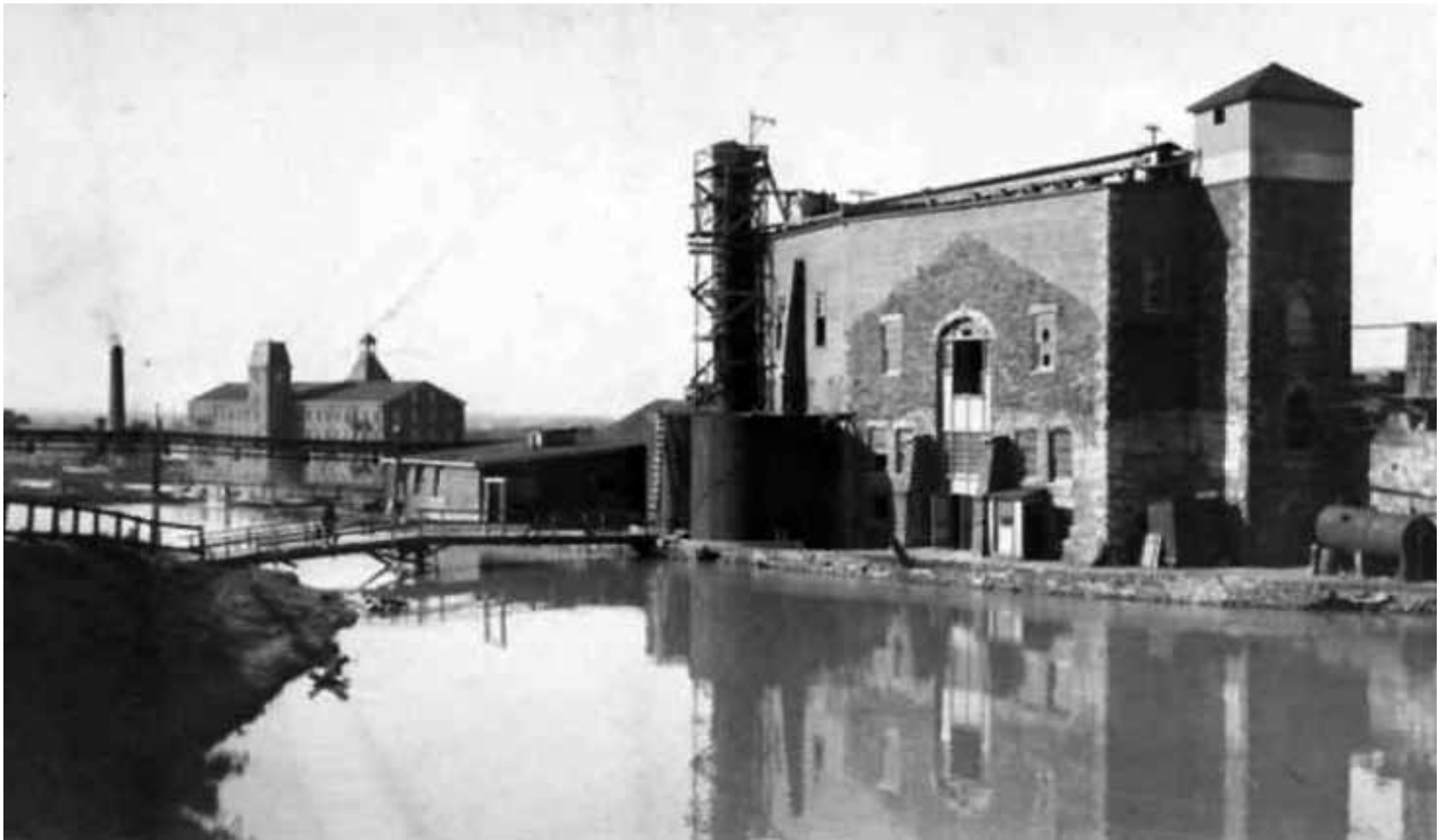


# MERRITTON MATTERS

WINTER 2016 • Volume 12, Issue 1 • [www.merrittonmatters.ca](http://www.merrittonmatters.ca)



## Merritton Matters

This newsletter is a volunteer effort by a small group of people who are determined to keep the spirit of the Merritton community alive through providing information to our readers about the past, present and future of our neighbourhood. Merritton Matters is distributed through The St. Catharines Standard and is also available at many of our community's fine establishments. If you know someone who might like to receive the Merritton Matters by mail, please call Sheila at 905-227-8988.

**CHECK OUT THE MERRITTON MATTERS WEBSITE AT  
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MERRITTON MATTERS NOW OPERATING AS ANOTHER PROJECT  
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**Hope to see you  
at the Trivia Night!  
See Page 3  
for details.**

# MERRITTON MATTERS VOLUNTEERS

**Editor/Writer:**  
Lorraine Giroux

**Photographers:**  
Susan Fluellon

**Article Contributors:**  
Isabel Bachman  
Tom Barwell  
Matthew Brady  
David C. Craig  
Michael Gander  
Patricia Gander  
Pamela Guyatt  
Denis Savoie

**Graphic Designer:**  
Lana Pesant

**Behind the Scene  
Coordinators:**  
Arnold Hartnett  
Sheila Morra  
Phyllis Thomson

**Advertising  
Representatives:**  
Morag Enright  
George Hostick  
Tony Morra

Send articles or ideas for  
future articles to the editor  
at: merrittonmatters@  
hotmail.com or by mail  
to 3 Capri Circle, St.  
Catharines L2T 3X4.



Sally Dollar and the Free Hugs Team at the Labour Day Parade where they had the most hugs they have ever had in their history. Merritton people are great huggers!

## Who Wants To Be In A Parade?

The Merritton Lions Club is hosting its annual Community Days Parade. This parade has been running since 1946 and is well attended by the public. We are looking for music, floats, clubs, clowns, organizations, etc. to join us in entertaining the people along the parade route. The parade is on Monday, September 5th, 2016 at 11 a.m. Come help us make our 70th anniversary the best yet! Contact Jeff White at 905-684-3078 or jwhite57@cogeco.ca.

