

# The Rideau Township Historical Society

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

## May 2013 Newsletter

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

### The May Meeting

**Date:** Wednesday May 15  
**Time:** 7:30 p.m.  
**Place:** Knox Presbyterian Church  
5533 Dickinson Street  
Manotick, Ontario



### Our Annual Bring and Brag Meeting:

The May meeting will be held on May 15 and will be at Knox Presbyterian Church in Manotick. It will be our annual "Bring and Brag" night.

That is where the members scour their basements, attics, sheds and maybe even the living room walls to find those precious artifacts and treasures that have been handed down through the generations or collected over the years. The members then bring them in and share their history with us. It has always been a fun and interesting night at the Society.

The projector & screen will be available if your artifact is a picture in electronic form.

Saturday, July 22, 2013. Our annual **June excursion** is being planned this year to the Cumberland Heritage Village Museum. See next newsletter for more information.

### Bring a Friend, Light Refreshments

### This Month

1. The May meeting
2. April excursion
3. News from the Rideau Archives

4. Opening of the Dickinson House
5. Donations to Dickinson House.

### Notice

**Membership** 2013 Membership fees are now due. \$10 for a single membership, \$15 for a family membership.

### Opening of the Dickinson House

The Dickinson House opening weekend was blessed with gorgeous weather. We had approximately 130 visitors. The House itself is sparkling with freshened up paint, thanks to Brian Earl & his crew, particularly Pat Earl, Doug Culham and Brian Sawyer, who worked hard over the winter.

The gift of an early 20th century parlour set was unveiled. The three pieces, presented by the Tomkins family on Saturday, had been in the Tomkins family for generations. It makes an attractive addition to the Dickinson House Parlour.

On Saturday, as part of the Mill Opening Celebration, Brian Sawyer & Coral Lindsay presided over a fascinating collection of artifacts on a table outside the drive shed.

Guests, at Dickinson House, especially ladies, were delighted with the beautiful display of Wedding Dresses &

Customs on the Third floor. Most went away with Wall rack Cards, (thanks to Ron Wilson) and expressed interest in returning to some of our events. Also of interest was the "Artifact of the Week", a wonderful display of moustache cups, thanks to Brian Sawyer.



Photo by Maureen McPhee

*The wedding dress display on the third floor drew much attention at the opening of the Dickinson House for the 2013 season.*

## ***The April Excursion to the Science Museum***

***Article and Pictures by Lucy Martin***

April's meeting was a new type of field trip: small behind-the-scenes group tours of part of the storage facilities of the Canadian Museum of Science and Technology. We owe that splendid opportunity to Artifact Handler Pat Hilborn, who takes genuine pleasure in sharing more about the collection with members of the public. Because close to 90% of museum inventory is in storage at any given time, some things may seldom be seen except for tours like ours.

And? What was that like? It was like your several warehouses of your grandparent's attic, and then some. Fascinating and somewhat overwhelming.

Many items called to my inner pack rat. (Yes! That's lovely! I want it! ) Some I would have thrown out, frankly. Which only re-proves that one person's junk is another person's treasure. A fair number of artifacts were mysteries that required explanation.

Eleven of us gathered for the 10 am tour. Ten more took an evening tour the next day. This particular collection was only begun in 1967. It is currently spread across different buildings and is constantly outgrowing available space. I hasten to add, for all that room is a perpetual issue, everything we saw was clean and accessible. Tightly packed, but still accessible. (In that respect it was not like most attics!)

Organization is always a challenge, because how does one store a steady flow of completely different items? Indeed, considering that all the shelves were full, it's mystifying that anything new can get squeezed in. I am still wondering how the ridiculously long automated milking bay was moved and inserted into the stacks..

Hilborn grew up in Manotick and studied museum trade at Algonquin College. In this case, though, on-the-job training never ends. For example, as part of getting items where they need to be, he's learned how to drive all sorts of cars, planes and things that move. The work offers carte blanche to explore whole worlds. As Hilborn said: "That's one thing I love about my job. I get to meet everyone and learn about the stuff!" (In the small world department, Hilborn remembers having RTHS's Stu Rogers as a teacher at South Carleton High.)

Besides the eternal struggle for sufficient space, staff and budget another big problem comes in knowing what to accept and what to decline. The truth is, one cannot (should not) keep everything. But in some cases there is no time to be discerning either: a call comes in saying this factory - this something or other - will be taken to the dump unless it is collected right away.

In other instances whole collections are absorbed when a particular company either goes out of business or doesn't want to run their own specialty museum anymore. These days key considerations include: what's important to preserve and what's missing in the present collection? Speaking to those essential questions Hilborn mused: "I

used to know, I don't know anymore." (This is not to say he has given up, he's simply realized there may not be one simple answer.)



