THE WALKING QUESTION MARK

Newsletter of the Grand River Heritage Mines Society

Always Digging For Answers

January February March April 2004

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WHAT IS IN THIS ISSUE ?

Reminder:

PAY YOUR DUES!

COMING EVENTS: Mark your calendar!

January 31 - Celebration of the release of the video of the **Visual Heritage of Brant County and Brantford** made by Pixeldust Studios at the Sanderson Centre. Showing of the video will be at 4 p.m. The Mines Society participated in making the video last summer. We and other heritage groups will have displays set up in the foyer from 2 p.m to 7 p.m, and there will be entertainment as well. Come and bring a friend. Copies of our book will be available.

February 16 - **Grand River Watershed Annual Heritage Day Workshop & Celebration** at the Paris Fairgrounds, 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. Ilse and Jean are preparing a display for it, and Jean will be one of the speakers. Her topic is ***Gypsum Mines: Shaping the Face of Paris.*** The theme of the day is **Grand Legacies: Boom, Bust and Beyond.** Register by Feb 4 (Limited to 300). To sign up, **phone John Quinn 519-752-4150, Fax 752-6977** Email: jquinn@brantford.ca

Saturday, April 17 - 2 p.m. This is official notification of **GRHMS Annual Meeting** at Edinburgh Square Museum in Caledonia. **Guest speaker: Cheryl MacDonald** will speak on the Gypsum industry. **Mark it on your calendar.**

Bits and Pieces, by Jean Farquharson, Editor

Greetings for 2004! 2003 was quite a year! We hope the New Year brings an end to earthquakes, disasters, pestilence and war!

The Mines Society fared well last year, and we hope that this year will be just as successful! Our book, ***Herons and Cobblestones***, has sold well. We still have copies available.

In November, we had a very successful meeting at the Princeton and District Museum, thanks to Karen Richardson, the new curator. I spoke on the history of the gypsum mines in the area, centering on the Drumbo Mine. Several local people turned up and gave us the names of contacts to further our research. Karen's son, Charlie Richardson, gave a wonderful talk on Mine Safety, about which I have written an article. Ilse and I prepared a display which remains there for a while.

On the topic of mine safety and accidents, in November I had an interesting phone call from Manitoulin Island, from Marion Seabrook, descended from John Hodgson (1803-62), a miner at the Martindale Mine. I gave her the following information, taken from Mary Nelles' notes:

"John Hodgson, foreman in Mr. Alex Taylor's Plaster Beds, was killed by a fall of Plaster on Thursday last, whilst digging in the mine. Another person was near him at the time but he fortunately escaped." (Grand River Sachem 21 November, 1861.) The inscription on his stone in York cemetery reads: "John, son of John and Priscilla, died 15 November. 1861, age 22 years, 4 months." His father, John Hodgson, Sr., tried to save his son and died as a result, 16 April, 1862, age 58 years 11 months and 11 days. His wife was the former Priscilla Walton. They, the Hodgson and Walton families, originally came from Weirdale area, England.

According to Marion, John Sr.'s son, George Hodgson, settled at Mindemoya on Manitoulin Island (near our second home). Marion, who lives in Mindemoya, found me on the Internet when searching for her ancestors by looking up "gypsum". Small world!

This incident suggests to me that we need our own web site to make more contacts. I have had a few other contacts through the Internet. Marion requested that anyone reading the old Sachems ca 1862-1874 and seeing ads for settlers to Manitoulin in the Sachem, please contact her through me. I plan to call on her when we go to the Island.

On December 6th, we had a wonderful Christmas Pot-Luck, with Arnold and Gail Douglas as our special guests. Joe Clark couldn't attend because he is recovering from a knee replacement. We wish you a good recovery, Joe. Thanks, Ilse, for having us year after year. Dr. Gary Balsdon has invited interested members to visit his model train display. If interested, call Ilse.

We have several contributions to this edition of the newsletter, beginning with the President's Report. We thank those who have made the effort in these busy times.

There are already lots of events coming up to keep us busy. See page one, and remember to mark them on your calendar. **Please remember also that membership renewals are due now.**

Notes From Your President - Diane P. Baltaz

If you wonder whether it is worth forking out $10 for a membership to the Grand River Heritage Mines Society, keep on reading. In addition to providing great camaraderie and educational hikes, we make our mining heritage better known throughout the Grand River Valley.

