



WHS

Wolfville
Historical
Society
founded 1941

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NEWSLETTER

RANDALL HOUSE : WOLFVILLE'S COMMUNITY MUSEUM

Volume 14 Issue 2

MAY 2014

A NEW SEASON

There is a lot of news to share this month, which sees the launch of our summer season with the opening of Randall House Museum on May 31.

Meanwhile, we have had to say goodbye to our Curator Alexandra Hernould, who understandably was unable to refuse an offer of a full time position with the Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage. We wish her well. We are also delighted to welcome our new Curator/Manager, Dr. Roger Marsters. Roger began his work with us on May 1st, and you can read more about him in this issue.

We have also seen changes in our executive officers. John Brown retired from the Board this January after giving noble service as Acting President and Treasurer during a difficult period in 2012-3. Jim Laceby also withdrew from the Board after serving in 2013 as our Treasurer, and doing a lot to put our financial house in order. We have been delighted to welcome Greg Miller of Bishop and Company Chartered Accountants as our new Treasurer, confirmed at the membership meeting on April 16.

This year sees the launching of a major new initiative for the Historical Society. Up until this year our summer activities have been restricted to the Randall House Museum, its gardens, and the park just below it. Now, on the occasion of the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, we have set in motion a whole host of activities in the Town of Wolfville and beyond, partnered by many local organisations and businesses. But we must await confirmation of our major funding before finalising things.

We urge you to take advantage of the program we plan to present, and join us in the films, talks and readings we are offering - please volunteer to help out if you have time. Meanwhile the Town of Wolfville is enthusiastically supporting our plans. Thank you Wolfville, and thank you too to all our partners!

Michael Bawtree, Editor

ROGER MARSTERS

our new Curator/Manager for the Randall House Museum



Dr. Roger Marsters received his B.A. in English, and his M.A. and PhD in History, from Dalhousie University. He has worked as an Interpreter at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic; as an editor for Formac Publishing Ltd.; and as Graduate Student Administrator, Doctoral Researcher and Lecturer in history at Dalhousie University.

As Museum Interpreter of the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic over four years he researched, wrote and presented programming interpreting Nova Scotia's history to a broad range of publics; collaborated with other staff, volunteers and the general public in developing and presenting community events based on museum collections; undertook collections-based research in support of interpretive programs; and learned principles of museum collections management.

Roger considers himself to be a public historian as much as an academic one. He has published two books: *Bold Privateers: Terror, Plunder and Profit on Canada's*

Atlantic Coast, and *Shipwreck Treasures: Disaster and Discovery on Canada's East Coast*. He is also working on a third book, under contract with the University of Toronto Press, to be named *Approaches to Empire: Geography, Climate and Power in Eighteenth-Century Littoral North America*. He has also authored articles, including one on the cultural history of Grand Pré.

Roger's particular historical interests are: Canada's economic and cultural relations to the ocean realm; resource extraction and economic and cultural change; the history of technology; history of landscape, architecture and of cities; history of food, cooking, eating and drinking. He is a member of the Canadian Historical Association. One of his referees described him as a 'notable scholar' with 'experience in museum work [and] with a demonstrable commitment to community service'.

Roger writes:

"I am delighted to have been chosen to serve as the Randall House Museum's new curator, and am keen to help advance the Wolfville Historical Society's work of preserving, interpreting, and making known this region's singular landscapes and histories. In important ways, I am myself a product of Minas Basin landscapes. Descended from Planters, I spent much of my youth around the Basin's Southern Bight, and know the region and its past deeply. In my role as academic historian, I have studied the cultural geography of the Bay of Fundy marshlands; my recent work follows geology and ocean forces as they shape human use of the Minas Channel, from Aboriginal summer camps to tidal power test sites. I am so pleased to be back living in the Minas region, surrounded by its astounding physical character and the singular peoples it supports. I am thankful for the opportunity to work with and learn from the Society's many dedicated volunteers, and with them to engage the public with Wolfville's remarkable past and present."



WOLFVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD 2014

Left to right: Roger Marsters (Curator); Krystal Tanner; Anne Hope; Christine Lynch; Michael Bawtree; Greg Miller (Treasurer); Anthony Harding (President); Martin Hallett (Vice-President); Hilary Sircom (Secretary). Absent: Wendy Elliott, Andria Hill-Lehr

COMMITTEES 2014

Finance: Greg Miller (Treasurer); Michael Bawtree; Derek Watts

Communications: Michael Bawtree (Chair); Elizabeth Browne; Wendy Elliott; Anne Hope; Derek Watts

Programs: Wendy Elliott (Chair); Beth Keech; Andria Hill-Lehr; Bob Wallace; John Whidden

Memorial Book Committee: Patty Williams (Chair); Martin Hallett; Jim Tillotson; Pat Townsend

Randall House Management: Martin Hallett (Chair); Jan Baldwin; Sue Bissix; Christine Lynch; Elaine Slauenwhite; Heather Watts; Roger Marsters (Curator/Manager)

Randall House Management Sub-Committees:

Collections: Jan Baldwin (Chair); Nicholas Kaizer; Christine Lynch; Krystal Tanner; Heather Watts; Roger Marsters (Curator/Manager)

Garden: Sue Bissix; Karen Maser; Mary Pratt; Heide Schumacher; Diana Shelley; Heather Watts; Gisela Westphalen

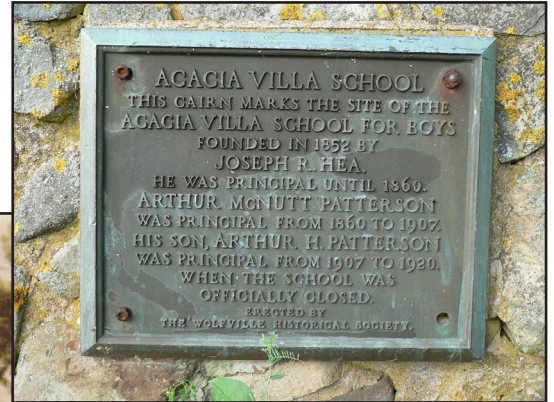
Property: Martin Hallett; George St. Amour

1914: War Comes To Wolfville Project Committee:

Anthony Harding (Chair); Michael Bawtree (Project Co-ordinator); Andria Hill-Lehr; Christine Lynch; Krystal Tanner; Roger Marsters (Curator/Manager)

AN OLD SCHOOL - AND THE SOCIETY'S COUNTRY ESTATE

If you drive through Horton Township, perhaps to visit the cross at the site of the Expulsion of the Acadians in 1755, you may notice at the corner of one intersection a stone cairn. If you stop and read its plaque, you will learn that it marks the site of an old school, the Acacia Villa School for Boys, which operated from 1852 to 1920, and included Canada's future Prime Minister Robert Borden among its pupils. On February 19, Pat Townsend gave the Society a most stimulating talk about Acacia Villa, sharing with us something of the history of the School. As the photograph shows, it was an impressive cluster of buildings, now almost completely expunged from the



landscape.

Pat then went on to give us the result of her researches into the minute books of the Wolfville Historical Society, and recounting the efforts of the Society back in the 'sixties to get the cairn erected. It was

a complicated story, involving the donation of stones and labour, the moving of the stones in the trunks of members' cars, the raising of funds, and finally (a few years later) the purchase of the 9' x 9' site on which the cairn sits. It is this patch of ground which our past president John Whidden refers to as the Society's 'country estate.'

Sadly, like so many country estates, ours suffers from having negligent landlords. On a visit to the site a few weeks ago we saw broken stonework, and a sapling growing up in front of the cairn. The plaque's screws were rusting out and the plaque itself in need of a good refurbishing. And how about an acacia or two as a background? If any member would like to help take this on, please be in touch with our Curator at Randall House: 542-9775

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We are sad to record the passing of Dr. Reg Moore, a stalwart member of the Wolfville Historical Society for many years, and owner, with his wife Pat, of Kent Lodge, the oldest house in Wolfville (dated 1760). We send our deepest condolences to Pat.