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## ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION DONATION

Representatives from Merritton's Branch 138 present a donation cheque for \$5000 to One Foundation for the NHS on Friday, October 9, 2015, at the St. Catharines Hospital. Pictured from left to right are Kevin Froats (Poppy Chair Branch 138), Kristina Manzi, Anne Atkinson (both from One Foundation), Alex Verdile (Branch 138 President) and Mike Gander (Veteran's Service Officer and Charitable Foundations Officer).

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# Welcome to the Royal Imperial Collegiate

An old friend has taken on a new look. We are excited to welcome Royal Imperial Collegiate of Canada and staff, including Chancellor Willis Leung and Principal Roy Lalonde to our Merritton Community. Opening in February, there will be approximately a dozen students attending the winter semester in the former MHS building on Seymour Avenue. The enrolment after this soft opening is expected to approach 300 by September of 2016 and would be a target of 50% local students and 50% international students. If this venture is successful, three expansions are already in the planning stage. Chancellor Willis Leung has said that the quiet quality of the school and surrounding neighbourhood were attractive and helped lure them to the old Merritton High building. They feel the great promise and potential of the area!



Knowing that they have spent considerable time and money updating the interior of the 90,000 square foot former Pinehurst School within the past year, we asked Councillor David Haywood to give us some insights on the upgrades that he saw on his tour of the facility. David let us know that there are now new washrooms, a new dance studio (the former art classroom), a new commons area (previous shop class area) and workout space. The former library now houses the computer area while the principal's office has been opened-up and combined with the classroom which housed David's grade 9 typing class (now partially a conference room). The third floor has dorms retrofitted within the previous classrooms - big and bright bedrooms that seemed very inviting.

Neighbours have been witness to the countless workers going in and out of the building and we've been told that we'll continue to see more investors/visitors, who will bring possible business opportunities to the area, arriving in June. All this hustle and bustle resulting in amazing renovations, has perked our interest and we hope that a tour of the building can be organized this coming summer for former students and interested community members.

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# Merritton's

By Patricia Gander

# GOT TALENT

Contestants answered the call to step forward and share their wonderful talent to a sold out crowd. Merritton's Got Talent was a Merritton Legion fundraising event not only for the Legion, but for Community Care as well. Betty-Lou Souter was our Master of Ceremonies for the evening and she did a fantastic job. Admittance fee was a donation to Community Care.



Everybody was a winner. The audience played a big part in the evening as they voted for finalists and the top winners. Our judges, Brad Davidson, Geoff Downes and Bonnie Davidson were amazing. Their critiquing of the contestants was always complimentary and positive. We also had an amazing group of Legion volunteers who donated their time and efforts to this cause.

After the final votes were tallied by the judges, the winner was 283 Performing Arts Group from Thorold and 1<sup>st</sup> runner up, Oscar Anderson. The audience had a difficult decision because all contestants really did a great job.

It was a 'feel good' evening for all involved and helped not only our Legion but Community Care as well. The big raffle of the night was a Christmas tree full of gift certificates with a value of almost \$1,000. The winner of the raffle donated it to Community Care. A great night was had by all. Watch for Season Two coming in the fall of 2016.



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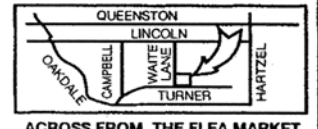
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ACROSS FROM THE FLEA MARKET



# St. James Anglican Church, February 2016


By Pamela Guyatt

I have been reflecting on my time here at St. James, and how the past eight years would fit into the rich history of the past 145 years. St. James has grown and changed more than once in that time frame. In terms of the building, we began with the old wooden church that came down the canal on a barge from Port Dalhousie, when that burned down the brick structure we have now was built, then in the 1950's the addition was added to contain the large Sunday school. Then the rectory was torn down and gave way to a paved parking lot. The glass enclosed stairwell was added, and we finally had the chair lift installed in 2009.

Throughout the years there have been dances, bake sales, Christmas Bazaars and other fund-raising activities. In the evenings organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Pathways to Peace, the Girl Guides and the Brownies have used our space for meetings. Today not only do we continue to host the Girl Guides and Brownies, we have Yoga and Zumba groups who meet throughout the week. On Sundays we have another faith group who rent our space as they grow their own church. Sometimes the building seems so full of activities that the parishioners have difficulties finding time to do ministry. All of this activity is now the normal for every church.

But in the middle of all that busyness, it's important to contemplate the changes that are happening. More and more people are looking for places where they can slow down, not worry about a list of things to do, a place to just 'be' and recharge.....that's what Sunday mornings are all about. But we wanted something more, something that could take place at a different time, and after much searching and prayer we purchased a portable Labyrinth. If you haven't heard of that, a Labyrinth is an ancient 'resource' that people have been using for centuries to help with their faith journeys. In times gone by when people couldn't afford to make a pilgrimage to a holy shrine, they could simulate the pilgrimage with a Labyrinth. In the modern era, the Labyrinth has become a place of quiet, that a person can use to reconnect with themselves, or question what comes next, or as a time of prayer. If you would like to explore a time set apart just for yourself, call the office and set up a time 905-682-8853. The Labyrinth is a community resource I hope many will take advantage of.

So present day St. James is following in the footsteps of all those who have gone before us, we are changing and adapting to fit the community around us. Thanks be to God.



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# Merritton (Rail Yard) Memories!

By Mike Gander

For the second time, your trusty scribe, Tom Barwell, has struck up old memories for me, prompting me to write. His story on the Merritton rail yard really struck home. You see...I worked for CN Rail from 1971 until I retired in 2005. I started as a brakeman and finished up as a conductor. I have worked out of many locations throughout Southern Ontario but one of my favourite terminals was Merritton. A lot of my career was spent around Merritton and St Catharines, on the old NS&T lines, mainly because it was close to home. Out of Merritton, we would service industries in Merritton, St Catharines, Port Weller, Thorold, Fonthill and Welland. We had three assignments to service all the businesses in our area. Over the years, I have seen too many businesses close, jobs lost and assignments dwindle. I have seen vehicular accidents, derailments and injuries within this area. I remember that, in one year, our assignment alone was involved in as many as twelve vehicular collisions.