Take our 2004 itinerary, for instance. Mike O'Byrne is working with the County of Brant to place a gypsum mine cart and a plaque near the site of Ontario's first gypsum mine, at the "Forks of the Grand" in downtown Paris. Jean Farquharson is scribing the plaque's wording.

The Brant Heritage Association, a network described in the last newsletter, forges ahead in its dealings with Brant County in matters of stable funding and for a common heritage policy. An executive now exists, consisting of Bob Hasler (Paris Museum and Historical Society) as President; Bob Glass (Brant Historical Society) as vice president, and yours truly as secretary. These two "Bobs" will present the group's aims and objectives before the County Finance Committee in early February.

Your Mines Society received requests for displays at events which you may be interested in attending. One event is the Heritage Day Conference that the GRCA is hosting at the Par;is Fair Grounds on February 16 (See the promoption for this elsewhere in the newletter – Jean will be giving a power point presentation at this event). Also the youth who founded Pixeldust Studios, Zach Melnick, created a sequel to their recent heritage video on Haldimand County – this time on Brant County, to be launched on January 31st. Also, we continue to have displays for the County of Brant in the Council chambers, accessible when not in use for Council or other meetings. We have had a display at Princeton since our meeting in November.

The GRHMS Executive meets later this winter to plan the annual general meeting, which we hope to have on Saturday, April 17, in Haldimand County. See Coming Events for details. That's your chance to provide further direction to the GRHMS – and to join the executive.

Hopefully, we will cross paths at all of the above events, especially on April 17. Meanwhile, your 2004 membership dues ($10, family $15, corporate $20) still go to Ilse Kraemer (Her address is at the end of the newsletter).

FIELD TRIPS:

A Visit To the Drumbo Mine, by Ilse Kraemer

This modern gypsum mine has been closed for a few years. For miles, one can see the high head frame surrounded by fields and woods. I had planned for a while to visit and take pictures and hopefully collect some samples of gypsum. It was a lucky day for me; I met the new owner of the property. Generously, he gave me permission to roam around and photograph whatever was left The mine will become a sawmill and some of the equipment can be used, including the buildings. The shaft itself is a problem since it is filled with water sixty feet from the surface. They tried to fill it with earth and gravel. Water was a reason for closing the mine. The strong pumps could not defy the masses of water. All had to be abandoned in a hurry, including all the equipment deep down in the tunnels. Twice we visited the mine with Mike and Lou. Marlin, the

new owner, showed us the inside of the buildings and gave each of us a souvenir, a miner's basket. I was allowed to collect samples of gypsum, the most beautiful gypsum I ever saw - pure white and soft. One huge piece was a lovely sky-blue colour. This reminded me of the Bass Island Grottos (Lake Erie). These caves were once filled with gypsum. During the time the gypsum was leached away and only celestite crystals remained. Celestite is a white to light blue mineral $SrSO_4$ - sulphate of strontium. Maybe my blue tinted sample is not gypsum at all.
Source: ***National Audbon Society Field Guide to North American Rocks and Minerals***

Visit to Karst Caves at Rockwood, by Derek Dalton.

Editor's Note: Derek visited this site in early fall. This park has excellent examples of karst topography. This would be worthwhile for a group field trip in the future. The U.of Waterloo has studied it extensively. See article: www.science.uwaterloo.ca/earth/waton/f0110.html

Rockwood Conservation area is centered upon a site of karst topography. As with many such conservation sites, Rockwood can be viewed from different perspectives: aesthetic, recreational, historic, scientific. The GRCA has taken a natural beauty spot arising from the phenomenon of the Karst topography and has opened it to the public while maintaining its beauty. The activities offered are extensive: camping, canoeing, hiking, picnicking and swimming. The list continues but each activity is managed in a manner to protect this fragile and sensitive resource.

An awareness of the fragility of the site does not seem to have been evident in the old days. In 1868, a woollen mill was built on the site. It was active for over half a century. It was closed down and sat idle until 1967 when it burned down. What might have been a disaster for the area turned into a benefit. The old ruins became an integral part of the site as if nature had intended them to be there. The combination of the mill ruins and the scenic beauty has provided a background to many wedding pictures and tourists' pictures.

This beautiful scenic recreational spot has scientific importance too. It lays claim to having the world's largest pot hole, the Devil's Well, and also the greatest concentration of pot holes in Ontario - 300! During the last Ice Age, swirling rocks in a glacial meltwater stream eroded to create them. Trails have been developed for the hiker to view the potholes. The site has other typical features of karst topography but the amateur explorer should be very careful. The sites that are most attractive or the most interesting can be the most dangerous.

