
GLENGARRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

BOX 416 ALEXANDRIA ON K0C 1A0
February 2008 Volume 38 No. 1 ISSN 0229-6705

next issue: April 2008

NEXT MEETING

Date: February 7, 2008
Time: 6:00 p.m.
Location: Alexandria United Church-on-the-Hill
Topic: Annual General Meeting & Pot Luck



Annual General Meeting & Pot Luck

First we eat, then we meet. Don't forget to bring a few dainty morsels so that we can all enjoy some glorious Glengarry cooking. After our annual repast, we will have a short business meeting and elections for the 2008 executive followed by a 20-minute presentation by **Glengarry Pioneer Museum curator, Jennifer Black.**

The GPM has been documenting its considerable collection for the past 2 years and Jennifer will explain this process, known as Collections Management, in terms of the cataloguing and inventory projects undertaken by the Museum. She will also provide us with facts and figures about the collection, as well as introduce us to the new software package being used to manage the collection, PastPerfect. Finally, Jennifer will give us a sneak preview of how all this hard work will impact the future success of the Museum. **Welcome, Jennifer!**

A Call for Missing Tapes by Hugh P. MacMillan

We are looking for historical audio and video tapes that have gone missing over the years. Please check basements and attics and should you come across the tapes, please contact the GHS or bring them to any meeting. In addition, some time in the past, Velma Franklin gave her tapes to someone within the GHS so if you are that someone, please let us know.

Time To Renew

ALL yearly memberships are due on **February 1, 2008.** You can renew at any meeting or mail your renewal to:

The Glengarry Historical Society
Box 416
Alexandria ON K0C 1A0

Current Membership dues are:
Single Membership: \$15.00
Family Membership: \$20.00
Lifetime Membership: \$200.00

Skating by Lamp light

by Rosemary O'Flaherty

There once was a man in Dunvegan
Who kept the ice nice and clean-shaven
He charged but a dime
We all had a good time
At our Saturday night skating haven

Back in the early years of World War II, young Mr. Mainville of Dunvegan had neither prospects nor employment. His father kept a small herd of cows but hardly enough to keep the young man busy. With the depression just barely ended, Mainville took a stab at being an entrepreneur and opened a public skating rink in Dunvegan.

I was fortunate enough to spend a delightful afternoon this week with **Leslie Clark** of Dunvegan who regaled me with stories about the once popular skating rink that provided one of the few entertainments for the young people of Glengarry in the early forties.



Leslie Clark sitting by the fire at his home in Dunvegan.

The first challenge the skaters faced was actually getting to the rink. The usual method of transport was, of course, Nellie the Nag or Rosie the Roan. There was ample place for parking; three barns or drive sheds being within a

stone's throw of the rink including a three story barn where the GPM's Campbell Barn is now located. Leslie was able to lay his hands on a photograph for me and it was a lovely, old structure with dormer windows on the third floor.



Site of the old Mainville skating rink in Dunvegan.

If the young folks were really lucky, someone would have an automobile or farm vehicle and they would all pile into it. If all else failed, there was that other type of horse, shank's mare. Leslie told me that he used to walk to Dunvegan from Baltic's Corners of a Saturday evening.

The skating rink was located on the southwest side of the Greenfield road, right next to the brick house. Tall fir trees still delineate the spot and if you're a hopeless, historic romantic like me, you can close your eyes and picture the rink and the merry skaters. There were no zambonies in those days so Mainville improvised with a home-made board and scraper and he would shovel, sweep and flood the rink himself.

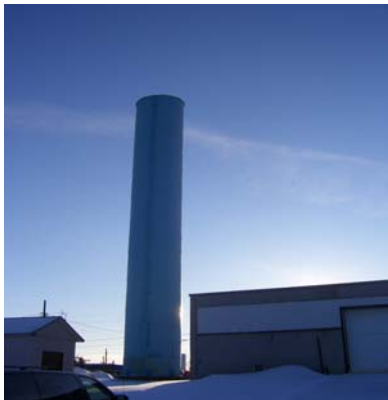
Mainville provided a shed beside the rink to don skates and get warmed up on chilly nights. Admission was a dime but you could skate all evening by the light of the coal-oil lanterns. Never on a Sunday though, skating was restricted to

Saturdays for as Leslie said, “it wouldn’t have been fitting back then.”

Alexandria’s Intrepid Skater

by Rosemary O’Flaherty in collaboration with Dane “the Great” Lancken.

Take a close look at the picture below and use your imagination. It’s a bird, it’s a plane, no, but it could be Charlie Meldrum atop Alexandria’s Main Street Water Tower where he is rumoured to have skated so many years ago.



