

# GRAND RIVER HERITAGE MINES SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

April, May, June, 1999



## Editor's Notes, by Jean Farquharson

We hope everyone survived the winter intact. At our annual meeting/pot luck, held at the Farquharson home on Saturday, March 13, we decided to formalize our society. A public meeting will be advertised and held in October with a guest speaker, election of officers, adoption of by-laws, and a motion to apply to the Ontario Historical Society for affiliation and incorporation. We hope to see some new faces serving but until then, we will continue with the following executive:

Chairman - Jean Farquharson

Treasurer - Ilse Kraemer

Secretary - Cathy McArthur

Mike O'Byrne offered to prepare the by-laws.

Jean reported that she had been guest speaker with the **Moyle Women's Institute**, and would speak at the **Burlington Gemini Gem and Mineral Club** on May 13 at 8 p.m. Anyone wishing to attend should call Jean for a ride or directions.

Jean and Ilse have been interviewing some of the Indians descended from the Jamiesons and Hills who lived at Five Oaks and Apps Mill before the white man came. The publishing of the **Five Oaks booklet** has been deferred until the interviews are complete, but this continues to be slow.

Gloria Boulaine offered to contact CGC at Hagersville to arrange an underground tour.

The theme for our display at **Brant Geo-Rama** this year was selected as **The Long Point Furnace**. Ilse has some additional photos from the field trip she and Jean took last summer.

**Ilse's report follows:** The **Lapidary Show** as always was a hit with young and old. Kids liked the mine display created by Mike. Our thanks go to our helpers: Mike, Paul, Harry, Cathy, and Katie, with special thanks to Cathy for her wonderful Silurian fossil display from Manitoulin Island. This year was the first time for me to display part of the archaeological Kraemer Collection of Indian artifacts in this area. People were very interested.

Our next exhibit will be in Mount Pleasant on **July 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>** or **Heritage Mount Pleasant's 200<sup>th</sup> year celebration**. They planned a lot of exciting things and we are invited. We congratulate Mike for forming this new historical society. Mike is founder and the first president, and the organization has started out with many interested volunteers and interesting activities. We will show a low profile at the **Golden Horseshoe Steam Show** this year but will bring out a better display next year.

Dates and location of field trips have been changed since our meeting. Please verify time and place with Ilse. Rain dates are on the alternate Sunday.

**The revised list of field trips follows:**

May 2, 10 a.m. **Brantford Northwest -the Perched Fen** Meet at junction of Hardy Road and Oak Park Road (Masters)  
 May 2, 10 a.m. **Gypsum Mine at Paris Dump** Meet by Paris Kitchens  
 May 30, 10 a.m. **Garland Mine** *Holstein meet Hwy 54 under Hwy 6 over pass Caledonia* (Tentative) To be arranged later  
 October **Sandstone Mines at Blair, Conducted Tour** Details later.

Membership Renewals are overdue. If you have not paid, please send your cheque to Ilse.

### **The Paris Plaster Mines in 1891, by Ilse Kraemer**

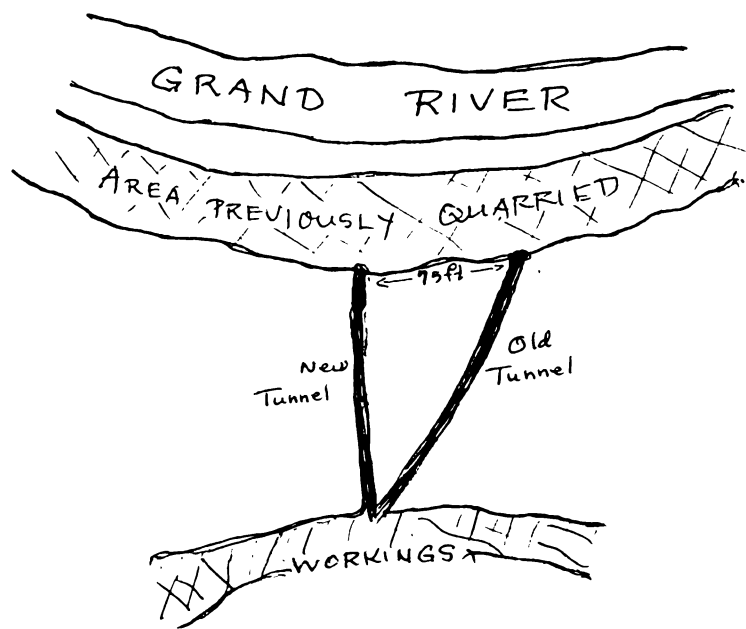
The first report of the **Bureau of Mines** was printed in 1891. The inspector was Mr. A. Slaght from Waterford. Sometimes when the Paris Plaster Mine is reported, it refers to the Mile Hill Mine and sometimes it is the Dickson Mine. This report refers to the Dickson Mine out East River Rd.

