

The Depot

Since 1995, Friends of the Rideau has been operating an interpretation and visitor centre in a building known as The Depot, located near the blockhouse in Merrickville. The building is owned by Parks Canada and will undergo badly needed restoration this winter. The Depot is an old building and its exact origins are shrouded in mystery.

A depot is by definition a storage facility, a storehouse (warehouse), and that was the use of this building for many years. It has the appearance of a railway style storehouse and this has led some to interpret this building's origins as being built for the railway in Merrickville and then later moved to its current site. But is that really true?

A storehouse has been in this general location from the early days of the canal. An 1835 map shows an area marked off in the general area of the Depot as "proposed site for a storehouse". A John Burrows painting, likely dating to the late 1830s, shows a building in that spot. But it wasn't the Depot, it was in a slightly different location and orientation. An 1848 map shows the location, to the east (closer to the

blockhouse) than the present day Depot. That first storehouse was built by John Read and E. Whitmarsh. In 1849 the ownership was transferred to Aaron Merrick who added a wharf in front of the building.

In 1849, Ordnance (who owned the canal lands) gave a lease for an area adjacent to Merrick's storehouse to another Merrickville merchant, Charles Holden. In 1850 Holden built his storehouse, much to the annoyance of Merrick since apparently the new storehouse was very close to Merrick's storehouse. So close in



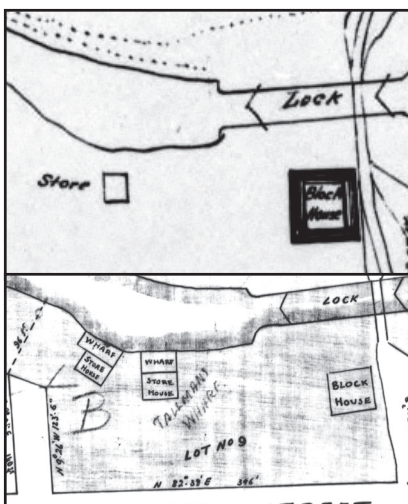
The Depot

Friends of the Rideau welcomes thousands of visitors each year to the Depot. The outside appearance belies its poor condition, something that Parks Canada will be fixing this winter, performing needed rehabilitation and ensuring that it can continue to welcome visitors for years to come. Photo by Ken W. Watson.

fact that Merrick complained the roof overhang would shed water onto his building, or, if it caught fire, it would threaten Merrick's building.

So now there were two storehouses in this area, neither of which, based on the apparent close proximity of the two, was likely the Depot. The plot thickened in the 1860s when Hiram Easton applied for a lease to erect a storehouse. While the records are a bit murky, it does appear that Easton built a new storehouse in 1864. At about that same time, it appears that Charles Holden abandoned his storehouse, since in 1867 Easton applied to obtain a lease for that land and building, which he stated had been abandoned for two years. That implies there were now three storehouses in the area; Merrick's, Holden's and Easton's.

The first map that shows a building where the Depot is today is an February 1868 map of Merrickville. That map shows only two storehouses, including one in the exact location and orientation as the present day Depot. The Depot oriented building is most likely Easton's 1864 building, the other is either Holden's or Merrick's storehouse. In 1869, rents were being paid by both Easton and Merrick, so the second building is likely Merrick's, leaving a mystery of what happened to Holden's building.



1848 and 1868

The top 1848 map shows the original Read & Whitmarsh storehouse. The bottom 1868 map shows two storehouses, the one on the left is in the exact location and orientation as the present day Depot.

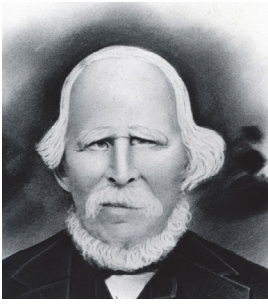
Friends of the Rideau is a volunteer, non-profit organization, working to enhance and conserve the heritage and charm of the Rideau Canal.

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Hiram Easton

Easton was busy as a forwarder (moving goods) in the 1870s and 1880s, so he was likely using his storehouse through that time. At some point in the 1890s, the Ottawa Transportation Company took over the storehouse. They were using it to store goods for shipment, including boxes of cheese. In 1914 the Rideau Power Company took over the building, using it as a storehouse for

electrical equipment and in the 1940s to house two hydro trucks. Later, use of the building went to the Merrickville Lion's Club and then in 1967 to the Merrickville Historical Society. By the 1980s, Parks Canada was using the Depot to house an interpretive display about the commercial use of the canal. That was a casualty of the budget cuts in the early 1990s and in 1995 Friends of the Rideau gained use of the building from Parks Canada, an initiative by board members Dave and Jeanne Brett.