Derailments were not uncommon. One time, we were heading up to Kimberly Clark. We had just come through the "cut" and turning onto Townline Road. It had been a particularly cold winter and ice had built up between the street and the track. When making the turn onto Townline Road, our engine climbed the ice and headed straight. Our engineer applied the brakes in emergency and we finally came to rest in a driveway, just a couple of feet from the house. I am sure that some of the older residents of Townline Road will remember that incident. Another "wreck" that we were involved in took place after a particularly wet week during the late spring. Again, we were heading up the hill towards Domtar and Kimberly Clark. When we got up a ways, about opposite of where Sparkle

Pallet used to be, the first car behind the engine derailed and started down the incline. Next, went the second, third and fourth cars. Our caboose, where Larry, my brakeman, and I were riding, then started to go. Both of us, at the same time, headed for the rear door so that we could jump clear of danger. We both hit the door at the same time. It was like a Laurel and Hardy thing. We started laughing, (in the face of danger), but managed to get out to safety. The caboose was left teetering half on and half off the hill. The wet spring weather had weakened the embankment and it had washed away underneath us, causing this derailment. Another wreck that we were involved with took place at the bottom of that hill, across from the old Garden City Paper Mill. That is where the Fonthill Spur, (line to Kimberly Clark), and the Grantham Spur, (out of Merritton to Niagara St and, before, right down to Michigan Beach), joined up. We had just finished servicing Domtar and our brakeman, Doug, was riding the ladder of the last car. We were doing track speed, which was only ten miles per hour, when a rail broke under the first car. All four cars derailed and a couple overturned. All we could think of was Doug! I bailed off the engine and went back to check on Doug but could not immediately see him. Next thing that I see is a figure climbing out of the drainage ditch that runs along the east side of the tracks. It was Doug. He was all right and had jumped clear as soon as the first car had started to go. That line was closed down for about three days while clean-up crews worked to restore service. I believe that must have been about 1990.



We were always on the look out for kids climbing on the train. I am sure that we all did this as kids, but kids being kids, we didn't realize how dangerous that practice could be. We were not as harsh with them, though, as Tom Barwell alluded to in his story. We would go back most of the time, stop the train, (unless they bailed and ran), and make sure that they had gotten off safely.

There were pranksters in our ranks, as well. One trip back, (again from Kimberly Clark), we were shoving down towards Bessey Street crossing, off of the hill. I was sitting in the caboose, (we were the lead car at the time), watching the rail ahead with one hand on the emergency brake. My brakemen, Phil and Brian, were in the caboose with me. Now, in those cabooses, we used to have a five gallon jug of drinking water and ice. While I am, diligently, watching where we were going, these two decide that it would be funny to pour this ice water on the unsuspecting conductor. I did get them back later though!

Despite all of the unfortunate incidents there were a lot of fun times around Merritton, as mentioned above. Many good memories came out of the Merritton Yard. In closing, I would like to say to Tom, 'Thank you' for bringing back some of those memories with the story that you wrote in the last issue.

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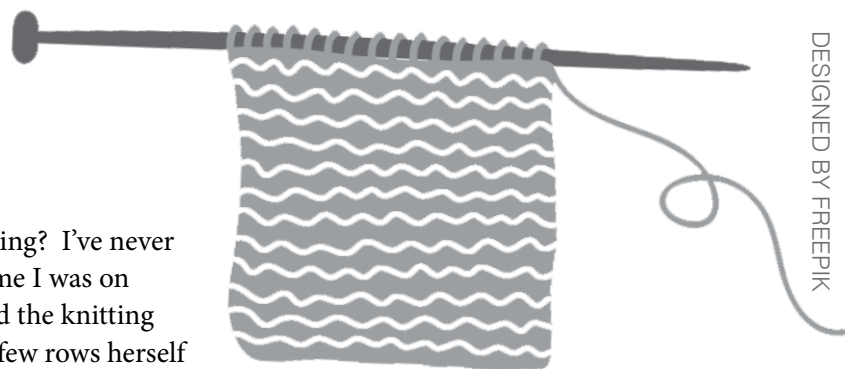
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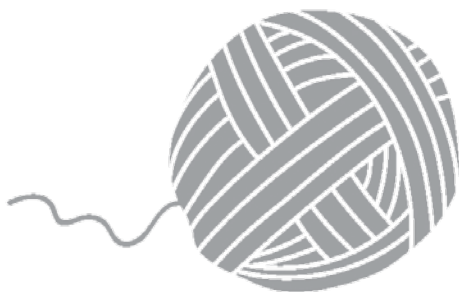
  
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# THE EDITOR'S POINT OF VIEW KNITTING UNRAVELLING AT THE TOWN HALL

Why does an article about closing the Town Hall remind me fondly of knitting? I've never been a knitter. Tried it a few times with very unremarkable results. One time I was on the train trying out some knitting moves and the woman beside me grabbed the knitting needles out of my hands to tell me I was doing it incorrectly and finished a few rows herself before handing it back to me with a grunt. She obviously didn't believe in the gradual release of responsibility teaching method. Another time was at a boxing match where I was being a stand-in parent for a friend's son who was in the midst of pummeling some unlucky person. I had taken my first stabs at a knitting project along with me as I had to finish a few rows before the next day's knitting meeting but looking back I guess it must have created some dissonance in the minds of those around me as I might have had a less than calm approach in my cheering. Even though I've never been a knitter or someone who is particularly calm, I see it as an admirably calming pursuit. I've just never been good at it unlike my mother who knitted a coat for my dog Cherie so that when I pushed her around Burleigh Hill School in my doll carrier, she would look so cool. (Unfortunately Cherie thought it was the cat's meow and quickly turned it into a soggy lump of wool.) So when we used to have our Merritton Community Group meetings at the Town Hall, I would go early and walk among the knitting. Some may have said I was avoiding the monthly ill-fated pursuit of setting up the tables just so to maximize participation but I really just wanted to enjoy the products of the Wednesday knitting and crocheting club. I would take pleasure in looking at the beautiful pieces from a group who obviously found pleasure in knitting for others.

