

Winchester Old Town Hall Summer Heritage Museum

Virtual Tour of North Dundas' Post Office and Hotel History Exhibits

Summer 2011

The front area in the Winchester Old Town Hall provides a space for the summer heritage museum, which is in operation from the beginning of July to the end of August each summer. It is the job of the Summer Heritage Coordinator, hired by the Township of North Dundas, to research, design, and organize the exhibits.

Post Offices



The July Exhibition featured “Post Offices and Hotels of the Past”, where the area was divided into the two spaces to represent what the two institutions would look like in the “good old days”. The post office counter, shown above, displays a postal scale used in the Nestle Office, Chesterville Ontario, from the 1930s to the 1950s. In front of the scale in the same case is a cancellation hammer, from Sonnyville Alberta, which was used prior to the introduction of stamps. The letter would be weighed on the scale; the hammer would be patted in ink, and then stamped onto the letter to signify the postage had been paid. In 1851 the first stamps, which came in the form of the six pence beaver, the six pence and the twelve pence consort, were introduced to Canada by Sir Sandford Fleming. The cancellation hammers are

now a collector's item. Both the postage scale and the cancellation hammer are on loan from the Chesterville Heritage Centre.



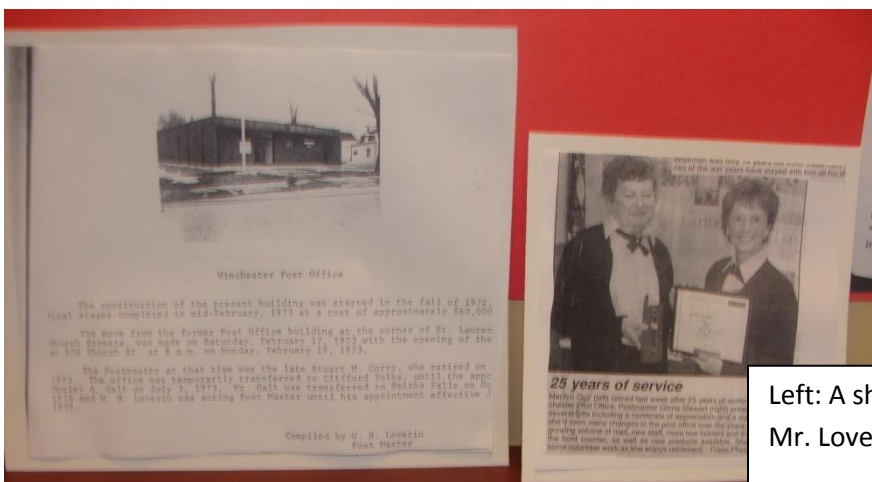
In front of the case is a service counter bell. To the right side of the counter is an Inkerman Ontario Canada Post cash box, on loan from Tom and Erma Allison of Inkerman Ontario. The Allison family owned a general store in Inkerman at one point, which also housed the post office.

Hanging to the left of the counter is the British flag and Her Majesty's Royal Mail postal sign. Both items would be commonly seen in the post office as the Canadian government took over the control of the post offices in 1851, long before Confederation.

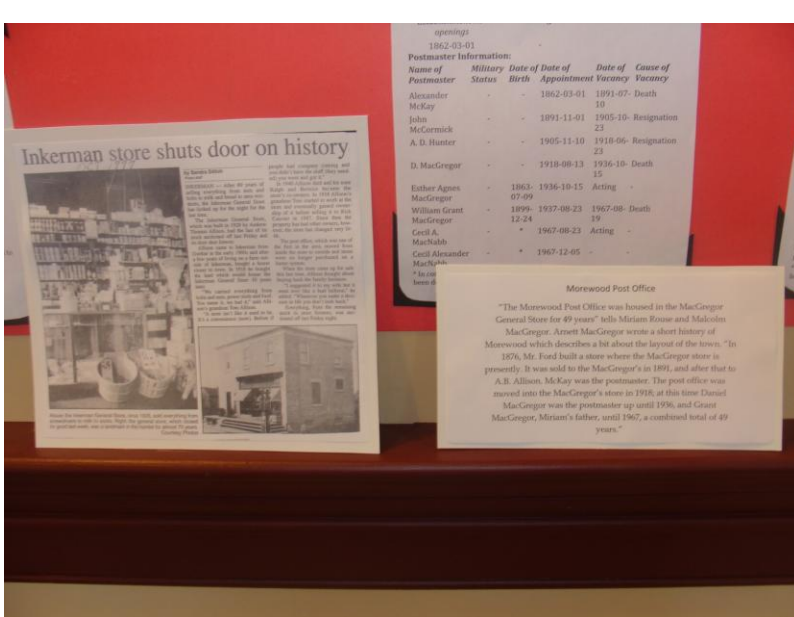
To the right of the flag are the old Marvelville Post Office mailboxes, which is on loan from the Vernon Museum. This beautiful wooden structure represents the hub of social activity in a small community such as Marvelville. Residents talked about news, gossip of the town at the post office. As *Country Post: Rural Postal Service in Canada, 1880-1945* puts so wonderfully, "the post office was the single most important agency spreading news and cultural symbols to all parts of rural and urban Canada during the late 19th and 20th centuries. The postal system made it possible for town and country to communicate, and was, in effect, the communication underpinning of the rural market in the larger social ensemble dominated by urban industry, commerce, and culture."



