

Wolfville Historical Society

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NEWSLETTER

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Randall House Museum

259 Main Street

Wolfville

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WOLFVILLE – Before she was even unveiled, children were placing dandelions at the feet of the life-sized sculpture of Mona Parsons.

Mona Parsons Comes Home

Wolfville Mayor Jeff Cantwell said the sculpture brings Parsons' WWII story to life. "It's important to Canadian history, Nova Scotia history and it's certainly part of Wolfville's history." Now that she's dancing on Main Street, Cantwell joked, he can finally take Parsons' image off his FaceBook page where she's been for two full years.

Kings Hants MP Scott Brison looked at the 250 people there for the event and said, "We're all here to honour such a remarkable hero or heroine." He thanked biographer Andria Hill Lehr for "bringing to life the story of Mona Parsons, who was willing to risk her life to protect and save" British airmen. Brison added that the sculpture will remind future generations of her valour and he congratulated the community effort to make something happen in Parsons' memory.

Representing the North Nova Scotia Highlanders, W.O. Mark Joseph poignantly described a soldier encountering the 87-pound Parsons at war's end in 1945. She was looking for British troops and happened upon the Highlanders, in the shape of a soldier from Halifax. Joseph noted that Parsons had used her acting ability, which he called a military-like skill set, in order to survive.

Hill Lehr, who found Parsons' archived story in 1995, said, "I can't wipe the smile off my face. It takes a community to make this happen." She read from the May 5, 1945 letter Parsons wrote home in which the emaciated woman said her joy was almost too much to bear.

Sculptor Nistal Prem de Boer depicted Parsons expressing the joy of freedom. He said she was an ordinary woman who was called upon to risk her life to save others.

De Boer said he looks forward to the face on the Parsons sculpture changing every day.

Mona Parsons – Did You Know?

Married to a well-to-do Dutch man, Parsons was sentenced to death in 1941 for hiding Allied airmen in their house near Amsterdam. She spent the rest of the war in forced labour camps in Nazi Germany, and then escaped by walking to the border of the Netherlands.

She was the only Canadian female civilian to be imprisoned by the Nazis and her bravery was unrecognized until Hill Lehr wrote a play and a book about her exploits. Her wartime heroism was later documented by a Heritage Minute and in a History TV documentary.

Parsons was born in Middleton and died in Wolfville in 1976.

The Women of Wolfville took up the need for a commemoration and were joined by the Wolfville Historical Society. The provincial government and the town of Wolfville were the lead contributors to the campaign, which was also supported by individual donors. A Canadian Heritage Legacy Fund grant and a significant donation from former Annapolis Valley resident Dr. Allen Eaves helped bring the fundraising campaign to a close.

Wendy Elliott

President's Message

There is good news about our financial situation: Wolfville Town Council has restored our annual grant to its previous level of \$10,000. However, fundraising is still very much an issue, as we look for new ways to make the Society an important part of the cultural life of our town.

Randall House Museum will once again be welcoming visitors from far and near, starting May 27th. With Krystal Tanner returning as our Curator, I am confident in predicting that the Museum will be humming with events and activities to please all tastes, from the spooky sensations of Scary Story Night to the more sedate pleasures of taking tea in the dining-room of a Saturday afternoon!

You will also find in these pages Anthony Harding's update of what we and other local societies are planning as Canada 150 celebrations. Anthony is our representative on the Kings – Hants Heritage Connection, an "umbrella group" of the region's historical societies, which has been hard at work for some time developing and coordinating the various events that will mark this national milestone.

Last but not least, you will be pleased to read that your President is plying his skills (?) with a paintbrush as he readies our famous sign for return to its customary spot: a happy end to a long story!

Martin Hallett

HORTON LANDING



Horton Landing, located where the Gaspereau River empties into the Minas Basin was an important location for all three of the founding peoples of this area. The first nations people, the Mi'kmaq, spent the winters in the forest, but came to the ocean in summer to hunt, fish and camp.

