



Rideau Township Historical Society

October

Newsletter

2023

*Preserving
the Past
to Enrich
the Future*

October Event

Rideau Township Historical Society

Presents

A Preview of Our Forthcoming Publication

North Gower

A Village History: 1820 ~ 2020

**Thursday,
Oct. 19
2023
7:30 P.M.**



**Alfred Taylor
Recreation
Centre,
North Gower**

North Gower: A Village History 1820 - 2020 traces the development of this eastern Ontario village as it grew from an obscure crossroads in the wilderness to a thriving, self-contained village and seat of government, ultimately becoming a residential and commuter community within the City of Ottawa.

Launched in 2016, this project has culminated in a 400 page illustrated book researched and written by a small group of dedicated RTHS members, who at this event will provide an overview of the publication. *North Gower: A Village History* will be available for pre-order at this event, with delivery in time for Christmas!

**This is a FREE, IN-PERSON and ZOOM EVENT
ALL ARE WELCOME!**

For more information, or to attend via ZOOM visit rideautwphistory.org,
or scan the QR code on this page



Preserving the Past to Enrich the Future



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

President's Message

The City of Ottawa provides much of the operational funding for RTHS. Each year at this time, reports are submitted to the Heritage Program of the City to explain how we used the resources. This month I thought I would take you through a little of what the Society has accomplished in 2023.

By the end of 2023, RTHS will have held 9 events and organized an excursion at which members and guests heard presentations on and engaged in discussion of a range of heritage-related topics. We explored such themes as the development of transportation routes and modes of transport both locally, regionally and beyond; the growth of local communities, particularly the village of North Gower; the importance of diversity in sports organizations; the building of local military defence infrastructure over time; and the historical significance of cartography.

Our monthly programming will have included:

1. January, 2023, AGM and "Bring and Brag" presentations by members
2. February '23, "Willie O'Ree, First Black Player in the NHL" by Willie O'Ree
3. March '23, "No Railroads in Rideau Township" by Doug Matheson
4. April '23, "David Thompson, Canada's Greatest Cartographer" by Richard Van Loon
5. May '23, "Thomas McKay, The builder of Ottawa" by Alistair Sweeney
6. June '23, Excursion to Eastern Ontario Railway Museum and the Heritage House Museum in Smiths Falls
7. Sept. '23, Book Launch, "Steamboats on the Rideau" by Maureen McPhee
8. Oct. '23, Book Launch, "North Gower: A Village History" by four local authors
9. Nov.'23, "Armories and Drill Halls of Eastern Ontario" by Owen Cooke
10. Dec.'23, Christmas celebration and story-telling.

By the end of the year, we will have published two books "Steamboats on the Rideau" by Maureen McPhee and the "North Gower: A Village History" by four local authors: Susan McKeller, Bill Tupper, Owen Cooke and Ruth Wright. The next significant item on the horizon is work on the "Historical Atlas Project".

The Society has a significant online presence. The goal of RTHS's online activities is to make historical and heritage information about the former Rideau Township accessible to RTHS members and the general public. The RTHS website is both a repository for and gateway to many aspects of Rideau Township history, including Community profiles, RTHS publications, monthly blog posts, newsletters, and additional items of interest, as well as a registration portal for RTHS events. RTHS's monthly newsletter contains a report on the previous month's speaker event, a preview of the next event, and other items of interest to members.

Anyone can connect with RTHS through:

1. Website <https://rideautwphistory.org/>
2. Facebook www.facebook.com/rideautownshiphistory
3. Email rideautwphistory@gmail.com
4. Twitter: <https://twitter.com/RideauTpHS>

I think we should all be proud of these achievements.

~ Doug Culham

RTHS in the Community



RTHS had a publications table during the recent "Taste of Manotick" event. This photo shows RTHS volunteers Maureen McPhee and Sandy McNiece promoting the Society's extensive selection of books focused on various aspects of the history and heritage of the former Rideau Township.

"History cannot give us a program for the future, but it can give us a fuller understanding of ourselves, and of our common humanity, so that we can better face the future."

