

CANADA and the RIDEAU CANAL

This year, as Canada celebrates its 150th birthday, the Rideau Canal enters its 186th year of operation. It's a time to both look back and to look forward at what the Rideau Canal means to Canada. Inside this newsletter you'll find articles written by three of our heritage experts: Hunter McGill, Brian Osborne and Marcus Létourneau, each with a different take on this topic.

We are a young nation, continuing to evolve. As with all nations, our Canadian culture and identity is rooted in our past. There are very few things that we can look at today that directly speak to that evolution into nationhood. The Rideau Canal is an element from our past that operates today much as it did when first built. It's not a diorama in a museum, it's the real deal, and it speaks directly to our journey into becoming an independent nation.

The Rideau is first and foremost a waterway, one that has seen continuous use by humans since shortly after the glaciers retreated and the Champlain Sea drained about 10,000 years ago. The lakes and rivers of the Rideau were attractive fishing and hunting grounds, we have direct archaeological evidence of humans on the Rideau dating back at least 8,000 years.

By the time of European colonization of North America, the Rideau was both a significant native summer hunting and fishing area, and a travelway between the Ottawa and St. Lawrence rivers. A few physical elements of that travelway still exist on the Rideau today, such as portions of the old native portage around what was formerly the extensive rapids at Jones Falls.

Rapids along the Rideau provided power for European technology; sawmills and grist mills. The King's Mills at Cataragui Falls, built in 1784, were the second saw and grist mills built in Ontario. Those government mills were followed by entrepreneurs bringing mill irons into the wilderness and setting up their own mills at places such as Merrickville and Morton. Settlers, United Empire Loyalists from the U.S. and immigrants from the British Isles and Europe, were



Our Flag among the Pines

A Canadian flag flying proudly among the tall pines on Newboro Lake. (photo by Ken W. Watson)

arriving in every increasing numbers. The Rideau region was turning into a frontier.

War with the recently formed United States, in 1812-14, sparked a military need for a safe supply route to the naval base at Kingston, which meant a canal to allow the passage of larger boats. The military elements of the Rideau Canal, the blockhouses and defensible lockmaster's houses that we can see today, speak directly to our very rocky early relationship with the U.S.

The Rideau Canal played a significant role in shaping the demographics of Ontario with thousands of loyal British settlers travelling into then Upper Canada via the Rideau Canal in the 1830s and 40s. And of course it was directly responsible for the founding of Bytown, later named Ottawa. In 1857 when Queen Victoria was asked to choose the capital for the Province of Canada, she picked Ottawa. Of the several reasons for this decision, the Rideau Canal was a major factor, since it provided a direct waterway connection to the new capital from both the former Upper and Lower Canadas.

ANNUAL SPRING MEETING

Saturday, May 13, 2017 (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.

Friends of the Rideau, P.O. Box 1232, Stn Main, Smith Falls, Ontario K7A 5C7

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This newsletter is published by Friends of the Rideau with assistance from the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

The commercial use of the Rideau, thousands of barges travelling up and down every year, provided the basis for community development – products could be easily shipped to markets far and wide. We even see rocks from the Rideau (apatite), barged to Kingston and then down the St. Lawrence to Montreal and shipped to England for use as fertilizer.

As commercial use waned in the late 1800s, the Rideau was transitioning into a recreational waterway. Summer homes and cottages were starting to be built on Rideau lakes by the late 1870s. Canadians were just starting to have leisure time available to them and were taking advantage of all the wonderful outdoor activities the Rideau could provide. We were again being invaded by Americans, but this time as tourists, with resorts being built on the Rideau to accommodate them. The evolution of communities along the Rideau reflected this change in usage.

When Canada celebrated its 100th birthday in 1967 there was much reflection on our past and a recognition of the significant contribution made to our nation by the Rideau Canal. That put machinery in motion that directly led to the transfer of the Rideau Canal to Parks Canada in 1972, due to the heritage value it represented to Canada and the need to protect and present that heritage.