Access to the Rockwood Conservation area is very simple. Take Guelph Line north from Burlington to Hwy 7. Turn right and proceed to Falls Road. Turn right. Proceed to the entrance. The GRCA website provides maps of the area and the park.

THE WESTROC MINE NEAR DRUMBO, by Jean Farquharson

Taken from a talk prepared for the public meeting at Princeton Museum on Nov. 8th

The Opening of Westroc: After exploration in 1958 by National Gypsum, Westroc Industries Ltd, a subsidiary of BPB Industries, acquired leases in 1960, and mining rights for 1700 acres near Drumbo. The flat-lying six-foot bed of gypsum is near the base of the **Silurian Salina Formation**, about 380 feet below the surface.

Ray Hartviksen, an experienced geologist and mining engineer, was responsible for developing the Drumbo Mine. It proved to be a real challenge! A test shaft was drilled 44 inches in diameter, to acquire a 50-ton bulk sample, later to be used as an escape hatch and for ventilation. The samples proved of excellent quality - as much as 88% pure.

The company began to drill a vertical shaft 12 ½ feet in diameter in 1976 and it was completed in the fall of 1977. Details are available in a technical article written by Mr. Hartviksen. The shaft was lined with precast concrete sections to a depth of 455 feet. Water was encountered in the bottom of the shaft and plugged. A 56-foot steel liner was installed to reduce flow. Headframe and hoist were completed and mining began by February 1979. The tunnels were located at only one level - 385 feet.

After Mr. Hartviksen left, **Kirk Scheifele**, an experienced miner and a registered mining and mining survey technician, managed the mine until it closed.

The **buildings** above the mine included an office, the hoist building, and the shaft house or head frame. West of the shaft house a 1,000 foot conveyor belt took gypsum to an area where a huge loader was used to automatically load the gypsum into trucks or stock-piled.

The **elevator car** that moved the workers was called the **cage**. A **hoist** with a cable moved the cage up and down 800 feet per minute. There was a bucket-like car called the **skip** that moved the gypsum. The hoist man was very important in the operation. He had to make sure the equipment was working **100%** at all times to get the men in and out and move the equipment and gypsum.

An **air system** pumped fresh air into the mine - 60,000 cubic feet per minute. The mine always had **water problems**: 150,000 gallons of water were pumped daily into Horner's Creek from the mine.

Maintenance: All the large machines needed to extract the gypsum and run the mine had to be partially dismantled to be taken into the mine through this vertical shaft. Once they were installed, John Van Kruistum of Woodstock and another employee worked full time maintaining machinery underground and fixing flat tires. Tires were punctured and shredded regularly on the sharp rock, and sometimes chains were used to protect the tires. The maintenance dept had a full operating shop underground. Eight workers kept the mine and hoist operational.

The mine plan: The mine was built on one level at 385 feet, centred around the shaft. For safety, there were two exits - the main shaft and the exploratory shaft which served as the air shaft. Both were provided with ladders. There was also an explosives room, kept locked. Every week a truck delivered the explosives used to blast the rock. A lunchroom was provided for the men who worked a 10 hour shift. There was an electrical control room for the whole mine was operated using electrical power. There was a large battery charging area, for the vehicles and machines were operated using huge batteries which had to be continuously recharged.

The **mine tunnels** were low-ceilinged. Only 4 ½ feet of the 5 ½ feet of gypsum was pure enough to extract. This meant that the side tunnels were only 4 ½ feet high. To overcome this, low slung vehicles and machines were used in the operation.

For support, the room and pillar method was used, where a section 20 feet by 20 feet was left to support the mine. This meant that 75% of the gypsum could be mined.

The workers: When workers were on duty, they wore coveralls, heavy leather belts with battery packs for the lamps clipped on their helmets, steel-toed boots. They had a

strictly enforced check-in check-out system so that the company knew who was in the mine at any time.

The Mining Operation: The workers who worked the 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. shift extracted the gypsum. A crew also worked from 5:30 p.m. to 3:30 a.m. This was when the charges were set. A mining surveyor was in charge of deciding where the tunnels should be blasted. He marked the 21 spots to be blasted 8 inches apart. An operator used a high speed drill to bore blasting holes into the seam of gypsum, and took only a few seconds to bore into the rock.

When the blast occurred, everyone was out of the mine, and the blast was set off from ground level. It took four hours for the dust to settle so that those coming on duty at 7:30 a.m could breathe freely.

