



January Event

Rideau Township Historical Society *Presents*

BRING & BRAG and RTHS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

January 18th, 7:30 p.m.
Client Service Centre, 2155 Roger Stevens Drive,
North Gower and via ZOOM

Bring & Brag

By popular demand, we once again provide members and guests with the opportunity to share with others a treasured family heirloom or other heritage item of interest. For details on how to participate visit www.rideautwphistory.org, or scan the QR code symbol below.

RTHS Annual General Meeting

The Bring and Brag event will be preceded by the RTHS Annual General Meeting. During this short business meeting, members of the RTHS Executive Committee for 2023 will be elected and the budget approved.

To register for ZOOM attendance visit:
www.rideautwphistory.org



Preserving the Past to Enrich the Future



More details on Page 2

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

President's Message

Happy and Prosperous New Year Everyone!

By the time that you read this, much planning for the upcoming 2023 program of the Society will have been undertaken. Your Executive Committee has planned a far-ranging program, from the NHL, to railroads, and on to the publication and launch of books on local history. However, further assistance is needed.

The RTHS Executive has 13 positions; this is a large group for the size of the membership, yet this is the secret of the Society's success – tasks can be spread over a greater number of people so no single task becomes too onerous. Those who attended the Christmas party will realize that these types of events do not happen by accident. Help is required. The Nominating Committee will present a slate of candidates at the next AGM. Ten of the 13 RTHS Executive positions are slated, but we are looking for a Vice President, Secretary, Program Director, Publications Director and possibly a director-at-large.

Membership on the Executive provides an opportunity to interact with as congenial a group of colleagues as you will find anywhere. So, if you have an interest in any of these positions, please contact me at rideautwphistory@gmail.com or culhamcpee@gmail.com. The Annual General Meeting/Bring and Brag event is coming up on January 18th, and it would be terrific to be able to provide the membership with a full slate of candidates.

The "Bring and Brag" portion of the meeting is always interesting. This will be a hybrid in-person/Zoom meeting. The in-person meeting will be held at the City of Ottawa Client Centre on Roger Stevens Dr., North Gower January 18th, at 7:30. As an example, I will be talking a little about my family history and an 1826 letter that sets out family expectations for sons and daughters leaving for the New World. For those with an object or story to present, the easiest way is to attend the meeting in person; however, we will be able to accommodate those who wish to participate remotely either through sharing their screen, or by sending me a file with the presentation material in advance.

Looking forward to seeing everyone.

Doug Culham, RTHS President

January Event Details

**Bring & Brag and RTHS Annual General Meeting
January 18th, 7:30 p.m., Client Service Centre,
2155 Roger Stevens Drive, North Gower**

Bring and Brag

By popular demand, our January meeting will feature another session of the very popular "Bring and Brag". Participants are encouraged to display an item of importance to them and share with others why this object is of significance. Artifacts can be brought to the in-person meeting at the Client Centre in North Gower, or presented via Zoom as was done in recent years. There will be a computer and screen available on site for those who wish to make a PowerPoint presentation, so bring a memory stick with you or be prepared to share your Zoom screen. Zoom participants are asked to register their intention to participate by emailing rideautwphistory@gmail.com and providing a short description of their treasured possession.

Annual General Meeting

The Bring and Brag event will be preceded by the Society's Annual General Meeting. During this short business meeting, we will elect the members of the RTHS Executive Committee for 2023 and approve the year's budget. The Nominating Committee will present a slate of candidates for the Executive and there will also be a request for nominations from the floor. This will provide an opportunity for participants to join the Executive team either as a director-at-large or with responsibility for a particular subject matter. Positions that are currently either vacant or filled in an acting capacity include Vice President, Secretary and Directors of Publications and Programs. If any of these positions is of interest to you, please contact Doug Culham at 613-692-8260 or via email at rideautwphistory@gmail.com.

Membership

Owen Cooke

Happy New Year and welcome to a new membership year for RTHS.