Now in the 21st century, in our age of virtual communication and increasing urbanization, the Rideau

Canal serves as a physical reminder of the early development of our nation – you can step into the past at any lockstation, see and touch those elements that helped shape what we are today.

The Rideau Canal remains relevant to Canada on many levels, from its continued significant economic contribution to the communities in the Rideau Corridor to its authenticity as a heritage site, one with “universal values” (our UNESCO World Heritage Site designation) which speaks directly to the many stories of our past and our development as the nation of Canada.

I’ll add some wonderful words written by Sheila Fraser, Canada’s former Auditor General, about Canada’s National Historic sites, including the Rideau Canal, and why we should care about them.

“These places recall the lives and history of the men and women who built this country, and they foster awareness of how Canadian society evolved. They help us to better understand the present and prepare for the future. They contribute in important ways to Canadians’ sense of belonging to their community.”

The Rideau Canal, if properly preserved and presented, will continue to remind us of our rich past as we move into Canada’s bright future.

- Ken W. Watson

What the Rideau Canal Means to Me

Ed. Note: our Chair, Hunter McGill, has done a very interesting twist on the theme – what the Rideau Canal means to a Canadian. His thoughts are shared by many of us who love the Rideau.

I have lived near the Rideau Canal for almost two-thirds of my life. At various periods during that time I have been able to walk beside the Canal on a daily basis. The Rideau Canal for me is the most important heritage site in Canada, a beautiful chain of rivers and lakes knitted together by lockstations that capture history and heritage and make both so welcoming and accessible.

My earliest memory of the Rideau Canal is from my high school days, riding my bicycle out to Hogs Back to watch my crazy friends jump into the roiling water of the falls. On one of those occasions I met an American couple who had come all the way from Stamford, Connecticut, in their beautiful 40-foot motor yacht. How I envied them cruising all the way up the Rideau, passing through the locks and visiting the towns and villages en route.

When I attended Carleton University, right next to the Canal at Hartwells Locks, my dream was to get a summer job working on the locks, but it was not to be. Early in my marriage I was able to persuade my wife Jane that the best

way to spend our weekends was to visit lockstations along the Rideau, exploring, picnicking, and here and there, swimming. They were blissful times, getting to know the history of the Rideau Canal and learning what an important part in the heritage of Ontario, and Canada, it has played and continues to play.

In those days Robert Leggett’s book *Rideau Waterway* was our bible. Leggett’s opening sentence, “There is a lovely waterway in Old Ontario” for me ranks up there with Karen Blixen’s “I had a farm in Africa, at the foot of the Ngong Hills”, from her book *Out of Africa*.

Finally, when thinking of the Rideau Canal on a cold March afternoon, I am tempted to borrow a line from *Wind in the Willows*. You know the scene where the Water Rat says to Mole, “Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing – absolutely nothing – half so much worth doing as simply messing about (here I take liberties with Kenneth Grahame’s text) on the Rideau Canal.”

I have lived in six countries and visited about 45 others, but none of those experiences can compare with a warm, sunny, lazy afternoon along the Rideau Canal.

- Hunter McGill

2017 AGM

Our AGM will be held on Saturday, May 13, in the theatre of the Rideau Canal Visitor Centre in Smiths Falls. This year our featured speaker will be **Fiona McKean**, the new co-owner of the Opinicon Resort. She'll have a "fireside" question and answer chat with us about what she's done and plans to do to restore the grand old Opinicon to its former glory.

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 in June, depending on availability of summer students and 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

2017/18 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. 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 and the interested public.

June 18: Paddlefest, Smiths Falls

Aug 7: Colonel By Day, Bytown Museum, Ottawa Locks

Aug 12: Classic Boat Show—location TBD

Aug 19-20: Rideau Ferry Regatta, Rideau Ferry

We welcome anyone that would like to help us meet and greet the public during these events. Please contact Hunter McGill: huntermcgill1@gmail.com

Message from the Chair

Dear Friends,

As I write the snow is finally melting in Ottawa, though there is quite a bit of ice remaining in the stretch of the Rideau Canal running through the centre of the city.

