

Wolfville Historical Society

Summer 2019

Newsletter – Regatta Edition

Volume 19 Issue 2

Up Tails All!

*An Account of the Inaugural Randall House Regatta
By Martin Hallett, President*

Having dodged a meteorological bullet on Canada Day, when it looked as if the WHS hotdog stand in Willow Park would be submerged for the second time in three years, our merry band of BBQers could be forgiven for feeling that the weather gods just don't *like* the Historical Society – the only consolation being that if anyone fell into the pond, they couldn't get any wetter.

But wouldn't you know it -- we dodged another bullet! The rain held off, more or less, and by the time we packed up, a rather steamy sun was making its presence felt.

We really didn't know what to expect: the sale of boats had gone well, but whether that would translate into a host of young would-be sailors eager to commit their craft to the deeps of Willow Pond remained to be seen. Things started slowly, but by early afternoon there was a definite nautical ambiance to the park. Boats were in the water, although due to an unforeseen design flaw, most of them were upside-down. Fortunately, the day was saved by our intrepid boat-wrangler, Chris Gertridge, who laboured mightily to restore order and dignity to the regatta.

As all good maritimers know, sailing a boat can be a hungry business, but the wise heads in Randall House forestalled that



Photo by C. Gertridge

problem by sending in their renowned team of hotdoggers to feed the communal tummy; those in need of some sweetness in their lives were quick to spot The Real Scoop Ice-cream stand just a hop, skip and a jump away. And those who wished to offer their faces for artistic purposes were obliged by Mme. Jasmine Renaud, who moonlights as a WHS board-member.

Last but not least, the joys of “messaging about in boats” (or, in our case, “with”) were attested to by Michael Bawtree, who read – as only he can – an appropriate chapter from Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. And then we all went home.



Photo by
C. Gertridge

The Best-Laid Plans...

Martin Hallett

It wasn't entirely a surprise when the company that insures Randall House contacted us to arrange an inspection – it happens to everyone once in a while. And needless to say, we were a little apprehensive; what problems would the inspector uncover?

By and large, we came out of it pretty well: for instance, he requested that we install items such as a carbon monoxide alarm in the basement, signs warning of low door-frames and raised sills, and re-enforcement of the railing at the bottom of the attic staircase. One other change he required, however, was one that has confronted many a home-owner. Presently, the museum has a single-based oil-tank, which looks as good as new to the naked eye – but current regulations demand a tank that is double-based or made of fibreglass.

So in a stroke, our fund-raising goals are in urgent need of revision; we were intending to tackle the numerous cracked and broken windows in the museum, but now that money and more must be diverted to the purchase of the newest oil-tank on Main Street. What's particularly galling is that a new tank doesn't even affect the quality of the heating system – it just sits expensively in the basement!

The Civic Memorial Book

The Civic Memorial Book was started in 1993 to remember and preserve the stories and contributions of the people of Wolfville. Do you know someone who should be included in our Memorial Book? Please give us an email. Check out the Civic Memorial Book in person at the museum, or take a look at the pages on our website:

https://wolfvillehs.ednet.ns.ca/?page_id=482

Do you think you know the people of Wolfville? Try this quiz by Wendy Elliott, and check your answers at the back of the newsletter!

1. Who was the first mayor of Wolfville?
2. Which 'Home Child' is one of the Wolfville Ghostwalk ghosts?
3. Who was chair of the Canadian Broadcasting Commission from 1958 -64?
4. Which industrialist resident has a local school named after him?
5. Which famed teamster/mail man never had a driver's licence?
6. Who was responsible for six editions of the Kings English Drill?
7. Name a Canadian senator who built a Wolfville subdivision.
8. Who was the Quiet Park named after?
9. Which Acadia University hockey coach received an honorary degree?
10. Who started Wolfville's longest running commercial enterprise?

Then and Now - I

Gordon Haliburton

It is 75 years since the D-day landings in Normandy in 1944 and the nations then at war have been celebrating the beginning of the end of Nazi Germany. I was 16 that summer and had been doing a man's work on the farm for two years and with my work-mates enjoyed the excitements of Saturday night among the bright lights of Wolfville. When I examine the Wolfville scene of today, I feel I have wakened up in a different universe, with different standards and different values.

By the summer of 1944, the British Empire, including Canada, had been waging 100% war for practically 5 years. We school boys could barely remember a time of peace, when we were not army cadets and did not wear khaki uniforms all our waking hours, or at school were not learning the essentials of military knowledge and defense.

The times were prosperous as the farms surrounding Wolfville strained (along with farmers across Canada), to produce the food our armed forces needed and the people in the British Isles depended on. With so many of the younger men overseas there was work for all the willing, and every Saturday night the workers lined up at the farmhouse for their pay and then went to the town to spend some of it.

