

# The Rideau Township Historical Society

Preserving and Promoting local history for the former Rideau Township

## September 2020 Newsletter

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

### *The September Meeting*

**Date:** September 16, 2020  
**Time:** 7:30 p.m.

This meeting will be a virtual one to test out how we might operate in the time of the pandemic. For information on how to participate in this test meeting see page 2 of this newsletter.

Basically the participants stay home and join the meetings from their computers or phones. Everybody sees whoever is speaking and there is a scrollable strip of pictures of the participants to select a person you wish to see.

### *Speaker:*

There will not be a speaker at this test meeting as we will only be evaluating the zoom application and figuring out how best we might use it.

### *In Memoriam - Brian Wright (1948-2020)*

Brian Wright was a true son of North Gower, a tireless worker for his community and an enthusiast for local history. Born into two pioneering families, he was a descendant of Philemon Wright, the first European settler in the Gatineau, and Alonzo Wright, "the king of the Gatineau", as well as the Thomson family, early settlers and storekeepers in North Gower.

Brian followed his father into the family plumbing and electrical business, H.O. Wright and Sons, where he worked for over forty years. A great many houses in North Gower and area show evidence of his workmanship. A fine craftsman and tireless worker, he saw that there was always a right way to do a task – and it was not always the easy way, as his sons Spencer and Todd could attest.

At the same time he served his community as a volunteer fireman for four decades and led many of the firefighters' fundraisers and events. One of his particular delights was the history of the North Gower Fire Department, and he amassed a formidable archives and museum collection on its development and activities.

Brian was a longtime member of Holy Trinity Anglican Church in North Gower and was particularly passionate about maintaining the grounds of its cemetery. This led him into the study of local genealogy and history, and again he built up a fine personal archives on the history of North Gower and its families. His family claimed he never threw anything out. His interests included an ongoing enthusiasm for the publication of the forthcoming *History of North Gower Village* by Rideau Township Historical Society.

An electrical accident some twenty years ago led to Brian's declining health and a series of health challenges in recent years.

Among the many who mourn his loss within Rideau Township Historical Society are Ruth, our Secretary and his wife of fifty years, his brother Colin, our former Treasurer, and his sister-in-law Dorothy Gray, our Programme Director. We are thinking of them and all his family.

Owen Cooke



The RTHS has implemented an **online gift shop** for the sale of our publications and other items. See the Dickinson House Update page 3

### *Gary Bagley*

Our Membership Director, Gary Bagley, has had some health issues this year, and is currently unable to fill this role. Our thanks to Margot Belanger, who has agreed to fill in. Gary has had to leave his house and is currently staying with a friend, and has no computer or internet access. He hopes to be able to resume his responsibilities in the future. We wish him well in his recovery.

## ***RTHS Zoom Meetings***

In this 2020 time of COVID-19, the RTHS has decided to host on-line meetings this fall, hoping that in-person meetings are not too far off. We have been successfully holding executive meetings this way since last spring, so we're expanding this to the RTHS membership.

Our September meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 16, at 7:30 p.m., and we have decided to have a couple of trial runs prior to this, to give people an opportunity to get familiar with the technology. These will be on Monday, September 14, at 3:00 p.m. and again at 7:30 p.m. A couple of days before this, you will receive two emails from your President, Susan McKellar, inviting you to participate in each of these. It is entirely up to you whether you do or not. You may join by computer or by phone.

### ***How to join the meeting on a computer/device:***

You will need a computer or device with a webcam and microphone to participate in a Zoom session, or you can just join with the audio if you do not have a webcam (camera on your computer). If you can get email on your cell phone, you can use it as well. This might be preferable if it is newer than your computer. There will be a link in the email that you click on at the time of the meeting. You do not have to have a Zoom account to attend a Zoom meeting. You will be prompted to download the software, once you have clicked on the link that you have been provided.

**Step 1:** Click on the link provided in the email. An alternate method that some find preferable, once they have downloaded Zoom, is to join a meeting via the Zoom icon on the desktop and type in the meeting ID (specified in the email).

**Step 2:** If you do not already have Zoom on your computer, download it by following the prompts.

**Step 3:** Join the meeting. You may have to click on the link in the email again, once you have installed Zoom.

And there may be a requirement to enter a password; if so, it would be specified in the email. You may have to click on boxes to specify you want to join with audio and/or with video.

### ***Tips:***

Closing any applications you don't need for the meeting will improve the quality of your connection. Pay attention to your background. Too much light behind you makes you appear to be only a dark figure. Make sure you have a good source of light in front of you and behind your computer. Audio is integrated in the meeting. However, you have the option to participate via audio-only if a web-connected device is not available.

The Zoom menu bar appears at the bottom of the Zoom window once the meeting begins. If you don't see the menu bar, move your mouse slightly and the bar will appear. There are various functions – you can mute/unmute your audio, and stop/start your video – you may have to do one of these at the beginning, so other participants can see and hear you.

