



GRAND RIVER HERITAGE MINES SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

April - May - June 1998

Editor's NEWS AND NOTES , by Jean Farquharson

Spring is in the air, and members are itching to get out on regular field trips! But time has not been wasted this winter. Because of El Nino's influence, Ilse and a few others have been taking advantage of the unusually mild weather to go on some interesting **field trips** which she is reporting.

January to March has been extra busy indoors as well, with lots of time dedicated by Cathy, Mike, and Barbara helping Jean to **research** people involved in the gypsum industry in Brant County. Barbara continues to transcribe the letterbook of the Grand River Plaster Company of Gypsum Mines.

On Heritage Day, Jean and Mike represented the GRHMS at an all-day **workshop** held at the GRCA headquarters in Cambridge, sponsored by GRCA and the Heritage Resources Centre, U. of Waterloo. The day's topic was "What Works?", a workshop on planning, managing and making decisions about heritage in our community. We picked up some interesting information and made some good contacts.

A presentation given by Jean to the Brant Historical Society about *Gypsum Mining Along the Grand* was surprisingly well attended despite the rain and fog (in January!).

Mike O'Byrne has volunteered to contribute to a **regular column** in our newsletter to tell us about some of his experiences working as a miner, and to relate some interesting lore he has found in his research. We are certain you will enjoy his wit.

We have a few more **indoor events** in the near future for you to mark on your calendar. Please attend if at all possible. Members go to a lot of work to prepare these presentations and displays. We appreciate your support!

April 4th and 5th: Geo-Rama, at the Paris Fairgrounds. Sat. - 10-6; Sun. 10 -5. As usual we will have a booth there, and several faithful members have volunteered to set up the displays and man them during the show. Come and join us. We can always use more help. Admission is by donation.

April 22 (Wed.): Barbara Topp will speak on the *History of the Gypsum Industry* at a combined meeting of **Dunnville Historical Society and Haldimand Branch of the OGS** (Ontario Genealogical Society), at **Dunnville Public Library, 8 p.m.** She will use

some of our display boards to illustrate her talk. Anyone is welcome to attend. Some members of GRHMS are intending to go down from Brant County. Give us a call if you are interested in joining us, or meet us there!

April 26, (Sunday) 2 p.m. at Brant County Museum, 57 Charlotte St., Brantford, Jean Farquharson will give a talk about *The Families Involved with Gypsum Mining and Milling Along the Grand*. This talk is for the **Brant County Branch of the OGS**, and anyone is welcome to attend.

On **May 2nd**, at 4 p.m., the GRHMS will hold a **Planning Meeting** followed by a **Pot-Luck Supper** at the home of **Jean & Allan Farquharson**, 823 Powerline Rd., Paris (1st road north of Hwy 403 off Rest Acres Rd.).

IMPORTANT: If you have not yet paid your 1998 fees, please do so if you wish to continue to receive the newsletter. Your previous newsletter had a membership (new or renewal) form attached. If you have not yet paid, we will enclose another form.

DID YOU KNOW ABOUT LETHAL PITS?

There are about 250,000 abandoned mines in the western US. Because record-keeping a century ago was less than precise, no one knows exactly how many excavations exist. Some mines have been on fire for decades and others are near collapse or contain hazardous substances. Last year, two Nevada men ventured into the New Savage Mine, despite a skull and crossbones sign warning about bad air. Authorities say air in the old silver mine was lethal just 22 feet inside. The men were found dead about 70 feet inside.

(Contributed by Ilse Kraemer, from Toronto Globe & Mail, 1997)

Note: Some of our gypsum mines may be just as lethal. Beware of going inside ANY old mines without first checking them out! Ministry of Labour standards require proper ventilation for any working mine for a good reason!

REPORT ON FIELD RESEARCH, by Ilse Kraemer

We had **one field trip**, by the invitation of the City of Brantford Engineer and Councillors, to visit the site in the Northwest of Brantford where they hoped to bring the sewage pipe across the Grand River. Mike and Harry joined with Ilse and the city representatives. The city's plan was to pass the sewage pipe through bedrock deep under the river bed. Two attempts with directional drilling failed owing to fractured rock. When the drill penetrated into the fractured rock, pieces of rock would constantly fall into the borehole, and make it impossible to pass any pipes through.

Because they have been working in the Salina formation, the drillers also hit an oil-bearing strata which plugged up the drill, and then the drill broke off.

It has become an engineering disaster! Water poured into the drilling pit from unknown sources, almost impossible to be controlled by pumps.

At present the drilling has stopped and engineers are looking at plans of a pipe bridge to cross the river, with the pipes concealed under the bridge. We all agreed to this idea. Up to now, millions of dollars have been wasted and the City of Brantford faces a huge overrun on their budget for this project.

It was a very short but interesting outing; it was especially fascinating to see the strata exposed in a 50 foot deep pit.

We are hoping for a nice summer to be able to continue our explorations in the Grand River Valley.

OLD GRIZZLY'S COLUMN, by Mike O'Byrne

MILLY THE MUCKING MACHINE

This new column in the newsletter will be based on my large collection of mining literature, items I could steal from other sources and personal experiences from my several years underground. The title of this report stems from a piece of machinery that I never became proficient with, but in the hands of a proficient operator, could move large quantities of rock.