Main Street Water Tower or “Stand Pipe”. Note the seam up the middle, that’s the “rickety” ladder.

Charlie’s former wife, **Tilly Douglas**, welcomed me into her cozy, little home earlier this week to talk about Charlie’s famous skate and life in Alexandria, as it was in the 1950s. Alexandria natives (now there’s a rare thing), Tilly and Charlie lived close by the tower on Elgin Street, where they raised their three children: Douglas, Joyce and Catherine. Charlie, as it turns out, worked for Hydro, so scaling the heights did not phase him. The tower is open at the top so Tilly explained, “It was not unusual for water to overflow the top of the tower which in winter became a cascade of ice,” or as Dane Lancken says,

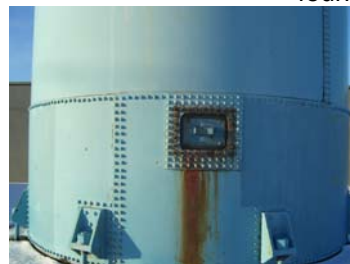


Tilly Douglas recounting her memories

it would just freeze “like an old fashioned milk bottle.” You probably won’t be able to make it out in the picture opposite, but if you visit the tower, swing around to the back and you’ll notice the narrow, rickety ladder climbing the 100 feet to the top.



Note the limestone block foundation



The clean-out door and its many rivets

The tower, or Stand Pipe, as it is commonly called, was built in 1896. It is made of ½ inch curved, steel plates (a total of 60 plates) that measure 5x15 feet each; three plates riveted together makes a ring and the tower has 20 rings, that’s 100 feet of steel soaring up into the wild blue yonder. Riveting the plates together,

along with those on the clean-out door, required 7,465 rivets! Each rivet was installed red-hot and hammered flat, tight. Quoting Dane, “the town breathed a sigh of relief when the incessant clang of the hammers ceased.”

Built in 1896, the tower rests on a foundation of limestone blocks, has a diameter of 14 feet, and a capacity of 100,000 gallons. Compare that to the 1986 tower on Industrial Boulevard that holds 1,000,000 gallons. The tower was still in use until 3 or 4 years ago and is still available for use, should the need arise. It celebrated its centennial in 1996 and you can read more about it in Dane’s excellent article, “Two Alexandria Landmarks: the Stand Pipe and the Alexander Hall’ in the 1996 issue of *Glengarry Life*.

♪ **Come on, it’s lovely weather
for a Sleigh ride together
with you** ♪

by Rosemary O’Flaherty

• • • and that’s any kind of sleigh you fancy: a one-horse open sleigh, a Quebec Burleau, a fancy Munroe & McIntosh cutter, a box sleigh, a mail sleigh and, just should the occasion arise, a hearse sleigh. They are all available to see, although not for rides, at the Glengarry Pioneer Museum’s Stewart barn.

The one-horse open sleigh or, as I like to call it, the jingle bells sleigh, was an all-purpose sleigh, open at the back, hence the name; a real favourite with the children. The Quebec Burleau is made of fancy wood with a removable seat. It has curled runners, built close to the ground to push the snow and clear a path in front of it. The Museum’s version is red and

cream with plush green seats and must have presented a pretty sight skimming across the countryside.

And then, of course, there is the Munro & McIntosh sleigh, a fancy cutter with the M&M decal still clearly visible on the back. Once a thriving business in Alexandria, in its heyday M&M had the capacity to produce four thousand carriages and sleighs a year. An interesting bit of trivia...the first stretch of Main Street to be macadamized was that between St. George St. and the Grand Truck Railway station (that’s VIA Rail today) for the express purpose of delivering M&M vehicles to the GTR for shipment.

The box sleigh was an all-purpose fellow with two removable seats so it could be used to haul a load or get the family to church on a Sunday. But Ah! The mail sleigh! The GPM’s mail sleigh saw active service for many years as the “stage” that ran from Lancaster to Hawkesbury. This sleigh has low-to-the-ground, solid runners as it had to be able to plow through snow drifts. It has a large open area for the mail and one seat for the driver.

My personal favourite is the hearse sleigh. Suitably black and somber, this sleigh has two sets of runners, back and front, known as a bob-sleigh, with a hinged door at the back. This door opens downward to allow the coffin to be loaded under the seats. That’s right, you had to wend your way to the cemetery sitting atop the casket!

So don’t forget to visit the Stewart Barn’s eclectic selection of sleighs. Stay tuned, we hope to have more on sleighs for you in our next issue (April).

See You on February 7th!

. . . . Rosemary O.