A NEW STATUE FOR WOLFVILLE: MONA PARSONS

Wendy Elliott wrote:

A quiet campaign has begun to commemorate Wolfville's unlikely war heroine Mona Parsons with a statue somewhere downtown.

A woman just sentenced to death by firing squad was expected to sob and plead for mercy, but not Parsons. Found guilty of treason in Amsterdam (Holland) in 1941, for hiding Allied soldiers in her house, Mona turned and walked to the prison van. The judge was taken by the beautiful 41-year-old woman's dignified demeanour. On her way out of the room, he suggested that she enter an appeal. Her sentence was commuted to a forced labour camp, from which she escaped. How on earth did a Canadian find herself in such a state? After a Wolfville childhood, Parsons became a 1920s New York chorus girl, a Depression-era nurse, the wife of a Dutch millionaire, an underground worker in the resistance, a prisoner of the Nazis, and an emaciated fugitive who walked across Nazi Germany in the dying months of World War II.



Canada has never done anything to recognize or honour this brave Canadian - the only Canadian female civilian to have been imprisoned by the Nazis. So members of the Women of Wolfville with the assistance of the Wolfville Historical Society have begun raising funds to erect a statue in Parsons' memory.

Former Lieutenant Governor Myra Freeman has said Parsons' exploits comprise a "remarkable story of which more Nova Scotians should be aware." Acadia University history graduate Sarah Story believes, "Women like Mona Parsons, nationally and internationally, are not widely recognized because they did not hold political or economic power."

Wolfville's popular Gravely Ghost Walks ends at Parsons' gravesite. Her tombstone is totally inadequate, listing her simply as a wife. Fortunately the Nova Scotia department of Communities, Culture and Heritage has already contributed a third of the estimated \$25,000 cost of a statue.

"This project isn't just about remembering the contributions of a community member," noted Andria Hill-Lehr, who wrote both Parsons' biography and a play about her. "There are many who deserve that. This is about honouring the memory of a woman who, though she never wore a uniform or carried a gun, was willing to put her life on the line when she found herself in a war zone and seized upon the only thing she could do to support the Allies in their fight against Hitler."

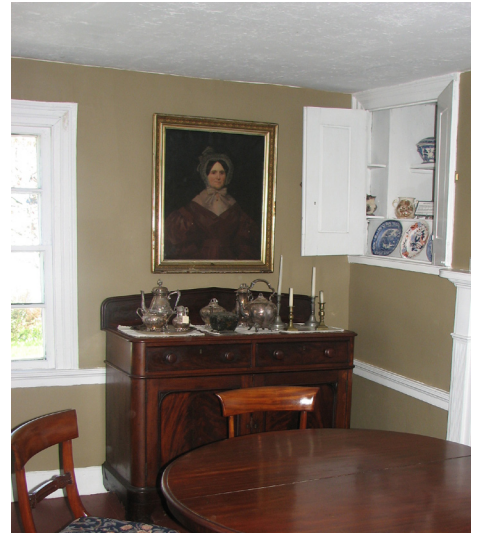
Contact Hill-Lehr for further information at andriahill@yahoo.ca, or call Wendy at 542-2533.

RANDALL HOUSE OPENS SATURDAY 31ST MAY

The first salvo in the Wolfville Historical Society's unique Commemoration Year sounds off at 1 p.m. on Saturday 31st May, when the ribbon is cut to open the 2014 season of the Randall House Museum. Under the management of our new Curator Roger Marsters, the house will once again be welcoming visitors to its old rooms, little changed from when the house was first built in the early 1800s (or even earlier). Furnished in Victorian style - many pieces donated to the Museum over the years by generous benefactors - the house gives us a vivid idea of how a family of comfortable means might have lived and worked and played.