Robert Penn Warren

Report on Our Septemeber Event

STEAMBOATS ON THE RIDEAU

Maureen McPhee served as the Curator of the Dickinson House Museum in Manotick, Ontario from 2014 to 2021. In 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, she curated an exhibit entitled "Steamboats on the Rideau", which opened to the public in July of that year. In her presentation to RTHS on September 20, 2023, she shared with us the key things that she had learned while researching and preparing the exhibit, as well as the accompanying booklet that she authored.

Maureen began her presentation by paying tribute to Coral Lindsay, the founder and first Curator of the Dickinson House Museum, who passed away in 2014. Over a period of many years, Coral collected information on Rideau Canal steamboats. She had often talked about having a steamboats exhibit on the third floor of the museum, where she had mounted many displays on a wide range of subjects. So, it was a logical progression towards a decision to install such a special exhibit.

When Maureen began work on the exhibit, she learned that Coral had staged exhibits on the steamboats in many venues over the years, including the Central Canada Exhibition. For one such display at the Exhibition, Coral not only constructed a wharf, but created a mockup of the canal itself.

The Rideau Archives in North Gower has a collection of Coral's research papers on steamboats, and her family also provided Maureen with access to a large body of research and display materials that were found in Coral's house after she passed away. Rod Brazier photographed all of these panels, as well as the individual images affixed to the panels or loose in the collection. This was the first of Rod's many contributions to the exhibit, including his design of the display panels for the exhibit and the accompanying booklet entitled *Steamboats on the Rideau*, which was recently published.



Maureen McPhee Presenting



Coral Lindsay



Coral Lindsay's Mockup of the Rideau Canal at the Central Canada Exhibition

Maureen advised the audience that she would not go through all of the information that is contained in this new booklet; rather, she would focus on the key things that she learned from Coral's and other research materials that were consulted to create the steamboats exhibit and publication.

1. Rideau Canal's Purpose Not Just Military

Maureen noted that she had learned in school that the Rideau Canal was built solely for the military purpose of providing a secure transportation corridor in the event of an American invasion cutting off the St. Lawrence. While this was a major determining factor, it is also the case that at that time, there were rapids in the St. Lawrence that seriously impeded vessels from travelling upstream. The Rideau Canal, as well as locks on the Ottawa River that opened in 1834, made it possible to go around these rapids.

During its first decade of operation, the Rideau Canal became a vital link in the transport of goods on steamboats travelling a triangular route from Montreal, up the Ottawa River to Bytown, and then down the Rideau Canal to Kingston. When travelling downstream on the St. Lawrence, vessels were able to run the rapids for the return journey to Montreal.



Triangular Route Used by Steamboats

2. Canal Built for Steamboats

Colonel John By had the foresight to have the Rideau Canal built with steamboats in mind. The dimensions of the locks - 134 ft. long, 33 ft. wide, with a minimum depth of 5 feet - was sufficient to accommodate the steamboats of the time. As well, the absence of towpaths in the design demonstrates that steamboat traffic was anticipated.

3. 1840s the Golden Age of Rideau Steamboat Transport

The third thing Maureen learned relates to the important role played by canal steamboats in the 1840s. The impression she had held prior to working on the steamboats project was that since the Rideau Canal was never needed for military purposes, it fell into disuse until it later became a route for pleasure boats. In fact, during the 1840s, the canal played a pivotal role in the transport of goods and people in British North America. This was a period of free trade access to both the British and American markets. Steamboats on the Rideau carried agricultural products to both markets and shipped sawn lumber to the United States. As a result, the period has acquired the title of the golden age of Rideau steamboat transport

4. Role in Immigration

The canal and its steamboats played a key role during the upsurge of immigration in the 1840s. Immigrants arriving at Montreal also followed the triangular route from Montreal to Bytown to Kingston, where they transferred to Great Lakes steamers to continue their journey westward. Travelling by steamboat at the time was, however, less than pleasant, with references made to the “dirty little canal steamers.” Accommodations were cramped, with sleeping places separated into those for ladies and gentlemen, the areas being described by one traveler as “less airy” than could have been desired.¹



Views along the canal were also quite different and less beautiful than we are used to today. The construction of the Rideau Canal used a process of building dams to drown waterfalls and rapids, as opposed to digging out

channels. The dam constructed at Jones Falls, for example, was the highest dam in North America at the time it was built. The result of this canal construction technique was denuded banks and drowned forests.