Until the introduction of the mechanical mucking machine, all rock broken underground moved via gravity or as a result of hand-shovelling or mucking. The term High Mucky-Muck, an archaic term for a person who is, or who believes he/she is of an elevated social status may derive from mining practice. When a large volume of rock had to be moved, one miner or mucker would work at track level shovelling the rock into an ore car. A second miner might be assigned to assist, and would work at the top of the pile, shovelling the rock down to his partner. The guy working at the top of the pile was the high mucker.

All mines are inhabited by bats, rats, imps and gnomes, the latter being called tommyknockers by Cornish miners and kobolts by German miners. You cannot see these guys, but they are there. These creatures are mostly friendly, mischievous, and frequently warn miners of impending danger. Most of the time they specialize in hiding tools and causing other minor problems. Most of us have tommyknockers in our homes and they are responsible for hiding our screwdrivers, using the last of our toothpaste, or not replacing the toilet paper.

The mucking machine that I was familiar with was a beast operated by compressed air and mounted on flanged wheels so that it could move on a narrow gauge railroad track. The machine was powerful, fast, heavy, and about the size of a large deepfreeze, and just about as friendly.

The operator stood on a small platform and operated the machine via two lever-like controls, one of which caused the machine to move back and forth and to pivot, hopefully, while still on the track, while the other control caused the bucket at the front end to raise and lower and ultimately arc overhead and dump the contents of the bucket into an ore car spotted at the rear of the machine. At least this was the way it was supposed to go according to the operator's manual.

Under the influence of the tommyknocker who invariably sat on the left shoulder of the operator, the machine could be very dangerous. While they were supposed to remain on the tracks, they frequently headed elsewhere. This was of significance if the wall clearance in the heading was tight, as it didn't yield. Often the operator could scoop up a large piece of rock which taxed the machine's lifting capacity, then precipitated an intellectual exercise to determine if there was sufficient overhead clearance to dump the piece, without tipping the machine over, without wrecking the ore car or getting the piece jammed in the ore car such that it would have to be blasted in order for the car to be dumped, or derailing both the machine and the ore car. This was above and beyond the normal expectation that the operator did not inadvertently sever the flexible air hose powering the machine in which case the machine would stop, but then one had a wildly flailing air hose to get under control. These operations were carried out in a dank, foggy

and noisy atmosphere, the only illumination being the operator's cap lamp, plus perhaps that of his partner. As unstated in the operator's manual, some shifts were akin to a demolition derby.

In the hands of a skilled operator and a sympathetic tommyknocker, the exercise was like a ballet and vast amounts of rock were moved.

MY MINING FRIENDS, by Jean Farquharson

Over the years, while gathering information about the gypsum mines and mills, I have become familiar with the people involved and in some cases, with their families. As a genealogist, I do not have any ancestors to search in Brant or Haldimand Counties, and thus have adopted as my friends the families involved with gypsum. I keep wondering how they lived, where they lived, what their houses were like, how they spent their time, what they thought about their lives. Gradually as I searched for information, some of these questions were answered and some are yet to be answered.

My curiosity was aroused about **Augustus Jones**, the land surveyor for Upper Canada who discovered a deposit of gypsum along the banks of the Grand and Nith Rivers at their junction. D.A. Smith, in *At The Forks of the Grand*, wrote about some interesting episodes in Jones' life as a surveyor in the rugged wilderness, and quoted from his notes. Curious about how he acquired so much land for himself around Paris, I found that he had married the daughter of an Indian chief, and received from Joseph Brant a 999 year lease to a 1200 acre tract to help support their children (a sort of mother's allowance system), the fee for leasing being one pepper corn, if lawfully demanded. Jones had a total of nine children, but not all from the same wife, and from surveying he earned two shillings, four pence per day. He probably needed the support. Jones established a home at Coldsprings on the property east of Paris. His property extended approximately 6 miles eastward from the Grand River, and he sold off the part that became the Town of Paris to Hiram Capron, founder of the town.

Peter Jones, one of Augustus' sons, became a famous Methodist missionary, converted to Christianity at Davisville, an Indian mission church and school, situated south of Augustus' home near Paris. Ilse discovered the site of Davisville on her trek through Brantford's Northwest. A fascinating book has been written about Rev. Peter Jones, whose beautiful home, Echo Villa, east of Brantford, he shared with his English wife and family.

I learned that there was also a tract of land in Haldimand County, around Gypsum Mines, called the Jones Tract, awarded to Augustus Jones for his surveying of the Indian lands. Augustus seemed to have an eye for gypsum, because he and his Loyalist buddies at Niagara acquired leases to much of the property containing gypsum.

I shall tell you about other people involved with gypsum in future columns.

This newsletter is edited by Jean Farquharson. We are not responsible for errors. We are looking for more information about the mining industry in S.Ont.

Submissions are welcome. Please send correspondence to: Jean Farquharson, RR 3, Paris ON N3L 3E3. Phone 519/442-2156, Fax 519/442-2373.