When in 2009, former St. Andrew's councillor Andrew Gill suggested closing the Merritton Seniors Centre at the Town Hall, I thought the knitters would be ringing the old place holding their needles with points up in protest. Lots of words have been published in the years since to make the sale no surprise at all. A few years ago one of the elementary schools in Merritton invited senior knitters in to teach some intermediate students the finer points of the craft. What a great idea for sharing generational wisdom. Knitters don't have to be seniors and their skills don't have to be housed and shared at a senior centre at a historic town hall. Although it was very nice to soak up their precious knitting zen there and contemplate their creative expressions as a form of meditation.



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# MERRITTON'S \*SOCK HOP\* REUNION

By Denis Savoie

“What a Rush!”, “Dy-no-mite!”, “What a Blast!” These are all terms from my generation to describe what a wonderful event happened at our Merritton Legion Branch 138 on Saturday, September 5, 2015 when the Legion hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Merritton Labour Day Weekend Reunion! The weather certainly cooperated. While it was warm, with picnic table umbrellas, shade canopies and the natural shade offered by the Legion grounds and supplemented by a gentle breeze, it was certainly tolerable for everyone.

Alex Verdile, Legion President, and Patricia McCabe, Legion Treasurer, together with their wonderful Legion comrades, served the food and beverages. They did an exceptional job, making sure everything was perfect and that the gathered revelers were fed and ‘hydrated’. For those needing a break from the heat, the Legion’s air-conditioned building certainly offered a welcome moment of cooling relief.

Bev Downes Damiano led the Merritton Memories (MM) committee which is a Facebook group for those of us who grew up in our favorite home town and now more than 1300 members strong. Her dedicated volunteers (who don’t want to be named, acknowledging that “the reunion

likely might not have taken place without Bev”) started to plan this event in February and the hard work, frequent meetings, the time and effort spent gathering raffle prizes, setting up the Legion site certainly showed in the end result. Music from the 50/60/70’s was provided, a photo booth was available, and Ken Servos’ absolutely classic 56 Lincoln helped to create the mood and keep the Sock Hop theme rolling. The large, well-supported raffle, a 50/50 draw and other events successfully raised money to further the charitable goals of the Legion. The MM Firefighter Memorial Plaque Committee members were also at the Sock Hop, fund raising for their project and had a very successful day. The generosity and friendliness of the people of Merritton never fails to surprise me.

This was a day when everyone who attended got the chance to reconnect and reminisce with friends from our younger years, former classmates, neighbours, teachers and people who were so instrumental in keeping our memories alive and thriving. I personally reconnected with three people who I have not seen in almost 50 years. Thankfully, I was wearing my name tag as I doubt they would have recognized me otherwise. Yes, it was like

time had stood still as we recalled events that happened long before cell phones and computers. People chatted and laughed about swimming and lessons at the pool, Teen Town, baseball games, band tattoos, high school days, Granny’s Pond, our favorite bike, tobogganing down Burleigh Hill, house parties, school dances, MHS and DM days, our favorite swimming holes, Amalgamation (that one still stings) and so much more.

The fog of time lifted to allow us to recall those days with almost crystal clarity, with the emphasis on “almost”. How do you explain the joy of looking into the eyes of someone you haven’t seen in so many years and at the exact same time when they recognize you? How do you explain the warmth of a hug or the tear that forms in the corner of your eye on these occasions? I guess you don’t. You just accept it and relish in the moment as I did.

Trish Pastore-Rodgers, Bev Downes Damiano and I have already been excitedly planning two new fun “things” for our next reunion. Maybe next year, we will have a special prize for the person who travels the farthest to be at our third annual Merritton Reunion. Please plan to “come home”!

## MERRITTON TOWN HALL SURPLUS



As you know if you’ve been following the news, the Town Hall building has been declared surplus which is the first step in repurposing the facility to a non-municipal program use. Town Hall meetings were held in December to provide information for community members and obtain feedback. The next step is for the City to ask for submissions of potential uses from private investors.

Anyone who purchases the building must maintain the heritage aspects of the building. It was designated as a heritage site in 1978. Built in 1879 by James MacDonald, it features local sandstone and stonework by John Walker and is an example of Victorian architecture. It is designated as Mixed Use which is a label intended to provide a broad mix of medium and higher density housing, commercial, local office, institutional, indoor recreation and culture uses to serve the immediate neighbourhood and community.



# MERRITTON'S CANALS

By Isabel Bachman

Everybody who grew up in or lives now in Merriton knows at least a little about canals.

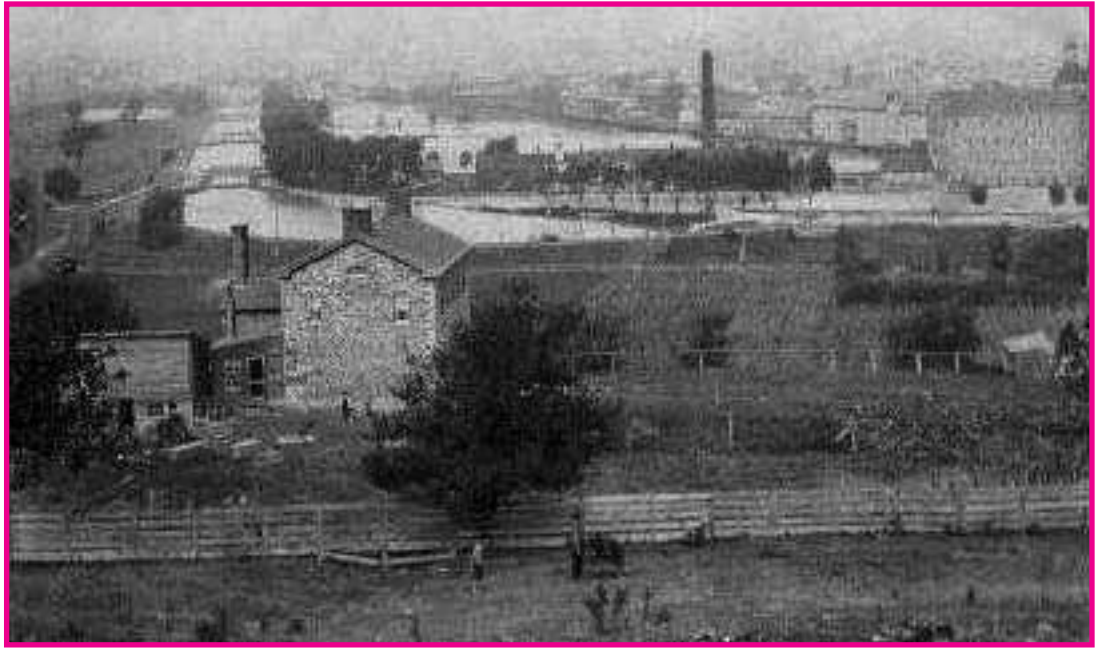
Some of us take all of our out-of-town visitors to Lock 3 to watch the leviathans squeeze into the lock and rise above the viewing platform. Personally I've been extra lucky in that regard; I got paid to do it as well, as a canal and local history interpreter for the museum in the Lock 3 complex. It was a dream job, reimbursement for doing what I loved to be doing anyway!

