



## May Meeting Details

### SWEENEY'S DIARY

*The Life & Times of Peter Sweeney,  
Lockmaster at Jones Falls*

with **Susan Warren**, Author & Historian  
**May 18th, 7:30 p.m. (via ZOOM)**

The first lockmaster at Jones Falls on the Rideau Canal, Peter Sweeney served there from the canal's opening in 1832, to his retirement in 1872. For twelve years of that tenure (1839 to 1850) Peter Sweeney kept a diary.

A troubled man with a tumultuous home life, Sweeney's diary not only provides a fascinating firsthand glimpse into the daily activities at a Rideau lock station, but also into the social life of this sparsely populated section of Upper Canada.

Join us as well-known local historian Susan Warren shares insights on the early days of life on the Rideau, drawn from her thorough analysis and transcription of the Sweeney diary, as well as her related research and writing that adds fascinating and valuable context to Peter Sweeney's diary entries.



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

## Coming Events

**June 26th 1-5pm**

### **A Day Out in Burritts Rapids!**

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

**To be COVID safe:** Individuals will be responsible for their own transportation. Please wear a mask while indoors!

More information to come.

## President's Message

### Sharing Interests

In the last Rideau Township Historical Society newsletter Ruth Wright wrote an article on maple syrup, a signature staple of Canada. Several years ago, Owen Cooke talked to us about Canadian railway engineers building railways in Russia during the First World War. Neither were long pieces, but very interesting nonetheless. Coral Lindsay was perhaps the most prolific contributor of both written articles and presentations. These are examples of RTHS members preparing items for RTHS members. Articles for the RTHS website or newsletter or perhaps a time slot at the program meeting are most welcome. I would therefore encourage all, if there is a topic or subject of interest to you, it might be surprising who else might find it interesting.

### Remembering Our Members

A section of the newsletter includes mention of those who are no long with us. Brian Sawyer passed away March 23rd. You will note in the April newsletter a short biography of Brian. Doris Inglis, Barbara Rhodes and Richard De St Croix, all members of RTHS at one time, have passed away recently. Barbara Rhodes was very active as a volunteer at Dickinson House. If any are aware of a society member who has passed, please pass the information along.

### Hybrid RTHS Meetings

Beginning in the fall, RTHS meetings will move to a hybrid format. The core of the meeting will be face-to-face, at a facility around the Rideau Township community. For those who choose, you will be able to participate via Zoom, the technology that we have all become familiar with. The new format will provide the ability to go farther afield for presentations and speakers that are of interest to the Society.

### Walking Tours

Walking tours of Rideau Township communities: Kars, Burritt's Rapids, North Gower and Manotick are in progress. A couple are quite far advanced and should be available for our summer outings.

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

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

## RTHS Remembers

RTHS extends condolences to the families of Barbara Rhodes, Richard de St. Croix, and Doris Inglis who passed away during the past year. We thank them for their service to the community and for their contributions to our Historical Society.

**Barbara Rhodes**, the wife of Keith for 62 years, passed away on October 4, 2021. She was a regular member and supporter of RTHS and spent many hours dressed in period costume while volunteering at Dickinson House.

**Richard de St. Croix**, predeceased by his wife Patricia (who was the Treasurer and director at RTHS in the early 2000's) passed away on November 6, 2021. Richard and Patricia were residents of the Second Line Road in Kars.

**Doris Inglis** passed away on April 22, 2022. Doris was a former director and treasurer of RTHS in the late 70's and early 80's. Her husband Allan, a Royal Bank manager in North Gower for several years, predeceased her on December 1, 2020. They were both members of RTHS and avid antique collectors.

