



June Meeting Details

**Sunday, June 26th 1-5pm
Burritts Rapids Excursion!**

Location: Burritts Rapids Community Centre & Picnic Ground (23 Grenville St, Burritts Rapids)

Our afternoon adventure will include:

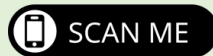
- A walking tour of the historic village, which predates the building of the Rideau Canal;
- A look at the wonderful local archives, with some actual Burritts memorabilia;
- Music, nibblies, and...
- Opportunities to be with each other – **IN PERSON!**

Details

- To be COVID-safe, no organized, shared transportation will be provided;
- Please register by June 18th
- Feel free to come early and bring a picnic lunch — the outdoor grounds are available.

Note: We would welcome your contribution to the shared “nibblies”(ready-cut, in individual wrapping please)

Click [HERE](#) for our website registration page, or scan the QR Code at right with a mobile device to be taken to the RTHS website.



Upcoming Events

Kars 200 th Anniversary Celebration – July 16

This year the village of Kars is celebrating the 200th anniversary of its beginning. A day-long event is being planned, with lots of activities (see <http://kars.ca/> for more details). The RTHS is participating, offering guided historic walks of the village and boat rides on the Rideau River. We are also putting together a historic display in the hall. If you would like to assist with these activities, please contact Sandy McNiece, Ruth Wright, or Susan McKellar.



KARS 200TH ANNIVERSARY

JULY 16TH

FOR MORE INFO:
613-489-2524
karscra@gmail.com

TRINITY/ ST. ANDREWS CHURCH EVENTS:

- Church/cemetery tour
- Refreshments
- Washroom access
- Trinity BBQ: 11am - 2pm

RA EVENTS:

- Pancake breakfast
- Evening beer garden
- Canoe/kayak poker run
- Historic walk of village & boat rides
- Softball tournament
- Bouncy castle, old fashioned kids games & face painting
- Car show
- Historic & military display
- Horse drawn farm machinery
- Scavenger hunt



President's Message

RTHS Website

The RTHS website is now the primary resource center for gathering, managing and storing information and the major communication link between society's activities and its membership. For example, the walking tours of the Rideau Communities will be there, as they are developed. Additional assistance with website development, over and above what is now provided by RTHS volunteers, will be needed. The Communications Committee has approached a local tech company to discuss possibilities.

RTHS Programs

The development of programming is ongoing. Bringing a presentation to the Society each month is no mean feat. Myra, our Program Director, will be away during the fall months so she is asking for members to help provide presentation ideas for that period. If anyone has a topic that they might be willing to present or knows of someone or a subject that would be of interest to the society, would you please let us know.

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

Summer Excursion

Next month, June 26th is our summer excursion. This will be the first face-to-face meeting in more than two years. The outing will be to Burritts Rapids. A general invitation and agenda will be going out to the membership soon. Please, you must RSVP so that we can have a reasonably accurate number of those attending. No group transportation will be provided this year so we will be responsible for making our own way there.

Dickinson Days

The weekend of June 4th is Dickinson Days in Manotick. RTHS has undertaken to man a display table during the weekend. The table will be located adjacent to the walkway by Dickinson House. I encourage you to drop by. Another interesting event coming up is the Kars 200th year anniversary celebration on July 16th. Among other things, RTHS is sponsoring a cruise on the Rideau between Long Island Marina and the Baxter Conservation Area. Cruise guides will be needed to talk to guests about some of the passing points of interest.

RTHS Projects

From time to time, projects are undertaken by the Society which contribute to the knowledge and understanding of our past. The most obvious ones are the books that are authored and published by society members. One potential project under consideration is a spatially related digital historical atlas. We are exploring the possibility of entering into a cooperative partnership to develop a project using information relevant to Rideau Township and the Society.

