

GRAND RIVER HERITAGE MINES SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

July-August-September, 1996



Report of Outdoor Research Group, by Ilse Kraemer

This year the weather was not very kind to our Mining Society. The winter dragged on and on and we started late with our outdoor research. On our first outing we visited the old cemetery where the **Cook mining family** is buried. The property belongs to Alf and Eileen Peart, and it was their long-time dream to preserve the gravestones and have them set upright into a cairn-like structure with a roof. We will continue our project in the summer after the vegetation is so high our field trips are no longer possible. The first visit was to have a look and to determine what work has to be done and to evaluate the whole situation.

The afternoon brought us back to the **Excelsior Mine** to finish photographing the site; we were unable to complete it in the fall because the bitter winter weather started very early. Through dense bush and vines, we made our way down to the river to look at the remnants of what we believe to be the Grand River Navigation dock. We found the overgrown road from long ago, but the water level of the river was so high that we couldn't see the dock. But it was not in vain. We discovered the remnants of what looked like an old brick kiln, some bricks, and fire-heated stone. There are very good clay deposits along the river bank, and people must have used the supply.

Tracing the Excelsior mine was exciting! Many more cave-ins had occurred over the winter. With all the vegetation down we could actually see the outline of the tunnels and rooms underground. Everything had sunk down a bit. We rediscovered the old mine shaft. It was filled with milky-white water to the brim. A dinky track went from there to the crusher, with heaps of gypsum still lying around, and remnants of the calcining ovens and other buildings. Deep, water-filled holes all over the place, many old cement foundations of some buildings, metal pipes, wheels from huge to small, steel rods used to stabilize the mine roofs, and parts of rails for the track. There seems to have been a double track, one for carrying the gypsum from the head frame to the crusher, and the other one for the empty cars to get back to be filled up.

The next outing was to explore and photograph the historic mine works of the **Olds Mine** or the old Caledonia Mine, as the locals call it. The area is riddled with exploration inclines, tunnels and talus heaps. Up to now, we haven't much in written reports, only that the mine burnt down in 1912, and was never reopened. Mr. Alfred Thompson took us on a field trip and showed us where the tunnels and buildings had been located. The gypsum seam was not very thick and it was interbedded with shale (poor quality). We found the incline with the foundation of the headframe and crusher. The dinky track came in from the mainline, made a loop at the headframe and went back to the mainline, about one-third of a mile. The airshaft was a huge white water-filled round hole, very dangerous. No abatement program from the government seems to have been carried on here.

After a quick lunch we went to the west side of Caledonia to try to relocate the **Holstein Mine**. Thirty-five years ago while carrying out an archaeological survey in this area, I saw the tunnel and lots of white material. I did not know anything about gypsum mines at that time, and shrugged it off as a natural cave in the embankment. Coming back now, I found the area was not as I had remembered. A large hydro corridor was built over the area, and Highway 6 crosses it at the same spot. Thirty-five years ago, hardly any trees were growing there. Now it is heavily wooded, and bulldozers have altered the embankment. We saw a lot of talus heaps and gypsum, and all of a sudden we came upon three tunnels, cave-ins and more gypsum. Everybody was very excited about the rediscovery of the Holstein Mine. Since we had run out of film, we will return in the fall to photograph it.

In April, Jean and I set up a display in Paris with the **Geo-Rama**. It was a success; we had many visitors, and we would like to take an opportunity to thank all the members who helped man the display. Another display was set up for the annual **Brantford Riverfest**. Thanks for all the help Ilse, Jean, Sanko, Cathy and Michael.

In the meantime, we went back to the **Cook cemetery**. We cleaned all the stones and some were lifted. It took us a few hours to scrape and lift off the sod. We found 14 gravestones and some small ones for babies. It was a cold and windy day working way up on the hill. The Pearts kindly invited us into their beautiful historic home for coffee, tea and our lunch.

Cathy went exploring and found some new mines in Paris, large pieces of white gypsum, and beautiful tufa-covered roots and twigs. This could be part of the **Hamilton beds** that were leased and then sold to Hiram Capron.

Bill Darfler, from the *Brantford Heritage Committee*, had uncovered an old map in the Brant County Museum showing the **Augustus Jones tract** where his homestead was located. Augustus Jones was the surveyor who originally discovered gypsum in this area. Jones received from Joseph Brant a lease for 999 years of a 1200 acre tract of land along what became the Governor's Road, for the payment of one peppercorn per year. He built his home east of Paris at Coldsprings, in South Dumfries Township. A few years ago the present owners, the Hagglands, found part of the road that connected with the Paris- Brantford Road. Our research group spent a few hours trying to find the remains of the settlement and Jones' home. The original spring-fed pond is now a wetland still strong-flowing into a creek. The whole area is literally covered with Indian sweetgrass and other rare vegetation. Huge gray yellow birches, old apple trees and a small wet fen require more investigation.