This will be an active season along the Rideau, given the celebrations of Canada's 150th anniversary and the lure of free lockage, plus the opportunity to recognize the 186th year of continuous operation of the Canal. Now, if we can just arrange for warm sunny weather...!

Friends wrote to the Honourable Catherine McKenna, minister responsible for Parks Canada, on the occasion of her first year in office, last November, to congratulate her for the commitment last May of \$57 million for rehabilitation and reconstruction work on the Rideau Canal. We reiterated our ongoing concern about the low level of attention given to heritage presentation and interpretation on the Rideau. We also mentioned our interest in taking part in the consultations to develop a new management plan for the Rideau, and the Minister, in her reply, indicated that the timeframe for completion of the plan has been extended to winter 2018 to allow for more engagement with stakeholders and the general public.

Elsewhere on this page you will find the schedule of Friends of the Rideau's summer road show. We look forward to seeing many of you at these events, as we did at the Ottawa Boat Show in February. At the time this message is written, we have not had an official response to our request for a grant to employ summer students, but we hope that we will receive the same level of funding as in 2016, which would permit us to open The Depot at the beginning of June. Do come and visit.

I hope to see you at the Friends' annual spring meeting. The notice of that meeting and the program are on the back page of the newsletter and I'm looking forward to hearing from Fiona McKean, co-owner of the Opinicon Resort, who will be our guest speaker.

- Hunter McGill

Season Opening

The Rideau will open for its 186th season of navigation on **Friday, May 19**. Parks Canada plans to celebrate this with an event at Jones Falls (details TBD). So plan on coming out that day in celebration of this magnificent part of our Canadian heritage.

The Rideau Canal in 1867

If we could step back in time to Confederation in 1867, we would find a very different Rideau Canal than we see today. It was a busy commercial waterway that operated 24 hours a day. Along its banks were dozens of mills and other industrial activities that made use of the water and water power that the Rideau Canal and its dams provided. Tourism and the iconic verdant green lawns of today's lockstations were still years away.



Mills at Old Slys c.1885

A carding (wool) mill is on the left with a grist (flour) mill on the right. The Brockville and Ottawa Railway bridge, built in 1855, is in the background. (Parks Canada, Newman collection).

It was also in that year that the new federal government was given responsibility for the Rideau Canal. In 1856 the Rideau Canal had been transferred from the British Government to the Province of Canada. In 1867, with Confederation, the British North America Act handed matters of shipping and navigation to the federal government. So that year the Rideau Canal became a federal waterway and the lock staff became federal civil servants.

Lots of tonnage was being moved along the Rideau, in the order of 250,000 tons in 1867, all sorts of bulky goods. Passenger traffic on the other hand was low, about 2,000 passengers per year, 1/10th of what the Rideau would see 40 years later when more leisure time became available. Freight was transported on large barges, purpose-built for the Rideau Canal at local ship-building locations such as Bedford Mills. These barges were generally 102 feet long by 21 feet wide, with a rudder, and towed by steam tugs (also built locally). In 1869 two of these barges, *Mineral* and *Algoma*, crashed through the lock gates at Jones Falls when the sill failed, killing two men. Those barges were each loaded with 45 cords of firewood destined for Kingston. A steam tug was pulling 4 of these large barges between lockstations. Steam tugs pulling lines of barges would have been a common sight along the entire Rideau Canal in 1867.

The many mills, in particular sawmills, caused a problem the Rideau doesn't have to deal with today, refuse in the form of slabs, bark and sawdust being dumped into the canal. In 1865 the lockmaster at Old Slys complained that the local mills were dumping so much refuse into the canal that navigation was likely to be

impeded. It was later reported that the canal between Old Slys and Smiths Falls was barely navigable due to sawdust in the channel and boats had to proceed dead slow so that they didn't stir it up. In 1868 it was noted that the lower lock at Ottawa was two feet deep in sawdust. Each passage of a steamer stirred up

this refuse and took half a dozen men, labouring several hours, to clear it. In the spring of 1855 the lockmaster at Kingston Mills reported that he had "7' 5" on the lower sill, all sawdust."