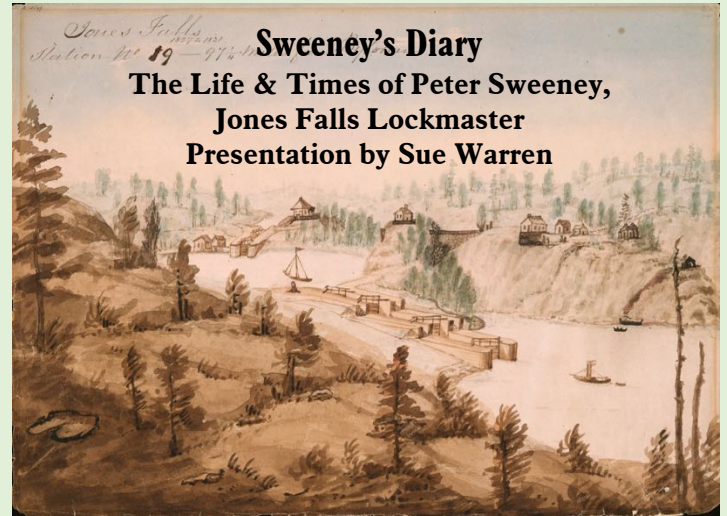
Executive Team Adjustment

As some of you may know, Margot Belanger is stepping back from her volunteer activities with RTHS while she deals with some health issues. A card is being sent wishing her well and hoping she will be able to return soon. In the meantime, I have asked Bill Tupper to represent RTHS as the ex officio member on the Board of Watsons Mill while continuing as the Chair of the Dickinson House Committee.

As the days are becoming longer and warmer, it is perhaps time for us to try some of the things we have been restricted from doing over the last couple of years: visit a neighbour, go for a walk, go to a baseball game (guilty pleasure). Have a great summer.

Doug Culham, RTHS President

Report on May's RTHS Event



Jones Falls; post-1843; John Burrows, watercolour; Library and Archives Canada

Susan Warren has had a long interest in the Rideau Canal. A retired librarian and author, she has also served as a heritage interpreter on the Rideau Canal, and a volunteer curator of the lockmaster's house at Chaffey's Locks.

The Friends of the Rideau published Sweeney's diary in 2007; included in the book are Warren's "The Life and Times of Peter Sweeney" and "Who's Who in the Diary" which greatly enhance our understanding of the diary. Warren illustrated her talk with several lovely watercolour sketches of the area by Thomas Burrowes, a military artist.

Peter Sweeney was the first lockmaster at Jones Falls. He kept a personal diary from 1839 to 1850, which provides a picture of both his work life and his personal and family life, even though the entries are not long.

Colonel By came to Bytown (Ottawa) in 1827, and set about building the canal. The Royal Artillery supported him, along with other groups. Peter Sweeney came to Ottawa with his wife and son in 1828 as a member of the Royal Artillery.

John Redpath, expert stone mason, won the contract to build the locks at Jones Falls; that involved about 300 workers and their families, and 21 oxen teams. It was a difficult site, with a 60-foot waterfall, and included building the largest dam in North America at the time. Stone was drawn from a local quarry, five to six miles away. The dam drowned lands and altered landscapes.



The Great dam at Jones Falls; from the West end, 1841; Watercolour; Thomas Burrowes fonds; Archives of Ontario, I0002172

The Sweeney family included Peter (born in Ireland around 1805), well-educated, a surveyor and meticulous record-keeper; his wife Catherine (also Irish, born 1807); son Thomas (born 1824 and educated in Bytown); and daughter Catherine/Kitty, born in 1829 in Ottawa and educated in schools in the Kingston area. They had no extended family in Canada, and when they were living in Jones Falls were very isolated. Peter was a friend of artist Thomas Burrowes.

Early traffic on the Rideau Canal included 21 steamers and several barges, which were towed behind the steamers. Many passengers travelled the Canal – up to 50,000 a year in the early years. It took about six hours to get to Kingston from Jones Falls, and a day to get to Ottawa. There was also lots of commercial traffic, with lumber and squared timber being shipped.



LOCK, DAM, &c. at DAVIS' MILL; Barges passing from the Lock to the Steamboat 'Bytown'. Sketched Oct. 40. Col.d Dec. '40, 1840; Thomas Burrowes fonds; Archives of Ontario.

Sweeney had three to four permanent canal men working with him, and a similar number of seasonal workers. There was a lot of turnover in staff, as Sweeney

apparently had a terrible temper, and fired several men. In the winter, when there was no traffic on the canal, they did work such as repairing the lock gates and travelled to assist other lockmasters.

