



# *Historic Gloucester*

Newsletter of the

**GLOUCESTER HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY**

[www.gloucesterhistory.com](http://www.gloucesterhistory.com)

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## **Eastview Under Water**

## ***The 1947 Rideau River Flood***



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THE GLOUCESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
IS HAPPY TO ANNOUNCE  
THAT ITS HISTORY ROOM WILL BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC  
EACH THURSDAY FROM 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.  
BETWEEN MAY 1 AND OCTOBER 23, 2013,  
OR BY APPOINTMENT

LOCATION: 4550B BANK STREET (AT LEITRIM ROAD)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Robert Serré at 613-749-0607 or bob.rosealine@gmail.com

**Cover Photo:**

*The photos on the cover are of the 1947 flooding of the Rideau River, the biggest flood in many years and one which has not been repeated since. (see article on p 4) The Eastview photo of Greensway Avenue was submitted by Claudette Racette. The air photo is from the National Air Photo Collection A10903-069.*

**Historic Gloucester** is published by The Gloucester Historical Society. It is intended as a Newsletter to members of the Society to provide interesting articles on Gloucester's past and to keep them informed of new acquisitions by the Museum, publications available, upcoming events and other items of general interest. Comments and suggestions regarding the Newsletter are



*Gloucester Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the City of Ottawa.*

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The Board of Directors of our Society held a rather unique meeting on January 19. Paul Henry and Harriet Fried of the City of Ottawa Archives were scheduled to start the proceedings with a presentation, but in the end the agenda was set aside, and the entire morning was spent negotiating a new partnership agreement. Harriet had brought two boxes of binders containing an index to the Gloucester collection of photos (60,000 or so), and Paul explained that the actual photos were stored in a vault, pending digitization within the next few months. Partnership agreements already exist, notably with the British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa and the Ottawa Branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society. These organizations now have office space at the new City of Ottawa Archives facility at 100 Tallwood Drive off Woodroffe Avenue, but for the time being our Society will remain within the former limits of Gloucester. Following the presentation, the eight board members present unanimously supported a motion that our President sign the four-page partnership agreement with City Archivist Paul Henry.

For the second time in as many years, our Society has received a grant of \$2,300 from the City of Ottawa instead of the maximum amount of \$2,500 which had previously been requested and received. On the other hand, the British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa recently donated \$100 to our Society in recognition of its contribution as a heritage organization.

We continue to ensure that Gloucester's past history is preserved for future generations.

*Robert Serré*

**Note: The Grace Johnston History Room is now supplied with Internet to assist researchers when they come to visit us. Drop in some Thursday and see us!**

### Board of Directors 2012-2013

President:	Robert Serré (2013)*	Directors:	Bob Kemp (2015)
Past President:	Mary Boyd (2014)		Jean-Marc Jossinet (2014)
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and Webmaster:	Glenn Clark (2015)		Mary Patterson (2014)
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Newsletter Editor:	Joan Scott (2014)		
Membership	Shirley McCooye (2015)		

\* Indicates date when this person is up for re-election to Board of Directors.

## **A Flood for the Ages**

### **The 1947 Rideau River Flood**

By Glenn Clark

It started with a small newspaper notice that appeared in the Ottawa Citizen on April 5, 1947 (Page 22)

#### ***Water from Cyrville Flows into Eastview***

*Surface water four inches deep commenced flowing across the Montreal road between Granville and Paris streets in Eastview last night. The flood condition, which occurs every year about this time is caused by the overflow of a ditch originating in the Cyrville-Mer Bleu district and following a depression in vacant land through Eastview, where it is carried away by sewers.*

*Eastview police last night said no complaints of water in cellars had been received.*

It was truly an innocent beginning of the biggest Rideau River flood in many years and which has not been repeated since.

It had been a snowier than average winter with a total of 116 inches, which had been somewhat exceeded just 4 years earlier and was far from the record for the City of Ottawa that up to that time was recorded in 1907. [Ottawa Citizen, April 17, 1947 page 13] This record was greatly exceeded subsequently by the winter of 1970-71.