It was also in this period that the Rideau started to have low water problems due to changes in the watershed that resulted from the cutting down of the forests for merchantable timber, firewood and to create farmland. This led to the first reservoir dams for the Rideau Canal being built in 1866.

It was a very different era, the typical 19th century commercial use of a waterway. Cottaging and tourism were still a few years away, those activities, which began in the late 1870s, slowly transitioning the Rideau to what we see today.

Barbara Humphreys

Barbara Humphreys, long time member of Friends of the Rideau, passed away earlier this year at the age of 97. Barbara was an expert in, and passionate about, heritage architecture. Among her very many accomplishments was the manuscript report, *"The Architectural Heritage of the Rideau Corridor"* which she wrote for Parks Canada in 1974. In 1999 she co-wrote a beautiful book *"Legacy in Stone, The Rideau Corridor."* She was active with many organizations devoted to protecting the built heritage of the Rideau Corridor, including Friends of the Rideau.

Barbara has left us a lasting legacy in her tireless work to preserve and promote the rich heritage architecture in the Rideau Corridor.

What does the Past of the Rideau mean for the Future of Canada?

Dr. Brian S. Osborne, a long time board member of Friends of the Rideau, is Professor Emeritus of Geography at Queen's University, where he has taught since 1967.

Many nation-states look back at the part played by rivers in their national chronicles. Think of England and the Thames, France and the Seine, Germany and the Rhine, the United States and the Mississippi. For Canada, the St. Lawrence has certainly played such an iconic role, but the Rideau Canal is also part of the national history – even its future!

In 1783, following the American Revolution, some 10,000 United Empire Loyalists fled north to what is now Ontario and Quebec as refugees from the new republic. The St. Lawrence River then became a sensitive frontier between the revolutionary United States and the imperial British North America. With this, the focus on the Rideau corridor shifted from being a mere hydrographic feature and a cartographic detail to performing a geopolitical role because in times of war – and in subsequent periods of *fears* of war – St. Lawrence's role as the critical supply-line of military materiel and personnel became vulnerable. Hence the need to seek an alternative connection between the St. Lawrence estuary and the Great Lakes system to the west.

The region's First Peoples and fur-traders knew of one: the Ottawa River, as a tributary to the St. Lawrence and as an avenue to the north-west of the continent. All that was required was a connection from the north to the settlements in the continental interior to the south. Several routes were considered and the decision made to connect the Ottawa River, the Rideau River and Lakes, and the Cataraqui River, to the fortified site of Kingston on Lake Ontario. While British-American tensions continued following the 1812 War prompted by the Oregon Crisis and the American Civil War, increasingly, the St. Lawrence developed as the major commercial corridor and the Rideau Canal functioned as a military controlled transporter of government immigrants and some internal commerce. But over time, the gradual improvement of the St. Lawrence navigation by the construction of dams and locks, together with the expansion of rail communications, both served to erode the national significance of the Rideau Canal. It declined into a local link serving the immediate Kingston and Ottawa hinterlands.

However, if these developments were diminishing the strategic significance of the Rideau Canal as a national communication system, new perspectives were emerging.



The locks in Ottawa with the former Commissariat building, constructed in 1827, today's Bytown Museum, on the right.

The expansion of the industrial and urban society prompted a growing appreciation of undeveloped locales and the attractions of "nature." The Rideau Corridor met that need. From the late nineteenth century on, the very railroad and steamboat competitors that had caused the decline of the Rideau Canal served to promote the success of the Rideau Corridor. Steamboat cruises, residential hotels, and summer cottage developments were attracted to the natural beauty and seclusion of the region. And its story also became appreciated as

part of Canada's heritage: the Rideau Canal was recognized as a National Historic Site in 1925; it became part of the Parks Canada system in 1972, a Canadian Heritage River in 2000, and most recently, the Rideau Canal and Kingston Fortifications were inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 2007.