The big question is whether the present day Depot is Easton's 1864 building, or a later building moved onto the spot previously occupied by Easton's storehouse. The building has been interpreted by some to be a "railway style" storehouse and hence related to the railway. One idea is that the building was built for the railway and then later (~1900) moved onto the exact spot previously occupied by Easton's depot. The railroad arrived in Merrickville c.1886 which would date the building to that time.

However there are features of the building, such as its axe squared timbers, that appear to indicate that it's an older building. Axe squared timbers were being replaced by saw milled timbers by the 1870s. But that's not conclusive evidence; there would have been a time period overlap. A c.1905 photo shows a dilapidated looking Depot. Is that photo showing a 20 year old building or a 40 year old building? A canal depot has the same needs (wide overhanging roof) as a railway depot, so "railway style" doesn't necessarily mean railway.

So for now, the exact origins of the Depot remain a bit of a mystery. Whether it was built on-site or came from the railroad, it is a heritage building and it's the only storehouse style building remaining along the Rideau Canal. As such, it's a very important part of the heritage of the Rideau Canal. The building speaks directly to the era of commercial navigation and provides a tangible reminder of that era. It also speaks to how the Rideau Canal helped to shape local communities, the canal allowing these communities to grow and be commercially successful.

When you visit the newly restored Depot next summer, have a look at the building itself and appreciate what it represents to the heritage of the Rideau Canal and to the heritage landscape of Merrickville.



The Depot c.1905

This is the earliest photo we have of The Depot. It's original board and batten siding (later covered with metal sheeting) can be seen and it is sitting on a rubble stone foundation.

Much of the background information for this article has been taken from "*Industries and Industrialists of Merrickville, 1792-1979*", Manuscript Report 423, by Richard Tatley, 1979.

Image credits: 1848 map: Library and Archives Canada, Microfiche 27895. 1868 map: Library and Archives Canada, NMC 129558. Easton Photo: MRS 423 pg.737 (from Mrs. Kathleen Easton). Depot c.1905 photo: Clifford Pennock (Neil Patterson Collection, Parks Canada).

- Ken W. Watson

The Depot—2019 Season

Friends of the Rideau had a successful season in 2019 at The Depot, our visitor and interpretation centre in Merrickville. Our student employees, Lauren Frankovitch and Joshua Terpstra, worked long hours and contributed greatly to the services given to visitors, providing them with information and advice not only about Merrickville but also about the entire Rideau Canal system. We're very grateful for their commitment and initiative – it was a pleasure to have them on our "team".

We had approximately 8,500 visitors to The Depot in 2019. The operating season ran from mid-June to Labour Day, seven days a week. By special arrangement The Depot was also open during Merrickville's Tulip Festival in May and for the European Car Show in Blockhouse Park on September 29. We're grateful for financial support from the Village of Merrickville and for the assistance of the Merrickville and District Historical Society. We were also pleased to be able to offer visitors the opportunity to purchase butter tarts prepared by the Village's own Nana B's Bakery.



Our 2109 summer students

Joshua Terpstra and Lauren Frankovitch. Photo by Gillian Organ

As this article is written, The Depot is a shell, with the contents removed and placed in storage while the building undergoes major refurbishment by a team from Parks Canada, the owner. The work will include constructing a proper foundation, reconfiguring the interior space, installing a new floor, and landscaping the site to ensure proper drainage away from the building. Most importantly for visitors, there will be new washrooms! The exterior of the building, and the interior original frame, will remain. We can hardly wait to see the results. Do come and visit next June.

- Hunter McGill

2019 AGM

Friends of the Rideau had its Annual General Meeting on May 25, 2019 at the Woods Mill Complex (Parks Canada offices) in Smiths Falls. The invited guest speaker, Susan Millar, the Parks Canada planner for Ontario Waterways, was unable to attend. Thus the meeting covered the business of Friends: the annual report, the acceptance of financial report and minutes of the 2018 AGM, election of directors and a general discussion of heritage developments on the Rideau Canal.

Our Annual Report can be found on the Friends of the Rideau website (www.rideaufriends.com). Elected as a director for a two-year term was Cheryl Gulseth who joined existing directors Hunter McGill, Ken Watson, Chris Biber, Gillian Organ, Marcus Létourneau and Bruce Kemp, who were elected for a two-year term last year.