Some of us remember fishing or swimming in the forbidden reaches of the Third Canal, walking across the lock gates, surfing and splashing dangerous waters. We're lucky we survived!

But what about the oldest of the canals, the original and the old stone locks of the 2<sup>nd</sup> that still dot their way up the hill and out of sight?

I grew up within the sight (and smell) of the old Second Canal. It was the boundary line my parents set when I disappeared to play every day. "Don't go past the canal!" Occasionally too, almost as an afterthought, I was reminded not to 'plester in the water'. I did stick to the boundary, usually, I played along BOTH sides of the canal, studiously avoiding the lure of the danger of 'past the canal' and 'over town'. But I couldn't help plestering! I don't recall how old I was before it dawned on me that it was the canal that was supposed to be the danger, not downtown Merriton! I explored pretty much the whole danger zone from the CN tracks to Townline Road. Townline Road was the southern boundary set by my parents, Thorold looming as equally dangerous as Merritt St. in my naiveté.

It was a four season playground. I loved the old weirs best. Watery wild places, they were, with a never-ending catalogue of adventures waiting for any kid who had eyes, ears and imagination, so any kid with mobility was basically hooked by the get go. I had my first exposure to amphibious creatures in the backwaters, creepy crawlies of all descriptions. I scaled the big limestone blocks in all seasons, pretending to be a great Canadian explorer or an escaped prisoner



A stereoscopic image ca.1870s of the turning basin as the Welland Canal begins the climb up the escarpment behind what is now the Keg. The series of locks that stretched directly ahead of the photographer is Lock 15 down to St. Catharines along Canal Valley.

or a pioneer or a shipwrecked castaway on a deserted island. I learned to skate on thin ice, both metaphorically and literally. The trick was to avoid the attention of adults, any adults, because they could identify you. You'd get the lecture twice, once from the adult who nailed you and again later at home. As a redhead, I was particularly vulnerable to easy identification so I excelled in lying low. Being extra-ordinarily short helped.

Now that I've retired and am able to devote some attention to my favourite stuff, I'm starting to jot down memories of those 'plestering' days around the old canal locks and weirs. The adult me joined the Canadian Canal Society where we work at preserving and documenting the canals that built the trade and the towns from the early 1800s to today. Without the existence of these canals, simple or

gargantuan, a lot of Canada wouldn't exist. The timeline of Merriton's founding parallels the building of these historic canals to bypass Niagara Falls and summit the Niagara Escarpment.

Here in Merriton Matters, I hope to chronicle Merriton's canals, and the saga of hard work, strong will, inventive technology and big dreams. Starting from Townline Road (my old boundary line), down the hill and through the valley, I'll post installments on each lock and its environs. It should be an interesting journey and I hope you'll join me along the way.



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# STU GILCHRIST

We're always tickled when we find Merritton graduates who have made significant contributions to the larger community. Many of us grew up watching *Mr. Dressup* and Stuart Gilchrist was the creator and producer of *Mr. Dressup* which is Canada's longest running children's television program that has influenced generations of Canadian children.

Stu grew up on Almond Street and went to Central School. His grandmother, aunts and uncles were all longtime residents of Merritton. He fondly remembers Main's Drug Store, getting the mail every day, attending Presbyterian Church and loved going to the movies in St. Catharines for 10 cents. Other favourite memories include helping on some days to ride the horse wagon delivering Mammy's bread with Mr. La Chance and, of course, having a crush on his daughter back then. His Merritton childhood was a very happy one. Stu now lives in Toronto to be close to his children and grandchildren. His Merritton was a lovely town that is still very much a part of him now and always.

A graduate of Queen's University in the 1950s, Stu spent the early years of his career teaching children. In 1962, recognized for his work with youth, he was asked by Dr. Fred Rainsbury, who was then head of Children's Programming at the CBC, to work on children's programs with him. Stu's first jobs were in radio as television was still an emerging technology. He produced many series at CBC radio including *Voices of the Wild* and *Canadian Poets*.

Shortly after his start in radio, Stu moved to television and created and produced a variety of programs such as *The Depths Beneath* and *Concepts in History*. It was at this time that children's television programming was evolving and Stuart was invited to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania by Fred Rogers to produce some of the earliest episodes of the famed Mr. Rogers television show. Stu also led the team that brought *Sesame Street* to Canada in the 1960s.

While working with Fred Rogers, Stu came to meet a young puppeteer by the name of Ernie Coombs, who Canada would grow to adore as Mr. Dressup. Upon Stu's return, he served as creator and Executive Producer of many popular CBC children's television programs such as *Barney Boomer*, *Upside Town* and *Butternut Square* – the precursor to Mr. Dressup. Stu was the creator and producer of Mr. Dressup, the program for which he is most well-known.

In 2008, Stu created Suitcase Theatre which carried the same values and magic that Mr. Dressup brought to Canadian children for over 40 years. Married for over 50 years, Stuart is the father of two grown children and is also a proud grandfather.



