



GRAND RIVER HERITAGE MINES SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

January/February/March 1996

Greetings to all members for 1996! We have lots to report since the last newsletter in the field and research. Due to the mild weather in the fall, we were able to have many field trips in several areas, and visits to libraries and archives were fruitful as well.

*We finished the **Five Oaks research** ending with taking measurements of old and rare trees. Now we are ready to begin work on our publication.

* A few field trips brought us back to the **Forks of the Credit red sandstone mines**. Halfway up the Escarpment, we discovered a new dinky train track and many mines along this track. Mining artifacts were scattered around - old derrick foundations, cables, black powder tins, etc. More rare mosses, ferns and mushrooms were discovered. The last trip up there got us into a heavy snowfall, so we couldn't photograph the sites.

*A few weeks before this we explored the **sandstone mines at Terra Cotta or Salmonville** as it was called in the 1800's. Not much is known about these mines, but Ilse's daughter, Ramona, found some information in a local history book. The mine works seem to be more primitive than the Forks of the Credit mines. The sandstone found there was of a very fine quality and near the surface. Mining started in 1840 and ownership changed frequently. About 50 men were employed. At the beginning they hauled the stone down to the railway at the bottom of the mountain by wagon and team. Later they erected a sort of pulley system in which the loaded flatcars pulled the empty cars back up the hill. They had one steam engine for stripping off the overburden. Many of the workers were subject to silicosis from the fine sandstone dust. In 1930 the mines were sold again and adopted the name Credit Valley Stone. Toronto was a good market for this stone. Old City Hall, Timothy Eaton Memorial Church, the Ontario Parliament buildings, Hart House, the Soldiers' Towers and Union Station were built from the stone. In 1970, the last of the sandstone was taken out. Since cement was much cheaper, sandstone was no longer used. Recently the sandstone has been mined again to use in the restoration of these historic Toronto and area buildings.

*The last outing of 1995 was just one day before heavy winter and snowfall set in. Mr. Alfred Thompson, the uncle of one of our members, an ardent mining historian, offered to show us some previously unknown mines. His forefathers were all involved in mining in the **York-Caledonia** areas. He showed Sanko and Ilse the old **Caledonia Mine** on the farm where he was born. If he had not shown us this place, we would never have found it. Everything is there just as the miners left it. We found the air and escape shaft. The tunnel itself had started to cave in. A dinky track goes off the Caledonia main line into the tunnel. The foundation of the crusher and piles and piles of good quality gypsum are right next to the tunnel. This extinct **Caledonia Gypsum Co.** never went into full production. Shortly after it opened in 1912, the surface buildings burned down. It was never reopened. By then, the Alabastine Co. had moved in and taken over in that area. Several exploration shafts that were dug and not properly reinforced are now beginning to collapse. This is an important area to investigate - photograph, map and measure - **soon** before it is completely obliterated.

*Jean and Allan Farquharson took several research trips, one to the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines in Sudbury. It is located on the university campus in a beautiful edifice constructed with many Ontario rocks including black granite floors in its hallways - gorgeous! Unfortunately hard times has hit the Civil Service, and many departments of the Ministry have been decimated. We visited their Resource Centre and did a few hours of research. This will be continued at a later time.

*Jean also spent a limited time in Toronto libraries searching data bases for information on the gypsum mines and mills without much luck.

*However, we had our best luck in Ottawa. While on a trip in the area, we took advantage of the opportunity to visit the National Archives and the National Library, and discovered five documents relating to gypsum.

*The oldest document was an 18-page pamphlet published by the Agricultural Society in Canada, dated 1791, and entitled "On the Effects of Gypsum or Plaster of Paris as a Manure, chiefly extracted from papers and letters on agriculture." A photocopy was obtained for our archives.

*A valuable source of information was the Merritt papers in the Archives. William Hamilton Merritt was an M.P. from St. Catharines who was very involved in the founding of the Welland Canal and also the Grand River Navigation Co. which opened the Grand River between Brantford and Dunnville to large ships. He was also interested in developing the lands along the Grand River, including the extraction of gypsum. The Grand R. Navigation Company made it easy and reasonable to move the gypsum from the mines along its banks in barges, and to load it on ships to export it to Buffalo and other places. The Merritt papers in the Archives contained **three letters of agreement between William Hamilton Merritt and various people to extract gypsum from their mines.**

*The first, dated Sept. 21, 1832, was an agreement between Merritt and Abraham Nelles.

*On April 9th, 1833, he signed an agreement with James and Clark Davis who owned lands formerly in possession of William Cook (the Cook Mine?)

*The third agreement, dated May 17, 1833, is with James Spratt who had taken over from the Davises.

*Merritt's family continued to show an interest in gypsum mining after his death; about 1876, William Hamilton Merritt, grandson of the M.P., became proprietor of the Case mine from the estate of John Brown. He had just returned from England where he had trained as a mining engineer. It was a tract of 300 acres located on Lots 2 and 3 in N. Cayuga Township. It became known as the Merritt mine, located at Gypsum Mines, now a ghost town. He sold out to the Grand River Plaster Company in 1887, but remained associated with the company, as shown by a 4-page booklet located in the National Library, entitled "The Grand River Gypsum Company Has Entirely New and Improved Machinery for the Manufacture of Pure White Land Plaster." The rest of the pamphlet is addressed to farmers, describing the chemical components of gypsum, describing an experiment with wheat conducted by Ontario School of Agriculture at Guelph in 1879, directions for applying gypsum to various crops, and a few letters recommending the use of gypsum, including one from the Hon. George Brown (of the famous Bow Park Farm at Brantford.)

OTHER ACTIVITIES

* We celebrated together in December at a Christmas Pot-Luck at the home of Ilse and Sanko Kraemer. Along with good food and fellowship, we enjoyed seeing Gwen Parkhill's slides on wildflowers, and Joe Clarke passed around his pictures of his trip to Alaska.

COMING EVENTS

*Dates for hikes depend on the arrival of spring; we will announce them in the next newsletter.

*We plan to have a meeting Sunday, February 20th at 9:30 p.m., to make our plans for the year. It will end with a box lunch social. Snow date is February 27th. Please bring your own lunch. We will provide beverages.

Plans to be discussed include:

- Brochure about Five Oaks - who does what?
- Display at the International Plowing Match in Haldimand County in September
- Participation in Brantford's SesquiCentennial in 1997

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

* Memberships are due for 1996. Individuals - \$10; Seniors & Students - \$5; Families - \$15; Corporate - \$15
Please make cheques out to Grand River Heritage Mines Society, and send to:

Ilse Kraemer, 23 KingsHill Lane, Brantford, Ont. N3T 6A3

This newsletter is edited by Jean Farquharson. Submissions are welcome. We are not responsible for errors. Send correspondence to: R.R. #3, Paris, On N3L 3E3 Phone:442-2156, Fax 442-2373