THIS YEAR'S SPECIAL EXHIBIT

Each year one of the rooms on Randall House's main floor is devoted to a themed exhibit. This year, our new Curator Roger Marsters, with the assistance of Society and community members, has put together a unique collection of artefacts, letters and memorabilia commemorating the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, and focussing especially on the effect of the outbreak of that terrible conflict on this small rural town in the Annapolis Valley. The exhibit will also feature a taped video interview with Mack Frail of Centreville, whose father fought in the War, and another with young Caleb Perry of Berwick, who was chosen from across Canada last year to visit the battlefields of Vimy, and shares his experiences with us. Roger writes:



"In the second decade of the twentieth century Wolfville matured as a town, becoming ever more closely integrated into the roiling world of commercial and cultural exchange beyond the rich valley and basin that sustained it. New civic architecture—an imposing Beaux Arts post office (1912), a fine brick station on the Dominion Atlantic line (1914)—testified to the town's growing confidence and prosperity. Railway and the telegraph lines embodied the region's openness to the main currents of modern life, bringing news near-instantaneously from the furthest extent of the connected world, carrying local people to Halifax, Boston, New York and, via the great ocean liners of the age, to the furthest reaches of Europe, Asia, and the Americas. But this very openness to modernity brought with it a terrible vulnerability. With the outbreak of war in August, 1914, Wolfville's integration opened it to the intense fervours and terrors of the greatest and most destructive conflict in history. This year's exhibit at Randall House examines the reciprocal relations between Wolfville and the war: how the conflict militarized everyday life in the region, as local men, women, and children worked together to help sustain the war effort; and how men at the front relished the familiar comforts of home, as they fought to stay sound and alive in the face of unprecedented, industrialized violence. It is a story of how the town and the region confronted the modern world, its full promise and horror."

THE SOCIETY'S 1914: WAR COMES TO WOLFVILLE PROJECT

Our January newsletter contained a report on how plans were developing to commemorate the outbreak of the First World War, and its effect on Wolfville and the surrounding area. Since that time we have continued discussing and planning, and are now putting together the finishing touches to one of the most ambitious projects the Society has ever undertaken. As noted on the front page, we still await confirmation of the targeted funding for which we have applied.

Once this funding is in place, we will be producing a special brochure, describing in some detail the various activities and events we have planned. We expect it to be ready in the middle of June, and it will look something like this:

1914: WAR COMES TO WOLFVILLE

'A REMINDER'

A hundred years ago, far away in Serbia, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne is assassinated. Rural life in Nova Scotia goes on; but six weeks later Europe is at war, and Canada as an unquestioning member of the British Empire finds itself involved in the terrible conflict. . .



INSTALLATIONS, TALKS, EXHIBITS, FILMS AND MUSIC

WOLFVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY and its many partners explore the beginnings of the war, its effects on the local community, and the way it changed life and lives in the Annapolis Valley for ever.

Explore with us!

WATCH FOR IT!

WOLFVILLE'S WW1 RECRUITING OFFICE



This remarkable photograph is in the Wolfville Historical Society collection, and shows vividly the kind of pressure placed on young men to enlist in the Nova Scotia regiments which had been formed soon after the War broke out. There were many ministers like Dr. George Cutten, President of Acadia University, who combined his sermons at the Baptist Church with stirring calls for men to do their Christian duty. In fact there was great enthusiasm to join up 'for the Empire' in those early days of the war, and those who had their doubts, whether moral or political, were subjected to public humiliation: young women were encouraged to hand a white feather (symbolising cowardice) to any young man not in uniform.

*Watch for the replica of this office, which is to be contributed and built to scale by William Lang of Green Army Design, and will be unveiled on Main Street, Wolfville, by Mayor Jeff Cantwell on Canada Day as part of our Society's **1914: War Comes To Wolfville** Project.*

If you have been a member of the Society but have not yet renewed your membership for 2014, we urge you to do so. If you would like to join, please pick up a form from Randall House. Memberships make up an important part of our revenue, enabling us to serve the community in so many ways. Drop off your cheque at Randall House, or mail it to:

Wolfville Historical Society, Randall House, 259 Main Street, Wolfville, NS B4P 1C6

Tel: (902) 542-9775 in summer season.

E-mail: Randallhouse@outlook.com