To keep the mine safe and from collapsing, an operator reinforced the mine ceiling. He loaded an automatic roof drill with a steel bolt. The steel bolts were drilled in to the mine ceiling at regular intervals, supporting a weight of 26 tons. The bolt was anchored with resins. A cartridge containing resin was placed in the hole. The cartridge would rupture when the bolt was inserted and the resin would set, leaving the bolt secure.

Once the mine was safe after the blast, the loose gypsum was loaded automatically into the massive loader, one of several massive machines, which are only three feet high and run electrically. 1000 to 1500 tons a day were shipped out

Why did the mine close? Operating an underground mine with all the safety features needed and water problems to solve, is very expensive. We were told that the company hoped, to keep the mine operational, it would be able to market 250,000 tons per year, selling what they couldn't use for their own products, mainly drywall, to cement plants who used gypsum as a retarder component. Apparently it was difficult **to maintain this market** during a slump in the building industry.

Also **new technology** allowed Westroc to obtain a cheaper source of gypsum. They were the first wallboard manufacturer in Canada to convert to *desulphogypsum* (DSG), that is, gypsum produced as a by-product of a sulphur dioxide removal process used by certain coal-fired thermal electric generating stations. What was once waste material destined for landfill sites is now transformed into recyclable, high-purity gypsum board products. The mine was no longer needed and was closed a few years ago - we believe around 1998.

Before the mine closed, CKCO television in Kitchener recorded some sessions in the mine, an interview with Kirk Scheifele, and a tour of the drywall plant in Mississauga. We were fortunate enough to borrow a copy, and I have taken extensive notes from it for future use. Ilse, Lou and Mike went on a field trip to the mine in November and took pictures of the site while the buildings are still there. They acquired some of the old cages used in the drying room for workers to store and hang their wet garb after coming out of the mine. Ilse has written a report.

WE NEED YOUR HELP! The mine is now part of the history and industrial archaeology of the area. We are searching for more information about the Westroc mine, the people who worked there, and their experiences in order to preserve it for history. Please contact me if you have any information.

Sources:
Guillet, G.R. Gypsum in Ontario. Ontario Dept. of Mines, 1964.
Harmer, Esther, comp. A History of Drumbo, 1851 - 1987.
Harttviksen, R.C. "Development of the Drumbo Mine: A new gypsum mine in Ontario," in CIM Bulletin, January, 1983.
"Mine Millionth Ton of Gypsum at Drumbo Mine," in The Ayr News, February 11, 1987.

MINE RESCUE AT GEORGIA-PACIFIC IN CALEDONIA

By Jean Farquharson (Notes from a speech made by Charlie Richardson)

Many of our members are curious about mine accidents. Over the years we have told a few tales about accidents that occurred underground in the gypsum mines, mostly when mine roofs collapsed owing to poisonous gases, rotten timbers or cracked rock. Mine safety has come a long way since the first gypsum mine opened up in 1822.

Part of the GRHMS program at our meeting in Princeton and District Museum on November 8th was a well-received talk by Charlie Richardson about mine rescue. While performing his regular job in the maintenance department of Georgia Pacific's plant in Caledonia, Charlie is on call as a member of the Mine Rescue team at the mine. His fire-fighting background serves him well for the job.

Charlie described how mine rescue was developed and standardized over the years, based on mine accidents. Ontario Mine Rescue was born after a fire in the Hollinger Mine at Timmins in 1929 with a heavy loss of life. Procedures were set up to improve rescue methods during mine fires. In 1947, a fire in East Malartic resulted in the creation of a Senior Mine Rescue Officer to create standards across the province. In 1984, after a rock burst at Falconbridge, additional standards, procedures, and training were developed for non-fire emergencies.

All over Ontario, mines must have rescue teams set up to be trained and prepared for emergency situations. Methods have been standardized so that teams can all work together. They have reciprocal agreements with neighbouring mines to provide back-up. Members of the Georgia Pacific team train regularly with members of the CGC team in Hagersville, and are trained and prepared to serve as back-up in an emergency in both mines.

How are they chosen to serve? The selection process for Mine Rescue team members is rigid:

- Passing a physical and an annual test for physical fitness
- A stress test for those over 40
- 16 hours of training underground to be familiar with the mine
- Basic and standard first aid training
- Basic and standard mine rescue training
- Eight hours of training and practice once per month To encourage them to keep in top-notch shape, an Ontario-wide Mine Rescue Competition is held every year.

Georgia-Pacific has 15 Mine Rescue workers. When an emergency occurs, 5 members make up a team, but a full back-up team must be available before they can go underground.