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## NEIGHBOURS LIKE NO OTHER

*By Tom Barwell*

Years ago we looked at purchasing a home on Park Ave. On the one side lived Blake Richardson. On the other was the Savoie family. We were quite familiar with Blake. But of the Savoies we had sometimes heard that they were a little wild. As a teen I had only met the kids a couple of times in passing, as we seldom went to that side of town. We did however, eventually decide to buy. What a great decision that was.

The leader of the clan was Omer 'Lefty' Savoie. I had never seen him play ball but stories indicated that he was a very good player and in his prime Merritton had some very powerful senior teams. I had assumed that Lefty was a pitcher but he informed me that he was a first baseman.

Lefty's wife's name was Edith. While she was Irish, Lefty was French-Canadian. He was her French Poodle and she was his Irish Setter.

They were a great family and more than anything, great neighbours. On the day we took possession I was working on the inside of my car. Suddenly a voice boomed out 'welcome neighbour'. It was Denis Savoie. After a brief handshake, he was gone in a cloud of dust.

With two girls and three boys at the time, next door was always a busy place. But periodically strange things happened. Not bad things but what we called Leftyisms. One in particular stands out and it was probably the funniest thing I have ever seen.

It was on a Sunday morning and it had been raining most of the night, a slow freezing drizzle. Ice had built up on everything and TV aerials were no exception. Lefty loved his sports and Sunday was an important day for football. With the ice, reception was impossible. No problem for Lefty. I happened to be looking out a bedroom window and noticed a spray of water aimed at his aerial. It had no effect. In fact the water froze and made it a little bigger. Then I noticed a mist. This was warm water and increased the size of the aerial ever more. And of course heavier.

The hose disappeared. I then noticed a long board being edged onto the roof. It was aimed at the aerial and used as a battering ram in order to break the ice away. The guy wires must have been tighter than bow strings from the weight of the frozen water. I heard a voice suggesting not to hit it anymore from one of the boys who had gathered around for the event. It was obviously ignored as the battering continued with renewed vigour. Then with sharp singing snaps the wires gave way. Miraculously, for a few seconds, the aerial stood alone. Then slowly, with a cloud of ice and snow, the whole rig came crashing down. Ducking and weaving, everyone ran. The family car parked below was engulfed in wire, aluminum shards and ice. There was stunned silence. Then a peal of laughter that was quickly shouted down. Me? I had collapsed on the floor in stunned laughter. Thank goodness no one was hurt but the car had sustained a few scratches. A while later I noticed the remains of the aerial strapped to the clothes line pole. Reception apparently was decent for the moment, except when there was a channel change. Then Lefty had to run outside and turn it by hand.

To this day, 50 years later I still laugh at the scene. It was a mere short chapter of living next door to the Savoies. They were great neighbours. Lefty and Edith are gone but certainly not forgotten. We are still in touch with the family even though they are scattered all around Ontario. When we do meet them we share much laughter in regards to this momentous event. If for some reason I feel down in the dumps I only have to think of those years living next door and any anxieties fade away.

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# Girotti: a Merritton Family (Part II)

David C. Craig

In the last issue of Merritton Matters, we saw how an immigrant Italian family, through hard work and wise decisions, rose from their humble beginnings, to establish two successful businesses, which are still family owned and operated. How did four generations of Girottis hold everything together? What are the keys to their success?

One of those keys is the value they place on service, both to the nation and to their community. The four older brothers actively contributed to the war effort, as mentioned in Part I. Dino has been a member of the Thorold Legion for 62 years! Mario (“Modio”) served in the RCAF from 1951 to 1956 (where he met his wife Theresa). Scotty was a member of the Merritton Volunteer Fire Dept for 15 years. Scotty is the oldest active member of the Merritton Lions Club, and, together, he and Mario have over 100 years of service in the Lions Club! And the Merritton Lions Club has been a major player in serving Merritton youth over the years, through its involvement in building the swimming pool, the community centre, and the arena.

Another element in the “formula for success” of the Girotti brand is their religious faith. The family church was and is St. Patrick’s RC church in Merritton. Mario’s and Dino’s families still attend St. Pat’s, as did Marino and his family. As the families grew and spread out, other churches, like Holy Rosary in Thorold, became new houses of worship.

The element that impresses me the most, in looking across four generations of Girottis, is the primacy of family in their lives. How many other businesses could be managed by six brothers, without dissension causing a split? Of course there were disagreements, especially between the two strong-willed and opinionated brothers, Silvio and Marino. But early on, Dominic, their father, gave them sound advice that they all took to heart: “You can disagree and be disagreeable at work, but when you come home, remember--- we are a family.” And that attitude of the primacy of family, I believe, continues to be their secret to success.



The original machine shop adjacent to the family home on William St. which is now Dunn St.



Girottis celebrating 65 years in the business: From left, Silvio, Scotty, Dino, Marino, Nello and Mario.

(According to the Family Business Institute, 30% of family businesses survive into the second generation, and only 12% survive into the 3rd generation.)

As children and grandchildren were born and grew old enough to work, they got summer jobs as laborers in the concrete division, so as to encourage their return to school in the fall. Many of these cousins have joined the organization, working their way up into leadership positions. Whenever a special event occurred in a child’s life, such as a baptism, or

first communion, or confirmation, or graduation, or wedding, the whole extended family would gather for a celebration, usually in the parents’ house but, if too large, in a rented hall.

Sunday was always family day for the Girottis. In the late 1940s and 1950s, after Mass, everybody would gather at the Girotti William St. homestead. The women prepared lunch, usually with homemade pasta, cleaned up afterwards, and supervised the children. After the meal, in the warm weather, all of the men of the local Italian families came out for a game of bocce, which was usually held on Essex Lane, next door to Nello’s house on William St. They were all familiar Italian names to those of us who lived on the hill: Berti, Bianco, Lorenzi, Muratori, Galeazzi, Esposito, and, of course, the Girotti boys. It was often very hot, and beer cooled everyone down—bets were made, with the winner being rewarded with the title of padron, or boss---he then controlled the beer distribution to the other players! We local kids would often go down to Essex Lane to watch this strange game, and I was always impressed with how much good-hearted fun the Italians had. As the families increased in size, they still came to Sunday dinner at the homestead, but half would come for lunch and the other half for dinner.