## Report on February's RTHS Event

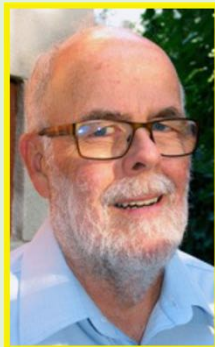
### History as Story

A report on the presentation  
by author Ian McKercher

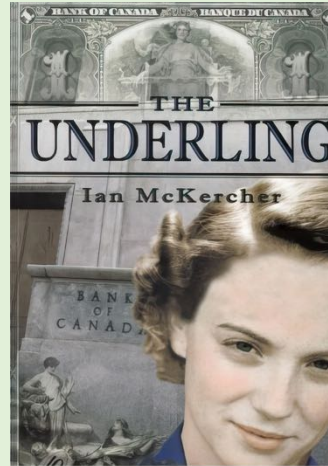
*"I like history and I like stories; that's what I do."*

On April 20th we were treated to a lively, wide-ranging and interactive discussion with Ian McKercher, ostensibly about his historical fiction.

Ian is interested in history, and in story. As he says: I like history and I like stories: that's what I do. As a historical fiction writer, his knowledge of what actually happened vs what might have happened forms the crux of his work.



Ian's period of study is between 1934 and about 1942, and he uses the increasing independence of Canada as an effective backdrop to several page-turning works of fiction, which interpret events that may or may not have actually happened. His use of the creation and growing pangs of the Bank of Canada shows us how our history, while on the face of it boring, is nothing but, and is filled with interesting personalities and events which play out on the world stage, albeit in the shadows.



What we see in Ian's work is the connection between "known" history and the art of story making, often inspired by something that actually happened and a question like "what if". He writes about the social and political maturation of Canada, the public service specifically, but not exclusively, the Bank of Canada, and about how individuals can and will step up for an ideal.

Heady stuff, written in an accessible and entertaining manner, and which encourages the reader to "willingly suspend disbelief."

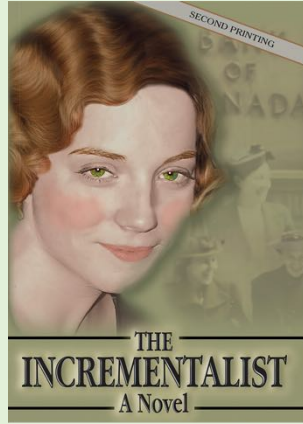
Ian has some strongly held views about Canadian history in general (shared by many of those attending on zoom that night) - that it is undervalued, under taught and, in contrast to what he called "gun & trumpet" history, really interesting!

In his heroine Frances, we see a parallel development - from a seventeen-year-old school girl, to a trusted member of the team that launched the Bank of Canada, and performed feats of derring-do, heretofore unknown!

Unsurprisingly, Ian shared with us that he did reams of research to create his fictional characters and to make the historical characters come alive. Background reading included contemporary newspaper articles, as well as documents about the political and economic context for the creation of the Bank.

Additionally, he shared with us the results of his research about the "mandarin" class and the implications for the personnel decisions surrounding the beginnings of the Bank. For our group, Ian's comments about how that research convinced him of the intelligence, integrity and creativity of that group came as no surprise at all!

The discussion then moved onto a more abstract conversation about the maturity level of individuals in their late teens and early twenties, in comparison to the “extended adolescence” that we see today. And of course, the value of influence vs hard power in any organization, which explains how our heroine Frances could do the things she did!



Finally, and we cannot capture the entire evening - as Ian says, “show don’t tell” - the discussion turned to the feeling of living in Ottawa at the time of the end of the depression and the beginning of Second World War. Here we saw the research about the context within which his characters lived paying off. “I had a map of the streetcar lines, and could see that everyone lived within 800 yards of a street car stop.” Ottawa was geographically, socially and physically a small town. Everyone knew “someone.” And that’s why the plots feel so real.

