

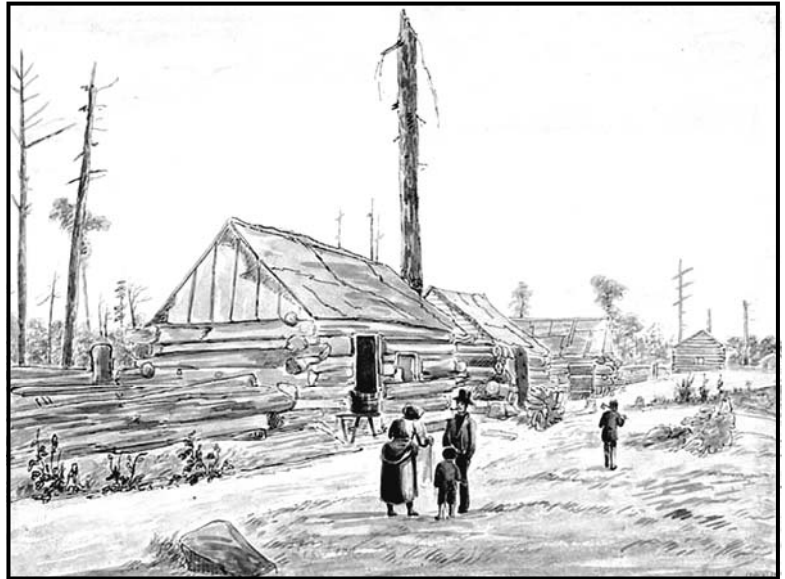
Women at the Rideau Worksites

One of the great untold stories of the Rideau Canal is the life of women and children at the worksites during the building of the canal. We tend to think of the worksites as male only, labourers and craftsmen building the mammoth works of the Rideau Canal. But that's not an accurate picture. Many of the men were married and had their families with them at the worksites. But how many women were at each site and their exact roles remain frustratingly vague.

The problem is the inherent bias in the historical records. The bulk of the Rideau Canal documentation are basic bureaucratic material such as progress and accounting reports. These reports don't mention the daily life of the worksite, they detail issues directly related to the building of the canal. However we do have a few reports concerning sickness and death which provide some insights about the presence of women at the worksites.

A.J. Christie's 1827 medical reports for the Rideau worksites show that 17 men died (10 from disease, 7 from accidents) as well as 6 women and 38 children. He also recorded 54 births. So we clearly have many families at the worksites. With the first outbreaks of malaria in 1828, Colonel By began to compile sick reports. For instance, at Jones Falls in 1828, 2 men died but no women or children died, whereas in 1830 at Kingston Mills, 8 men died along with 4 women and 4 children. That's a clue regarding where many families were located. Jones Falls had a labour force taken from Quebec (mostly Montreal), primarily French-Canadian and Scot. Most of their families would have been left back home. Kingston Mills, on the other hand, had many recently immigrated Irish workers and their families living on the worksite. A November 1830 census at Kingston Mills shows 101 buildings located on the site, including a schoolhouse.

Many of the Royal Sappers and Miners were married. In 1831 for example, there were 51 men of the 7th Company located on the Isthmus (Newboro) together with 27 women and 46 children. An 1830 map of Newboro



Family at Long Island, 1830

This painting shows an Irish family and a group of log cabins at Long Island. The men were part of the workforce building the locks, dam and weir at Long Island. "Settlement on Long Island on the Rideau River, Upper Canada" by James Pattison Cockburn, August 17, 1830, Library and Archives Canada, C-040048

shows the single men's barracks and the civilian barracks located in the main camp and houses for married sappers and clerks in a separate area (see map on page 2). In 1829 at Hartwells, records show the employment of 25 military personnel, 482 civilian labourers and 83 boys. There is also a reference to gangs of boys hauling water at Hogs Back. The presence of boys indicates families living near the site. The 1830 painting by James Cockburn (above) shows a number of cabins at Long Island with families living in them. We also know that several of the contractors and craftsmen had their families with them.