"The Drowned Land" George Seton, 1844

5. Steamboats' Role in the Growth of Communities

As the number of steamboats using the canal grew, communities along the way built wharfs to serve and be served by the steamers. If Coral had been giving the presentation, she would no doubt have referred to Lindsay's wharf in Kars, which was established in 1832 by her husband's ancestor James Lindsay and was a stopping point for steamboats for over 100 years. Many competing shipping and forwarding companies developed and prospered along the canal route. One such company was operated by Moss Kent Dickinson, who later in life became the owner of the milling complex in Manotick. Given its location in Dickinson House, the steamboats exhibit and booklet both focused on Dickinson, but there were many other forwarders not only in Ottawa and Kingston, but also in towns such as Merrickville, Smiths Falls and Newboro.

6. Mid-19th Century Regional Transport

Although the beginning of railway competition and the building of St. Lawrence locks bigger than those on the Rideau caused the canal to lose its previous pivotal role in the Montreal, Ottawa, Kingston triangle, as communities developed, regional steamboat transport continued to be important from the 1850s to the 1870s. With the ending of free trade in grain with the United States and the growth of a market for cheese both domestically and in Britain, farmers along the Rideau route began to shift to dairy farming and many cheese factories were opened.



Daisy Cheese Factory, Manotick

7. The Development of Steamboat Tourism

The focus on Moss Kent Dickinson in the Dickinson House exhibit and its accompanying booklet is strengthened somewhat by the fact that in 1863, he was the instigator of a major new initiative in passenger travel. Still living in Ottawa at the time, he launched the 107.5-foot *City of Ottawa*, which was purpose-built for the Rideau and focused on passenger comfort. It was more powerful than existing steamers, although surprisingly it was a side paddle wheeler at a time when screw propellers were becoming more common. The vessel was stylishly decorated with the intent of attracting wealthy travelers, offering two-berth staterooms and other appointments that caused the *Ottawa Citizen* to describe it as “the best boat that has yet ridden on the Rideau.”ⁱⁱ

Other steamboats owners followed Dickinson’s lead, introducing new passenger-focused vessels such as the 99-foot *Ella Ross*, launched in 1873. It was one of the first iron steamboats on the Rideau and boasted plush chairs and carpeting. Travelling both day and night, vessels such as this could make the trip from Ottawa to Kingston in a day and half, while in a modern pleasure boat, traversing the Rideau Canal takes about 5 days.

What is particularly interesting about the *Ella Ross*, however, is that it pioneered the practice of making a round trip around the traditional triangular route that had been relied upon in earlier times, but this time for pleasure purposes. As stated in an advertising poster, the *Ella Ross* was the only passenger steamer making a weekly round trip from Montreal via the Ottawa and Rideau Canal to Kingston and then down the St. Lawrence to Montreal, “running all the Rapids and passing through the matchless scenery of the Rideau Lakes and 1000 islands by daylight.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The development of tourist steamboat travel on the Rideau was no doubt influenced by the fact that with the

passage of time, vegetation had regrown along the route providing a more pleasant cruising experience.