In 1841 the government decided to put up 14 defensible lockmasters' houses along the canal, with tin roofs, and gun slits. Sweeney moved into the one at Jones Falls then. In 1843 a blacksmith shop was built there, for making parts for the gates, etc., and was used until the 1880s.



Jones Falls c.1841. This enlarged view of a Thomas Burrowes painting shows what Jones Falls looked like in the early diary period. At the very top of the hill is Sweeney House, built in 1841. Just to its right is the wooden guardhouse.

Transportation: Good horses were very important to Sweeney, and sometimes he would go to New York State to buy them. They were used with wagons, carriages, etc. He and his family would also travel on the canal by canoe, rowboat, sailboat, etc., and by foot if necessary – it was not unknown for people to walk 20-25 miles. Winter travel was easier in a way, by horse-drawn sleigh, as there was less work to do at the locks then.

Agriculture: In those days, everyone, including Sweeney, was a farmer. People raised pigs, cattle, sheep, geese, guinea hens, rabbits, etc. Animals were slaughtered in the fall, and food was salted to preserve it. They planted potatoes, turnips, carrots, etc., and picked cranberries and



Cradling and scything grain

other fruit in season. They did some hunting, and traded with the local Indigenous people. Sweeney's son went spearfishing in the lock. At one point Sweeney owned a

nearby farm, and tried growing wheat, although not too successfully. Life was a constant struggle.

Local villages included Delta, Newboro and Elgin (then called the Settlement), and Sweeney visited them for canal business and personal shopping.

The Sweeney family's furniture included a horse-hair sofa, a desk with a lock, painted chairs, rag rugs, candles and whale oil lamps.

Social life was important to provide some relief for the long hours of work. In some cases, alcohol alleviated the boredom – both Sweeney and his wife became alcoholics. This led to some fights and physical abuse. In 1848 Sweeney gave her money to leave and not come back, but they were reconciled by the local priest. The children started to rebel – in 1848 son Thomas left to join the American army. Daughter Kitty tended to get into a lot of trouble, and eventually eloped with another canal man.

Serious illnesses included cholera, typhus, malaria, child-birth problems, etc. Between two and four percent of workers on the canal died from malaria, called “ague” at the time, until it became less prevalent in the 1880s. Doctors were rare. There were few churches, but there were a few travelling ministers and priests.

Sweeney became very unhappy with his life, as expressed in the diary. His wife Catherine was ill a lot, and burned herself. She died in 1855. Kitty's marriage broke up and she lived with her father for awhile. Thomas deserted the American army.

In 1869 there was a terrible accident at Jones Falls – the lock gates collapsed, and some people were killed.

In 1872 Sweeney retired with a pension. He built a retirement home and remarried to his maid servant (much younger than himself). He died in 1882.

Susan McKellar



Sweeney House at Jones Falls today

How to Connect with RTHS



<https://rideautwphistory.org/>



www.facebook.com/rideautownshiphistory



rideautwphistory@gmail.com



<https://twitter.com/RideauTpHS>

How to Connect with Dickinson House Museum



<https://dickinsonhouse.org/>



www.facebook.com/Dickinsonhousemuseum



dickinsonhousemuseum@gmail.com

Sign me up as a member of RTHS



Members of the Society enjoy:

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

For more information visit <https://rideautwphistory.org> and facebook.com/rideautownshiphistory.

Please mail this form with a cheque for membership dues payable to: Rideau Township Historical Society, Box 56, North Gower, ON, KOA 2T0, OR pay by e-transfer to rideautwphistory@gmail.com and email a scanned copy of the form to the same email address.

Name:

Address:

City & Postal Code:

Telephone:

Email:

Date:

Are you a new RTHS member?

Yes _____ No _____

Individual Membership \$15 _____

Life Membership \$100 _____

Family Membership (2 adults & school-age children) \$20 _____

Donation \$50 _____

Other Donation \$ _____

Receipts for paid memberships will be issued when we are able to meet face-to-face, but tax receipts for donations will be issued at the end of the year.

Thank you for supporting RTHS!