From every hamlet around farm trucks loaded with eager passengers (and fuelled with farm gas), brought the younger people with their \$5 or \$7, (their week's pay) into town, and the little shops along Main Street welcomed them for the busiest hours of business of the whole week. At that time, if I remember correctly, Wolfville had 4 filling stations/garages, 3 hardware stores, 2 butcher shops, 3 barbershops, a pool hall, the Palms Ice Cream Parlour, 2 banks, 4 or 5 dry goods stores, a shoe store, and 3 or 4 grocery stores, in short every kind of source necessary for life and happiness. As well there was the movie theater, the telegraph offices connecting with the world and the Acadian newspaper with local intelligence, the trains coming through about 6 times a day and stopping at the little brick DAR station where the station agent and his family lived upstairs. There was the university which had a large outreach to the community, making its library and its gymnasium available to all.

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The Bleakney/Chambers store, across from the Wolfville Post Office, shot from the Customs Office on the top floor of the old building, by H.J.B. "Jack" Marriott, in 1945 or 1946. From the collection of David Sheppard.



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There was the still newish Eastern Kings Memorial Hospital and 3 or 4 doctors who made house calls when required. There was no liquor store closer than Kentville, and you could only patronize that if you had a liquor license. In 1944 there was no coffee shop, no pub, and not much of a restaurant in the town. So, very little night-life.

As you pushed your way along the busy sidewalks in that summer evening of 1944 you looked out for friends or lovers from other hamlets, or greeted older people, friends of your parents. All along the way you passed little clusters of older people, relatives perhaps, or long-ago schoolmates, taking the opportunity to exchange family and community news and find out what was happening in the countryside. You might even have a date with a girl and be headed to see the latest Gene Autry movie at the Orpheum Theatre. You might finish off this special evening by having a chocolate milkshake or ice cream sundae at the Palms.

Now it seems to all have been a dream.

Alfred Lake the WWI Bicycle Messenger

Wendy Elliott

At the Wolfville post office behind the Mona Parsons' sculpture, *The Joy is Almost Too Much to Bear*, stands an oak tree with a fascinating history.

In a sense it goes back to the time of King Charles II of England when an oak was planted at Windsor Castle. It was meant to commemorate the king's escape from Cromwell's army and the oak tree he hid in.

During WWI Wolfville resident Alfred Lake heard the story on the grounds of the castle and happened to pick up an acorn. He served with the 85th Infantry Battalion in the dangerous role of bicycle messenger. We know he was hit by two bullets during the Hundred Days Offensive just as the Great War ended. Researcher Sarah Atkinson believes he was wounded at Valciennes on Nov. 5 or Nov. 6 of 1918. He was in hospital for 69 days due to wounds in his abdomen and leg.

Wolfville native Gordon Hansford tells the tale that Mr. Lake found the acorn in his pack on his return to Nova Scotia. As the gardener and caretaker at the old post office for many years, he planted it on the grounds. The oak must be nearly one hundred years old now.

The Wolfville Historical Society hopes to tell Mr. Lake's story and that of the town's war memorial in an information panel on the site. Born in 1897, he died in 1977. The society has small oak trees available for a donation. Contact: welliott@bellaliant.net or Randall House Community Museum.



Above: Photo courtesy of David Demone.

Below: photo by Wendy Elliott.



Victorian Hair Art

This curious form of art, popular in the 19th century, garners mixed feelings from visitors when they realize that they are looking at real human hair. Beyond the sometimes curious and amazed or even disturbed reactions lies an extraordinary form of art that required immense amounts of skill and time to practice.

Hair art was born from a new form of mourning culture that took root when Queen Victoria entered a state of mourning -- that would ultimately last for the rest of her life -- after the death of her husband Albert. This new form of mourning would spread its influence on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean and included new formalities, fashion and art.

During the American Civil War, soldiers' wives would thread their hair into watch chains, so that the soldiers could keep a memento of their loved ones as they marched off to war. Other times, locks of hair from different family-members were placed in the family Bible. The examples that we have here at the museum take the form of wreaths, which were another popular art form.

Initially they were used for remembrance, but as the art became more popular, people became less concerned about whose hair was used in the creation. In time, customers could order all sorts of hair jewellery and decorations from a shopping catalogue, which shows a shift from sentimentality to fashion.

As photos began to replace hair art as a means of mourning, it eventually lost its social purpose and quickly fell out of fashion. Nevertheless, the beauty and intricacy of these pieces made almost always by unknown artists, cannot be denied.