Message from the Chair

Dear Friends,

It was a good summer for the Friends of the Rideau. As you will see in the article about The Depot, we welcomed over 8,000 visitors through the doors just at that site alone. As well we met more people at the Rideau Ferry Regatta (despite some rain on the first day) and at the Classic Boat Show, also held at Rideau Ferry. It is always a pleasure to hear from the folks we speak with about their personal/family connections to the Rideau Canal. Equally pleasant is the opportunity to share our enthusiasm for the Rideau with visitors to the region and with newcomers keen on learning about the oldest continuously operating historic canal in North America.

I have to express our disappointment that the public consultations to feed into the preparation of the Rideau Canal National Historic Site management plan did not take place over the summer, as forecast. As many of you know, this is a long-awaited activity, to support the management plan which is almost a decade overdue. Friends has been very clear in communicating its expectations to Parks Canada as to the urgency of the management plan process. We hope that the new Director, Ontario Waterways, Parks Canada, David Britton, will make this a top priority in the coming months.

A few days ago a new minister for Parks Canada was appointed, Jonathan Wilkinson, MP for North Vancouver and previously Minister for Fisheries and Oceans. We will be writing to Mr. Wilkinson conveying our congratulations and reminding him of his responsibilities for national historic sites, of which the Rideau Canal is one of the best known. Commemorative integrity is a leading issue of concern for us. Also, as the funds approved in 2015 for infrastructure restoration and repair run out, it will be important to replenish this budget so that the Rideau Canal upkeep will not fall into arrears as was the case from 2000 to 2015.

Watch for the letter to Minister Wilkinson on our website.

See you in the spring.

- Hunter McGill

Exactly How Much of the Rideau Canal is Man-made?

Your editor has been working on a “little” project to map and document the man-made sections of the Rideau Canal. As with all things Rideau, the answer to this apparently simple question is much more complicated than it appears due to the way the Rideau was built. Stay tuned for the answer (or in fact “answers”) in the next newsletter.

Placing the Stones

One of the many gaps in our knowledge of how the Rideau Canal was built is how the stones for the locks and dams were put in place. We know that stones with a dimple in them are original stones, the dimples were chiseled into the stone to provide purchase points for the rock tongs (large timber tongs) that were used to put the stone in place. But how exactly was that done?

Fortunately we have a couple of period paintings by Thomas Burrowes that show the rigging use for this. They show a system using two large timbers to support a block and tackle holding the rock tongs. Movement was controlled by crabs and ropes. While I could see the generalities of how it was done, the specifics escaped me, so I went to an expert, Robert W. Passfield, a retired Parks Canada historian who literally wrote the book about building the locks, his 1983 microfiche report, "Canal Lock Design and Construction, The Rideau Canal Experience, 1826-1982".

Unfortunately, Parks Canada was very selective in what they wanted researched and the focus of his report was on the physical fabric, the built heritage, the "what was done" but not the "how it was done". I was calling the two timber setup "duopods" (as opposed to tripods). Bob corrected me on that, noting that the proper name for that timber arrangement was variously called "lifting shears", "shear legs", "shear frame" or just "shears". But, while the general methodology was clear, the exact methodology was not.

The next morning I received an email written by Bob at 5:00 am, he'd just woken up with a "eureka" moment. Here is the explanation Bob provided:

"Apparently I was thinking about the shears lift system depicted by Thomas Burrowes in his watercolour, and I awoke with the explanation. The horizontal rope that crosses the lock to connect the two shears lift frames has a weight on it to cause the shears frame to dip forward over the lock chamber when the crab anchor line holding the working shears frame upright is let out. Once dipped forward, the block and tackle were used to lift a stone, and then the crab would wind in the



Rock Tongs

Rowena Cooper with a set of rock tongs (Rideau Canal collection). Photo by Ken W. Watson.

rope attached to the top of the shears frame to pull it back to a more vertical position over the lock wall where the block and tackle were used to lower the stone block onto the mortar bed.

Having the two shears lift frames in tandem was simply a way of suspending a large weight at a height over the lock chamber where one shears lifting system would be worked in laying stone along one lock wall, and then the rigging and crab anchor would be moved to operate the shear legs frame on the other side of the chamber to lay up the masonry of that wall".

So, a bit of new information about how the Rideau Canal was built. The beauty of early 19th century engineering is that they generally used simple, although as evidenced in this case, ingenious, engineering solutions. This system allowed for the manual lifting and positioning of stones that could easily weigh a tonne or more. It was all done with timber, ropes and some mechanical gearing, operated by hand.