So these are some of the indications that women were present at many worksites, but what role did they play? With no actual documentation we can only assume that

ANNUAL SPRING MEETING

Saturday, May 9, 2015 (see back page for details)

Friends of the Rideau is a volunteer, non-profit organization, working to enhance and conserve the heritage and charm of the Rideau Canal.

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they played the typical domestic role of that era centred around raising a family. There is much written about how tough the men had it, but it was also very tough on the women. They were in a rough frontier, trying to raise a family with limited support. The women were responsible for managing the household and their ever growing family of young children. Their days were spent caring for their children, preparing meals, cleaning and doing laundry, making and mending clothes, and tending to the sick. They had to make do with what they had, which was very little. Unlike settlers (who also had it tough) they had no land. The husband was working for wages in the hopes of saving enough for a better future for their children.

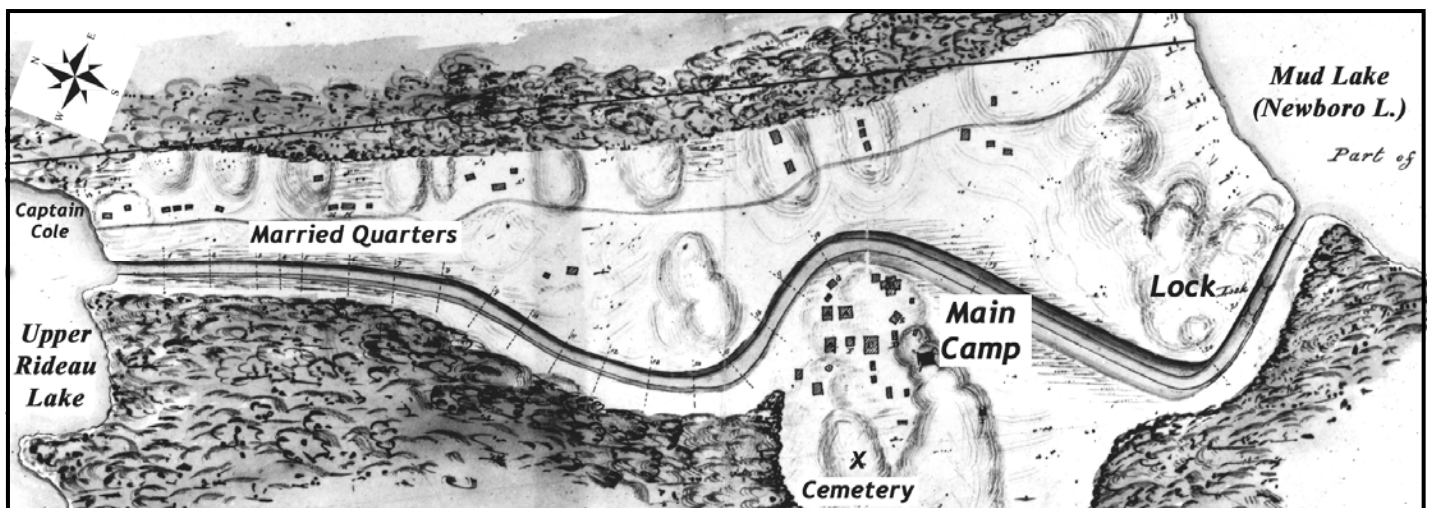
Christie in his 1827 medical reports noted that many of the women and children, as well as many men, were suffering from digestive problems (bowel complaints). He surmised, likely correctly, that it was due in part to the severe change in diet from a vegetable-based diet to a meat-based diet. It was also likely due to a lack of understanding of sanitation – e-coli and other bugs would have been present in some of the meat, vegetables and water. While some of the workers did start little garden plots by their cabins at the worksite, they were very reliant on supplies obtained by the contractor. Those supplies included flour, potatoes, bread, corn, bran, and peas. For meat the main staple was salt pork with some beef and pickled fish. Diet improved when local settlers started supplying the camps with fresh meat and produce. Workers' families also gained local knowledge of plants that could be used to make teas and flavour stews.