Now, in 2017, we can look back with pride at the several contributions the Rideau Canal has made to Canada's heritage and future:

- the construction of the Rideau Canal ensured secure communication between Upper Canada, Lower Canada, and the mother country across the Atlantic and, indeed, the very survival of what was to become Canada;
- while the British military surveyors are to the fore in this narrative of engineering acumen, their guides through this un-surveyed wilderness were the indigenous population, probably the Mississauga and Algonquin of the Rideau Corridor watersheds. At a time when Canada is increasingly recognizing the part played by its First Peoples in its history, their role in the creation of the Rideau Canal should be noted;
- the Rideau Canal initiated the establishment of Bytown on the Ottawa River and initiated its later rise to national prominence as the national capital, Ottawa;
- finally, apart from continuing to contribute to the historical chronical of how we became a nation, the Rideau Canal is now sustaining our links in a trans-national world in terms of our experiential tourist economy and our international image.

So, as we celebrate the Sesquicentennial of the Dominion of Canada on 1 July 1867, the Rideau Canal should be remembered for contributing to our past and present – but also its future story.

- Brian S. Osborne

What does the Rideau Canal Mean for Canada?

Dr. Marcus R. Létourneau is a historical geographer, planner, and heritage conservationist. In addition to running his own heritage consulting firm, he teaches at Queen's University, the University of Waterloo, Willowbank School of Restorative Arts, and the Ontario Museum Association. He is currently President of the Ontario Association of Heritage Professionals and the Kingston Historical Society. This is his first year on the Board of the Friends of the Rideau .



Photo by Marcus R. Létourneau

Canada's sesquicentennial is an opportune time to pause and reflect on the importance of the past, present, and future of the Rideau Canal. As the works of Jeff Malpas argue, places (including historical places) are dynamic, contingent, and historical; they are also inseparable from notions of identity and experience.¹ As other articles in this newsletter have shown, our connections with the Rideau Canada can be profoundly personal; our experiences engaging with it produce lasting and diverse memories, and its meanings have changed over time (and will continue to change). Reflecting on what the Rideau Canal means for Canada means a simultaneous consideration of what it means to us as individuals and its role in national identity, heritage, and history. While a much larger conversation than this article, nonetheless, the following is meant to engender broader discussion.

The Rideau Canal can be understood as both a physical and symbolic link. While it is an active transportation route, it is also a mnemonic device that can help illustrate and elucidate key events in Canada's past. As Susan Marsden has written, the ideas history and heritage are often conflated, and in this conflation, there are stories, people, artifacts, and sites that are forgotten, marginalized,

or overemphasized.² Historical and archaeological research on the Rideau Canal has helped bring some of these stories, artifacts, and physical places to the fore. These include aspects of aboriginal history, labour history, social history, natural history, and architectural history.

Indeed, as one of Canada's 18 World Heritage Sites, the Rideau Canal demonstrates Canada's commitment to the protection and promotion of cultural heritage at a national and international level. As a State Party to the World Heritage Convention, Canada has agreed to adhere to its requirements. This includes not only identifying, protecting, conserving, and presenting cultural heritage resources, but also:

- To adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community and to integrate the protection of that heritage into comprehensive planning programmes;
- To set up within its territories, where such services do not exist, one or more services for the protection, conservation and presentation of the cultural and natural heritage with an appropriate staff and possessing the means to discharge their functions;
- To develop scientific and technical studies and research and to work out such operating methods as will make the State capable of counteracting the dangers that threaten its cultural or natural heritage;
- To take the appropriate legal, scientific, technical, administrative and financial measures necessary for the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and rehabilitation of this heritage; and
- To foster the establishment or development of national or regional centres for training in the protection, conservation and presentation of the cultural and natural heritage and to encourage scientific research in this field.³

Reflecting on these and other national heritage conservation requirements, the Rideau Canal can be understood as a litmus test for our commitment to heritage conservation and research. The debates concerning its use, management, and conservation reflect broader trends concerning how we as Canadians understand and protect our cultural heritage resources. Ultimately, as Robert Archibald states, how we treat the past in the present will have a profound impact on the future.⁴

- Marcus R. Létourneau

1. Jeff Malpas. *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Typology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

2. Susan Marsden. "Is heritage history? History and the built environment." *Community History*. June 1992, pp. 6-9.

3. UNESCO. *The World Heritage Convention. Article 4 and 5*. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>. Updated 2017.