Following the flow of the exhibit, to the right of the Marvelville mailboxes we find a display with information on the Chesterville Post Office taken from *The Time That Was*, a compilation of Chesterville and area history. A couple of clippings from the Winchester Press show the relationship between the postmaster and the community. A wonderful picture of Mr. Loverin receiving his public service letter upon his retirement, alongside Gloria Stewart, Howard Moore, and Gladys Clarke is displayed. A photograph of William Bow, the first postmaster of West Winchester (Winchester) is pictured on the poster, as well as the oath signed by all employees of the post office upon their employment. On the east wall hangs the list of original post offices within the current boundaries of the Township of North Dundas, from 1845 to 1907. Chesterville, known as Winchester until 1875, was one of the earliest settlements in North Dundas. South Mountain, North Mountain, Mountain, Inkerman, Van Camp Mills, Rose Haven, Hallville, Ormond, Melvin, West Winchester, Winchester, North Winchester, Connaught, Lockville, Cass Bridge, Reids Mills, Morewood, and Winchester Springs are listed. Information about post offices and postmasters can be found on the Library and Archives Canada website (<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/post-offices/index-e.htm>). A heat stove (seen in right picture above, left side) was commonly seen in post offices as they were used to heat up the room. Carter, Smyth's *A History of Dundas, being a history of the County of Dundas from 1784 to 1904* is a useful research tool for exploring the history of the United Counties. It, along with numerous other local history books, is located throughout the exhibit to add quick accessibility to local heritage.

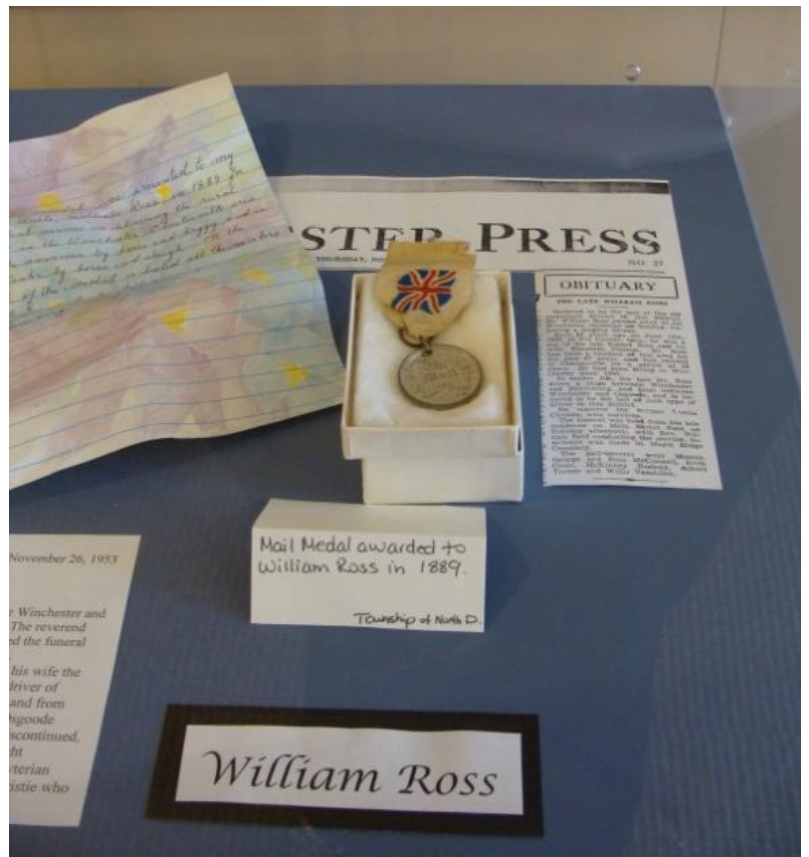


Left: A short history of the Winchester Post Office, compiled by Mr. Loverin, a retired postmaster of Winchester P.O.



