



GRAND RIVER HERITAGE MINES SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

October, November, December 1999

Tid Bits, by Jean Farquharson

We had a very small display at the **Golden Horseshoe Steam Show** this year, and thank Alf and Eileen Peart for setting up the display of the Mines Society for the show.

We also had an interesting weekend with our display at **Heritage Mount Pleasant's 200th Anniversary** celebration.

After 4 ½ years, the O.M.B. hearing is over! The hearing ended with a settling of issues at mediation. We lost but we won. The truck stop goes in but there will be special terms and conditions written into the site plan agreement with the County to safeguard our water and our neighbourhood. Being allowed to attend the expert witness meetings, we learned a lot from this process. We will have access to monitoring reports and will need to actively keep watch over the project to keep the neighbourhood happy.

Ilse has been very busy attending meetings and taking experts on hikes to Brantford Northwest to preserve her beloved fen. We congratulate her on her success which came from many hours of dedicated work. She will receive an award from GRCA in November for her achievement. We also made contact with Professor Mario Coniglio, Earth Sciences Department of the University of Waterloo. He is a karst and marl expert and is interested in the disappearing and reappearing streams and tufa beds along the Grand in the NorthWest.

Coming Events

Saturday, October 2, 10 a.m. at the home of Jean Farquharson, we will have a meeting to plan a public meeting later this year. We will also plan fall hikes including a trip to the sandstone caves at Blair. **Bring your lunch.** Weather permitting, and if we have time, we will take a hike locally.

November 27th, 6 p.m. **Christmas Pot-Luck** at Ilse's. Please phone (519-756-6634) and tell her whether you will attend and what food you will bring so that we can balance the meal. Please bring any slides, photos, etc., to share with us.

Annual Meeting: We are planning to hold a public meeting late in the fall so that we may formally organize as an affiliate of the Ontario Historical Society. When the time comes we will need the support of all members. Please watch for an announcement.

In previous issues, we described the marl beds at Blue Lake in Brant County. Ilse has written an article for us about another marl operation she discovered that operated in Halton County.

News From the Northwest, by Ilse Kraemer

During the past few years, I have reported to you about the Brantford NorthWest area sewage crossing under the river. The Grand River Heritage Mines Society is very interested in this area since there was historic gypsum mining activity, gypsum and tufa quarries. The field research group had a few trips into this area and we met with City Engineer Alf Gretzinger and his staff. After different aborted attempts at directional drilling under the river bed, they finally took our advice and now they are going over the river. They are building a truss bridge with the pipes running under the bridge, and the pedestrians crossing the river on the upper level. The connecting footpath will probably be used for the Trans-Canada Hiking Trail, when it is finished in October or so.

In the meantime, planning for the NorthWest Industrial Area is in full force. The newly formed Citizen Advisory Committee has a lot of input into this project. This enables us to protect the fen, and other precious areas. We could get a large set-back for buildings from the rim of the escarpment which is an oak savannah. The City is still drilling more monitoring wells (over 60 by now) to fully understand the underground flow of the aquifer which supports the fen. The Citizens' Committee was structured last week and we have a name - NorthWest Gateway Park Committee. A lot of work still has to be done, and we hope in the near future the NorthWest Gateway Nature Park will be ready for visitors.

Marl In Ontario, by Jean Farquharson

According to Industrial Mineral Report 28, Marl In Ontario, by G.R. Guillet (Ont. Dept. of Mines), marl has not been important in Ontario since about 1920. From 1890-1920 there were at least 25 Portland Cement plants operating in Ontario, using marl as their resource. However, when Portland cement was manufactured from limestone, the uncompetitive marl plants closed down. Marl was also used as an industrial filler in paper, paint, plastic, rubber and linoleum and a great variety of minor uses. It is also known as "whiting" because its most important feature is its whiteness or brightness.

Marl is an unconsolidated limestone that forms the bed of small clear emerald-green lakes and marshes. It is produced by prolific algal life that occurs in the spring-fed land-locked waters in areas of carbonate bedrock. Often mistaken for white clay, it has few clay properties except in appearance and use as a finely ground limestone. It is less plastic and less dense than clay. True marl consists of soft sediments having a total content of calcium and magnesium carbonates of 50% or greater.