So, history, or story? Or something in between? You be the judge. Ian has kindly offered to visit book clubs to discuss his works further from the point of view of literature, and not solely the historical perspective as was the focus of our lively meeting. You can reach him through his website - and be sure to tell him you heard about his work here! <https://ianmckercher.com/>

Myra McFarlane

### How to Connect with RTHS



<https://rideautwphistory.org/>



[www.facebook.com/rideautownshiphistory](http://www.facebook.com/rideautownshiphistory)



[rideautwphistory@gmail.com](mailto:rideautwphistory@gmail.com)



<https://twitter.com/RideauTpHS>

### How to Connect with Dickinson House Museum



<https://dickinsonhouse.org/>



[www.facebook.com/Dickinsonhousemuseum](http://www.facebook.com/Dickinsonhousemuseum)



[dickinsonhousemuseum@gmail.com](mailto:dickinsonhousemuseum@gmail.com)

## Featured Article

### Oxen Did Heroic Work on the Bush Lot Farms of the Pioneers



*They Did the Heavy Work Better Than Horses Could – Were Steady, Reliable and Strong – Could be Easily Trained – Were Able to Scent Water a Mile Away.*

#### A Nonagenarian’s Story

When the late Noble Watterson and his family went into North Gower in the year 1844 from Ireland, he took with him a yoke of oxen. Those oxen played a big part in the work of conquering the wilderness. When it came to pulling stumps and hauling logs the oxen were stronger and steadier than the horses and easier to feed, as they could live on food that horses could not eat.

Mr. Watterson believes his father had the first yoke of oxen that went into their part of the township.

#### Short on Feed

For example, prior to the land being cleared, all the oxen had to eat were the leaves of the basswood trees. In the summer Noble Watterson and his 14-year-old son would chop down basswood trees in the forest and let the oxen “go to it,” or in other words, feed themselves off the green leaves.

#### Gathered Leaves

In the fall they would gather a large quantity of green basswood leaves, dry them, powder them and store them away. For the first winter or two, the poor oxen had to exist on the dried leaves alone mixed into a mash, into which had been mixed such scrapings as came from the household table. After the first few years, when winter came they would combine the leaves with a small quantity of oats and cut up a few potatoes to make feed.

#### Good When Trained

In later years when the land was cleared a bit, the oxen ate grass in the summer. In the winter they ate such crop stuffs as the farm then produced.

Mr. William Watterson, the son, who is now 98 and living at 136 First Avenue, says that once a yoke of oxen were trained into ploughing or other farm work they proved more reliable than horses. Mr. Watterson says that with a yoke of oxen he has ploughed furrow much straighter than with horses.

While oxen did not require the care horses did, they were, of course, slow. Painfully slow, especially when going to or coming from town, but they were also sure.

#### **Nose for Water**

A thing about oxen which Mr. William Watterson vividly recalls is the uncanny nose they had for water. When travelling to or from town, if the oxen got thirsty and there was water ahead, they could smell it for a mile or two away, and could not be held back. If the water was off the road in the bush, they had to be unharnessed and let go in after it, or they would try to take cart and everything with them in an effort to get into the bush.

#### **Landed at Lindsay's**

The Wattersons landed at Bytown in the spring of the year on their way to North Gower. From Bytown they took a steamboat up the Rideau to Lindsay's wharf (at Kars), and from there slashed a road part of the way through the bush to their farm. The path cut was zig-zag in order to escape the swamp lands. In that part of the country but few natural open spaces or groves were found. It was all solid bush.

*(This article originally appeared in the Ottawa Citizen, July 6, 1929)*

**Note to RTHS Members:** Beginning with our March speaker event, RTHS has discontinued the practice of preceding the formal presentation with a short business meeting. Accordingly, there are no Minutes included in the newsletter. However, beginning with this month's newsletter, we have a new feature, "President's Message" in which our RTHS president will provide an update on current Society activities.

# 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](mailto:rideautwphistory@gmail.com) and email a scanned copy of the form to the same email address.

Name:

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Address:

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City & Postal Code:

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Telephone:

Email:

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Date:

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Are you a new RTHS member?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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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!**