In just two days (April 7<sup>th</sup>), the flood had reached the front page of the Ottawa Citizen with a blaring headline “**Flood Waters Swirl Around 200 Homes**”. Those 200 homes were in the Nordic Circle area just west of Billings Bridge on Bowesville Road (now Riverside Drive), which was

notoriously prone to flooding. A few other homes were surrounded in Ottawa South and Ottawa East. In addition, one hundred feet of Montreal Road in Eastview was inundated with two feet of water and although still passable to traffic, rowboats became an alternate means of transportation for those on foot. As a further warning of what was to come, there was a report of a 160 foot steel bridge being swept one quarter mile downstream on the Castor River in Embrun as a result of a massive ice jam hitting the bridge. Yet still there was optimism that the water would start to recede. According to reports, the problems in Eastview were not due to flooding of the Rideau River at all but because of excess drainage from higher land and from creeks south of the town and an inadequate sewer system to carry it away.

The water did indeed drop by six inches the following day as a result of colder weather. But with that news came a dire warning from Ottawa Controller Grenville W. Goodwin who motored from Toronto via the Rideau Lakes. He claimed that with warmer temperatures that day, the Rideau River watershed was about to let loose and this could bring the worst flood in the history of the river. The river could rise sharply leaving residents awake at night keeping vigil and worrying of sudden flooding. [Ottawa Citizen, April 8, 1947 page 1]

On April 9<sup>th</sup>, water receded a further eight inches but homeowners particularly in the Nordic Circle area continued to prepare for further flooding by placing belongings and furniture on boxes or stilts. Road crews also marked the flooded section of Bowesville Road with steel posts to show the location of the shoulders. They also installed warning signs on all flooded sections of road. [Ottawa Citizen April 9, 1947 page 1]

The lower water levels did not last and the river rose quickly overnight to a new high and an ice jam formed on the river opposite Nordic Circle. At that point, desperate residents took matters into their own hands and detonated fifteen sticks of dynamite, which successfully cleared the jam. Residents also worried of the loss of hydro if the substation at Riverdale Avenue and Bank street were to become flooded. City Works Commissioner F.C. Askwith indicated that the city had done all it could to prevent flooding with blasting and ice cutting. [*Ottawa Citizen*, April 10, 1947 page 1]

Criticism was directed at the Department of Transport and Canals by city engineers for their failure to control water flow at Hog's Back. All the stop logs had been removed the previous fall and the full force of water flow was passing over Prince of Wales Falls (now popularly but incorrectly known as Hog's Back Falls) despite the fact that river levels were five to six feet below summer levels at Mooney's Bay. [*Ottawa Citizen*, April 10, 1947 page 1]

On April 10<sup>th</sup>, water continued to rise to the highest level since the river overflowed its banks on April 6<sup>th</sup> forcing 30 families out of their homes at Nordic Circle. The Red Cross used rowboats to assist them. Two of those families took refuge in the township hall at Billings Bridge. Another family was rescued from a waterlogged trailer along the river in Overbrook and taken to the Red Cross house on Metcalfe Street. As much as five feet of water covered Bowesville Road with a water flow of 15 to 20 miles per hour. Six feet of water covered parts of the River Road between Billings Bridge and Hurdman's Bridge and three feet covered Russell Road just to the north of Hurdman's Bridge. Across the river, Brewer Park was completely flooded as was the Ottawa Tennis Club. Warrington

Drive disappeared under the flood waters, and Harvard and Raleigh Streets became rivers. A number of homes in Ottawa South were surrounded by water. [*Ottawa Citizen*, April 10, 1947 page 12]

The Ottawa Citizen April 11<sup>th</sup> headline read **"Rideau River Floods Worst in 20 Years – Waters Raging Unchecked at Hog's Back"**. As a result of the extent of the flooding, the Canadian Red Cross Society took action and established disaster relief centres. At Nordic Circle, this was located in the home of Percy Bassett. Other disaster relief centres were established at the Gloucester township hall and in Eastview.