In 1680 French-speaking Acadian farmers migrated down the Annapolis Valley from Port Royal to dyke the tidal rivers and create rich new farmland and thriving communities. Ongoing wars between France and England finally resulted in the ceding of Acadia to Great Britain in 1713, at which time a sometimes hostile colonial government presided in Halifax. The Acadians were expelled in 1755 and scattered to distant colonies, their homes and barns burned. A major expulsion point for the families being rowed out to the waiting transports, was Horton Landing.

The third and last group of settlers, the Planters from New England, disembarked at Horton Landing in 1760 to take up the vacant Acadian farms. As a condition for coming, they demanded, and were granted, government by an elected legislative assembly as well as by governor and council, and thus Nova Scotia became the first of the British North American colonies, in what would become Canada, to have representative government.

Heather and Derek Watts

Just a Reminder ...

... That there is a Members' Meeting this Wednesday (May 10th). Susan Markham-Starr will be speaking on The Halifax Common: 250+ Years of Community Use and Debate (cows, cricket, circuses, Catholics, The Stones, and The Friends), 2 pm Wednesday May 17, 2017, at St. John's Anglican Church, 164 Main Street, Wolfville.

... That Randall House will be opening for the season on Saturday, May 27th

... And that you can renew your WHS membership (Individual \$20; Family \$30; Sustaining Member \$100) either by cheque to WHS 259 Main St. Wolfville NS B4P 1C6, or online at www.wolfvillehs.ednet.ns.ca We value your support!

A SUMMER OF ANTIQUES

The Summer of Antiques is the Society's project for 2017. We know that many people are interested in antiques, and that it is appropriate for the Historical Society to offer a summer programme on this theme.

We are planning on holding a number of seminars in Randall House which will be of interest to antique collectors. The seminar topics have not been finalized yet, but they will include renovation, preservation and care of antique furniture, books, and textiles. We are hoping that a local bodger will be able to demonstrate how Windsor chairs are made, using original hand tools of the trade. We also hope to attract a man who specializes in antique farm tools and machinery. The seminars will have a limited number of participants due to the lack of available space in Randall House, but they will be friendly, sociable, informative events with lunch served afterwards. Be sure to reserve your place quickly as soon as they are announced.

We at the Historical Society are looking forward to our Summer Project of Antiques. We think we will be providing the community with very useful information, and a unique opportunity to learn more about quality antiques in Wolfville.

Caroline Power

For further information call Krystal Tanner, Manager-Curator, at Randall House on 902 542-9775.

CANADA 150 NEWS

Since early in 2016, the WHS has been cooperating with several other heritage organisations to plan events marking Canada's sesquicentennial year. The Kings-Hants Heritage Connection, an umbrella group that includes Les Amis de Grand Pré, Kings Historical Society, Hantsport and Area Historical Society, Prescott House Provincial Museum, Acadia University Archives, and the Wolfville Historical Society, with other groups, has joined with the Rotary Club of New Minas Sunrise to apply for both federal and provincial funding. Our project title, "Celebrating Our Home, Sharing Our Stories," reflects the emphasis on inclusivity and working together that both levels of government consider to be a primary goal for Canada 150.

At the time of writing, no news has been received about the federal grant, but we are happy to report that the group has been awarded \$21,069 from the 150 Forward Fund of the Province of Nova Scotia. We are also grateful to the Rotary Club of New Minas for agreeing to sponsor the application, and for underwriting expenses that could not be covered by grants from government.

The flagship event for Canada 150 will be a family-oriented heritage fair at Prescott House on Saturday 29 July (rain date: 30 July), bringing together representatives of the many cultures that now make up the communities of our area. A "legacy video" will be created, as a record of the event and potentially a teaching tool. In the fall, there will be a day of discussion on the place of this province in Confederation: this will be primarily for high school students, but also open to members of the public (location TBA). The Kings County Museum will have an exhibit with a similar focus on the implications of Confederation, entitled "To Join Or Not To Join." The Randall House exhibit will present fifteen significant artefacts, each representing one decade from 1867 to 2017. There will also be a new historical exhibit at Harbourville, arranged by the North Mountain United Tapestry Heritage and Culture Society, telling the story of the family of D. B. Parker from 1860 to 1904.

— Anthony Harding