THE GRENVILLE SENTINEL

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Annual Dinner

What a wonderful night we had at the Renegadz Restaurant in Prescott for our Annual Dinner on October 15th. We had a good crowd and a delicious dinner. John Wilson showed digital photos that he has produced from negatives, glass negatives, and photos from our collection at the archives. People in the audience were able to add information about some of the individuals, buildings, and events seen in the photos. It was a pleasant time of reminiscing. Fraser Laschinger presented the GCHS Award of Merit this year to our long-serving volunteer, Gini Leonard. Gini served as President of the society in 2012 and 2013 and was our Membership Chair from 2014 to 2024. She has worked on the Research team since she joined us in 2008 helping visitors who came to our archives to search out their family roots, houses, businesses or events from the past. Gini has volunteered at Open Houses, House Tours, Cemetery Tours, Doors Open, Walking Tours, Prescott's Loyalist Days, and was able to get a new microfilm reader, computer, and printer for our archives on a Trillium grant that she prepared. Gini was a valuable member for all those years. She decided to retire at the end of 2024 and we do miss her very much. Congratulations, Gini, on a well-deserved award.

Gini Leonard, longtime volunteer, received the GCHS Award of Merit in 2025.

Plaque Unveiling

An enthusiastic crowd showed up on a beautiful sunny day at the waterfront in Prescott to witness the unveiling of a plaque that tells the story of the small community of Prescott Junction that existed for a time and then disappeared. Michael Barrett MP and Stephen Clark MPP were on hand to assist Fraser Laschinger with the un=

veiling of the plaque. Fraser worked diligently researching and preparing the text and photos for it. What follows is the address that Fraser gave at the unveiling.

Fraser Laschinger, Stephen Clark MPP & Michael Barrett MPP unveiled the plaque for Prescott Junction.

The Lost Village of Prescott Junction

Where we are standing today is on an old rail line from Prescott to Ottawa. It may be hard to imagine but there was a rail overpass at this point over Highway #2 similar to the one at Windmill Point Road just east of here.

The Prescott train station was directly west of us opposite Fort Wellington. Parks Canada has installed a plaque on the pathway behind a park bench which shows an outline of the CPR station and rail-tracks. Today only some pilings can be seen on the shoreline where the old railcar ferry dock used to be. That ferry service carried CPR railroad cars across the river to Ogdensburg. The Bytown-Prescott Railway, later taken over by the CPR, extended from this point and through Prescott Junction, where the line crossed the Grand Trunk Railway, and onward to Bytown which soon afterwards was renamed Ottawa.

The Grand Trunk, which later became part of the CNR, opened in 1855, the year following the rail line from Ottawa to Prescott. The junction was the point where people and goods had to transfer from the Grand Trunk to go to Ottawa.

The Grand Trunk laid out the plans for a small village at the junction and called it Prescott Junction. It actually was located in Edwardsburgh Township, just north east of the Town of Prescott. A young Louis Daniels, who later became mayor of Prescott, surveyed the site and laid out the streets on which to build the village and train station.

The village soon became a thriving place, boasting a telegraph office, a three storey stone hotel, and an inn with saloon, all to accommodate guests who found themselves spending time at the junction. We have in our archives copies of letters and telegrams from important travelers, government ministers and the like, who found themselves in Prescott Junction in circumstances waiting out a winter storm.

As well, the Junction was witness to royal travelers, a son and a daughter of Queen Victoria at different times, travelling to and from Ottawa. Government ministers and leaders like Sir John A. Macdonald passed through

the Junction as well.

One notorious traveler was Patrick Whelan, the convicted assassin of D'Arcy McGee, a father of Confederation in 1868. He was tried in Ottawa but transported to Toronto during an appeal in his court case. His train was cloaked in secrecy and he was the sole passenger, along with his guards, to transfer at the Junction to join the GTR train.

People lived at the Junction and there were a number of houses built and a general store. Workers also came from Prescott on a daily basis. The children of Junction residents attended a one room schoolhouse in New Wexford, which still exists today as a private residence.