But it wasn’t only in good times that the family came together. Murray Girotti, son of Marino and Anne, was born in 1948, graduated with his MD degree from Queens, and became a renowned trauma surgeon, first on staff at the U. of Toronto, and later at the U. of Western Ontario, in London. He was well respected by his peers and had a distinguished reputation. Shortly after a visit with his parents and relatives in Niagara at Christmas in 2010, Murray died suddenly, at the young age of 62. It devastated everyone. But the morning after his death, all of Marino’s brothers and his sister Mary (Bianco) came to Marino’s house to provide emotional comfort, and enough food to last several days. The family circle held fast and was strengthened even in adversity.

The tradition of family continues. Every Christmas and Easter, the whole extended family rent a hall and have a reunion. Laura and Albert Girotti (Nello’s son) sponsored the most recent gathering at Easter 2015. Girottis—young and old—came from as far away as Boston and Edmonton. There were 71 in attendance!

Four of the original seven children of Dominic and Teresa are living — two in Merritton and two in Thorold. Mary, Mario and Scotty are octogenarians, and Dino celebrated his 90th birthday in 2014. None of them has lost their zest for life!

They get together at Mary’s house every Friday afternoon for a glass of wine and for old times. But even though they have long since been out of the Girotti businesses, their presence is still felt. Dominic, Mario’s son, who is president of Hygrade Concrete, still frequently refers to a file in his office entitled “Wit and Wisdom of Uncle Marino”: WWMD—What Would Marino Do! The Girotti story continues to be a remarkable one.

Va piano. A domani. Until we meet again.

# Merritton Alliance Celebrates Tenth Anniversary Local Senior Baseball Team Takes A Look Back At The Team's History

By Matthew Brady



It all started in a bar.

It was a fall evening and a group of the Niagara Falls Falcons senior men's baseball team had gathered to watch a teammate's band perform at The Honest Lawyer. Those in attendance were discussing the past year and wondered what if we started our own team? As Josh Lighthouse's band played the talk grew into something very serious as ideas began to bounce back and forth. It was the beginning of something that started that night and has not stopped for ten seasons, the Merritton Alliance Senior Baseball Team.

The one idea that was discussed was that those members from Niagara Falls would join players that had previously played in Merritton, most recently at the junior level. Then the talk began about a name. It was after some research that we discovered Merritton had a rich tradition of senior baseball. The team wanted the name to pay homage to that tradition. As we dug we found that the Alliance Paper Mill had been the sponsor of a team in Merritton. This would fit nicely with the other meaning of Alliance, as the group from Niagara Falls would join the group from Merritton to form this new team. The team unanimously voted on the name and Josh Lighthouse began work on a logo that has been used by the team for all ten years of its existence.

"The Alliance truly embodies the name of the team. We all come from different places (some from Niagara Falls, some from West Lincoln and some from Merritton) and we have combined to become a talented team. We have just as much fun on the field as we do off the field," said current player Jeff Young.

Then the task began to put the on-field product together. Larry Collins was recruited to manage the team. His two sons Ben and Dave were also part of the committee to invite potential players to the team. The team would play out of George Taylor field in St. Catharines and would join the Niagara District Baseball Association's

Senior Division. The original team members that took to the field in 2006 were Josh Lighthouse, Chris Heckley, Dustin Jenckes, Jeff Arksey, Ben Collins, Brad Boucock, Jeff Young, Greg Biro, Matt Brady, Dan Bielby, Dave Collins, Adam Hope, Mike Nardelli, Adam Campisano, Jason Valliere, Shane Dinning, Dave Dawdy (Trainer), and Larry Collins (Manager). The team began to play that season in donated uniforms from the Merritton Athletic Association. The blue, red, and white uniforms were worn briefly that season until the grey, black, and red uniforms arrived.

That first season was magical. The team managed to raise a lot of money mainly due to the generosity of those within the Merritton community. The funds raised were put to use to pay for equipment, uniforms, and other expenses such as league and park fees.

The team got off to a rocky start on the field. The Alliance finished the regular season barely above the .500 mark and headed into the playoffs as a bit of a long shot. The team had come together at the right time and rode a hot September all the way to the league



championship. It would be the first of back to back titles. In nine full seasons the team has won the league championship 4 times, been a participant in the finals 7 times, and has won two tournaments.

When asked about what makes this team special Ben Collins said "our ability to compete year in and year out, to play the game with the respect it deserves, and winning the NDBA championship for our fourth time in 7 years when teams thought we didn't have it anymore."

This team however is more than just a baseball team. It has gone through roster changes over the years, but still has eight of the original members on the team, a great source of pride to all members. The team has gone through high points on and off the field (weddings, births, promotions) and difficult times as well. The team lost a valuable member as trainer Dave Dawdy passed away in the summer of 2008. Dave's mother Pam continues to support the team and is truly a member of the Alliance family.

There really is no other way to put it. Dave Collins said, "I think what makes us a special team is that...no matter what happens on or off the field we always have a great time together. Remember we have all been spending the majority of our summers playing baseball with each other. This has become our summer family."

The current team and alumni were asked what made this team special and to recall some favourite memories, some of which will not be retold in this article. The common thread between all of the comments I received from

past and present team members was the commitment to compete, to play the game the right way, to support each other as teammates and to enjoy every moment on and off the field.

Current player Mark Parris summarized the team in this quote, "... we always seem to be better than the sum of our parts. That's not to say we lack talent - it just seems the mutual respect among teammates makes for an environment conducive to success and most importantly, enjoyment for the game we love to play."

Chris Heckley added, "It is hard to explain the bond that this team has. It is just a feeling. No words can really explain it."

I'll leave the last word to former manager and assistant coach to current manager Dave Parris, Larry Collins. Larry said, "the most important thing I got out of these 10 years is that I got to spend time with my two sons, that they still wanted me around and I (also) got to watch all of you turn into fine gentlemen. (You guys) never lost the ability to have a good time. How much longer will it last, who knows? It's been a great ride!"