### ***How to join the meeting on a phone:***

Call one of the numbers provided in the email. (Note: they're usually long distance numbers, but if you have a long-distance plan there won't be an additional charge.) It answers with "Welcome to Zoom" and asks for the Meeting ID (which is given in the email, the same ID as for joining online). Then it asks for participant number or press pound, so press #. Then it asks for Pass code which is another straight forward entry on the keypad (also given in the email), and that's it. You will be able to hear and participate in any discussion.

### ***The Meeting:***

Once you have joined the meeting, by either method, you will be in a virtual "waiting room", until the meeting leader admits you to the meeting. Then you should be able to see/hear the speakers, and participate if you wish. The meeting leader will close the meeting at the end, but you may leave it at any point if you wish.



*Other September pictures including left to right: third floor overview, foyer, and a Melanie tea table.*

## **Dickinson House Update**

### **Maureen McPhee and Brian Earl**

#### **Open Days, Visitors and Tours**

The summer of 2020 is drawing to a close as is the daily opening of Dickinson House. Starting after Labour Day, the house will be open on weekends up to Dec. 6, as well as Thanksgiving Monday.

We have had the pleasure of the company of Cait Douglas and Antonia Cen, our two student Heritage Interpreters throughout July and August. I want to sincerely thank them for their hard work and the warm and friendly greetings which they gave to the visitors. Cait also worked with us in June applying her knowledge of artifact care to ready the museum for opening. Fortunately we will also have Cait and Antonia to guide visitors through the displays after Labour Day.

We would also like to thank Watson's Mill for their support in responding to the Covid-19 restrictions.

Attendance has been greater than expected, averaging 15 per day. To create a barrier between our staff and visitors, we re-arranged the furniture in the foyer, which had the effect of creating more gift shop space. This has increased in-house sales, despite the reduction in visitors due to COVID-19. Donations from visitors are well down this year, but that is to be expected.

#### **The Dickinson House Gift Shop**



As part of its response to COVID-19, Dickinson House has created an online gift shop. In taking this initiative, Dickinson House has broken new ground, as it is the only museum in Ottawa that allows purchases to be made entirely online in one transaction, with the option of curbside pickup or having the items shipped.

A popular sales item this year has been our new "Afternoon Tea" photo-art note card collection, created by Rod Brazier. The photo shoots for the cards took place in



*Cait Douglas and Antonia Cen in their PPE and ready for the day*

*The Dickinson House Committee has put considerable effort into planning the modifications necessary to ensure the safety of our visitors and staff in this difficult time. Please help us out by obeying the signs and instructions from staff.*

the home of Melanie Hayes who used her extensive teatime collection and artistic eye to create many beautiful and varied table settings.

#### **New Exhibit: Steamboats**

As noted in the June newsletter, Dickinson House unveiled a new special exhibit on July 11 entitled "Steamboats on the Rideau." Using scale models, imagery, artifacts, text and sound, the display tells the story of the evolution of steamboat transport and travel on the Rideau Canal, which was built with steamboats in mind.

The exhibit has been very well received by our guests and has garnered positive reviews from members of the heritage community.

Given the significant investment in this exhibit and its contribution to Dickinson Square, we anticipate that it will remain in place for at least three years and perhaps into the future.



*Model of the steamer Bytown, built by Doug Culham.*

Thanks are due to Maureen McPhee, Rod Brazier, Doug Culham, Brian Earl and Melanie Hayes who worked so hard to create this exhibit.

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

**Hours:** *The Rideau Archives is open every Tuesday from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and at other times by appointment. (613-489-2926). Please note that during the pandemic the Archives are open by appointment only.*

**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.*

### ***Schools and the 1947 North Gower polio outbreak***

On 9 September 1947, the Ottawa Journal published an editorial that criticized Dr. A. Howard McCordick, Medical Officer of Health for North Gower Township, for ordering all nine public schools there closed until 15 September "as a precaution against the spread of poliomyelitis" on the basis of two reported cases, amid rumors of an additional five or more suspected cases.

The newspaper, stressing that there was no reason to fear an epidemic, clearly thought McCordick was overreacting – "there is no reason for panic measures" -- and that the schools should have remained open, as was common practice even during bonafide epidemics, it asserted.

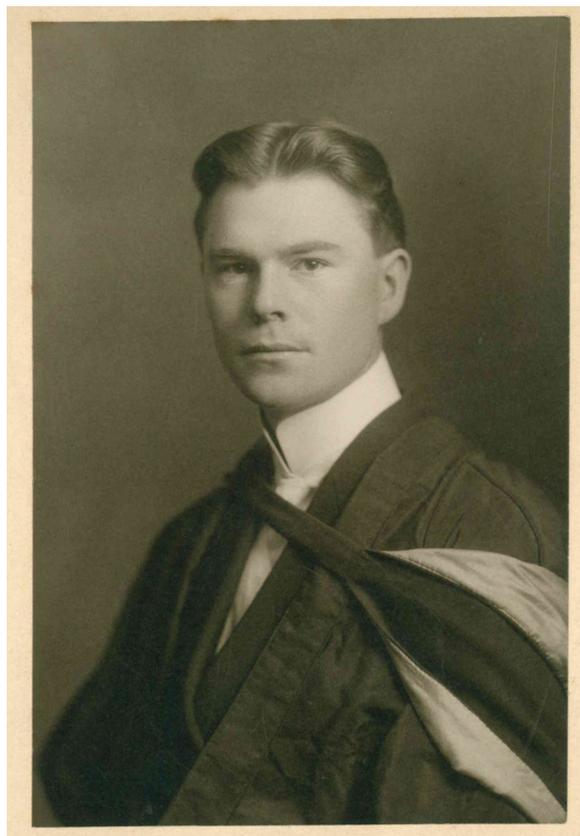
In a letter to the paper's editor written five days later, McCordick struck back at the newspaper's urban-focused lens and consequent lack of analysis by stating that physical distancing at home was easier in rural areas than in the city, whereas sanitizing rural schools would be more difficult since they lacked running water. He also indicated that many parents were unwilling to send their children to school anyways, making school closures a moot point rather than a panicked response.

