



On the Castor, near Vernon, early 1900's

Osgoode Township Historical Society & Museum

Vernon School
P.O. Box 83 - Vernon, Ontario
K0A 3J0

Newsletter

VOLUME 9 JANUARY 1983 Number 1

1. THE CASTOR RIVER PROJECT

The photograph on this year's newsletter shows Mr. David Cooke rowing on a surprisingly wide Castor River near Vernon. It was taken by Roy Dan Cameron sometime in the early 1900's and is a reminder of one of the ongoing projects in our township's history.

Over the next two years, we will be gathering together, artifacts, historical items, photographs, stories, reminiscences, and other information that will help tell the story of the importance of the three branches of the Castor River to the development of our township, and to those who lived along its banks.

We intend to publish a small book on the material we gather and have already in hand, several stories of "North Branch" from Allison Dempsey and Evelyn Felton. There will also be a new exhibit on the Castor River set up in the museum.

Once again we ask that anyone with items suitable for display, photographs, or stories related to life on the Castor (logging, lumbering, milling, fishing, ice cutting, winter travel, early settlement, trapping, boats, swimming, dams, bridges etc.) please contact: DAVID GRAY, Box 381, Metcalfe K0A 2P0 --- 821-2640.

2. THE EDITOR'S DESK IS STILL EMPTY

Since the first newsletter issued by our society came out in 1974, the writing and putting together of submitted articles for each issue has been done by Elizabeth Stuart. The society owes her a great debt for this endeavour (as well as for many others)! We sincerely hope that she is soon back in good health and able to carry on with her valuable work on our archives. To replace Elizabeth as editor we will have to either take turns or form a committee. INTERESTED?????

Contributors to this issue: Katie Campbell, Mike Daley, Allison Dempsey, David Gray and Viviane Shorey.

3. HERITAGE DAY - Saturday, February 19, --- 1 to 4 p.m.

Plan to attend; see old friends; meet new members; and don't forget to tell that neighbour of yours who hasn't been to the museum yet!

This year we will be offering visitors and new members, on-the-spot assistance in looking up information on the history of their house, property, or ancestors.

Heritage Day will also be your last chance to see our temporary exhibit - "The Rideau River and Osgoode Township". This exhibit was shown in Osgoode, Kars, Metcalfe and at the museum in Vernon during 1982.

Our regular exhibits of farm and wood-working tools, Indian baskets, pioneer kitchen and childrens' clothes and toys from the old days will be of interest to new members and visitors.

4. SOCIETY DEVELOPMENTS AND CHANGES

To meet the revised standards for museums receiving provincial operating grants, we have had to change the administrative set-up of our society. We now have a BOARD OF DIRECTORS who are responsible for policy, programs, funding and development of the society and museum. Under the board are two equivalent committees to oversee the operations of the two parts of the society. This is the new organizational set-up, with the names of those who filled the positions for 1982:

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 1982-83: Gerald Morris, Chairman Alex Campbell
Gordon Blair Douglas MacMillan Michael Daley
Harvey Linton David Gray Margaret Robb
Isobel Lewis

HISTORICAL SOCIETY COMMITTEE: Michael Daley, Chairman
Katie Campbell, Vice Chairperson
Grace Blair, Recording Secretary Harry Anderson, Corres. Secretary
Jennie Dow, Treasurer Margaret Robb

MUSEUM MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE: David Gray, Chairman
Viviane Shorey, Curator Arlowa Ferguson, Secretary
Margaret Robb, Treasurer Katie Campbell
Alice Craig

SOCIAL COMMITTEE:

Anne Carkner
Verda McNaughton
Alice Craig

MUSEUM STAFF:

Viviane Shorey, Curator
Arlowa Ferguson, Curator
Alice Craig

PUBLICATIONS:

Elizabeth Stuart, Editor, Newsletter

5. MUSEUM NOTES:

During these dark cold days of winter it is very nice indeed to have some good news to give to the many friends and members of the Osgoode Township Historical Society and Museum.