The women would have relied on each other, particularly in the event of sickness and childbirth. Death and injury were facts of life, not only for the husband but also for the children. Many children died, buried in the local burying grounds, the wooden markers on their graves long ago rotted away. We do however know the names of two children who died in 1829 and are buried at McGuigan Cemetery near Merrickville; Francis Ivers Frayne, the 18 month old son of Master Mason Richard Frayne, and Margaret Davidson, the two year old daughter of the contractor at Clowes, who died from "a contusion in the head."

One thing we can assume is that many of the women would have put on a brave face and coped with conditions as best they could. One of my ancestors, Mary Quaife, who arrived in Canada in 1832 with husband James and 4 children (ages 6 months to 6 years) wrote: "I am quite at home in my little cottage, as I have a good bed and a seat to sit on which is as much as I expected to have in this land." Contrast her description of a "little cottage" with the reality of a small one room log cabin for a family of 6 (7 by the next year) on the edge of the woods in the Cornwall area, rented to them by a local farmer. They had no money and her husband was working for shares (a portion of the harvested crop).

The experiences of women at the worksites is a very difficult story to tell due to the dearth of information. Perhaps in the future someone will take this on as research project and do proper justice to the topic.

- Ken Watson



The Construction Site at Newboro in 1830

This annotated map shows the many buildings at the Newboro lock and cut construction site. The married Sappers and Miners and workers' families lived in cabins on the east side of the cut. The cabins above the words Married Quarters are those shown in the legend as "House[s] for married sappers and clerks." Also note the large swath of forest cut down on Colonel By's orders to promote fresh air and blow away the bad air that caused (so they incorrectly thought) malaria. "Plan of the Isthmus Between Rideau and Mud-Lakes" by P. Cole & John By, 1830, Library and Archives Canada, NMC 12892 54/80.

2015 AGM

Our AGM will be held on Saturday, May 9, in the theatre of the Rideau Canal Visitor Centre (former Rideau Canal Museum) in Smiths Falls. This year our featured speaker will be **Phil Jenkins** who will present us with a compendium of songs and writings that feature the Rideau Canal. **Victor Suthren** will update us on the exciting plans Merrickville has to celebrate Canada 150. It will be a fun, educational and entertaining morning!

Our AGM is also a great opportunity to come out and meet the directors and members of Friends of the Rideau. We share a common love of the Rideau Canal so there is no lack of interesting conversation. See the back page for full details.

Everyone is welcome to attend!

The Depot

We hope to have The Depot in Merrickville open by late June or early July, depending on availability of volunteers. And speaking of volunteers, we could use some help, all we ask is that you bring your knowledge and enthusiasm for the Rideau and share it with visitors. If interested or if you wish to learn more, please contact Hunter McGill at huntermcgill1@gmail.com

Canoe & Kayak Rentals

You can rent a canoe or kayak at The Depot courtesy of our partner, canaltripping.com. On your next visit to Merrickville, consider going for a paddle.

Membership Renewal

A reminder that this is membership renewal time (our membership year runs from June 1 to May 31). If your membership is up for renewal, you'll find a handy renewal form with this newsletter. Please note that our mailing address is now P.O. Box 1232, Stn. Main, Smiths Falls. We thank you very much for your support.

Summer Activities

This summer we hope for warm dry days for the following events, as we plan to be present in our Friends of the Rideau booth and meet many members of Friends.

Aug 1-3: Canalfest, Merrickville

Aug 3: Colonel By Day, Bytown Museum, Ottawa

Aug 8: Classic Boat Show, Westport

Aug. 15-16: Rideau Ferry Regatta, Rideau Ferry

Message from the Chair

Dear Friends,

After the long, cold winter I am looking forward to the 184th season of operations of the Rideau Canal. With the amount of snow we had these past five months there shouldn't be a problem with water levels for the navigation season.

The Friends has now closed its office at 1 Jasper Avenue, in Smiths Falls, known to many as the Lockmaster's House. Parks Canada wants to renovate and re-purpose the building as part of its new business development plan. We are grateful to the Village of Merrickville-Wolford for making storage space available to us where we can keep our inventory of Friends' books and pamphlets, as well as our Rideau Canal-themed souvenir clothing items available at The Depot each summer.

