The Rideau Canal National Historic Site is part of a national system of parks and historic sites managed by Parks Canada. The 202 km waterway is a chain of beautiful lakes, rivers and canal cuts linking Kingston, at the head of Lake Ontario, to Ottawa, Canada’s capital. It has 47 locks, over 20 dams and a variety of buildings, constructed between 1826 and 1832 under the supervision of Lieutenant Colonel John By of the Royal Engineers.

The Rideau Canal was specifically designed for steam-powered vessels and is one of the greatest engineering feats of the 19th century. It is the best-preserved slackwater canal system and its mode of operation has changed very little since the beginning. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated the canal a World Heritage Site in 2007. It is one of 15 World Heritage Sites located in Canada.

The Rideau Canal brought remarkable commercial and industrial development to Merrickville. Entrepreneurs expanded the wood, food processing, metallurgical and textile industries, along the Rideau by steamer and barge destined for the United States, Montreal or England. With the advent of railroads, which were quicker and more economical, the canal’s commercial activity became mostly local. The 1880s heralded in the recreational period with luxury excursion steamers, such as the Rideau King and Rideau Queen, ferrying loads of travelers and sightseers along the picturesque waterway.

In the illustration on the front panel, the last steamer on the Rideau Canal, the Ottawa, is heading downstream at Merrickville locks, past the original swing bridge that opens over a wooden abutment. In the background, the blockhouse stands watch. Today, the canal continues to be an international recreational attraction, accessible both by water and by land.

**MERRICKVILLE BLOCKHOUSE**

The canal brought remarkable commercial and industrial development to Merrickville. Entrepreneurs expanded the wood, food processing, metallurgical and textile industries, and a safe and navigable waterway would be a further boon to village merchants and industrialists to ship agricultural and industrial products to larger markets further away.

This illustration shows the existing ruins of the woollen mill with the silhouette of the once grand building. During the construction of the locks at Merrickville, Lt. Col. By went to great lengths to ensure that the grist and saw mills would not be destroyed by rising water levels. This endeavor slowed the pace of work and increased expenses. Unfortunately, in 1831, when the section of the canal from Bytown to Smiths Falls was ready to be opened, William Merrick decided to dam the Rideau River above Merrickville in order to make repairs to his mills. Because water levels were affected, Lt. Colonel By’s grand opening became impossible. Soon after, a new law was introduced that prevented unauthorized changes to the waterway.

The adjacent illustration shows the bridge, built in 1904, over the spillway that controlled water levels on the upper reach. In the background, the entrance to the Merrickville blockhouse and the 1889 United Church are visible.
quickly resulting in a trade triangle of barge traffic from Montreal to Ottawa to Kingston and on to larger markets such as the United States. Merrickville was fortunate not only to be in a prime location but also to have a skilled population of Scottish, British and Irish descent who were capable of developing the textile and metallurgical industries for which it became renowned.

The area around Merrickville was rich in natural resources, especially timber, good soil, waterpower and minerals. An estimated 58 industries in Merrickville manufactured products by waterpower, from the earliest grist industries in Merrickville manufactured products by waterpower, from the earliest grist

An estimated 2000 men worked on the construction of the canal at 20 work sites stretching from Bytown and Kingston under the leadership of John Johnston, Royal Engineer, to defend Merrickville and the canal. For most of its history, the blockhouse served as a residence for Merrickville’s lockmasters and church and schoolhouse on occasion. It is now a museum managed by the Merrickville and District Historical Society.

During the Rebellion of 1837-1838, a garrison of local militia was stationed at the blockhouse to defend Merrickville and the canal. For most of its history, the blockhouse served as a residence for Merrickville’s lockmasters and then as a storehouse. It also assumed the role of church and schoolhouse on occasion. It is now a museum managed by the Merrickville and District Historical Society.

security and was surrounded by a dry moat. At 15.5 sq. m (51 sq. ft.) the blockhouse was large enough to accommodate 50 troops.

Like the Rideau Canal, the blockhouse was built for military purposes but saw very little action.

The blockhouse was designed to withstand cannon fire. The bottom section of the structure is separated from the top level by a floor made from timber and limestone infill. This was to protect troops on the top floor from gunfire if the enemy managed to breech the structure. Gun ports in the thick wall, as well as an upper gallery for shooting at the enemy from a safe position. The blockhouse had a drawbridge to increase its security and was surrounded by a dry moat. At 15.5 sq. m (51 sq. ft.) the blockhouse was large enough to accommodate 50 troops.

Like the Rideau Canal, the blockhouse was built for military purposes but saw very little action.