*The Paris Plaster Mine has been purchased recently by Alabastine Company of Paris of which Mr. Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan is the principal shareholder. Mr. Wheeler is the manager of the company's works in Paris. He accompanied the mining inspector on a recent visit to Paris.*

*The mine is situated one mile and a quarter east of the Town of Paris, on the south side of the Grand River. The mining right comprises 140 acres and has been constantly worked for the last seven months by a few men who mine the gypsum and deliver it to the mouth of the shaft by contract of \$1 per ton. It is taken out of the shaft by a small handcart. The company supplies the timber for the mine.*

*A drift starts at the foot of the hill a few feet above the level of the Grand River. The drift has been run in 400 feet in a southwest direction, passing right through the older workings done in former years. Radical changes were required to make it safe and convenient for working in the mine. Along the foot of the embankment the gypsum has been worked out for many years and for a considerable distance. Further back under the hill at a depth of 130 feet from the surface, where it is taken out now is still a large deposit left. It is interstratified with layers of grey and pure white gypsum at a thickness of five feet. A slate roof only a few feet thick overlies the gypsum with boulders and clay right up above to the surface. This required additional support as security. In some places the old workings were left in a dangerous condition. The air was foul and the men were unable to work in these conditions.*

*Another drift was opened about 75 feet west at a certain angle in order to connect with the old one. This would secure proper ventilation. Also the company plans to greatly improve the mine. This being done could mean that the property will probably become a large producing one, notwithstanding the removal of vast amounts of gypsum during the last thirty years.*



DICKSON  
PLASTER BEDS  
& MINE  
(EAST R. RD NEAR GREEN LANE)

The new drift provided an  
air current to improve  
ventilation in the mine.

### **The Mariagi Hotel by Mike O'Byrne**

The Mariagi Hotel in Prince Arthur's Landing was famous for its amethyst-fronted fireplace, and like the St. Louis Hotel in Fort William, had been a top dollar hotel. Tastes changed over the years and both became buckets of blood. The histories of these hotels has little to do with what follows except that they were both havens for miners seeking respite from their grim working and living conditions. Life at the hotels was frequently as dangerous as working underground.

Mining traditionally required a work force that was muscular, had strong backs and if you read about the working conditions, weak minds. To a large extent, the relatively high wages paid miners was supposed to compensate them for the poor working conditions.

Prior to the introduction of pneumatic equipment such as rock drills and mucking machines, mining was done by hand. Soft materials such as gypsum and coal could be mined with picks and shovels. If necessary, holes could be drilled or augured and blasted using blasting powder.

The hand drilling of blasting holes particularly in hard rock was a real skill and not a practice for the faint-hearted. To set the scene, so to speak, prior to the use of electric lamps underground, illumination was provided by candle lanterns, candle hat lamps or carbide lamps. The miner's working area was thus poorly lit by flickering candlelight. In some mines the miner was issued three tallow candles for a ten-hour shift and if he used them up too quickly, he had to grope through the last hours of his shift in total darkness.

Drilling holes by hand is called jacking. Single jacking involved one miner drilling a hole by twisting a 3/4 inch drill steel with one hand and hitting the end of the drill steel with a three to four pound short-handled drilling hammer with the other hand.

Usually the miner worked with a partner and double hand drilling or double jacking was done. One miner would swing an eight pound sledge hammer with both hands while his partner twisted a one-inch diameter drill steel. With each blow he hit the drill steel after which he made a

hissing noise to warn his partner that the next hammer blow was coming. Between blows the partner would raise the drill steel about an inch and rotate it. The end of the drill steel was a small target to hit in the faint light of a couple of tallow candles. At regular intervals, the hole would be cleaned and the miners would reverse roles.

Single jacking in medium hard rock would see a miner drilling four to seven feet per shift. Double jacking was best applied to drilling near vertical down holes. In a zinc mine in New Jersey, two miners double jacking were expected to drill three holes totaling eight feet per ten hour shift. When blasted, this would yield 8 tons of ore.

If one ventured into the Mariagi, one quickly learned not to mess with miners used to swinging a sledge hammer for ten hour shifts.

### **Tid Bits, by Jean Farquharson**

Cathy McArthur, in her travels to collect books, purchased *Port Ryerse 1774-1994*, which contained the following information:

The son of Lieutenant-Colonel Samuel Ryerse built a plaster mill at Port Ryerse about 1849. "In the early days land plaster was considered a necessity for clover and meadows. It was brought to Port Ryerse by the vessel load and dumped on the side of the street, close to the mill. The source of the supply for this article in the rock state was the mines near by the Grand River. Previous to the erection of this plaster mill, farmers would drive all the way to the Grand River in winter time for their supply. But little is now heard of land plaster, which shows how ideas change."

*This article was written by George Ryerse, grandson of Samuel, and published in the Simcoe Reformer in the August 3, 1923 issue.*

From another article in the collection:

"[One ] boat builder was Captain Lewis Ryerse, who first built the small "fore and after" *Emily Ellen*. Then he purchased a new but sunken two-masted scow, raised her, put the boat in good trim and renamed her the *Kate Kelley*, after the maiden name of his wife. The man who built this craft did a peculiar and unheard of thing, namely, instead of properly caulking his boat, he filled the space between the lining and the outside with land plaster, with the result that the water soaked through and she sank in the bay."

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This newsletter is edited by Jean Farquharson. We are not responsible for errors. We are looking for more information about the mining industry in Southern Ontario. Submissions are welcome. Please send **correspondence** to Jean Farquharson, R.R.3, Paris ON N3L 3E3. Phone 519/442-2156. Fax 519/442-2373. For **membership inquiries**, contact Ilse Kraemer, 23 KingsHill Lane, Brantford ON N3T 6A3. Phone 519-756-6634.