Mention of Parks Canada's business development plan brings me to the recently-issued invitation from the Parks Rideau Canal office for proposals to provide "innovative experiences and leading edge services" along the Canal from Ottawa Lockstation to Hartwells Locks, to increase visits. As this letter is being written there has been media coverage of the likely impact in the form of the closing of Paul's Boat Lines cruises on that stretch of the Canal. This appears to be a follow-up to the Visitor Experience Opportunities Concept initiative of two years ago. Our hope remains that heritage does not get lost in the scramble to "innovate" and generate revenue. For our part we try throughout the year, through our website, newsletter, The Depot and participation in events along the Rideau, to increase awareness of the historic importance of the Rideau Canal, its accessibility, and its key role in the character of this part of the country.

With changes in several municipalities after elections late last year, members of Friends Board of Directors are getting acquainted with new mayors and council members in Merrickville and Smiths Falls. Our objectives are to help enhance their appreciation of the Rideau Canal, and to support their activities to attract local residents and visitors to the Canal as a unique heritage site. We have a terrific partnership with Merrickville and hope that a similar relationship can be developed with Smiths Falls.

We hope to see you on the Rideau Canal this summer. As always, we invite you to drop in to The Depot in Merrickville in July and August and say hello. If you are so inclined, we would be delighted to have you join us at The Depot as a volunteer and help us get the message out.

- Hunter McGill

Poor Mrs. Stuart

A number of the Royal Sappers and Miners were married and had their families with them. The wife and children would accompany the husband to wherever he was stationed. Such was the case of Mrs. Elizabeth Stuart, wife of Corporal Joseph Stuart, a carpenter. Joseph was a member of the 7th Company of Royal Sappers and Miners who arrived in Bytown in the fall of 1827. In late 1829 the 7th Company, including Joseph, Elizabeth and their three children were moved to the Isthmus (Newboro). Three contractors had tried and failed at the Isthmus and Col. By, pressed for time, decided he had to do the job with his own men. In 1831, the 7th Company stationed at the Isthmus had 51 men with 27 women and 46 children.

Joseph and Elizabeth would likely have been living in the married quarters, cabins built on the east side of the cut, some distance away from the main camp which was located on the west side of the cut (see map on page 2). Joseph got sick with consumption (tuberculosis) and died from that disease on July 30, 1831. A funeral would have been held for him, with his widow and three children in attendance, and he would have been buried in what is today the Old Presbyterian Cemetery at Newboro, located near the main construction camp.

It was clearly a very tough time for poor Elizabeth, but it was about to get worse. She was lucky to be part of a system (army) that provided food and shelter, so she was taken care of in that regard. But in late 1831, the 7th Company got orders to immediately return to Bytown. They did so, leaving Elizabeth and her three children behind at the Isthmus. An order that she and her three children should accompany the troops had not arrived in time. It's uncertain when that problem was rectified, but we have a letter from Lt. Col. By to Lt. Col. Gregg written on January 12, 1832:

