founder and leader of archive's volunteer group)



*An art nouveau building in Riga*

and Serge Barbe (City Archivist).

Ellen does not speak or read Latvian fluently. So she directed her deepest thanks to her sister-in-law, Maija, who spent years translating family letters and research material for "With Only a Suitcase". While rewarding, the task could also be quite painful. Through family letters and records, Maija and Ellen discovered the inner hopes and fears of beloved relatives. Struggles to survive, years of physical hardships and searing loneliness were unveiled, as family members coped with the upheaval of war, followed by the loss of their homeland, language, and all they had known in their youth. (We who have only lived in peace cannot easily understand the horrors unleashed by war.)

Most have some working familiarity with countries like England, Germany or France. But mentioning Latvia often leads to wrinkled brows. Latvia, Latvia...hmm. That's one of those little countries, somewhere near Russia and the Baltic, right? (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania...which one is which?)

As Ellen explained, Latvia has the sometimes-unfortunate distinction of being wedged between big, fractious neighbours – including modern-day Germany, Poland,



Sweden and Russia. It was not a recipe for domestic tranquility. Consider what is said and unsaid in a single sentence from the BBC country profile: "Latvia was under foreign dominion from the 13th until the 20th century."



*Art Nouveau detail on a building in Riga*

I shan't repeat every historical event mentioned by Ellen, but here's a sampler. Latvia itself is blessed by mild climate and access to sea and trade routes. The tribes we came to call Latvians arrived circa 9,000 B.C. In general terms, Ellen recounts that they were an independent people, with a culture of gender equity, keenly connected with nature. They did not have a system of kingship. Interesting lake fortresses were a common feature in the 9th and 10th centuries. Across many centuries, typical components of Baltic trade included amber, fur, forest products, honey and wax.

Traditional Latvia was an oral culture rich in dainas, or folk songs. (See more travel and cultural information on the Internet at <http://www.latvia.travel/en> )

According to this site "...dainas are four-line verses that are impossible to translate precisely into other languages. They are lyrical, witty and philosophical, are similar to aphorisms and contain thousand-year-old wisdoms of the world. Folklorist Krišjānis Barons put a great amount of work at the end of the 19th century into collecting and codifying these dainas by writing each one down and filing it away in a large cupboard. Now the Cabinet of Folk songs contains over two million dainas and is Latvia's national treasure."

Many of the host culture's so-called pagan customs persisted even after outside influences arrived. Christian missionaries began their efforts in 1190. Caupo of Turaida was the first prominent Latvian leader to accept baptism (1191?). In some ways that represented a cultural betrayal, for which (as Ellen put it) "he is reviled to this day". In 1201 Pope Innocent III commanded German crusaders to conquer Latvia, which they did, establishing modern-day Riga. Although Indo-European in origin, at this time Latvian was rendered using the Latin alphabet style and structure in the 1270's. What I'll call creeping serfdom was introduced in the 1300's and would not be outlawed until 1817. (It began with small obligations of labour, which grew and grew.)

To keep things brief, let's just say the next period featured a confusing muddle of terms and events that sometimes make history an unpopular subject. Key dates mostly ad-

dress power and organizational struggles between the church, knights and city authorities. Later conflicts were less about church and cities and more about competition between neighboring nation-states. A short list: Hanseatic League (1282-1721), The Reformation. Livonian Wars (1558-1583). The Duchy of Courland 1640-1795. The War between Poles and Swedes (1600-1629). The Great Northern War (1700-1721) And so forth.

Just for fun, Maris Goldmanis has crafted a website on Latvian history at <http://latvianhistory.wordpress.com/> (I'm not sure how authoritative the pages are, but it's broad in scope and well illustrated.)

It wasn't until the mid 1800's and early 1900's that the perpetual springs of Latvian cultural identity coalesced into determined efforts for nationhood. That must have been an interesting period in Latvia. Prior to World War I, Riga's stimulating mix of culture, prosperity and architectural attainment earned the Latvian capital a reputation as "Paris of the Baltic Sea".

The 20th century brought Latvians dizzying cycles of hope, despair and rebirth. After enduring great devastation in World War I, Latvians fought to stake out post-war independence, with the first Latvian Parliament meeting in 1920. That window of independence was slammed shut by invasion and occupation by the USSR during World War II. For most of that conflict, Germans battled Soviets across Latvia. Civilians hunkered down, died or fled – by the hundreds of thousands. As battle lines swung back and forth, both Germany and the Soviet Union forcibly conscripted Latvians as just so much cannon fodder. After Germany's defeat, Latvia was claimed by the USSR as a spoil of war.