The process of marl formation by algae is largely precipitation. With restricted outlets, calcium content of the cool lake waters tends to increase through evaporation, and newly formed marl is not washed away. This environment encourages prolific growth of lime-secreting organisms such

as blue-green algae and green alga Chara. These microscopic plankton-like forms are responsible for the striking colour and clarity of the water, as well as the bulk of the marl also common are larger shelled animals of the snail (gastropod) and clam (pelecypod) genera, and occasional small clam-like molluscs of the ostracod family.

Marl deposits in Ontario are geologically very young, having been formed after the retreat of the glacial ice. Marl deposits which were formed before the ice age were swept away by the scouring action of the ice.

Ghost Towns, by Ilse Kraemer

On the west side of Twiss Road, across from Crawford Tract II in Halton County are a series of rectangular ponds, dissected by dams. The creation of these ponds began in the 1800's when the owner started to remove marl which was underlying the wetland. Besides being used for filler for insecticides, it had many other uses. Marl is a soft white to grey substance, usually a combination of clay and calcium carbonate that settles on the bottom of the lakes and ponds. In this area it is up to eight feet deep.

The first pit was dug near the road and the water pumped into the creek that ran along the side. The Marl was extracted and burned in a kiln at the site, and delivered to Campbellville. As a pit was completed, a new one was dug and the water pumped into the old pit. There were four pits in all. Later the company built the Climax Bug Killer plant on site, and the dust was manufactured right there. The finished product was delivered as far away as Windsor and Montreal. Around 1946 there was a big fire. What equipment could be saved was shipped to Milton where the operation continued. With the introduction of DDT the business declined and was abandoned.

The ponds are now left to nature and fishermen. Painted turtles, bass and trout and many frog species can be seen in the pond. A trail follows along the south side of the ponds. Many beautiful butterflies can be encountered in this area.

When I visited the place about 38 years ago it looked completely different. Board walks criss-crossed the lakes. I did not know at that time that the ponds were calcium pits. We were looking for caves and porcupines. When re-visiting the place last year, I was surprised about the size of the trees and how everything had changed. The boardwalks had rotted away; only some of the posts were visible. We found some stone kilns and an old railway track for small spurs. To the left and right of the track were wooden racks about 10 feet high. These were made out of cedar wood and in good condition.

In the meantime, I learned more about the history of this place. A few days ago I went back. It was a beautiful day. The ponds glistened in the sun. The water was crystal clear with a white marl

bottom. Lots of lobelia, goldthread and a very rare white orchid grow around the lake. Goldthread is rare in our area but not in Halton; we saw acres and acres of it. We followed the old train track again and took a good look at the old drying racks. They are close to 100 years old or older, made out of cedar and in good condition. Below the racks was a wall of marl which must have fallen from the racks. Marl is very wet and sticky when dug. Workers would form it into bricks which were dried on the racks before calcining it in the kilns. We observed a lot of old drums and remains of collapsed buildings lying over a large area. A small, strong-flowing stream found its way under a culvert, built out of old limestone. One would not expect such a masterpiece in the wilderness. Hidden among brush and bushes we found many foundations cemented with marl. This place is a real ghost town.

On the way back to Georgetown, we met with some archeologists digging on the site of Highway 7. I had a talk with them and found out they were excavating the old village of Silver Creek. No house is standing any more. This postal village was established in the early 1800's. It peaked about 1860 with about fifty people. Shortly after it was abandoned and became another ghost town. At its peak it had two churches, a school, a mill, distillery, two taverns, one owned by Thomas Clark, a toll-keeper, stonemason and a lime manufacturer. Farmers and settlers came from all over to go to church and visit the post office. Heavy stone foundations were found, with fragments indicating the buildings were built of logs with no basements. Only a few hand-formed bricks were found. Few people know about the existence of this ghost village of Silver Creek.

Mining Notes, by Michael (Old Grizzly) O'Byrne

When attempts at mining coal near the Susquehanna River a few miles north of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, proved futile because of perennial spring flooding, mining engineers came up with a different approach -- a water-tight mine shaft of reinforced concrete was built above the ground. The shaft sections were allowed to sink under their own weight until it hit solid ground. The material inside the shaft was removed using conventional mining methods while simultaneously additional shaft sections were built on top. The shaft ultimately reached a depth of 800 feet. The project was completed in 1908.

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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.