As many of you will know, we have had a number of years of uncertainty concerning our permanent location and future development. Since 1973 we have been leasing the museum building in Vernon from the township. Although the township council has always given us a great deal of moral support they were only prepared to give us a short term lease renewable each year.

The Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, the ministry which is responsible for many of the museums in Ontario, has been urging us to improve our museum, so that in time, it becomes a more attractive and interesting place for the public to visit. To do this, of course, and because of the expense it would involve, it was necessary for the museum to have a permanent home. At the same time, another community organization was eager to take over the school house and the site which we occupy in the village of Vernon. So we found ourselves in a rather difficult position.

The Township Council therefore asked consultant Harold Kalman and his associates, to produce a feasibility study to determine the future needs of the museum and to advise us as to the best location within the township for our museum. After a detailed study of a number of possible locations for the museum and of the future requirements of the museum, the study recommended that our museum should stay in its present location, as it was not only the best site but the cheapest option open to the society. The study also said, that the site which is 2.3 acres approx., was large enough to share with another building belonging to a different organization. The study also estimated that it would cost \$68,000 to up-grade the museum to conform to the standards required by the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, this spread out over five years.

It is essential that improvements are made to the lighting, air circulation, and humidity control to avoid the deterioration of the artifacts.

The Township Council is prepared to offer the Osgoode Township Historical Society and Museum, a long term lease, or, if we so wish, they are willing to sell us the building. The society hasn't yet made a final decision but, at least one thing is certain, the society and museum has a permanent home at last.

TOWNSHIP TREASURES

About a year ago, Margaret Hill Robb from Osgoode gave to the museum a linen towel. At first sight it's not a very special towel; it's small, rather coarsely woven, not white-white but a beige colour and, we are told that it was made from an old worn out sheet. Never-the-less it is one of the many treasured artifacts that have been donated to the museum. Its story, passed down to us by the former owners, gives one a richer and clearer understanding of the lives of the early settlers of Osgoode Township.

Quite a number of years before 1831, the flax from which this towel was woven, grew in the hills of Perthshire, Scotland. Planted by a hard-working woman in a sheltered spot near the croft in which her family lived, it was watered by the gentle misty scottish rains, then carefully harvested. Time was found to prepare and comb the flax and to spin the thread. The weaver who wove the linen thread into a fine thick heavy sheet was likely a man who worked long hours in his small home as long as the daylight lasted, and then perhaps by candlelight. The sheet made its way to the new world with John Dow, who, with his wife Katherine Campbell.

came to Osgoode Township from the United States in 1831, where John worked at his trade as millwright for a number of years. John and Katherine were married in Quebec City in 1830, we know this because we have their marriage certificate in the museum. John built the homestead for his family on conc. 10, lots 37 & 38 in Osgoode Township in 1833. Over the years John and Katherine had eight children, five boys and three girls. It was Janet, born in 1836 who made the towels for her mother out of the worn linen sheet. Flax was also grown on John Dow's homestead in Osgoode because some of the towels, we are told, have lace made from the thread spun from this flax. Janet died unmarried in 1920, and for many years she was cared for by a niece Christena Fisher. It is through Christena, to Margaret Hill Robb, that the towels came to the museum of Osgoode Township. Margaret is the great-granddaughter of John Dow and Katherine Campbell.

We would like to thank the many people who loaned us items and photographs for the Rideau River exhibit. In particular we value the contributions made by Mr. Harold Gates, at Ottawa, who loaned us three Rideau River steamboat models; Bessie Edgar of Osgoode, for items belonging to her father Eph Lindsay; Dominic Kelly, for tracking down a spearing-rack, Sid Lindsay for his Rideau photographs; and Coral Lindsay of Kars, for access to her amazing history of Rideau steamboating.

6. HISTORICAL NOTES

Our first story of the year was written by Allison Dempsey who grew up at NORTH BRANCH on the Castor River.

EARLY LOG HOUSES AND THE FIRST DEMPSEY HOME ON THE CASTOR What were log houses like?