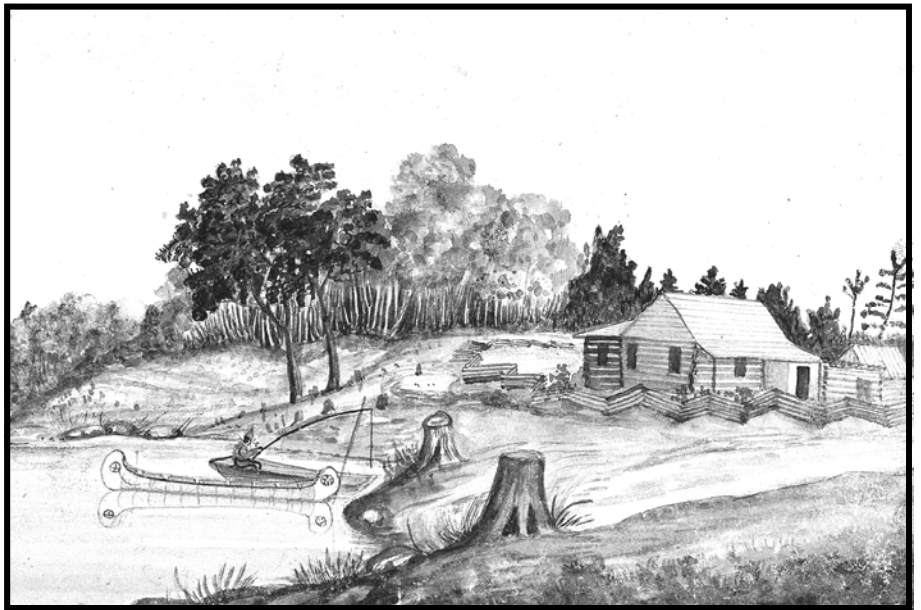
“Sir,

With reference to your communication to the Comm^s. Royal Engineer of Canada [Lt. Colonel Gustavus Nicolls], dated 1st Nov. 1831 – ... informing him that an authority had been given for the issue of the usual rations to the widow & Three Children of the late Private [sic] Jos. Stuart, Royal Sappers & Miners stationed at the Isthmus on the Rideau Canal to the period of Embarkation for England of that Corps – I have the honor of stating, that, prior to my receiving the said communication, which intimated that

she was to accompany the troops, – the Officer commanding the Detachment at the Isthmus had received orders to send the troops to Bytown immediately – and your letter having reached that office after the detachment had left – the said Widow consequently was left behind – I therefore respectfully solicit, that His Lordship, the Commander of the Forces, will be pleased to direct that the indulgence of a ration for Mrs. Stewart [sic] and her three children be continued, till a passage to England can be procured for them.”

It must have been a terrifying ordeal for Elizabeth, abandoned with her three children. Although the Sappers and Miners had left there would have been other workers remaining at the Isthmus as Colonel By's December 31, 1831 estimates show that £ 2,650 was still required to complete the works at the Isthmus. Elizabeth would have been dependent on the kindness of those at the site until she was returned to Bytown and eventually back to England.

- Ken Watson



Captain Cole's Cabin at Newboro in 1830

While we don't have any paintings of the cabin that the Stuart family was living in, we do have this painting, done in August of 1830, of Captain Cole's cabin located at the head of the portage across the Isthmus (see map on page 2). A French-Canadian voyageur (perhaps Captain Cole's chauffeur) can be seen fishing beside a birch bark canoe. "Residence of Capt. P. Cole, Rl. Engrs, the Officer in Charge at Isthmus, &c. during construction of the Works, from 1830 to 1832" by Thomas Burrowes, 1830, Archives of Ontario, C 1-0-0-0-35

2015 Hours of Operation

Dates	Days	Hours
May 15—June 18	Mon to Thurs	10 am to 4 pm
	Fri to Sun, holidays	9 am to 7 pm
June 19—Sept. 7	Mon to Thurs	9 am to 6 pm
	Fri to Sun, holidays	9 am to 7 pm
Sept. 8— Oct. 12	Mon to Friday	10 am to 4 pm
	Sat to Sun, holidays	9 am to 5 pm

2 for 1 Lockages

During the period of May 15 to June 30, 2015, Parks Canada is offering a 2 for 1 promotion on single lockage and return and one day permits. On your arrival at a lockstation to buy your lockage permit simply ask one of the lockstaff for a promotional coupon which will grant you a second permit which can be used on another occasion within the promotion period or shared with a friend so that two vessels can travel together.

These promotional coupons are also available at some marinas along the Rideau. For more info see: parksCanada.gc.ca/canals

oTENTiks

A National Parks program to encourage camping has arrived on the Rideau Canal in the form of oTENTiks. They are described by Parks Canada as a cross between a tent and a rustic cabin, “providing a relaxing, easier way to experience camping”. oTENTiks are being built at Beveridges and will be available by June 6, 2015. See the Parks Canada website for full details.