4. Robert Archibald. *The New Town Square: Museums and Communities in Transition*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004.

2017 Lock Hours of Operation

Dates	Days	Hours
May 19—June 25	Mon to Thurs	10 am to 4 pm
	Fri to Sun, holidays	9 am to 7 pm
June 26 – Sept. 4	Mon to Thurs	9 am to 6 pm
	Fri to Sun, holidays	9 am to 7 pm
Sept. 5— Oct. 9	Mon to Friday	10 am to 4 pm
	Sat to Sun, holidays	9 am to 5 pm

Interpretation at Jones Falls

While we continue to encourage Minister McKenna to restore the focus of Parks Canada back to its legislated mandate of heritage presentation on the Rideau Canal, something that has yet to happen, the Rideau Canal Office of Parks Canada is using its very limited heritage presentation capabilities to the best of its abilities. For 2017 that includes the re-opening of the Blacksmith's Shop and Sweeney House at Jones Falls with live interpretation. The blacksmith, Don MacKay, will be back, demonstrating his trade to the interested public and telling stories related to the heritage of the site. Sweeney House, the defensible lockmaster's house, will be open with a summer student, allowing the public to view and understand the daily life of the first lockmaster at Jones Falls.

It is very nice to see these important pieces of heritage interpretation restored.



Sweeney House, Jones Falls

After being closed for the last 5 years, the doors will again be open and a smiling face will be greeting visitors at Sweeney House this summer.

** FREE LOCKAGE **

To help celebrate Canada's 150th anniversary, Parks Canada is offering **free lockage** on the Rideau and the other heritage canals that it manages. You can get a free season lockage permit online (see the link on our website) or during the season at any lockstation. Regular fees still apply for items such as mooring, electricity and camping.

2017 Rideau Canal Passport

Friends of the Rideau and Parks Canada have been working since last year on a Rideau Canal Passport. Inspired by the passports issued in 1982, on the 150th anniversary of the Canal, and in 2007, the 175th anniversary and the year the Rideau was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the 2017 passport is seen as a way to encourage visitors to learn about the entire Canal.



Cover of the 1982 passport

The new passport will commemorate both the 186th year of continuous operation of the Rideau Canal and Canada's 150th anniversary. The passport will contain a map of the system and individual pages for each lockstation, with an illustration and a brief description. It is hoped that the passports will be available early in the navigation season from the main lockstations and from Friends' interpretation centre, The Depot, in Merrickville.

Management Plan

Parks Canada will be creating a new management plan for the Rideau Canal this year. A critical part of that process is public consultation to ensure that the management of the Rideau Canal properly reflects local community needs and interests.

The primary purpose of the management plan is to ensure the Commemorative Integrity of the Rideau Canal which is its heritage authenticity and presentation. Friends of the Rideau will of course be participating in the public consultations. We'll post a schedule of the opportunities for the general public to comment on the new plan on our website, www.rideaufriends.com, when that information becomes available.

FRIENDS OF THE
RIDEAU

ANNUAL SPRING MEETING

Saturday, May 13, 2017

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
10:30 am	A Fireside Chat with Fiona McKean, owner of the Opinicon

Our featured presenter will be **Fiona McKean**, new co-owner of the Opinicon Resort, who will sit down with us for a “fireside chat” about the restoration of the beautiful Opinicon since it was purchased in 2015 and future plans for this Rideau landmark. Come out and learn what it takes to restore and operate this wonderful place and what we can expect to see in the coming years.

Come out and meet some Friends

Everyone is welcome

Enjoy refreshments

Chat with some of the Friends’ directors



Top: the Opinicon, then called the Idylwild, in 1902 (Laisley collection)

Bottom: the Opinicon today (Opinicon website)

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.