IRON PALACE PASSENGER STEAMER

W. GARRETT, MASTER.
Will commence her

REGULAR WEEKLY EXCURSION TRIPS THE FIRST OF JUNE,
Making the ROUND TRIP WEEKLY, from MONTREAL via OTTAWA and RIDEAU CANAL to KINGSTON and thence down the St. Lawrence to MONTREAL, running all the Rapids, and passing through the matchless scenery of the Rideau Lakes and 1000 Islands by daylight.
The ELLA ROSS will remain over Sunday at the

“1,000 ISLAND PARK,” 1,000

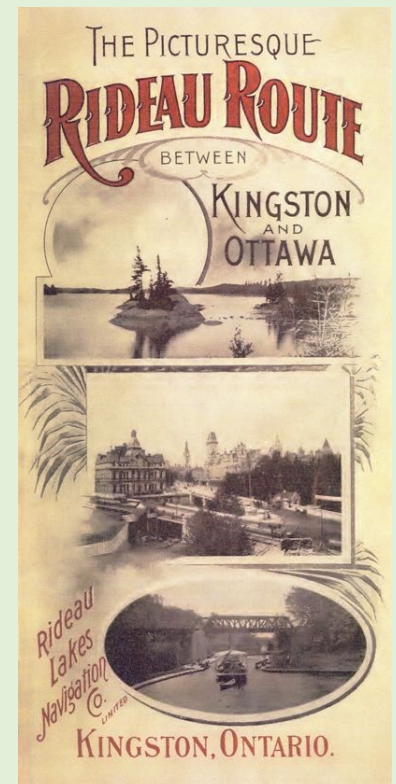
(Calling at Alexandria Bay each Monday morning.) The ELLA ROSS is the only passenger steamer making the round trip. Fare only \$14 for ROUND TRIP; meals and berths included. Passengers per steamer Varuna on Saturday can connect with the Ella Ross for the round trip, at Kingston or 1,000 Island Park.
For further particulars apply to

P. J. SHANNON, Agent,
Rathbun's Office

8. The Pinnacle of Steamboat Tourism on the Rideau: 1880s – 1914

The most storied steamboats on the Rideau system are the large, luxurious vessels of the late 19th and early-20th centuries, which were devoted primarily to passenger excursions and have been dubbed “palace excursion steamers”. The man behind this development was Captain Daniel Noonan from Westport. His Rideau Lakes Navigation Company based in Kingston carried out a significant passenger as well as freight trade for over 30 years.

A 20-page illustrated pamphlet described the delights of a voyage from Kingston to Ottawa, including Jones’ Falls, which was described as “the most beautiful spot in Ontario,” its dam being a “stupendous piece of work.”^{iv} While the beauty comparison was perhaps a shade overstated, modern promotional material still describes the dam as “an engineering marvel...one of the jewels of the Rideau.”^v