This enjoined a reaction from a reader from Manotick, published on 18 September, claiming to represent the views of most people there, under the pen name In "Public Office." This reader thought that Dr. McCordick's statements about suspected cases published in the initial article had indeed caused "at least a near public panic," upsetting meetings and causing too much concern among parents.

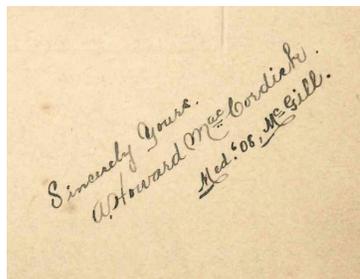
This all will, of course, have deep resonance with us today in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, as schools are set to reopen with much uncertainty. While somewhat similar – both viruses are now known to be carried asymptotically, for instance – the situation then was notably different than today. The Journal had related in its editorial that there was not, at that time, even an understanding among scientists if human-to-human transmission of the polio virus was possible. "The Great Unknown," it was called in *Maclean's* magazine the next year. Also, concerning school attendance, there was perhaps even more fear in the 1940s because polio chiefly affects children.

In the doctor's defence, the year 1947 did see a number of other localized outbreaks, including one at Stanley Barracks in Toronto, and another near Minden. The year ended up being one of the worst on record in Ontario and

was followed by several even worse, a steadily rising number of Canadian cases in the final decade before the Salk vaccine was issued in 1955.



*Alexander Howard McCordick, MD, on his graduation from McGill in 1908  
Wm. Notman & Sons, photographer.  
Rideau Archives/MGR102-001:1992.01:RV100.21*



*Dr. McMordick's Signature. Notice the writing.*

## ***Rideau Township Historical Society Books for Sale***

In this time of pandemic, people may be looking for new books to read. And new neighbours might be interested in learning about our communities. Why not print off this list, and offer it to friends and neighbours that you encounter? Susan McKellar (613-489-3961 or susanmckellar68@gmail.com) would be happy to make deliveries.

*These are a few of our publications of local history. For a complete list, visit our website.*

[www.rideautownshiphistory.org](http://www.rideautownshiphistory.org)

- Buildings of Old Rideau Township: A Driving Tour  
*by Betty Bartlett, 2006*.....\$ 10.00
- Carsonby: A Community History  
*by Carsonby Historical Society, 1969*.....\$ 10.00
- Cheese Factories of Rideau Township, second edition  
*by Iona Joy, 2013*.....\$ 20.00
- The Dickinson Men of Manotick  
*by William and Georgina Tupper, 2015*.....\$ 25.00
- "I Am, Gentlemen, Your Obedient Servant", Joseph Merrill Currier (1820-1884)  
*by Andrew Narraway, 2019*.....\$ 15.00
- Kars on the Rideau, Second Edition  
*by Coral Lindsay, 2010* .....\$ 30.00
- Manotick Then and Now, Reflections & Memories, Second Edition  
*by Dora Stamp, 2009* .....\$ 25.00
- Rideau Remembers: North Gower & Marlborough Townships' Sacrifice  
in the Great War, 1914 – 1918  
*by Owen Cooke et al, 2018*.....\$ 20.00
- The Women of Dickinson House and Their Place in Manotick Village  
Society, 1870-1930  
*by Maureen McPhee, 2014*.....\$ 15.00
  
- **Package:** The Dickinson Men of Manotick & The Women of Dickinson House.....\$35.00

# Sign me up as a member of RTHS



Rideau Township  
Historical Society

Members of the Society enjoy:

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

For more information visit [www.rideautownshiphistory.org](http://www.rideautownshiphistory.org),  
[facebook.com/rideautownshiphistory](https://facebook.com/rideautownshiphistory), and [twitter.com/RideauTpHS](https://twitter.com/RideauTpHS).  
Please send this form with a cheque for membership dues payable to:  
Rideau Township Historical Society, Box 56, North Gower, ON, K0A 2T0.  
A tax receipt will be issued for all membership dues and donations.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City & Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Individual Membership \$15 \_\_\_\_\_

Life Membership \$100 \_\_\_\_\_

Family Membership \$20 \_\_\_\_\_  
(2 adults & school-aged children)

Donation \$50 \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Thank you for supporting RTHS!**