# ALLIANCES

The article about the Alliance Baseball team refers to the joining of paper mills in Merritton, an amalgamation revolving around where Johnny Rocco's Italian Grill is now. The building currently at the site was constructed in 1860 by Gordon McKay and Co. of Toronto, and was known as the Canadian Coloured Cotton Mills, one of two cotton mills located in Merritton. It was also known as the Lybster Mill. The owners of the Lincoln Paper Co., located less than a mile north of the Lybster Mill decided to expand their operations and bought the Lybster Mill prior to 1908. After building additions to the south end and the east side of the old mill, and installing machinery, they started production in 1911. The company amalgamated with Ritchie and Ramsay of New Toronto in 1928 and joined the Georgetown Coated Paper Mill, and the name Alliance Paper Co. came into being. The Lybster Mill in Merritton then became the Lybster Division of Alliance Paper Co. Dominion Tar and Chemical bought Alliance Paper Co. in 1962 and it was known for years as Howard Smith Papers, and later it was called Domtar.

## Merritton Born and Raised

You have probably seen a decorative car with EYE GAL license plates zipping around the Merritton area for years. This vehicle is owned by Rachel Hill of Personal Optical.

Rachel has been a Merrittonian for life., raised on Rockwood and then Dunvegan where she still resides today. Rachel's first job back in 1989 was at the Merritt Branch library before leaving for college to study Opticianary. Her father Hans Hill is well remembered as Managing Optician at Sears Optical for 30 years before his passing in 2000. From him, Rachel learned her trade and customer service skills.

Rachel opened her Optical store in 2005 simply as a mobile optical store servicing the needs of those with mobility issues and busy lifestyles. She would come right to your home or office to help choose your new eyewear. The concept worked well but she found an actual store was still needed for expansion and located across from the Pen Centre in the Tremont Plaza.

Personal Optical is now well known in Niagara for their unique and fun styles that are not found in other stores. If you want different shapes and bold colours this is where you want to be. Her most recent pair of eyeglasses has one round shaped lens and the other is a square.

Rachel enjoys working in the community and loves teaching kids. She has visited her old school (St Christopher's) many times and created fun lessons about the eye and vision health. Personal Optical also collects old used eyeglasses for the Lions Club program.

Personal Optical carries eyewear from places such as Montreal, Italy, Denmark and France. The quality and style is also at affordable pricing so not to dent your pocket book. Rachel travels to Toronto and even New York city to meet with frame reps to see their latest collections.

Rachel is proud to acknowledge winning Ontario Optician of the Year back in 2009 and Eyecare Professional of the Year for Canada in 2012.


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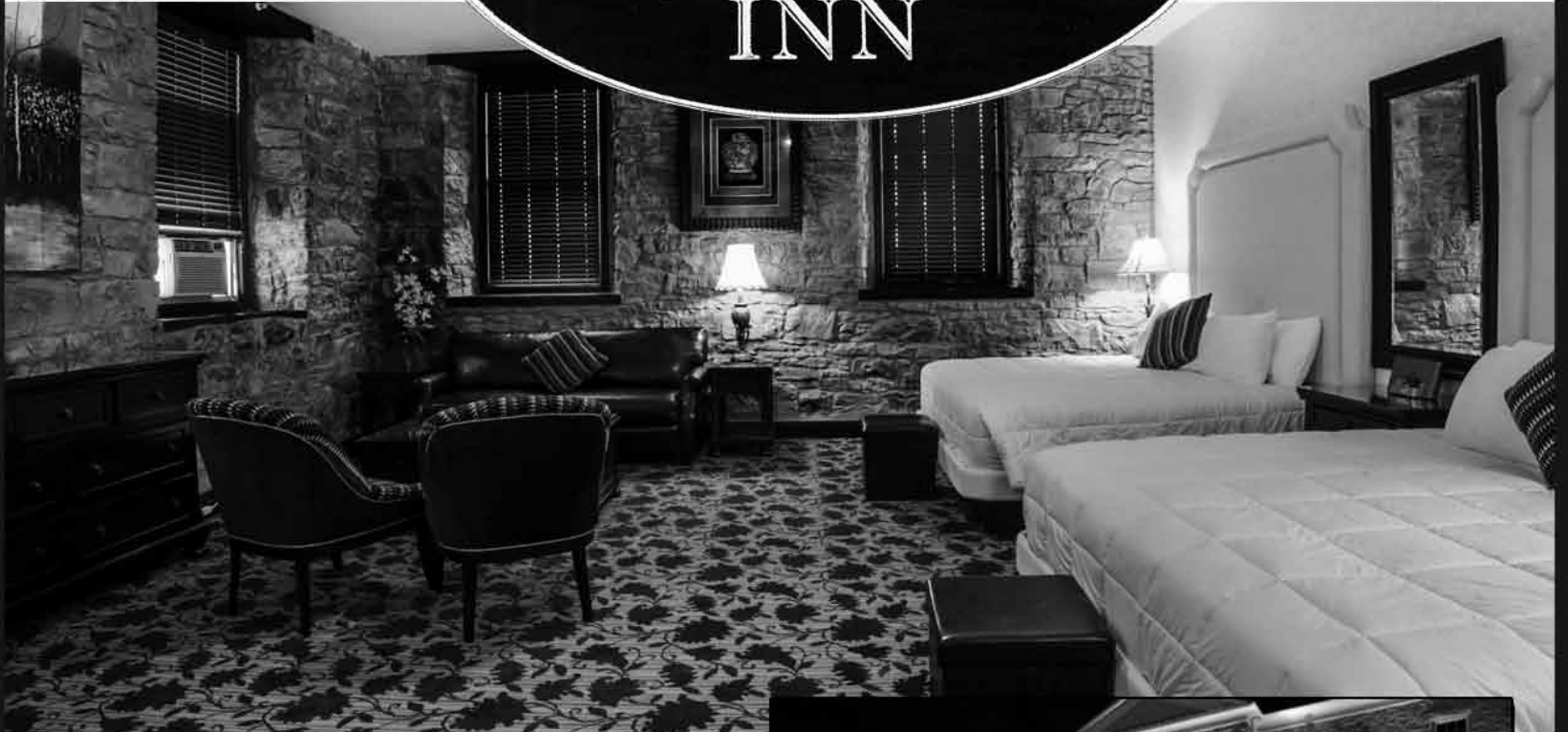
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