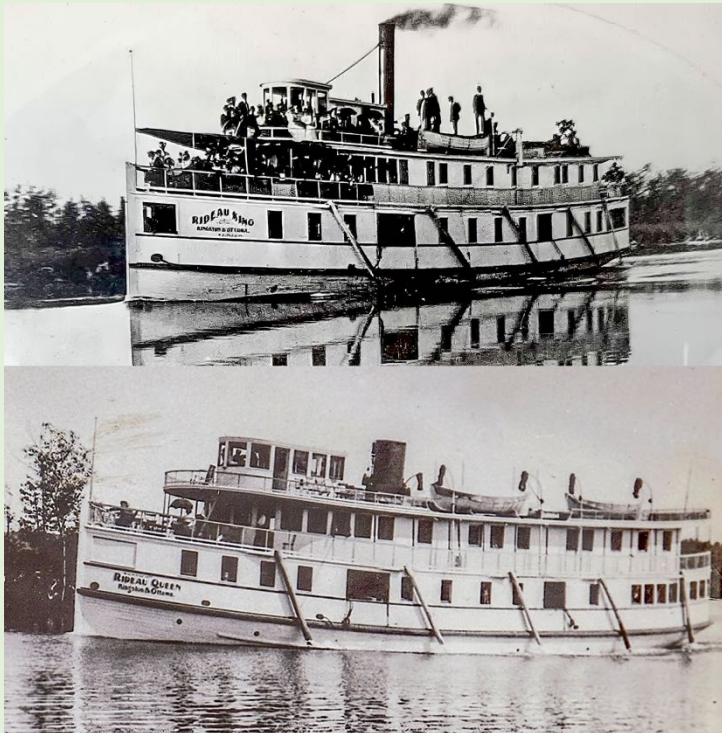


Captain Noonan's first vessel of this type was the *Rideau Belle*, launched in 1885. It offered unprecedented luxury including cherrywood paneling and sofas with satin cushions. This was followed in 1893 by the 107-foot-long *James Swift*, which had steam heating, electric lighting, and stateroom bathrooms with hot and cold running water. Following fires in 1901 and 1906, the *James Swift* was refurbished as the *Rideau King*. But *la pièce de résistance* of the palace steamers was Noonan's *Rideau Queen*, launched in 1900. It was the largest and most luxurious passenger steamboat to cruise the Rideau, with engines that allowed it to travel from Ottawa to Kingston in less than 24 hours.

The *Rideau Queen* and its sister ships were successfully promoted in the American market. In addition to accoutrements such as on the *Rideau King*, the *Queen* was advertised as having marble wash basins, spring mattresses and cabins ventilated by steam fans that offered passengers unprecedented temperature control.

9. Steamers Also Served the Local Population

While the palace steamers caused a huge growth in tourism on the Rideau, Maureen did not know previously the extent of the service provided to local people. Moss Kent Dickinson had in the 1860s initiated day excursions whereby people could sail in one direction on one of the large steamers and then return the same day on a sister boat. This continued into the 20th century.



Steamboats Rideau King and Rideau Queen

10. Why the Steamboat Era Ended

There were several factors that contributed to steamboats no longer holding sway on the Rideau after 1914. These included:

- The death of Captain Noonan in that year;
- The opening of a Canadian Northern Railway line roughly paralleling the canal, thus creating a land-based, 4-season version of the historic triangular route;
- The beginning of the First World War, which naturally put a damper on tourism; and
- The rise of motorboats and automobiles.

The most significant of these factors was the introduction of the internal combustion outboard motor, which allowed independent small boat owners to explore the Rideau Canal on their own.

The Steamboats Exhibit:

Maureen then turned to a discussion of the Steamboats on the Rideau exhibit that was installed on the third floor of Dickinson House in the winter of 2020 during the early days of the pandemic. Fortunately, most of the artifacts needed for the display had been gathered just before lockdowns descended in earnest, with great help from members of RTHS, who searched their attics, basements, and barns to find appropriate items.



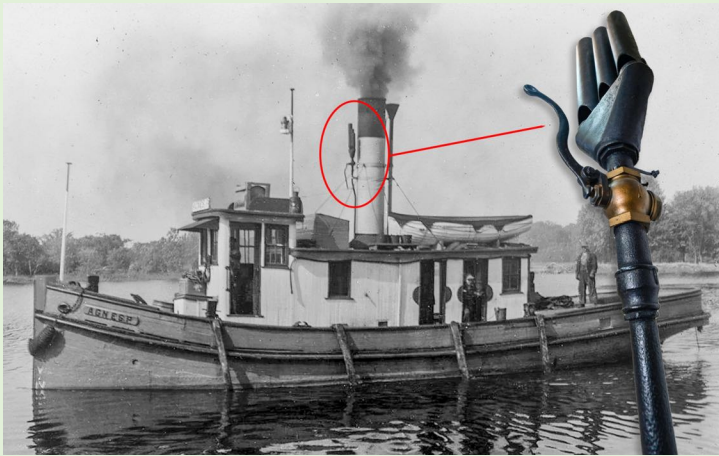
Steamboats Exhibit at Dickinson House Museum

Mock Wharf

The pictures of one of Coral's steamboats exhibits that were located during research for the exhibit provided some ideas for the display in Dickinson House. A mock wharf was created, reflecting the types of products that were exported from this region, such as grain, cheese and apples, and imports such as tea, nails, and tableware. The wharf also showed the fuel used by steamboats – wood initially and subsequently coal.