The Inkerman Store has housed the Post Office, according to local history, for a number of years. It was very common to have the post office within a general store. Local residents who have had ties to post offices with North Dundas provided some information, such as where the Morewood Post Office and Van Camp Post Offices were located. Three postal scales are displayed which show the modernization of post office instruments through time. A framed post card addressed to an individual in Chesterville, Ontario was sent for 1 cent back in the 1800s. A postal badge, probably worn by a postmaster or a mail carrier is also displayed. A one cent stamp is also enclosed in the case. Next, another poster displays more information on local original post offices. There are three representations of the first Canadian stamps, from the 1851 three pence beaver, as well as the 6 and 12 pence stamps. Wendell Harper, assistant postmaster in Chesterville, Ontario, from the late 1940s to 1983 is the feature of this poster. He began his career at the post office by driving the rural Chesterville route (RR2), from Chesterville, south to Dunbar and Elma, and back north to Chesterville in his Dodge four seater. He then became part of the staff of the town's post office, where his duties included selling stamps and money orders, sorting incoming and outgoing mail, as well as other varied tasks. Upon his retirement, he received a public service medal as well as an autographed letter from Pierre Elliott Trudeau. It is his life story, having been a veteran of World War Two as a wireless operator, as well as his thirty plus years with the Chesterville Post Office that gives a local perception to shape the town's history. Without oral histories like Wendell's, small community heritage would not be as rich, and perhaps even lost.

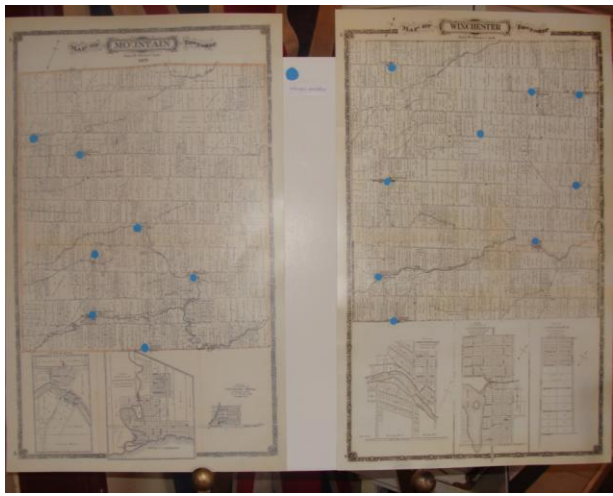




On the poster, there is also a photocopy of a newspaper clipping of the announcement of Erle F. Helmer's retirement as the postmaster of Winchester post office, on December 12, 1961 and his successor, Stuart M. Corry. Helmer was the postmaster of Winchester from June 30, 1938 to December 12, 1961, a total of 23 years.

In the last display case located in the post office exhibit, is the mail medal belonging to William Ross. He was awarded this medal in 1889 for his outstanding service as a mail carrier. It states in his obituary that he delivered the rural mail in Chesterville for 28 years and then moved to Winchester, where he passed away in 1953.

The two 1879 County Atlas maps seen below, indicate the locations of the post offices from 1845-1913 in blue. This gives visitors a clearer view of where the post offices were located through North Dundas. The land surveyor identified the occupants of the land holdings, which today we can see where family names originated, how many acres of land people possessed, how the land was divided up for sons and brothers, and so on.