A former Rideau Canal lockmaster claimed that the flooding was being made worse because all the stop logs were removed at Hog's Back and all the lockmasters were on leave. This was denied by an official of the Department of Transport and Canals. The river was running at six feet above normal and much of the flood waters were originating from the Jock River and Kemptville Creek, which were not controlled and the water could not be held back. There was also criticism that the Rideau Canal was not being used to reduce the impact on the lower Rideau River. But in response to this last comment, it was claimed that it was not feasible to fill the canal ahead of the normal May 1<sup>st</sup> schedule.

The Red Cross used rowboats to regularly keep in contact with families who remained in flooded homes and delivered milk, bread, fresh water and mail. Water levels had declined by a foot during the morning of April 10<sup>th</sup> but began to rise again quickly that afternoon as warmer weather arrived and rain was expected. [*Ottawa Citizen*, April 11, 1947 page 1]

By evening, more families were being evacuated at Nordic Circle, Hurdman's Bridge and Overbrook as water rose again by two feet. Water currents were reaching 35 miles per hour endangering homes in the flood areas. Telephones were mostly out of order but somehow hydro was maintained even where fuse boxes were underwater. The flood area along Bowesville Road had reached as far west as the Cowan Ice House (also known as the Ottawa Dairy Ice House) and as far south as the buildings at the Merkleley brickyard. [*Ottawa Citizen*, April 11, 1947 page 12]

### **Flooding Peaks**

During the morning of April 12<sup>th</sup>, flood waters reached their peak at 8 feet 3 inches above summer levels. By this time, all 75 families from Nordic Circle had been evacuated. Some took refuge at Southminster United Church and others at the Veteran Rehabilitation Centre near Billings Bridge and three more families went to the Gloucester township hall.

At Kingsway Park in Eastview, workmen built a levee to prevent the river from overflowing into that community. With the current now reaching 40 miles per hour and with the breakup of ice from Mooney's Bay providing an additional hazard, homes and buildings downstream were at great risk of being swept away.

An anti-looting patrol was set up at Nordic Circle as a result of unconfirmed reports of pilfering. The only means of safe access to the Red Cross Emergency Centre at the Bassett home was now by three ton truck. The Red Cross was now also delivering food to isolated homes in Ottawa South as the flood waters reached 3 feet deep on Raleigh Street and flooding was now extending along Seneca Street and Ossington Avenue.

The Gloucester Red Cross Society and other nurses helped the five families residing in the township hall and an additional family moved into Southminster United Church. A total of forty beds were available at the DVA Occupational Health Center, later known as the Rideau Veterans' Home. Rescued cats, dogs and chickens were taken to the Ottawa Humane Society shelter. Emergency workers assisted the victims in flooded homes around the clock and provided police patrol to maintain security. At Billings Bridge, water levels were within 2 feet of the bridge deck. Hurdman's Bridge was almost isolated with only Hurdman Road and Nicholas Street (now Tremblay Road) remaining above water level. Russell Road on either side of the bridge was submerged by 4 feet of water and stores near the bridge intersection were flooded. Russell Road was closed and buses were stopped north of the railway tracks with passengers destined for Hurdman's Bridge forced to walk along the railway right of way. Flooding affected a few homes west of Russell Road in Overbrook and 50 workers were called in to build a dyke using thirty truckloads of sand to the north and south of Cummings Bridge.

Waters were now receding in other parts of Eastern Ontario but the Rideau River bridge at Kars was threatened by ice and water, which had reached the deck of the bridge. [*Ottawa Citizen*, April 12, 1947 page 16]

On the evening of April 11<sup>th</sup>, the superintendent engineer of the Rideau Canal finally announced that the Rideau Canal water level would be brought up to summer levels as soon as possible. While that would bring some relief to water flow on the river, the normal speed of filling the canal would take 3 days because drainage at each lock was limited. Allowing water to flow out into the Ottawa River from the canal was not feasible

because of the lack of a waste weir. They began filling the Rideau Canal on Saturday, April 12<sup>th</sup>.