Basic clothing includes a pair of fireproof coveralls, work boots, hard helmet with a lamp, heavy leather belt with a battery pack, gloves, and a breathing apparatus. Until 1965, the McCawn System was used . In 1966 the BG1174 system was introduced, doubling the time a mine rescue worker could perform using an oxygen mask. Still used today, the BG will soon be replaced with a lighter model. Some of the equipment Charlie brought to show the audience was the BG. It consists of a mask, hoses and a heavy tank which is strapped to the worker's back. It is a recirculation system, which means the air exhaled is purged of carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide by passing through soda lime. Pure oxygen is added from a cylinder, and the rescue worker breathes it in again. As time passes, this air heats up and becomes very uncomfortable for

the worker. New models contain an ice pack to cool off the air before it is breathed in again. The BG lasts an average of four hours, varying from two to six, depending on how hard and efficiently the worker performs. An important part of training is rebuilding the BG machine to reuse it. This process takes a minimum of 10 minutes.

Each team member performs a particular task on the team and must carry some equipment related to his role. Each carries a load weighing between 150 and 200 pounds. It is important to keep the load as light as possible, but also to have the equipment needed. Fire extinguishers and fire hoses are a must. A flame safety lamp to detect gases, mainly oxygen deficiency and the presence of methane, is now being replaced by electronic devices. The OXSR45 is a breathing apparatus carried to use on patients. They also need reciprocating saws, air-lifting bags, a Griptek system to haul patients up the mine shaft, the jaws-of-life, and stretchers.

At the end of his talk, Charlie fielded many questions from the floor. The eager audience included his wife and two young sons, his father who used to be a scaler in the Caledonia mine, and his mother, Karen, curator at Princeton (formerly at Ruthven).

More About Mine Accidents and Rescue, by Michael O'Byrne

At our recent meeting, we enjoyed a most interesting presentation on mine rescue by Charlie Richardson. Mining has generally been an extremely dangerous occupation and all too often, legislation protecting miners was only enacted following mining disasters.

Canada lagged behind the U.S. with respect to mine safety legislation largely because of the horrendous history of mining disasters, culminating in the Monongah disaster which claimed 362 lives. The deadliest year in U.S. coal mining history was 1907 when 3,242 deaths occurred.

Metal mining has been equally dangerous but possibly due to the smaller scale of individual mining operations, the disasters were not usually of the same magnitude. There were some notable disasters such as in 1902 at the Park-Utah mine where 34 men died as a result of inhaling powder fumes, in 1910, 37 men died at the Alaskan-Mexico mine as the result of a powder explosion, the shaft fire at the Granite Mountain mine, where 1663 men died in 1917, or the flooding of the Barnes-Hecker mine which took the lives of 51 miners in 1926.

In 1928, the Hollinger Mine was the largest gold mine in North America and the British Empire, consisting of over 100 miles of underground tunnels. It was serviced by four shafts, two used for hoisting ore, the remaining two being used to hoist men and supplies.

On February 10, 1928, the day shift began as normal. Miners began to be lowered at 7 a.m., timbermen at 8 a.m., and samplers and surveyors at 9 a.m. By 10 a.m., it became apparent that something had happened underground. Miners were at the shaft stations ringing for help; others were climbing emergency raise ladders to escape. Thick smoke was observed billowing out of the 550 foot level. The smoke was being carried downward through the various working levels.

At this time, there wasn't a single mine rescue crew in Ontario, no respiratory gear on the site and no one trained for underground emergencies. In response to the call for assistance a special train was dispatched from Toronto with emergency equipment provided by the Toronto Fire Department as well as a special train en route from Pennsylvania, which wouldn't arrive for

24 hours. A total of 39 men died in this fire. Investigations determined that the fire had started spontaneously in an abandoned stope filled with old powder bags and waste. The company's rigid production schedule did not allow enough time to clean up the underground workings properly. This disaster was largely responsible for the introduction of Ontario's mine rescue teams and training.

The Paymaster Mine No. 5 shaft was equipped with a two-level man cage. In 1945 most of the miners were working between the 1050 and 2075 foot levels. On February 2, 1945, at 8 a.m., the cage was loaded with men and the cagetender signalled the hoistman to start lowering the cage. Just after passing the 900 foot level, the hoisting cable snapped. The cage's safety dogs immediately released and tried to dig into the shaft's timber guides. The descending cage slowed somewhat but the dogs gummed up, shredding the guides and failing to dig in to sop the falling cage. At 2666 feet below the shaft's collar, the cage hit the top of the ore loading pocket, the impact of which compressed the lower deck to two feet in height. Sixteen men died in this accident which was attributed to a corroded hoisting cable and improperly adjusted cage safety dogs.