The Agnes P

Ever since Maureen began serving as a volunteer guide at Dickinson House, she knew that it housed an important artifact that linked it to the history of steamboats on the Rideau. A key feature of the steamboat exhibit was the whistle of the last steamboat on the Rideau, the *Agnes P*. This 56-foot vessel worked as a Department of Transport canal maintenance and inspection boat, helping to do things such as setting out channel markers and hauling booms of square timbers to repair lock gates.



Agnes P. and Her Whistle

There is an intriguing story of how the *Agnes P* met its end and how its whistle came to be brought to the museum by a past President of RTHS, but Maureen left this it for readers of the *Steamboats on the Rideau* booklet to discover. The book also contains an excerpt from the *Ottawa Journal* describing the hardships and dangers endured by the vessel's 4-man crew. Suffice it say that it was a far cry from the marble sinks and satin cushions of the palace steamers.

Steamboat Models

A key feature of the Dickinson House steamboats exhibit was something that Coral did not have, i.e., two beautiful scale models of the vessels that operated on the Rideau Canal. They represent two different vessel designs – paddle wheelers in the early years and later screw propellers. The models were built by Maureen's husband Doug Culham. Coral knew that Doug was a sailor and had button-holed him on many occasions about making a presentation to the Society on steamboats. To honour Coral's wishes, Maureen then turned the floor over to Doug to describe how he created models of Moss Kent Dickinson's steamer the *Bytown*, and the pinnacle of Rideau Canal steamboats, the *Rideau Queen*.

Doug stated that an early example of the types of boats that would have travelled the canal during the 19th and early 20th centuries was the steam vessel *Bytown*, owned by Moss Kent Dickinson. The vessel was constructed of

wood and was 92 feet long and 17 feet wide, carrying both passengers and freight. One of the unique features of the *Bytown* was the walking beam/paddlewheel steam propulsion system. The paddlewheels made the ship extremely maneuverable, a distinct advantage in the confined waters of the canal. The walking beam was simple to construct but made the boats somewhat top heavy, suitable for river travel but not for open water voyages.



Model of Sidewheeler Bytown by Doug Culham

The hull of the *Bytown* model is based on a wood kit of a Swiss Lake paddle wheeler. The deck and superstructure were then scaled from a single image of the *Bytown* found in a pamphlet, as well as statistical information available for ships that plied the canal.

The second model in the steamboats exhibit was of the *Rideau Queen*, the luxury steam vessel of the day. It travelled the length of the Rideau Canal in the early 20th century prior to World War 1. Built in Kingston in 1900, it carried up to 150 passengers in addition to freight. It was constructed of wood and was 108 feet long and 24 feet wide. The model is illustrative of changing technology of the day - gone are the paddlewheels to be replaced by a propeller. The *Rideau Queen* was wider and marginally longer than the *Bytown*, and the result was a significant increase in carrying capacity.



Model of Rideau Queen by Doug Culham

The *Rideau Queen* model started as a wood kit of a steamboat that sailed the waters of Lake Erie between Buffalo and Detroit. Once again, the deck and superstructure were highly modified based on the many images of the *Rideau Queen* that are available.

At the end of his part of the presentation, Doug acknowledged the influence of Coral Lindsay and said: "I did my

best Coral; I contributed the boats; I hope that is good enough.”



Our "In-Person" Audience at Manotick United Church

Maureen brought the presentation to a close by saying that one of the things that finally lured her into curating the steamboats exhibit is the experiences that she and Doug have had as former owners of a 27-foot sailboat and currently a 35-foot house cruiser, which they found as a derelict and have been fixing up for years. They have traveled the Rideau Canal down to Kingston and beyond in both boats. Maureen said that she had ended the booklet and would close the presentation by referencing the feeling one gets when working one’s way through the very narrow and twisting channels of the Rideau Canal and wondering what it would have been like to be in a small boat and see the towering *Rideau Queen* coming around the corner. It would take one’s breath away.