Water flow at Long Island, which had been 3,300 cubic feet per second on April 1<sup>st</sup> had reached 12,000 cubic feet per second by the evening of April 11<sup>th</sup>. On April 1<sup>st</sup>, there was 24 inches of storage capacity on Rideau Lake and flow out of the lake was reduced to a minimum on April 6<sup>th</sup> in order to reduce flooding downstream. Rideau Lake was overflowing by April 12<sup>th</sup>. Even though there was evidence that run off was starting to decline in the upper reaches of the Rideau River system, water flow into the lower parts of the river was still increasing. With no ability to store water below Merrickville, nothing could be done to hold back flood waters. [*Ottawa Citizen*, April 12, 1947 page 29]

### The Worst is Over

Thankfully, over the weekend of April 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, water levels finally began to fall by more than 2 feet leaving refuse, slime, warped floors, damaged plaster and ruined basements as the water receded. House foundations remained intact and only outbuildings and smaller items were swept away. It was believed that the lowering of flood levels was assisted by cooler temperature, the filling of the Rideau Canal, and the removal of all stop logs at Rideau Falls.

Gloucester health officials began inspecting homes before families were allowed to return especially those including children and invalids. War veterans were particularly upset because they had spent their resettlement credits on lots that were claimed to not be subject to flooding. 90% of the homeowners at Nordic Circle were war veterans.

At the barricade on Bowesville Road, grim humour was displayed with a sign reading "Lots for sale. Cheap. Running water in every room."

The Gloucester medical health officer indicated that homes were not to be reoccupied until the main floor was thoroughly dried out. Water was to be boiled and wells were to be pumped out. Each home was to be inspected by Constable George Dolman, Gloucester sanitary officer.

Overbrook buses were again able to reach their terminus at Hurdman's Bridge and Russell Road reopened to traffic. The River Road between the Russell Road intersection and the Grey Nuns farm remained closed and was still deeply submerged. Only two of eleven cabins at the Riverside Campsite in Overbrook remained surrounded by water.

At Hog's Back water flow remained high and the Rideau Canal was already two thirds full as of the evening of April 13<sup>th</sup>. On the same day, thousands of pedestrians, cyclists and cars came to view the flooded areas. There was crowd control problems at Nordic Circle with crowds pressing against a barrier designed to prevent looting. The threat to the bridge at Kars was finally removed when volunteers were able to break up an ice jam with axes. The bridge had been closed to traffic on April 12<sup>th</sup> but re-opened on April 14<sup>th</sup> once the ice jam cleared. On the evening of April 12<sup>th</sup>, 43 people had taken refuge at the Veteran's Centre in Rideau Park. Billings Bridge school remained closed on Monday, April 14<sup>th</sup> although no longer surrounded by water. [*Ottawa Citizen*, April 14, 1947 pages 1, 13]

On April 15<sup>th</sup>, flood levels were quickly declining. Water had dropped by 4

feet since April 12<sup>th</sup> and water flow at Rideau Falls was noticeably diminishing. Road gangs were inspecting road shoulders for damage. Residents returning to their homes took advantage of sunny weather to dry carpets, rugs, drapes and upholstered furniture. Telephone linemen were busy installing temporary connections at Nordic Circle. The River Road remained closed but most traffic used the new road (Alta Vista Drive) that passed by the Rideau Military Hospital (the former Grey Nuns Convent). [*Ottawa Citizen*, April 15, 1947 page 1]

As the flood waters continued to recede, suggestions were made to widen Rideau Falls in the future but part of the flooding problem related to shallowness of the river near the falls. It was also difficult to control flooding with the loss of most forest cover in the Rideau River watershed. It was explained that forest cover slows the pace of snow melt and runoff. [*Ottawa Citizen*, April 17, 1947 page 17]

Unfortunately, the misery of the flood was extended when a freak snowstorm hit on Wednesday, April 16<sup>th</sup> breaking a 57 year April record. Gloucester Fire Chief John Brown was confident that the river would not overflow again unless the snowfall continued. [*Ottawa Citizen*, April 17, 1947 page 13] As a result of the snow storm, river levels did rise by as much as 12 inches but this was short lived. The flood was finally over. [*Ottawa Citizen*, April 19, 1947 page 16]