In spite of legislation, mining disasters and deaths still occur. On May 9, 1992, a violent explosion rocked the Westray coal mine located in Stellarton, N.S., killing 26 miners.

Sources

Angus, Charles. *Mirrors of Stone: Fragments from the Porcupine Frontier.*
Twitty, Eric. *Riches to Rust.*
Richard, K.P., Justice. *The Westray Story: A Predictable Path to Disaster.*

Silver Islet, by Cathy MacArthur

Silver Islet, previously known as Skull Island, is a small outcrop of rock located in Lake Superior near Thunder Bay. In 1845, a prospector named Joseph Woods discovered silver in this area. The Montreal Mining Company bought this claim in 1846, but let it sit undisturbed for twenty years until the Ontario government imposed a 2 cent tax per acre on unworked claims. Survey work was carried out in 1868 and silver was discovered on this little island. Samples were taken from the numerous veins of silver that extended far under the island. Right from the beginning, water was a problem, instantly filling the newly dug shaft. Mining became easier during the winter months when the water froze, making access to the mine easier. $23,000 worth of silver was recovered from the seven to eight foot wide veins in a short time.

Realizing that the cost of mining the silver under these conditions, plus the labour involved in cutting the large amounts of timber to build the cribbing to hold back Lake Superior was more than they could afford, the Montreal Mining Company sold the claim to an American, Major Alexander Sibley, for $225,000.

Sibley hired William Frue, a mining engineer from the States to solve the difficult conditions surrounding the working of this mine. Frue's incentive for success was the $25,000 bonus if he could mine $225,000.00 worth of silver from the mine in one year.

Frue loaded up supplies and a crew of experienced miners, most of them from Cornwall, England, to work in the mine, and sailed to Silver Islet.

Harsh winter conditions, storms and ice were overcome to enlarge the original island to

ten times its size. Frue and his men met the deadline and the quota imposed by Sibley to earn the bonus.

A shaft house, boarding house for the miners, blacksmith shop and engine house were erected. A boiler was installed and ran 24 hours a day to pump out the water that constantly flowed into the shaft. The sides of the shaft were tarred to keep out moisture. Timber was cut on the mainland to feed the boiler and to shore up the side drifts in the mine. Extensive amounts of wood were used for the cribbing to hold the lake back. When the timber source was exhausted, coal was imported to fire the boiler.

More miners were hired at $1.50 per day and the mine was successful for two more years until a freak wave washed over the entire island and flooded the shaft and caused the boiler to explode, killing two miners. Frue carried on, enlarging the island even more, adding an additional boarding house, a hospital and a library for his growing crew. During this time, Frue invented the Frue Vanner, a mechanism that reclaimed even more silver from the tailings left behind from the original separation. This Vanner became popular in all mines. Meanwhile, on the mainland, a village was growing due to the success of the mine.

Conditions were horrific in the mine below the surface. Low pay, poor food and accommodations for the men, constant cold and wet conditions of the mine and isolation from the mainland during certain times of the year were hard on the men. Morale was low. There wasn't any ventilation in the mine until the miners protested to Frue. Pockets of gas were sometimes released during drilling, often ignited by the miners' candles. Cave-ins and accidents took the lives of men working in these conditions. Even the miners' boots had to be pegged together with wooden pegs since nails rotted in the wet conditions or could spark and set off an explosion.

Meanwhile, the mine made many investors and Major Sibley rich. Sibley ordered a mansion built for his family and servants on the mainland. The natives who were camped on this selected site were moved off and more timber was cut to build this summer home. Wood being scarce by this time, the needed timber was cut from the native cemetery and turned into lumber for Sibley's house.

The end came in the spring of 1884. The usual shipment of coal to run the boiler never arrived, due to the ice on the lake. Frue's supply ran out, and with the timber all gone, the boiler died. The water flooded the shaft and shut down Silver Islet mine for good.

By 1883 Silver Islet had produced over three million dollars worth of silver. The rich veins of silver still exist under the island in the flooded shaft.

Sources

Brown, Ron. *Ghost Towns of Ontario, Volume 2.* 1983

Strathbogey, James. *Confessions of a Cornish Miner: Silver Islet 1870-1884.*

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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. **The deadline for the next newsletter is April 1, 2004.**

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