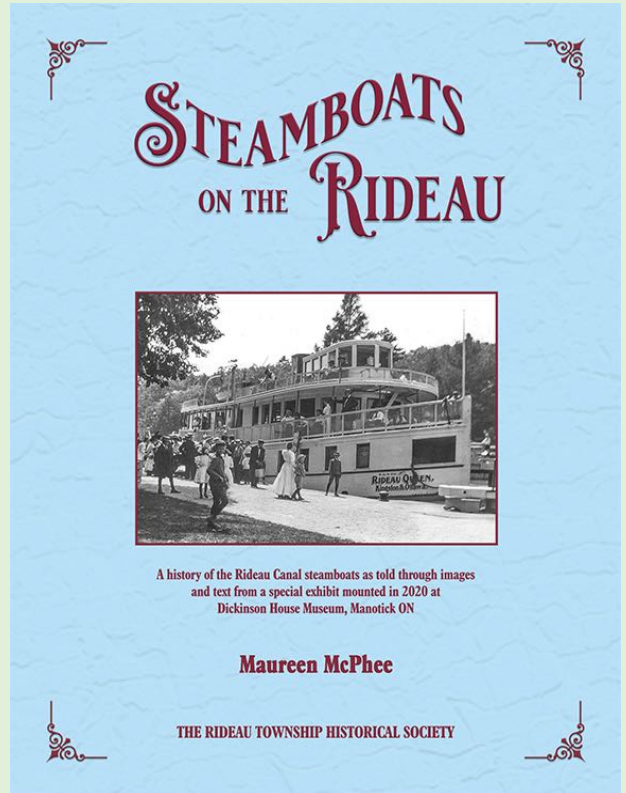
Figure 1 Maureen created this image by inserting a historic image of the *Rideau Queen* into a 2022 photograph of a "Le Boat" vessel approaching a canal lock. The human figures in the two images were used to determine appropriate sizing of the *Rideau Queen* within the modern image.

References:

- I. Mike Nelles, *Steamboating on the Rideau Canal*, (Ottawa: Historical Society of Ottawa, August 2007), p. 9.
- II. *Ottawa Citizen*, July 8, 1864, p. 2.
- III. Poster for Ella Ross, Coral Lindsay Collection. (See image in Maureen McPhee, *Steamboats on the Rideau*, p. 5.)
- IV. "The Picturesque Rideau Route between Kingston and Ottawa, Kingston, Ont., [1902?], Canadian Pamphlets 03667, Coral Lindsay Collection.

- V. "Rideau Canal – National Historic Site – World Heritage Site" (rideau-info.com/canal/history/hist-canal.html).

Note: The booklet *Steamboats on the Rideau* is available for sale for \$10.00 through the RTHS website: <https://rideautwphistory.org/books/>. Makes a great gift!



RTHS Online

RTHS Website

Be sure to stop by the RTHS website to keep up-to-date on RTHS activities and browse new content.

This month we are featuring "British Home Children in Canada ~ Part 1" an article originally published in the RTHS newsletter in 2011.

RTHS Facebook Page

Here are some of the items we’ve posted on the RTHS Facebook page in September:

- The Presence of the Past articles: 1070 Bridge St., Manotick; 6295 Fourth Line Rd., North Gower; 2944 Pierce Road; 1070 Bridge St., Manotick
- The Absence of the Past in North Gower Twp: 1125 Clapp Lane, Manotick (The Clapp House)
- Reflections on Labour Day in Wartime
- George Craig & Sons, Village Merchants, North Gower
- S.S.#8 Marlborough (Goodstown) - 1925

- Women's Institute Festival Winners - 1935
- Robberies in North Gower & Kars - 1939
- The Kars Women's Institute Efforts During the Great War (1914-1918)
- SS#10 North Gower (Manotick Public School) - 1969
- North Gower Methodist Church Orchestra - circa 1930s
- A Drive to North Gower - 125 years ago
- Wesley United Church Centennial (Burritts Rapids)
- Manotick Public School - 1911-12
- Kars Continuation School Baseball Team - 1939
- North Gower Continuation School - 1935

Click on the links under “How to Connect with RTHS” on this page 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 in-person; tax receipts for donations will be issued at the end of the year.

Thank you for supporting RTHS!