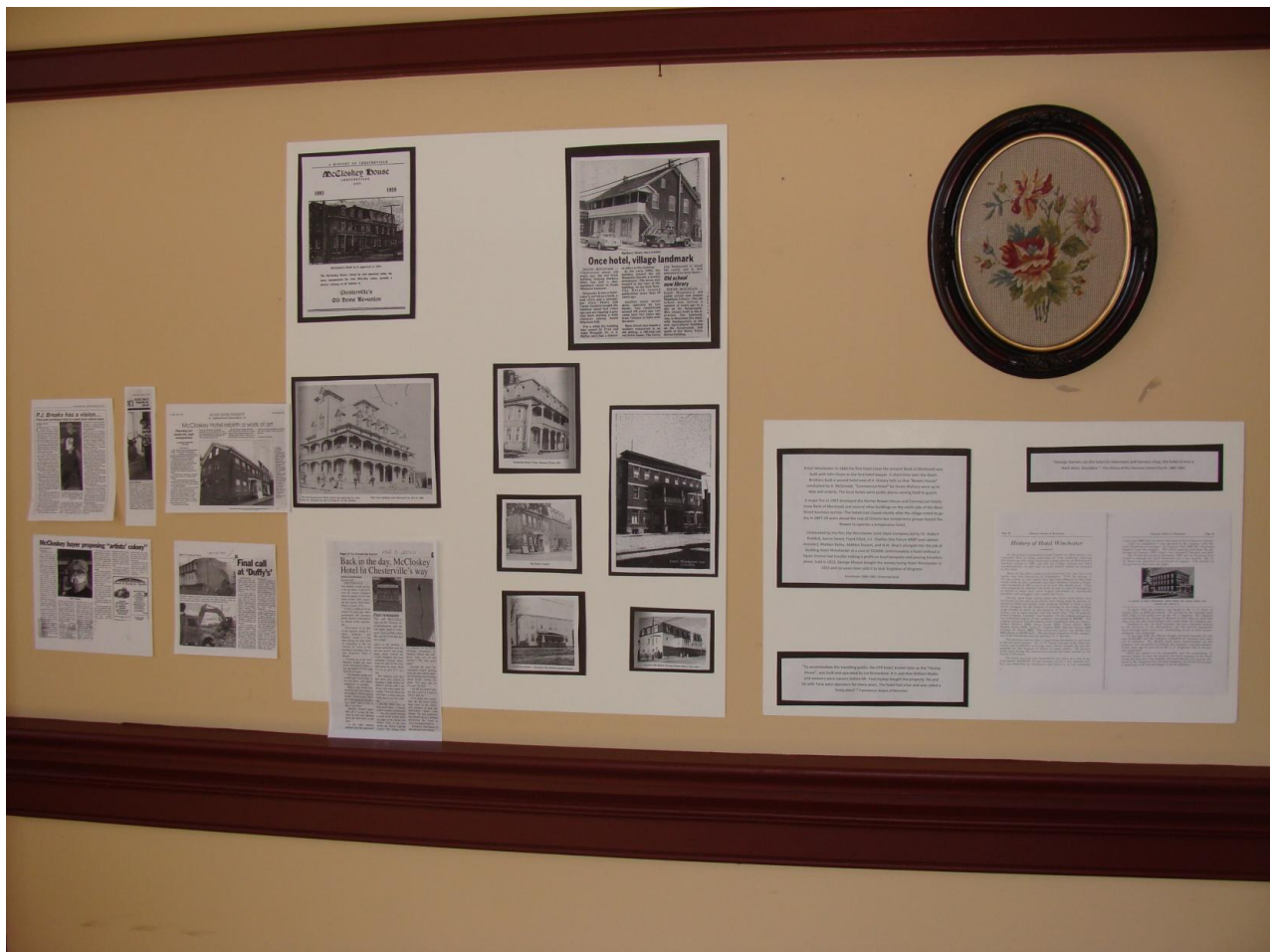


Hotels



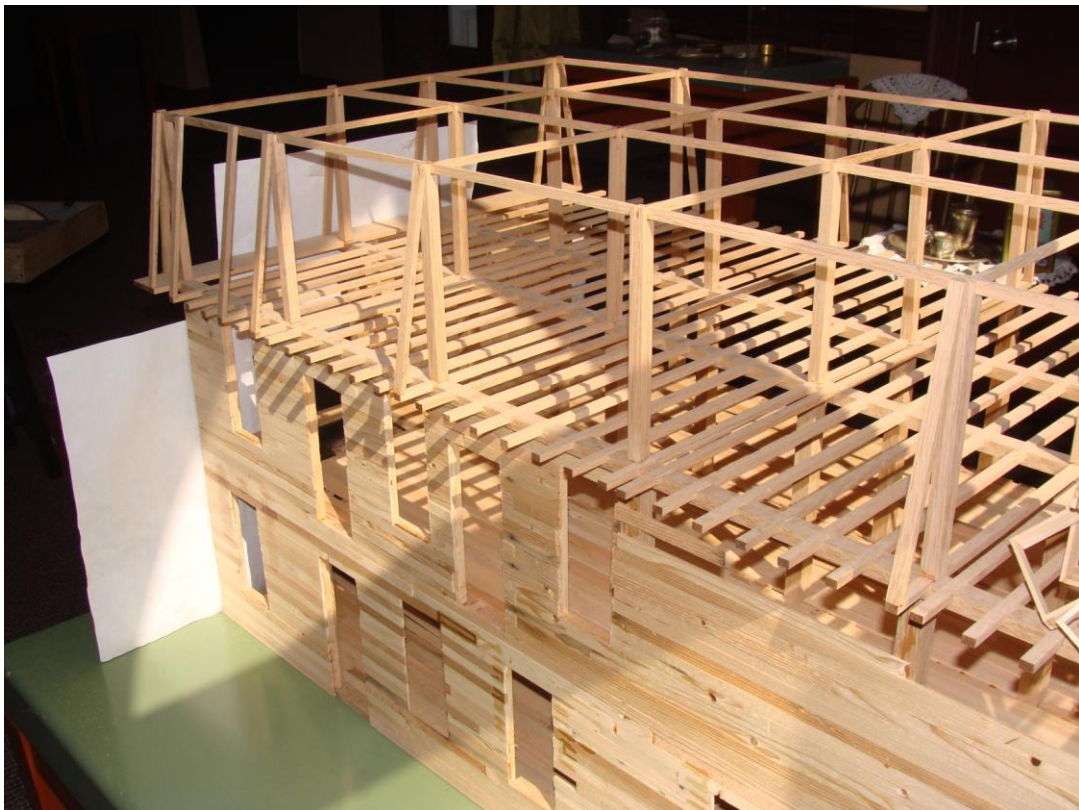
There were several hotels scattered throughout the region. Many came into existence for a few reasons. Stagecoach lines, specifically one traveling from Morrisburg to West Winchester (Winchester) needed accommodation for the long drive. Another stage coach route ran through the Dundas County, from Iroquois to Inkerman. As a result, there was a hotel (owned by the town's harness shop, according to census records) in Inkerman, where the feed mill now stands. Road conditions were poor-muddy and bumpy-making trips short and done only when necessary. Taken from the Upper Canada Village history of transportation, "The stage from Morrisburg runs northward to West Winchester and Dunbar, and another from Iroquois runs to Dixon's Corners, South Mountain and Inkerman. Once more you can see that travelling is costly - a day's way to travel 18 miles by stage coach. The stage coaches are usually brightly coloured with the name of the owner or line prominently

painted on the upper part of coach work. Red or yellow are especially popular colours. If the stage carries the local mail then it will have Post Office Mail inscribed in large letters on the door.” Later, with the integration of railway lines traveling east and west in the township, through towns such as Chesterville, Winchester, Inkerman, and Mountain, provided more hotels to accommodate those taking the train. Pictured below are some of the several hotels, serving different industries, scattered throughout the township. Most were found along a transportation route. The Winchester Hotel was