Parks Canada has also renovated the Defensible Lockmaster’s House at Davis Lock and plans to rent it.

The Opinicon – A Fresh Start

We were very pleased to hear that The Opinicon Resort was sold intact to an owner intending to restore it to its former status as a destination on the Rideau Canal system for visitors.

Fiona McKean, the new co-owner with Tobias Lutke, spent many summers during her childhood near the Opinicon, and frequently visited the resort’s ice cream shop – who hasn’t?! The Opinicon has been closed since 2013, but the new owners hope to have the kitchen and dining room, ice cream shop, conference rooms and a pub up and running by canal opening (May long weekend).

There is a lot of interest and support from the community for the new owners. The Opinicon, in addition to being a destination for visitors, has also been an important local employer. Friends of the Rideau wrote to Ms McKean in January congratulating her on taking on The Opinicon and offering assistance in documenting the history of the resort and its significance in the heritage of the Rideau Canal.

We wish her every success and look forward to seeing the Opinicon delight and entertain families once again. You can follow their progress by visiting their website at: www.opinicon.com

- Hunter McGill

WiFi

Last year Parks Canada announced that it planned to install WiFi hotspots in selected parks and national historic sites, including the Rideau Canal. However Parks has now stated that they have no plans to put in WiFi hotspots at any Rideau lockstation in 2015.

Rideau Lakes Subwatershed Report

The Rideau Valley Conservation Authority (RVCA) has just (April 2015) released another in their series of subwatershed reports, this one dealing with the Rideau lakes. There are 31 named lakes in that region including Big, Lower and Upper Rideau lakes.

The report documents many factors affecting water quality and then rates the lakes. Most lakes didn’t fare all that well in the ratings with Big Rideau Lake only listed as Fair, Upper Rideau Lake as Poor and Lower Rideau Lake as Very Poor. It’s not a particularly good report card, there is lots of room for improvement.

The report notes that water quality not only affects

local residents but that waterbodies in the Rideau Lakes subwatershed are also key tourist attractions, visual features, and a major source of business activity, providing significant economic contributions to local municipalities.

The report is full of interesting information including forest cover, wetlands and the managed water levels of many of the lakes. It also explains the roles of the RVCA, municipalities and individuals in improving water quality.

You can view/download a full copy of the report from the RVCA website: www.rvca.ca It can be found on the home page under “Publications/Reports”.

FRIENDS OF THE
RIDEAU

ANNUAL SPRING MEETING

Saturday, May 9, 2015

9:30 am to noon

Rideau Canal Visitor Centre, Smiths Falls

9:30 am	Meet and Greet - coffee & tea
10:00 am	Annual General Meeting
10:20 am	Merrickville Celebrations for Canada 150
10:45 am	Phil Jenkins—stories, poems & music

Our featured presenter is **Phil Jenkins**, who will give a presentation titled **Chapter and Verse: The Rideau Canal**, recognizing the Rideau as both an historic achievement and an inspiring traveller's route, which has moved authors and songwriters for almost two hundred years. Phil Jenkins, who is himself both an author and musician, will present to Friends a compendium of songs and writings that feature the Canal, including **an original song describing the maiden steamship voyage on it.**

Phil is an accomplished newspaper columnist, a travel writer, author, lecturer, and performing songwriter. For full details about Phil see the AGM listing on our website: www.rideaufriends.com



Victor Suthren will also describe some of the exciting plans Merrickville has for **Canada's 150th celebration in 2017**. The plans are quite spectacular and should spark some ideas for what other Rideau communities could do.

***Come out and meet some Friends
Everyone is welcome***

Enjoy refreshments

Chat with some of the Friends' directors

*Or simply come out and
meet some like-minded Friends*

The Rideau Canal Visitor Centre (formerly the Rideau Canal Museum) is easy to find – it's the big stone building with the grain elevator sitting at the south end of the main downtown area (34 Beckwith Street South) in Smiths Falls.

There is lots of free parking under the water tower (you can't miss it).