They were better than the early shanties; a stage between them and the houses of stone, and brick or clapboard which replaced them. Logs with dove-tailed ends made up the walls and hand-hewn pine shingles covered the rafters. They were usually not large with one, sometimes two, rooms on the ground floor and an upper floor reached by a ladder. At the end farthest from the door was a fireplace, the means of heating and also of cooking until stoves became more common. It was made of large stones and the chimney on the outside of the wall of field stones, well fitted and bonded with mortar. When time had reduced abandoned houses to ruin these chimneys could be seen standing as sentinels on the sites. The floor was of wide planed boards and mats or animal skin rugs provided some comfort and warmth for the family. Leather or iron hinges were used to hang the stout door with the latch on the inside and a leather latch-string through a hole a few inches above; this string might be pulled in at night but as a rule it was left out giving rise to the saying: "The latch-string is always out". A couple of windows with six or eight panes provided light. While the spaces between the logs were filled with mortar and vertical boards were nailed to the wall inside, there was no insulation and on winter nights the house would cool down as the fire burned lower. Efforts were made to keep the fire going, huge back logs being set in place in the evening, which would burn slowly and leave coals from which to build anew. When the cold winds blew and snow gathered in drifts, it was comforting to know that there were cords of hardwood and cedar handy outside the door.

There was meat, both beef and pork, and venison and rabbit as well, supplemented with fish from the rivers. It was not difficult to keep in the winter, but any to be preserved for summer use had to be salted down in barrels or dried or smoked. Dairy cattle provided milk, and butter was made in a hand-operated churn, with buttermilk a pleasant by-product. After harvest grain was taken to the village mill to be ground into flour; and bread was baked in pans set in a reflector oven in front of the fireplace or in the opening above it. An autumn task was to peel, quarter and core apples and string them up to dry. A piece of ground was marked off for a garden not far from the door and each year it yielded potatoes, corn and other vegetables. "Man worked from sun to sun but woman's work was never done." Days were filled with activity: cultivation of field and garden, preparation of food, spinning of wool and making of clothing, washing of clothes and caring for children, all without any of the labor-saving devices of our time.

Families in a community were knit together by the need for mutual help in clearing land or raising buildings or harvesting crops, when there was an emergency. Their pleasures arose naturally from the round of the year: from tasks accomplished, occasional trips to town, visits from neighbors, social events which included work or building bees, their childrens' development, improvement in their lot, and the moving scene in the community around them.

Our Grandparents' log house stood west of the road on a little rise above the Castor, (lot 22, concession 10). It was a place of hospitality although Grandfather was a quiet man and more inclined to action than to words. Grandmother

with her busy hands made the house a home and kept the welcome mat out. Four children spent their early years there and while they added to the busyness they also learned to take their part in daily chores.

The time came when Grandfather had gathered enough materials and laid aside the money needed to build another house. With shovel, plumbline, saw, hammer and manual labor, it arose on the east side of the road, larger and more comfortable, finished with clapboard painted white. And the log house, having sheltered the family and being no longer useful, was taken down and its site smoothed over and so lost to the next generation.

DO YOU KNOW THESE PLACES??

ALL ARE IN OSGOOD TOWNSHIP!!!

TOBAN'S ISLAND

BLUEBERRY MARSH

SKUNK'S MISERY

MURPHY'S LEAP

THE SWALE

PIG'S ALLEY

BEAN ISLAND

DOYLE'S ROAD

COLD SPRING

CROW'S NEST BRIDGE

YORK'S CORNER

----- If you don't, we'll tell you about them at HERITAGE DAY, and in the next newsletter. If you DO and have any information about them and their origin, we'd like to hear from you.

We'll have some more for you next issue.

7. DATES TO REMEMBER

Regular meeting nights are now the first TUESDAY in the month at 8:00 P.M.

Topics will be announced in the newspapers.

MARCH 1 --- Annual Meeting. ½ hour film program (Blacksmithing, Museums) followed by election of officers for 1983.

APRIL 5 --- Barn Building

MAY 3 --- Township Cemeteries, their history.

8. MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

If you do not receive your 1983 membership card with this newsletter, then your membership fees are now due. Consider giving a membership to that interested neighbour too!