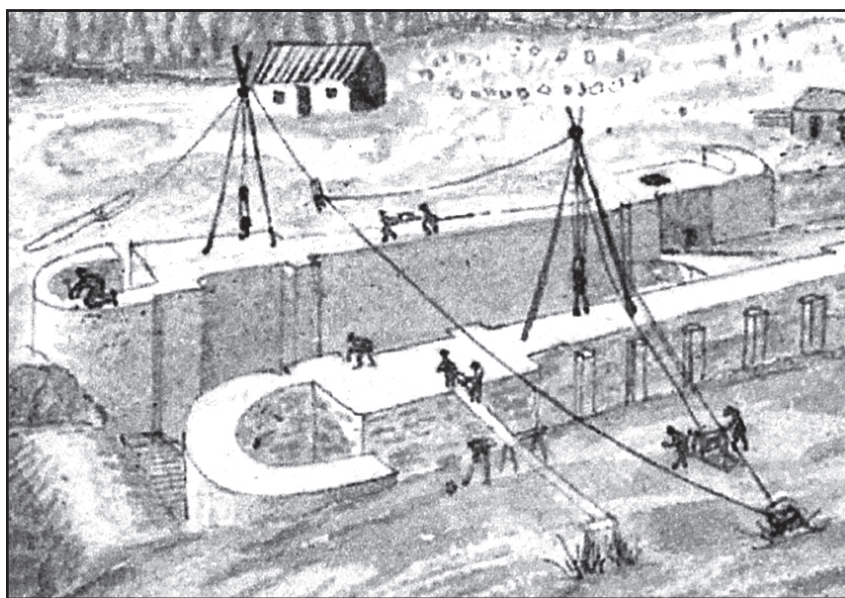
A more detailed article about this fascinating topic will be posted to www.rideau-info.com this winter.

- Ken W. Watson



Dimples in Stones

Dimples in lock wall stones at Kingston Mills. Photo by Ken W. Watson.



Rigging used for placement of the stones

This painting illustrates how the rigging was set up. "Brewer's Lower Mill: Masonry of the Lock nearly completed, Excavation for the Canal in progress, 1831-32", by Thomas Burrowes, 1831. Archives of Ontario, C 1-0-0-68.

Parks Canada—The Missing Pieces

In recent years (last 15 years or so) Parks Canada has moved away from its core mandate to maintain ecological and commemorative integrity of its sites in favour of a focus on revenue generation, often at the expense of ecology and heritage. This was apparent in 2012 when science, ecology and heritage took the brunt of the budget cuts and the management of the Rideau Canal, re-organized into a new Waterways unit, stripped out almost all aspects of heritage. The problem of Parks Canada not following its legislated mandate and heritage policies continues to this day on the Rideau Canal. It's a problem made much more difficult to solve because of the way the canal management was restructured in 2012. It's going to take a change in that structure to bring back heritage and ecology as first priorities on the canal.

We're not alone in bringing this up as an issue, many NGO groups interested in ecology and heritage have made the current problems with Parks Canada clear. These were forcefully expressed in the Let's Talk Parks Canada consultations in early 2017. When the Minister released the results of those consultations in early 2018, one of the recommendations was for *"An emphasis on commemorative integrity at national historic sites, together with the need to dedicate additional resources to education and interpretive programs"*. The latter two points, education and interpretation, speak directly to what Friends of the Rideau is all about (part of our mandate), but we've yet to see any action from Parks Canada on the Rideau Canal regarding that Ministerial directive.

Since the problems with Parks Canada go very deep, the Minister formed a temporary independent working group in the fall of 2018 to look specifically at those problems. The recommendations from that group were released in late August, 2019. Several of the recommendations are relevant to the Rideau Canal including:

- "It is recommended that Parks Canada make a targeted effort to strengthen a national constituency for national historic sites by cultivating relationships with non-governmental organizations, universities, and other civil society actors; as well as within the federal government and other levels of government". This speaks to forming closer relationship with groups such as Friends of the Rideau and the need to do meaningful public engagement, something that Parks Canada is not doing on the Rideau Canal today.
- "It is recommended that the Minister legislate that commemorative integrity will be the first priority in the management of national historic sites to be consistent with the similar objective on ecological integrity". While Parks Canada policy states that commemorative integrity (which includes heritage

landscapes and public education) should be a priority, it's not enshrined in legislation and that needs to be fixed.

- "It is recommended that Parks Canada revise the Cultural Resource Management (CRM) policy to strengthen commemorative integrity objectives". In recent years Parks Canada has watered down its CRM policies and this recommendation is basically to restore those original CRM objectives.