*Maureen McPhee and Pat Hilborn admire lamp posts from Ottawa's Union Station. They arrived in pieces with some assembly required.*

The work is made more challenging by requirements to downsize staff. Hilborn's comment on that shift was: "We're like everyone else. We're behind. We're trying to find better ways to do it." Speaking of the goal to work smarter, the Canadian Heritage Information Network does help list which museums have what, and if items can be borrowed by other institutions. But Hilborn points out it's still a challenge to make sure data bases are complete and standardized, able to cover the breadth of items in collections. Key-word searches can still miss things because of such inconsistencies or gaps.

And what might Hilborn wish more people knew about the facility and the cause it serves? The gist of it comes down to this: Canadians can be very creative. The Science and Technology Museum is just one of many institutions storing an array of important treasures. Safely handling and storing so many diverse items is a big responsibility that can seem overwhelming at times. Still, getting to know more about unique and fascinating artifacts is pretty darned fun.





*Any guesses? Think movie theatre. These massive film platters were in use up until the day they were added to the museum archive.*

Bruce Deachman did a nice profile on Hilborn and his work for the Ottawa Citizen's "One in a Million" feature in 2012:

<http://www.ottawacitizen.com/travel/Artifact+Handler/6492589/story.html>



*Owen Cooke and Pat Hilborn discuss the ins and outs of dealing with so much stuff!*

Hilborn generously offered to conduct more tours on request for other interested persons or groups. Speaking as a Canadian taxpayer – and as a fan of "stuff" - was really nice to feel so welcome and learn more about collections meant to represent our country's ingenuity.

## ***Descendants of Local Families Contribute to the 2013 Dickinson House Season***

On May 4, opening day for the Dickinson House Museum, this fine century home was visited by members of two families with strong links to its long history. The first visitors to sign the guest book this year were Harry Watson's son Jim and his wife Nancy. They provided Rideau Township Historical Society (RTHS) guides with information on the layout of the ground floor when the Watson family was in residence. The Watsons will be visiting the house again on Wednesday, May 8, to donate a wash stand, which will be placed in Moss Kent Dickinson's bedroom.

Also in attendance on opening day were members of the Tomkins family. Harry Watson's wife Anna was the daughter of William E.O. Tomkins and Ida Meredith.

Their grandson Brian Tomkins and his wife Dianne recently donated three beautiful pieces of antique furniture to the Dickinson House parlour. The Tomkins family believes that the furniture was a wedding gift to William and Ida when they married in 1903. Until the 1970s, the furni-



Photo by Maureen McPhee

*1st Row – Nicole Tomkins, Laura Scott, Susan Scott, Brian Tomkins (standing), Dianne Tomkins  
2nd Row - Terry Tomkins, Bill Tomkins, Bruce Tomkins. Missing Marg Stewart*

ture was located in the parlour of the old brick Tomkins

farm house in Manotick Station, where the Emerald Links Golf Course is now located.

The Tomkins family members were frequent visitors to their Aunt Anna and Uncle Harry Watson's home, which we now know as Dickinson House.

During their May 4 visit, the Tomkins also provided RTHS with information on what the house was like before it was transformed into offices by the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority.

During their May 4 visit, the Tomkins family also viewed their Grandmother Harriet Condie's wedding dress, which is included in the newly opened RTHS exhibit of heritage wedding dresses. Harriet Hawkins of Limebank married Lorne Condie on July 5, 1911. Her dress, which she ordered from the Eaton's catalogue, as well as a locket which was a gift from the groom, have been loaned to the exhibit by Harriet's granddaughter Deborah Toy of Manotick.



Photo by Maureen McPhee

*The settee and chair with the pink upholstery are two of the three pieces donated to the Dickinson House by the Tomkins family.*

## **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).*

**Resources and Services of the Rideau Township Branch of the City of Ottawa Archives:** a monthly feature in this newsletter, celebrating the services and holdings preserved in your community's archives resource centre.

### ***Carsonby Cheese and Dairy Company Fonds***

The Carsonby Cheese and Dairy Company is one of a dozen of these companies that produced an important agricultural foodstuff in the former townships of Marlborough and North Gower.

The surviving records of this factory include the company charter, the list of shareholders, the by-laws and the minutes of meetings of the Board of Directors and of the Shareholders for the years 1929 to 1953.

Documents such as these were used by former Rideau Township Archivist Iona Joy for the writing of the book *Cheese Factories of Rideau Township* (publ. 1990), one of the RTHS publications available at the Rideau Archives.



Photo by Owen Cooke 2012

*The Carsonby Cheese Factory building is still in use today.*

## ***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: Office hours: weekdays, 10:00-4:00. Watson's Mill: starting Saturday, May 4th: open to visitors 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 RTHS gratefully acknowledges the financial support received from the City of Ottawa

## MINUTES OF THE RIDEAU TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### APRIL EXCURSION

April 17/18, 2013

The Rideau Township Historical Society members went on an excursion in April instead of a meeting. This was a fascinating tour of the storage facilities at the Museum of Science and Technology by Pat Hilborn, artefact handler. In fact, two groups of 10 or 11 toured the facilities with Pat; one group went the morning of April 17, and the other the evening of April 18. Since a formal meeting was not held, no business was dealt with and no motions were made.