The Junction only existed for a couple of decades. The expansion of rail connections to Ottawa rendered the station at Prescott Junction redundant by the early 1880s. The GTR decided to close it and reopen the Prescott Station during the 1860s and 70s.

You can read more about the history on the plaque and of course we have lots of material at our headquarters at 500 Railway Avenue here in Prescott, the old GTR station built in 1854. We are open on Tuesdays from 10 to 4 pm.

I wish to thank Chuck Street, who assisted me with the design of the plaque. You can see his artistic work around town such as the mural on the wall of the Prescott Museum and his mural opposite the lighthouse on Water Street. We are indebted to Milaim Cengu at MD Signs and Graphics here in Prescott who manufactured the plaque. He did a beautiful job.

Bonnie Gaylord, our Director of Research, also helped with editing my text.

Finally I want to thank you all for coming today.

Fraser Laschinger, September 20, 2025

Maitland's Smithy

Writing about our past is very difficult, especially when historians are left with fragments. This is often the case with the history of small villages in Ontario. Once thriving communities supported by a local industry fade as technological marvels displace the "old ways," historians are left with few records and have to rely on oral histories to parse the truth. I find myself in this dilemma as I write this article. The information, which I am using to write this, differs from what has already been published.

I would have not questioned the author's information had I not been privy to oral history passed on to me by my grandmother, Alice Sarah Baker. Her father, James Peter Baker owned and operated the Maitland blacksmith shop for 48 years, longer than previous owners. Upon his death in 1930 the ownership and shop transferred to her.

The village of Maitland had but one blacksmith shop. In 1812 a stone building was built on the south side of the road. Its large wooden door faced the road and there was a set of stairs across the front which led to an undeveloped loft on the second floor.

The first record of the property was 1816 when Jonathon Black received the lot from the crown. He built a stone building which came to be known as the "Blacksmith Shop." He sold to Joseph Avery 1822, Avery to William Block 1825, Block to James Henry 1854, Henry to Willard T Miles 1859, Miles to James Robert Henry 1864, Henry to Richard Anderson 1877, Anderson to Richard Baker 1877, and in 1881 to James Peter Baker who carried on the blacksmith trade until 1929 when ill health forced him to close the shop. My Grandmother noted that she could only say with conviction that this location had been operated as a blacksmith shop from 1877 onward. My grandmother sold the property in 1945 to Miss Gertrude Baker, no relation, who remodeled the building into a residence.

This version is different from the story published in Otto's book "Maitland A Very Neat Village Indeed". In his book he attributes the construction of the blacksmith shop to Charles Lemon in 1826. While Charles Lemon was a blacksmith, famous for his Lemon Ploughs, his smithy was located 2-km east on Lemon Creek. His name was not mentioned in the deeds that my grandmother once owned. One other missing piece, my grandmother made no mention of the fate of the shop for 15 years. According to reports, the shop was converted into an automobile repair shop and gas station operated by Donald Griffin. This fact was mentioned in J.P. Baker's obituary in 1930.

James Peter Baker was my great-grandfather. His daughter Alice, my grandmother, spent many hours at the shop with her father as he carried out his duties. She recalls the shop as a gathering place for the men of the village. Current events and local gossip were the topics of discussion. During the summer the game of "Quoits" was played with serious intent. Quoits was an old Greek game that required throwing metal discs at a "hob" stuck in the ground. The game is similar to "washers" or horseshoes. In some cases the rivalry and competition was fierce. Voices were raised, but by the time darkness had fallen, so had the tempers.

Another tradition was "firing the anvil". This took place May 24th Queen Victoria's birthday and Empire Day. A small anvil was lifted to the middle of the road and filled with gunpowder. A wooden plug sealed the opening. A long rod, heated in the forge, was used to light the powder. The resulting bang could be heard all over the village.

On the east side of the shop was a large round stone. It was used to "set" buggy tires. The metal band went around the wooden wheel to add durability. My

grandmother noted this stone was, in fact, one of the millstones removed from Longley's Tower after 1837.

This stone, has for many years, served as a patio stone at the entrance way to the house. This past summer, 2025, the current owner made plans to renovate the house. The family generously donated the old millstone to the Grenville County Historical Society. The millstone was returned to Longley's tower to be displayed permanently.