### **No Help for Veterans**

The Department of Veterans' Affairs delivered further bad news that veteran flood victims would not receive special assistance. It was explained that present legislation did not offer any special grants relating to

disasters and only an Act of Parliament could change this. Many war veterans had spent their entire resettlement credit on homes that were flooded, particularly at Nordic Circle. [*Ottawa Citizen*, April 16, 1947 page 2]

In the aftermath, a Flood Prevention Committee was established by Nordic Circle residents which solicited support from flood victims along other parts of the river. They hoped for provincial and federal action to prevent future floods. Gloucester Councillor Alexander Roger welcomed the work of the committee but remarked that action should wait until the Greber Plan was released. He believed that the plan would consider flooding issues. It was also understood that the Rideau River shoreline may be included in future beautification plans. [*Ottawa Citizen*, May 6, 1947 page 4]

### **Postscript**

Nordic Circle residents had experienced flooding in 5 of the previous 6 years [*Ottawa Citizen*, April 14, 1947 page 1] and flooding would continue to be a problem in subsequent years. The Greber plan did take action and all river front homes were expropriated and removed before 1960 including those at Nordic Circle, which is now a park opposite Data Centre Road.

Although there would be further floods, none would be like 1947. Permanent dykes were put in place in vulnerable locations, housing was removed from the flood plain, better ice breaking measures and water flow management was implemented and marginal farmland was reforested. All of these actions assisted in reducing the magnitude and likelihood of floods along the lower Rideau River since that momentous year and into the future.



## Lillian Kitchen - 1920-2013

On January 12, 2013 the Gloucester Historical Society lost a great friend and long time volunteer with the death of Lillian Kitchen.

Mary Boyd remembers first meeting Lillian in 1992 when she visited the GHS office and was considering volunteering with the Society. Lillian, who was the type of person that put everyone at their ease, convinced Mary to become a volunteer. Lillian never put herself in the limelight but worked quietly and efficiently as Secretary, President, and volunteer, promoting the Gloucester Historical Society and Museum. It was always a joy to work with her in the History Room, which was a lot busier then than it is now.

Lillian and her husband Ron would travel to Toronto each year and take a special exhibit from the GHS And Museum. She had quiet a few contacts in the heritage community and did a great job of representing the Society. Everyone liked Lillian because she made each person feel as if what they said mattered. Both Lillian and Ron gave a lot of time and energy to the Society, Lillian as a volunteer and Ron as a photographer.



In addition to her work with the GHS, Lillian also worked at the Gloucester and Ottawa public libraries. In 1992 her good works earned her a Canada 125 medal.

Lillian will be sadly missed by all who had the good fortune to know her.



### Watch What You Sow!

We can never be too careful  
of the seed our hands shall sow;  
love from love is sure to ripen,  
hate from hate is sure to grow.

Seeds of good or ill we scatter  
heedlessly along our way;  
but a glad or grievous fruitage  
waits us at the harvest day.



# The Gloucester Historical Society

presents a talk on

## The RCMP Musical Ride and the Royal Family

by Sergeant Major Bill Stewart (Retired)



**Sunday, April 21, 2013 at 2:00 pm**

**Gloucester Senior Adults' Centre**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Earl Armstrong Arena, 2020 Ogilvie Road, Gloucester**

Free Admission and Parking. Bus Routes 12, 124

Light refreshments will be served.

For further information, please consult our website at [www.gloucesterhistory.com](http://www.gloucesterhistory.com)

or leave a message at 613-822-2076. Your call will be returned.

**A brief GHS Annual Meeting will precede the presentation**

**Guest Speaker for the GHS General Meeting on Sunday April 21, 2013 at 2 pm.**

**Sergeant Major Bill Stewart MVO**, a lifetime resident of Gloucester and retired RCMP Sergeant Major of the Musical Ride, will be the guest speaker. His presentation will be most interesting, especially to Royal or RCMP Musical Ride followers.

**Topics:**

1. A brief history of the RCMP musical ride and his world travel experiences.
2. The Queen's fondness for our RCMP Musical Ride and her love for horses.
3. His one on one experiences with Her Majesty at Windsor Castle.
4. His account of being presented with the Royal Victorian Order Medal by Her Majesty.