Real autonomy for long-suffering Latvians only came in 1991, with the break-up of the Soviet Empire. One legacy of that period is the fact that Latvia's population is now nearly one-third ethnic Russians. Many Russians came to replace Latvians displaced, killed or deported by war and occupation. Their descendents (born in Latvia) are not culturally Latvian, but have known no other home. Sorting out property claims from that era many decades later is



*Finnials on buildings in Riga*

still a challenge. By necessity, the struggle to nurture a strong Latvian identity must also encompass the country's many ethnicities, cultures and influences.

Today, Latvians cherish their country's freedom and work hard to be a European success story. As for what visitors can expect, Ellen shared slides from her own travels. For example, in the centre of Riga, a reported forty-percent of the buildings are in the style of Art Nouveau, quite the treasure trove of a lovely architectural style. That, combined with churches, Old Town and interesting wooden buildings put Riga on the UNESCO World Heritage list. If you go, Ellen says don't forget to look low (fun basements) as well as up. Special attention must be paid to the city's marvelous rooflines and finials (decorative end pieces).

I came away from Ellen's talk with a number of impressions. How strong people can be, in the face of overwhelming difficulties. How fortunate we are that countries like Canada make room for new citizens with so much to contribute. I also wondered why Latvia is not better known. (I am now keen on going there myself!) Web-writers for the Lonely Planet travel guides show similar enthusiasm:

"If you're yearning to hit Europe's untrodden jackpot, cash in your chips in Latvia (Latvija). Still undiscovered by the tourism masses, this sizzling Baltic spot is poised to become the continent's next A-list star. A country in transition, hellbent on shedding its stalwart old-Soviet image, the Latvia of today is vibrant, enigmatic and altogether mesmerising. Refreshingly unpretentious, Latvia manages to tantalise even the most jaded traveller. Many arrive expecting little and leave overwhelmed, certain they've uncovered long-buried treasure."

Hundreds of thousands of Canadians first loved other homelands but felt forced by war, hardship – or shimmering opportunity – to seek better lives here. "With Only a Suitcase" may be specific to one family, from one special corner of the world. But many say the book reminds them of their own family's story. Ellen hopes her project can inspire others to organize and share more precious family histories – and promote compassion for refugees facing similar struggles today.

## *Presentation on the |Titanic*

RTHS member Coral Lindsay spoke at the Top Generation Club in Ramsayville on Tuesday April 17, 2012. Coral's talk on the Titanic and its connections to people in and around Ottawa was very well received and will be repeated twice more (see coming events below). The lunchtime talk took place at the club's renovated one-room school, Ramsayville School (S.S. No. 13 Gloucester).

Coral taught there (grades 1-4) early in her career, when it was a two-room school!

Bev Whyte was an 8th grader in the older-class side of the dividing wall erected at that time.



*Bev Whyte, president of the Top Generation Club, and Coral Lindsay at the Ramsayville presentation.*

## *Coming Events*

Coral Lindsay will give her presentation on the Titanic to two Diners Club meetings; One in Osgoode June 5, and one in Manotick July 16. (I apologize for not having times and locations for this newsletter. Ron Wilson)

## *Watson's Mill Events*

The Mill is located at 5525 Dickinson Street, Dickinson Square, Manotick. Free parking on-site.

Web Site: [www.watsonsmill.com](http://www.watsonsmill.com)

Watson's Mill hours of operation: by appointment. Office hours: weekdays, 10:00-4:00. Watson's Mill: starting Saturday, May 5th: open to visitation daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Please visit [www.watsonsmill.com](http://www.watsonsmill.com) for a complete calendar of events.

## *The Dickinson House*

The Dickinson House opened for the 2012 season on the past weekend, May 5 & 6. It was a very successful weekend, with 52 guests visiting on Saturday and 48 on Sunday. Thank you very much to everyone who volunteered their time on those days.

There was more good news. We were successful in obtaining grant money to hire 2 students as Dickinson House hosts and there is still hope for a third. We will therefore be able to open the house Wednesday through Sundays and holidays from now until September. After September 1 we will revert to the regular weekends and holidays schedule. Please be aware that this will not reduce the requirement for RTHS members as volunteers as we will be covering more days.