Membership dues remain unchanged for 2023 - \$15 for an individual membership, \$20 for a family or \$100 for a life membership.

A membership form is attached to this newsletter or may be downloaded from the website, <https://rideautwphistory.org/membership/>. Members may renew either by

mail or by electronic funds transfer - just follow the instructions on the form or on the website. If you renew by electronic means, please also forward a copy of the membership form to the e-mail address.

Our membership currently stands at 28 life members, four honorary members for 2023 and one single and two family renewals for 2023.

Report on December's Presentation/Dinner Event

by David McNiece, with notes from Bill Tupper

The Rideau Township Historical Society Executive finished off the 2022 schedule of historical related events by hosting a Christmas event on December 14, 2022 at Strathmere House, North Gower. The evening included dinner followed by a presentation from Bill Tupper on the fascinating history of the very house we were sitting in.



Strathmere House ~ built 1860

The Strathmere/Phelan Farm is a very prominent and historical farm in the old Rideau Township.

The evening event started with a meet-and-greet at 5pm in the main Strathmere House dining/living room area with a selection of hors d'oeuvres. There were approximately 40 RTHS members and guests in attendance.

At about 6pm, attendees moved to the larger dining area attached to



Grand Hallway

the house where dinner was served. The RTHS president, Doug Culham, acted as Master of Ceremonies and welcomed everyone.

Following a well-appreciated meal, the main presentation for the evening was given by Bill Tupper who spoke on "The History of the Strathmere Farm," including the house and the families who first settled there and developed the property which today is a beautiful landmark in the area.

Bill divided his presentation (summarized below) into three main sections: the farm property itself; the development of the historic fine-looking farmhouse, and then the families who lived on, developed and worked the farm from its very beginning.

The Farm

John Cole settled on Lot 19 Con 2 in the township of North Gower in the early 1830s. About five years later, in 1835, he wrote to his friend John Phelan in Ireland and invited him to emigrate to Canada, particularly to North Gower, and enticed him with the availability of good farm land. John Phelan took up the offer and at the age of 32 immigrated to North Gower (a brave move



Pre-Dinner Mix & Mingle



Seated for Dinner



RTHS President Doug Culham as Master of Ceremonies

indeed!), purchased the adjoining property of Lot 16 Con 2, and began farming. Soon thereafter he married Mary McCarthy from nearby Goulburn. In 1846 the Phelans enlarged their farm holdings and purchased the adjoining Lot 17 to bring their farm holding to approximately 400 acres.



Bill Tupper Presenting

By the 1880s, the land under cultivation was approximately 300 acres. The Phelans primarily operated a dairy farm and sold milk to the local cheese factories in Carsonby and North Gower, with fluid milk eventually going to the Ottawa market. Also on the farm, the Phelans raised sheep and beef cattle, bred thoroughbred horses and kept approximately a half dozen draft horses for use on the farm. To top that off, they also operated a vineyard and grew some grain crops. They were a very industrious and ambitious farm family to say the least.

The Farm House

In 1859, the aforementioned John Cole had built a stone house which was situated on the lot south of the Phelan farm. John Cole at the time bragged that his house was the finest house in the area. John Phelan, not to be outdone by this, started building a house for his family in 1860. This house took about 5 years to build and about 10 years to completely finish. The house was built of field stone derived locally with corners and door lintels built of cut stone from a quarry in Fallowfield. The first floor consisted of a parlour, living room, dining room and bedroom. A winding staircase with two alcoves for religious symbols led to the second floor. The second floor consisted of a central hall, four bedrooms and a windowed alcove which originally served as a chapel. The house included two kitchens (winter and summer) with three upstairs bedrooms for employees, and a carriage house with three upstairs bedroom.

The Families

The Phelans had 15 children (2 of whom died before the age of 9). All were born in their log house, so you can imagine things were quite crowded. The family was quite accomplished, with 2 sons going on to be medical doctors, 1 son becoming a respected railroad builder, and one son (John Jr.) staying home to farm. One of the daughters married and moved to Nebraska, but there was no specific information available on the rest of the family.