**Note: A power point presentation will contain some rare photos presented to him by Her Royal Highness.**

***JUST PUBLISHED***

**WHO WAS WHO IN OTTAWA  
1855-1967**

On 1 January 1855 Bytown was renamed Ottawa. When Bytown was created in 1826, in Nepean Township, it consisted of two neighbourhoods: Upper Town west of the future canal, and Lower Town east of it. The next two neighbourhoods were Sandy Hill, south of Lower Town, and LeBreton Flats, west of Upper Town. Ottawa acquired several other neighbourhoods over the years, as the city limits were extended westward, eastward and southward. On its eastern

boundary, Ottawa annexed New Edinburgh in 1887 and Gloucester Village in 1889. Also in 1889 Ottawa annexed Stewarton on its southern boundary. On its western boundary, Ottawa annexed Mount Sherwood and Rochesterville in 1889, and then, in 1907, Bayswater, Manchesterville, Hintonburg and Mechanicsville. Also in 1907, Ottawa annexed Archville on its southeastern boundary. The largest single annexation of territory by Ottawa was effected on 1 January 1950, when 14,605 acres were obtained from Gloucester Township, and 7,420 acres were obtained from Nepean Township, thereby increasing the size of Ottawa five-fold.

**IN THIS BOOK YOU WILL FIND  
345 SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL PRO-  
FILES**

Including

MAYORS OF OTTAWA  
GOVERNORS GENERAL OF CANADA  
PRIME MINISTERS OF CANADA  
ENGINEERS AND SCIENTISTS  
MEMBERS OF THE CLERGY  
PERSONS ELECTED TO THE HOUSE OF  
COMMONS  
ARCHITECTS, ARTISTS, AUTHORS  
PUBLIC SERVANTS  
ENTREPRENEURS  
SPORTS FIGURES

This 56-page book costs \$10.00 (postal orders, add \$3.00). Please make your cheque payable to the Gloucester Historical Society, and send your order to: Robert Serré, GHS Publications, 1057 Riviera Drive, Ottawa ON K1K 0N7. For more information, contact [bob.rosealine@gmail.com](mailto:bob.rosealine@gmail.com) or call 613-749-0607.

**Is it Gloucester or is it Gloucester? Join the Debate**

by Glenn Clark

A few months ago, I entered in a discussion with a long-time Gloucester resident about the correct pronunciation of Gloucester. It was an interesting discussion that I had not thought about for many years. Yet in my deep dark memory of years past, I seemed to remember that there was a 'correct' way to pronounce Gloucester. But what was it? I do recall that there was a variety of pronunciations in use but I no longer remember what was deemed correct in years past.

So, we would like to hear your opinion of what is correct, and whether the pronunciation has changed over the years. Some believe that it has.

After a further discussion on the topic at our March Board of Directors meeting, we came up with three possible pronunciations that have been used over the years:

1. Gloss' ter
2. Gloss' sister
3. Gloss sess ter

Were there others that were actually used by Gloucester residents?

What do you think is the current popular pronunciation? What was the pronunciation in years past? Has it changed? Is there a correct pronunciation?

Please e-mail your thoughts on the subject to [english@gloucesterhistory.com](mailto:english@gloucesterhistory.com) or join the debate in our Google discussion group accessible from the main page of our website [www.gloucesterhistory.com](http://www.gloucesterhistory.com).

A selection of comments will be published in a future edition of Historic Gloucester.

**IF YOU HAVE NOT YET RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP, OR IF YOU WISH TO BECOME A NEW MEMBER, PLEASE COMPLETE THE FORM BELOW AND SEND IT IN WITH YOUR CHEQUE.** (Membership year runs from Jan 1 to Dec 31 calendar year)

**\*\* NOTE: NEW MEMBERSHIP FEES EFFECTIVE APRIL 2012 \*\***

**Membership Form—Gloucester Historical Society/Société historique de Gloucester**

Membership/Adhésion - \$20.00 for one year..... \$150.00 for life membership.....

NAME:\_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS:\_\_\_\_\_

CITY:\_\_\_\_\_ PROV\_\_\_\_\_ POSTAL CODE \_\_\_\_\_

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