operated, during prohibition, by a temperance union. The town of Winchester went dry in 1897, 20 years ahead of the rest of Ontario. The scenario was much different in Chesterville, where people would visit the McCloskey and Flynn (Dominion) Hotels for a drink, usually with the windows boarded to prevent from peering in the windows to see “inappropriate social acts”. The hotels also served the CPR workers, after the construction of the Canadian Pacific Montreal to Smiths Falls line in the 1880s. Many Nestle factory workers frequented the hotels in Chesterville. The Winchester Hotel also served as a temporary high school after the burning of the Winchester High School. The historic brick building on Main Street in South Mountain not only served as a hotel, but as a newspaper company (Mountain Herald), post office, and general store.





A miniature model of the Flynn Hotel, constructed by Chesterville resident Shaun Funk, was displayed in the Old Town Hall to give visitors an idea of what the hotel looked like in its prime. It also gives a visitor an idea of the type of architecture during the 1850s, when the building was constructed. A tea set, coffee pourer, cutlery, and hotel ware was also on display to give an idea of what one would find in the interior of a hotel.





A history of the Winchester Hotel is provided in the *History of Winchester Township*, a booklet printed for the Winchester Old Home Reunion of 1934. The first Winchester Hotel is seen in a photograph below the description, with the Bowen House attached to its east side, with original hotel innkeeper Jacob Dixon pictured in front with other Winchester residents.