John Phelan (Senior) died in 1874 and his wife Mary (1822-1899) lived with John Jr. who married and had 7 children – three sons and four daughters. Two of the sons (Edward and Alphonse) remained bachelors and took over the farm. They built a new barn in 1920 making the farm operation more comfortable and convenient.

In 1952 the sons decided to sell the farm which then changed hands twice between 1952-1954, at which time Alex and Eleanor Sim (both sociologists) bought the farm. Alex was an adjunct professor at the University of Ottawa and had a practicing clinic in the city. He gave lectures and seminars widely during this period. The Sims bought the farm as a country retreat and renamed the farm Strathmere. They modeled the Strathmere farm after European Folk Schools where city dwellers could escape from the stresses of urban life and work on their personal growth and development. This program was built around seminars and retreats which could last a day, a weekend, or longer. These programs proved to be a great success.

In 1957 the Sims moved a nearby original one room school, built in 1890, to the farm and developed it into a not-for-profit art and drama school known as “The Valley School of the Arts”. This school was a summer day camp program and operated for 16 years.

One might suspect Alex was not cut out to be a farmer but he turned out quite the opposite. Alex rebuilt or improved the surface drainage and tile-drained 300 acres of the farm. He essentially got the farm ready for a modern cash cropping operation and started growing corn and soybeans. He also assembled a herd of approximately 100 grade and purebred black angus cattle and improved the herd with breeding genetics. In addition, he built a “henery” for 3000 laying hens and assembled a support system for egg cleaning, grading, packaging, storage and shipping.

Unfortunately, Alex and his wife Eleanor divorced, and the farm was split up. Alex built an energy efficient house on his lot and continued farming for a period before selling and moving to southern Ontario. Eleanor sold her part of the farm (lot 16) to Walter Baker and his family in 1978.

Walter was a Professor of Public Policy and Management at the University of Ottawa, and for a time was an Assistant Deputy Minister in the Federal Government. The Bakers developed Strathmere into a management training centre, later into a wedding and special events facility and recently, into a spa and wellness retreat.

Many thanks to Bill Tupper for the above fascinating story: **WHAT A LAND, FARM AND RELATED FAMILY HISTORY RIGHT IN OUR COMMUNITY!**



Justin Theriault and Susan Toman Performing

After Bill Tupper's talk, we were treated to entertaining Celtic music from the very accomplished duo of harpist, Susan Toman, and flute/whistle player, Justin Theriault.

Following the concert, Doug Culham presented a bouquet of flowers to Susan McKellar who is retiring from the RTHS Executive after many years of unfailing service to the Rideau Township Historical Society. Door prizes, which had originally been made by



Doug Culham Presents Susan McKellar with a Bouquet with Thanks for Her Many Years of Service to RTHS



Event Coordinator Maureen McPhee

Dorothy Gray as centre pieces for the 2020 party that never happened, were awarded, and Brian Earl added a special thanks to Maureen McPhee for organizing and putting most of the finer details together for the event.

The warm evening activities ended about 9pm with a lot of festive Christmas chat among the attendees.



Door Prizes Courtesy of Dorothy Gray

DID YOU KNOW?

RTHS makes regular posts of Rideau history-related material to our Facebook page (see link below.) Posted under the heading "It Happened in Rideau," subject matter includes school photos, newspaper articles, extracts from the Tweedsmuir History records for North Gower, Kars and Manotick, and much more. Recent items have included:

- North Gower School Section #3 1929 senior class photo
- An Ottawa Journal newspaper article from 1948 on the retirement of Manotick Postmaster Harry Lindsay
- Photo of the North Gower baseball club – 1922
- Story about creating a 2,000 foot drainage ditch on the Whalen farm near Kars using dynamite

We invite you to check us out.

How to Connect with RTHS



<https://rideautwphistory.org/>



www.facebook.com/rideautownshiphistory



rideautwphistory@gmail.com



<https://twitter.com/RideauTpHS>

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!