Another interesting point at the bottom of the property, along the shoreline of the river, was a building that served as a grocery store. One of the deeds mentioned that it was owned by Richard Dumbrille who arrived in Maitland in 1836. Travel by water was, at that time, much easier than by road. Having a grocery store on the riverbank was convenient.

Mr. Baker made this bench in his blacksmith shop.

By the end of his tenure as blacksmith the horse was being replaced by the automobile. With less time shoeing horses and fixing buggy tires, Mr. Baker reused old buggy tires making what we refer today as outdoor patio furniture. He also reshaped the metal into fencing that used to separate his property from his neighbour to the west. Some of his handiwork still exists being used by his descendants.

This small article featured the writings of Alice Sarah Baker Wilson who was born, raised and spent much of her life as an adult in the village. She lived to be 99, her mind still sharp until her passing.

John A Wilson 2025
with references from S. Otto, *Maitland, A Very Neat Village Indeed*

Telegraph Demonstration

On Saturday, October 25th we had the pleasure of welcoming Graeme Roy and Andy Cameron, members of the Railway Museum of Eastern Ontario and Morse Code experts, when they presented a demonstration of how morse code was used in the past to compose telegrams that were send all over the world. This was the way communication was done in Canada's early days.

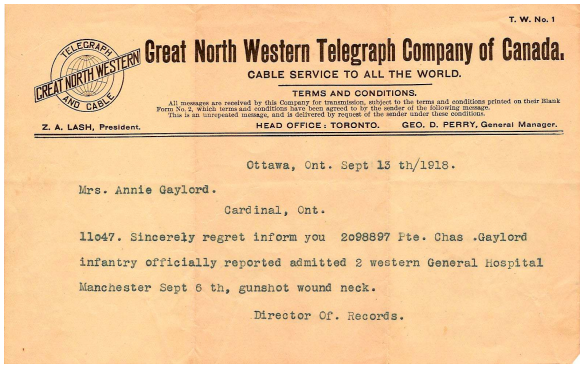
Graham and Andy, Morse code experts, presented an informative, entertaining program at our archives on the early telegraph and how it was used.

There were telegraph operators at our headquarters when it was the Grand Trunk Railroad station and then the Canadian National Railroad station. Our group made a model telegraph

operator we call Oscar at our station who sits in the window ready to send the Morse Code messages.

Samuel Morse used a series of dots and dashes for each letter of the alphabet. Messages were tapped out using a telegraph key and were sent using electrical signals across wires. A special receiver was used to convert the signal into dots and dashes on paper and later long and short sounds were used. In 1847 telegraph lines were installed in this area. At that time there were telegraph operators at each railway station to send and receive messages for pleasure of business. By 1861 there were telegraph stations across North America and messages could be sent and received across the continent very quickly.

One of our treasured family mementos is a telegram my husband's grandmother received. Her son Charles Gaylord, my husband's father, was injured in the First World War and this telegram arrived to tell of his injury. The government certainly didn't want to waste money on extra words, so no details were given.



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Z. A. LASH, President. HEAD OFFICE: TORONTO. GEO. D. PERRY, General Manager.

Ottawa, Ont. Sept 13 th/1918.

Mrs. Annie Gaylord.

Cardinal, Ont.

11o47. Sincerely regret inform you 2098897 Pte. Chas .Gaylord infantry officially reported admitted 2 western General Hospital Manchester Sept 6 th, gunshot wound neck.

Director Of. Records.

Mr. Gaylord suffered a hearing loss the rest of his life, but fortunately survived the wound. I thought this was rather fitting with Remembrance Day coming up soon.These were the days before cheap instant messaging that we have now.

With the assistance of Graeme and Andy, individuals visiting our archives were able to send their own telegraph messages for a $2 donation to the Friends of Grand Trunk Railway Station 1008.

Membership

Annual Membership: $20.00
Life Membership: $200

You may etransfer funds to gchs@truespeed.ca or make checks payable to Grenville County Historical Society Inc. and forward them to:

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