We have also been fortunate to have obtained a display on etiquette and social activities on loan from the Goul-

born Museum. This display has been set up in the yellow room on the second floor. Come and see it to see the role these activities played in the lives of the settlers.



## *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).*

Dave Bullock, former City Archivist of the City of Ottawa from 2001 to 2007, has recently joined the roster of volunteers of the Rideau Township Branch of the City of Ottawa Archives. Dave brings years of professional experience and a life-long passion for military history. He will be involved in an ambitious project to develop a memorial record of the First World War dead, to be "published" for the centenary of the outbreak of the war in 2014.

## *The Dickinson House Web Site*



The Dickinson House Web Site is now available.

The web address is <http://www.rideautownshiphistory.org/dickinsonhouse>. Sorry for all the typing. It would be a good idea to bookmark it. The site can also be reach through a link on the home page of the RTHS Web Site.

The purpose of the web site is to attract visitors to the Dickinson House, to make operational information readily available to visitors and to the Dickinson House volunteers, and to record information about the history of the house and its operation by the RTHS. To meet these goals the site will develop further under the guidance of the Communications Subcommittee. Stay tuned.



## *Minutes of the April 18, 2012 Meeting*

The Rideau Township Historical Society met in the Archives Building, North Gower, with 55 members and guests present. Bill Tupper, the President, opened the meeting at 7:30 pm. sharp. Bill thanked members of the RTHS executive under the leadership of Maureen McPhee, Vice-President, for their efforts in running the Society while he was away over the past few months.

### Reports

Minutes – Moved by Bill Adams, Secretary, seconded by Brian Earl, that the minutes of the March meeting, as published in the Newsletter, be accepted. Carried.

Finance – The Treasurer, Colin Wright, stated that our bank balance was \$24,889.32. Moved by Colin, seconded by Maureen, that the Treasurer's report be accepted. Carried.

Program – Ruth Wright, Program Coordinator, announced the remaining meetings for the spring session:

May 18– Robert Henderson on the War of 1812, at the Pierces Corners RA;

June 16 – an outing by bus to Prescott to visit Fort Wellington and the site of the Battle of the Windmill, lunch at the Red George Public House and in the afternoon a visit to Grenville County Historical Society Archival Resource Centre (Old Grand Trunk/CN Railway Station) ending with a visit to the Little Blue Church.

A sheet was circulated for signing up for the June 16th tour.

Membership – Pat Earl reported that we had at present 12 life members, 1 complimentary membership and 89 paid up annual members, not counting any who had renewed or joined that night.

Communications and Digital Applications – Ron Wilson noted that the website for Dickinson House will be finalized shortly and the web address published in the newsletter.

Publications – Ellen Adamsons reported that a committee was working on the creation of a list of the 1918 war dead from our area. Owen Cooke requested information about plaques in the Beckett's Landing Anglican church (now deconsecrated) that might list war dead. Bill A. to check on this. As well, the Society (represented by Lucy, Owen and Ellen) will be present to sell books at the event below:

*Region VIII Ontario Genealogical Society  
AGM and Genealogy Day  
hosted by Ottawa Branch OGS  
[ogsottawa.on.ca/region-viii-agm-and-genealogy-day/](http://ogsottawa.on.ca/region-viii-agm-and-genealogy-day/)*

*Saturday, April 21, 2012  
City of Ottawa Central Archives  
100 Tallwood Drive, Ottawa, Ontario*

Dickinson House – Maureen McPhee reported that DH will open May 5th and that some tours, by appointment, have already taken place. A general cleanup is scheduled for Saturday April 21st. Students are being interviewed for positions at DH this summer based on the expected funding that has been requested. Bill T. commented that more volunteers would be welcome in running DH even though there are quite a number of members already involved.

No new business was brought forward or announcements made.

### Evening's Program

Ruth introduced RTHS member, Ellen Adamsons, who presented a family perspective on Latvian history, culture and geography based on her own family's experiences. Her husband's family arrived in Canada after a harrowing escape from Latvia during WW 2. Ellen had a career in teaching in Alberta and Ontario.

Bill thanked Ellen adjourned the meeting at 9:15 pm for informal discussions and refreshments.

*Minutes prepared by Bill Adams, RTHS Secretary*