Photo from the Randall House Collection

Then and Now - II

John Whidden

From 1840 to 1885 Wolfville's Presbyterians worshipped in a steep-roofed wooden structure (pictured on page 96 of *Mud Creek*) perched above Keen Street (Prospect) on the site occupied since 1900 by the big Queen Anne Revival house which can be seen looking by up Linden Avenue from the Acadia Cinema, soaring above the roof of the school. The church was moved on rollers down to Main Street, surely a perilous endeavour, where it stood until it was destroyed by fire in 1913. Undaunted, the congregation called on Andrew R. Cobb to design a new building on the site.

Andrew Cobb had family roots in Greenwich, where he moved at age 14, and attended Horton Academy and Acadia before his architectural studies at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. By 1913 he had become known as a creative and important talent in the province. Today he is regarded as probably the most outstanding architect we have produced in Nova Scotia. He is the architect of a number of outstanding buildings in Wolfville: Emmerson Hall, Patterson House on Westwood Avenue, the L.E. Shaw house on King Street, the Fanny Parker house on Locust Avenue up behind St. Andrew's and the Robie Tufts house next up from the Baptist Church parking lot are among them. His finest design, though, is undoubtedly St. Andrew's.

In the late 19th century Scottish style with touches of Arts and Crafts, it was constructed by Wolfville's premier builder Charles H. Wright, Cobb's builder of choice, of red sandstone quarried in White Rock, and it opened free of debt in 1914. Its pedigree is unexcelled. Eleven years later with the union of Presbyterians and Methodists, it became the



Photo by HJB Marriott, from the collection of David Sheppard.

Wolfville United Church, though in Wolfville de facto union took place two years earlier. Not only was St. Andrew's one of the chief architectural gems of Wolfville's Main Street, but it was placed firmly in the list of Nova Scotia's notable buildings, small though it may be.

Its corner stone was laid on the same day as the Church of St. Paul and St. Stephen in Kentville, and, though surprisingly no proof can be found, it is probable that Cobb designed it too.

Both churches have been decommissioned and sold. At St. Paul's and St. Stephen's, an imaginative adaptation of the interior space has created an exciting library space while the exterior has been left intact.



Photo by Barbara Kaiser

Fishing the Gaspereau

Chris Gertridge

In the Spring of every year, a curious sight can be seen on the banks of the Gaspereau River. To the uninformed it might seem like madness, but to the locals it's a rite of passage. The race is on for the "flying fishermen" of the Gaspereau Valley to catch their fill of alewives using a technique that has been passed down through generations.

The history of the fishery starts with the Mi'kmaq peoples, who had long-established villages along the river and used traditional methods to catch the plentiful annual run, some say up to 8000 years ago. Excavations have revealed many tools they used, such as spear points and axe heads as well as pottery they made. The next group of people who undoubtedly caught fish on the river were the Acadians, but there is no record or indication of what method they used to fish. The next existing evidence of a fishery is from the mid 1700's, when the New England Planters arrived after the expulsion of the Acadians. In the original land draw of 1760, every Planter was promised property fronting on either the Gaspereau River, the Avon River or the Minas Basin. Regulations were established to control local fishing at this early date. An excerpt from the regulations of 1791 pertaining to the Gaspereau River read as follows:

"No Gaspereau seines [fishing nets] shall be drawn in Gaspereau River at any time on any pretence whatsoever... that Salmon shall be drawn only two days in the week, and no such seine shall be drawn higher up the River Overseer of the River Fishery to prevent anyone from pleading ignorance. That no Gaspereau fish shall be taken out of the River with other nets, other than with square or scoop nets and that no eddies, seine, or obstruction for taking said fish shall be erected opposite each other, or across more than 1/3 of where the fish swim."

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A square net in operation. Photo by G.H. Craig, 1893.

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The fishery continued through the 1800's and the 1900's with the traditional square-net method passed down to each new generation of fisher. In 1957 there were 25 active square-net sites on the river, and it was reported by the local paper that each fisher earned an average of \$20,000 in a season. Today there are 14 active sites and gaspereaux are still caught using the square-net method by many of the same families who have been catching them for hundreds of years. The bulk of the season's catch has historically been sold and shipped to the Republic of Haiti, where for hundreds of years it has provided a cost-effective source of food. Even today, gaspereaux are still heavily salted and shipped there. In more recent years, the fish have also been sold fresh as a source of bait for lobster fishing.

My family has been fishing on the Gaspereau River for six generations and on the same site for 140+ years. While the valley changes around us, this annual tradition continues with very little change. People call the gaspereaux the "Sunday" fish, because it takes all day Sunday to pick out all the bones and if you ask me, the best way to enjoy one is after it has been smoked and cured for several days. So if you ever find yourself in the Gaspereau Valley in the month of May, make sure you stop and take in this historic fishery that no doubt will be around for many more years to come.



The Gertridge family square net site that has been in operation for 140+ years in 2019. Photo by Chris Gertridge.