With a new CEO for Parks Canada (Ron Hallman) and a new Director of Ontario Waterways (David Britton) we hope to see a restoration of commemorative integrity on the Rideau Canal, including attention and resources for protecting heritage landscapes and for public education. We are after all a National Historic Site of Canada and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, we'd like to see the Rideau Canal operated under the requirements of those designations.

You'll find a link to the full working group report on the home page of our website (www.rideaufriends.com)

Management Plan

Public consultations for the new management plan, now many years overdue, is scheduled for next spring/early summer. Parks Canada has set a new deadline date of December 2020 for submission to the Minister. We are concerned as to whether the consultations will be meaningful, given the very slow approval process within Parks Canada. Will there be time to properly incorporate informed public input into the final plan? We've been assured by Parks Canada that there will be—we hope that's true.

2019 Boating Stats

Canal traffic in 2019 was similar to 2018 with a total of 61,145 vessel passages recorded through the locks, compared to 61,048 vessel passages in 2018. The numbers are close to the 2016 numbers (59,301). A change since then is the addition of the Le Boat fleet which now accounts for quite a number of vessel passages.

Mooring was up 1.5% compared to 2018.

In total, during 2019, 65.8% of the boats were from Ontario, 23.9% from Québec, 8.8% from the United States and 1.5% "Other". Ontario boater numbers are down a bit and Quebec numbers are up a bit.

For the 2019 numbers for some of the individual lockstations see:

www.rideau-info.com/canal/statistics.html

Rideau Slow TV

Last year your newsletter editor and Rideau heritage expert, Ken, was contacted by Mitch Azaria, Executive Producer with Good Earth Productions (who did the Great Canadian Parks series), about possibly doing a TV show about the Rideau. That's not new, there have been several TV shows done about the Rideau Canal in recent years, but this was a new concept to Canada, the idea of "slow TV." That concept originated in Norway and, in its pure form, it is "real time" TV of a trip. It's as if you're a passenger on a trip, a 4 hour train ride would be a 4 hour TV show (hence slow TV). TVO hired Good Earth to see about doing a slow TV show in Canada.

While in Norway these are sometimes done as live TV, other iterations (England) have it as a packaged (pre-shot) show, but still a real time journey, generally with no narration, but sometimes with supporting graphics to explain what people are seeing. That was the concept TVO wanted to bring to Canada. Several spots were pitched, including the Rideau Canal. For the Rideau the idea was to end the show in downtown Ottawa. So for four hours of TV, that set the starting point on the canal to be in the Manotick area. Earlier this year TVO

greenlighted the Rideau Canal as the first slow TV show that they would produce.

The Rideau is a friendly place and Mitch was able to secure the volunteer help of Dawn and Randy McKendry of the Manotick Classic Boat Club to have



Scoping the Shoot at Long Island

Peter Warren (videographer), John Morrison (director) and Mitch Azaria (executive producer) working out the best way to film the locks at Long Island. Photo by Ken W. Watson.

them pilot their beautiful mahogany boat, "Miss Geneva", as the featured boat for the show. This past spring, Ken, Dawn, Randy with Mitch and his film crew did a scoping run (in a pontoon boat) of part of this section, allowing Mitch, his director and his videographer to get a visual sense of the route (i.e. to pick which side of the canal to film in certain spots, where to do drone footage, etc.). The actual filming was done in late September, on days when conditions were perfect (sunny, no wind).

Ken is still helping Mitch with research materials, an

enjoyable process since Mitch had lots of questions and some have sparked new research into this section of the Rideau Canal. It will be very interesting to view the finished product, to see exactly what they come up for these four hours of Rideau "slow TV". That show will be aired by TVO likely sometime in April or May, 2020.

Out and About



Antique & Classic Boat Show

Hunter talking to visitors at our booth at the Antique & Classic Boat show, held at Rideau Ferry. Photo by Ken W. Watson.

Friends of the Rideau does a lot of public engagement. In addition to the thousands of visitors we greet each year at the Depot, we make the effort to get out to events along the Rideau including the Ottawa Boat Show in February, Colonel By Day in Ottawa, the Antique and Classic Boat Show and the bi-annual Rideau Ferry Regatta. In 2019, Colonel By Day celebrations at the Ottawa Locks were cancelled, but we were at the other events. Leading the charge is our Chair, Hunter McGill, who makes a great deal of personal effort to ensure our presence at these events.

We answer a myriad of questions about the Rideau Canal and it's always a fun day. We'll be out and about next year—come out and say hi. If you'd like to volunteer to help us out, please email us at info@rideaufriends.com.



Rideau Ferry Regatta

Hunter with our display of Rideau books at the Rideau Ferry Regatta. Photo by Ken W. Watson.