

Wolfville Historical Society

Newsletter

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259 Main Street, Wolfville, NS, B4P 1C6
<http://wolfvillehs.ednet.ns.ca>

December 2004

President's Report for 2004

H. John Whidden

The Wolfville Historical Society and Randall House Museum have come through 2004 in good order and have undertaken changes and improvements in several areas. Almost all of these are a part of a process that has been underway for a number of years and which will continue for several more.

First, the exterior of the house itself was scraped, cleaned, caulked and primed on all sides last summer and the summer before. This leaves only the finish coats of paint to be done next summer, once we have decided on a colour.

The garden committee has started on an ambitious plan, part of the overall Long Range Plan, to revive the Randall House grounds. By fall the first fruits of the work were evident. Though we are constantly told not to judge a book by its cover, the improvement in the appearance of the house and grounds this year are certainly a statement to the community that the Society is alive, well and active in Wolfville. Further work to be seen next summer includes new trees and other planting and improvements to the front walk. Sadly we will lose the last of our elms. This will not only make the house hotter from the sun, but will also change the impression one gets of the house from Main Street, especially when viewing it from the west.

In the interior the focus has been on presentation. Here the impetus has been the pressure from the Nova Scotia Museum's triennial assessments of our museum and Society which are intended to push small museums toward more modern professional standards of operation and upon which our grants depend. The attic and the front parlour, renamed the Dewolf Parlour, are the most obvious results of this. Equally important, though, has been the adoption of a consistent, clear system of labelling of our artifacts and exhibits. As part of the Exhibits Committee mandate, the process of re-

labelling is underway. Two members of this committee are attending a workshop, "Exhibits on a Shoestring", to help them in their work.

An unseen yet equally important process has been the upgrading of our record keeping relating to the artifacts in our possession. This process is not yet complete and awaits the attention of a member with secretarial/computer skills. The contents of the library have largely been catalogued, but a little more work is needed from a member with library experience. The photograph collection is being tackled over the winter by three energetic members who plan to be finished by June next year.

Concurrent with the above activities, policies and procedures to govern collections management have been developed. These policies and procedures are part of our overall manual (nearly complete) which has been under construction for a number of years and which will govern the structure and operations of the museum and Society. In our last N.S. Museum assessment we received high praise for quality and comprehensiveness of this manual. Clearly, we are an active, forward-looking organization with an enthusiastic and hard working membership.

Collections management became a prominent issue early in the summer when we discovered a serious outbreak of mould in the upstairs rooms. A great deal of expense for expert advice, and effort on the part of curators and board members, brought the situation under control. A consequence of this episode is the realization that we must change and improve our cleaning procedures, and keep the temperature higher than we have been accustomed to over the winter.

All of these activities involve time and expense. The modernization and improved professional management of Randall House being urged upon us have

greatly increased the demands on volunteers and curators alike. And even when the changes have been made, and the policies and procedures created, and the cataloguing finished, and the refocusing done, the demands involved in ongoing operations will continue at a higher level than that to which we were accustomed in the past. This is not a complaint. I think that no one will dispute that Randall House Museum has greatly benefited inside and out by the work of the last few years. But we must be aware that our members and volunteers will be asked to attend workshops so that they may work in a more focussed manner, and that our curators will have to be paid to do more in the areas of collections management and maintenance. In other words, our museum operations will become less seat-of-the-pants and more consistent and professional. This will require more time from more people.

The logical question at this point is, "Whence cometh help – and money?" Our membership has increased greatly in the past two years, and we are fortunate to have volunteers, both veterans of the struggle and newcomers, whose enthusiasm, ideas and energy have brought us to this point. But the membership and the new Board are going to have to pay close attention to fundraising and attracting volunteers if we are to fulfil our promise.

The membership and newly elected Board in January will be presented with *Long Range Plan II* encompassing not only ideas for the exterior of the House and garden and interior items, such as ventilation and lighting, but will also ask the members for guidance on endeavours apart from operating Randall House. For example, should the Society have a policy on maintaining the heritage character of Wolfville? If so, should we make representations to the Town, or urge stricter regulation of heritage properties whether or not they have been officially designated as such? Should we undertake a series of publications? If so, should this be as part of a more comprehensive project of involvement with the community as the N.S.

Museum thinks small museums ought to do? What can we do to make our website more informative? How can we do all that we do without burning out our volunteers? How can we raise the money needed to maintain and improve the fabric of the museum? These questions are not unique to us. Every volunteer organization faces similar ones. We must consider them and make the decisions that will carry the Society through the next few years. I am confident that we will be able to do so.

Finally, I must close on a very sad note. Heather Davidson, who has been our Curator since 1992, has submitted her resignation. We are grateful for the work and commitment that she has devoted to Randall House and the Society over those twelve years, and wish her the best in her writing and other endeavours. We can expect to see her at our Christmas party when we can thank her in person for her contribution to the Society.

Heather's resignation brings into focus a number of the points that have been made above. It will be difficult for a new curator without her experience to handle the multiplicity of duties we expect of her or him; further, we have no reason to expect that we can find a person who will stay with us over the long term. Before anyone is employed, something that the executive expects to have done by mid March, the Board and membership therefore will have to decide on the scope of these duties. It is possible that some of the collections maintenance and record keeping, particularly the updating of records, will have to be done outside our open season of mid June to mid September, thus involving more additional expense. Alternatively some of these duties may be assumed by volunteers.

Whatever happens, we need more than ever the support and participation of our members. We are faced with interesting times, but when we get through it all I have every expectation that the Society will be strengthened, focussed, and ready to face the future.

15 December, 2004, 7:30 p.m., at Maxine McCuaig's home, 646 Main Street

Wolfville Historical Society Christmas Party

Wednesday, 21 January, 2004, at 2:00 p.m., Wolfville Town Hall

Annual General Meeting of the Wolfville Historical Society

REQUEST

The Society has received an enquiry about a three masted schooner, the *Septhie*, built in Goderich Ontario in 1889. In 1917 it was sold to East Coast interests and in 1917 the owner was listed as Herman Baird of Wolfville, Nova Scotia. Does anyone have any knowledge of the ship or the family? If so, please call Heather Watts at 542-0307