A new company called *Adventures On the Grand*, located on East River Road, east of Paris, invited Jean and me on a 2 1/2 hour ride down the Grand from Glen Morris to their site above Paris, on a rubber raft. We started at six in the evening in pouring rain, but we still liked it. It felt as if we were in another world! Large blue herons were standing in the water or perched on branches along the way. We saw many waterfalls gushing over tufa terraces into the river. An old forgotten cemetery is situated high on a hill next to a series of gypsum mines, old roads and ruins of mills. Old mill races indicate there were several mills in the area. We landed along the river, and walked through a Carolinian forest, finding rare twin-leaf and old sycamore trees. When we returned to Kobe's, we had hot beef on a bun and coffee. We wish them luck in their new enterprise.

One of our new members, Michael O'Byrne, an experienced miner, has contributed much since he joined the group. He has participated in our hikes, and is very interested in researching the mines. His paper on mining terminology will be included in the next newsletter.

SUMMER ACTIVITIES

JULY/AUGUST: As soon as the Pearts are back from their holidays, we will start back on the cemetery project. Members should phone Jean or Ilse for details. With all the rain the rivers are high and the mosquitoes are bad. It is a bad time to have outings until conditions improve.

The Golden Horseshoe Steam Show: August 3, 4 and 5. We were invited to display again with the York(Grand River) Historical Society, and we need help again to man the booth. Please call Ilse or Jean.

SEPTEMBER: The International Ploughing Match, in Rainham, close to Selkirk, September 17 - 21. We have been invited to have a display there, if we can manage to get volunteers.

REPORT ON RESEARCH, by Jean Farquharson

While examining the Cook Family Cemetery this spring, the Pearts allowed me to examine some of the old Cook family documents in their possession, and to go through the research material they have already collected. This will be reported on in the next newsletter; however, I will include an excerpt from one of the documents in this newsletter.

For a week in June, Ilse and I taught a course at the Elderhostel held at Five Oaks. We learned a lot about the geology, archaeology, Carolinian plants, and history of Brant County and the area in order to teach the course. The preparation for this course has helped us in our research, and has provided more information for our booklet. The booklet is progressing well, and I am preparing to input the last few chapters into the computer, with Al's assistance. Mary Cassar has completed the chapter on Carolinian plants, including illustrations, with the assistance of Paul, Harry, Cathy and Katie. Ilse has written a chapter on geology and the gypsum mines. I and Cathy have spent a lot of time researching the local history, and I am continuing to dig up information.

THE GRIFFIN FAMILY

I found the name W.E. and N.F.Griffin on the 1858 Tremaine map, located on Col. Burrowes' property, which eventually became Five Oaks. Also the map shows a distillery, grist and plaster mill at the mouth of Whiteman's Creek, on the south side. Not having located any information about the brothers previously, I wondered how the Griffin family connected in the local history. When they came to Strathmore is a puzzle, but there was a death notice in the Christian Guardian, quoting the Paris Star, May 18, 1859:

GRIFFIN, Nathaniel, proprietor of the plaster bed and flour mills, at Strathmore, on the Grand River, died Sunday night from the effects of accidentally drinking some Bi Chloride of Mercury; survived by his wife.

Mel Robertson's *Around the Burford Plain* notes that N.F. Griffin owned the plaster mill at Mt. Vernon in 1858. Mel Robertson also makes the following comment:

The Mt. Vernon mill complex was a very busy place and on March 11, 1886, Peter Griffin, who owned the grist mill, announced in the Burford "Times"- 'After running the mill for one year to see how much wheat it takes to get a barrel of flour, I am able to report that I can give farmers forty pounds to the bushel. T.H. Brownley is in charge of the mill and is an experienced roller miller....The Mt. Vernon Barrel Factory was operating at 'full blast' trying to keep up with the mill's demand for barrels.'

Warner and Beer's *History of the County of Brant* (1883) relates that Peter J. Griffin, son of Robert Griffin, owned the mill standing on the site of the Old Perrin Mills at Mount Vernon, "doing a business the profits of which are about \$3200 per year." Since Nathaniel and wife had no children, perhaps the mill was left to a relative. Peter must have been the relative. Apparently the Griffins also owned a mill in St. George, and other businesses. Piece by piece, we may solve the puzzle.

THE COOK FAMILY

The Cook Mine was one of the earliest in the York (Grand River) area. Copies of several documents were acquired at the Public Archives of Canada by the Pearts, who own the property now. There is a certificate dated July 28, 1797, signed by William Dickson, Justice of the Peace, and stating that Nicholas Cook had appeared before him and had taken the oath of allegiance and signed the Declaration. The land was leased to William's father, Nicholas Cook, by Joseph Brant, for his services to the Indians. William Cook acquired 337 1/2 acres from his father, Nicholas, who gave a quit claim deed to his son for the property. In 1837, William applied for a patent to the lands. He then had to petition for the patent. The Indians had to sign a surrender to the Queen in William's favour.

I do hereby certify that Nicholas Cook
appeared before me William Dawson
Esquire one of his Majesty's Justices
of the Peace in and for the Home
District and took the oath of allegi-
ance & signed the Surrender
28th July 1797 William Dawson J.P.

In Council 19th October 1837

Recommended that the Surrender be
accepted, and that the Patent do
open to William Cook, according to
the survey, approved by the Chiefs
in Council.

W. Muller
22/6

J.P.M.

The Six Nations Indians
Surrender
to the Queen -
in favour of William
Cook - 337 1/2 acres -
1857