

# Rockwood's

# Geology & Habitat



## Rocks tell ancient secrets

Many ancient secrets have been revealed to geologists who have studied these famous rocks. Rockwood's limestone cliffs, potholes and caves tell a tale of an inland sea, volcanic eruptions, earth quakes and a melting glacier that had been more than one kilometre thick.

### A timeline...

410 million years ago: tropical Rockwood

Rockwood was in the tropics. The days were only 20 hours long, because the world was spinning faster than today.

Rockwood and most of southern Ontario was covered by a tropical inland sea. Rockwood was located in a shallow part of the sea where there was a thriving coral reef. The coral grew in pinnacles to the top of the water because it needed sunlight. It would die back when the water level fell.

Mollusks, such as snails and clams, lived in among the coral. They are now extinct, but are ancient relatives of today's edible shellfish. Over millions of years, their shells piled up eventually becoming limestone cliffs that are up to 36 metres tall.

60 million years ago and more: continents collide

Gradually, the super continent Pangaea began to break apart. A piece of Pangaea, called Laurussia, began to drift north.

During this change, the earth moved, volcanoes erupted and the landscape transformed.

The climate changed completely and became very cold.

11,000 to 16,000 years ago:  
The Ice Age and the Wisconsin Glacier

This was the peak of the Ice Age in the area. Instead of being covered by a tropical sea, Rockwood was covered by the Wisconsin glacier that was a kilometre thick.

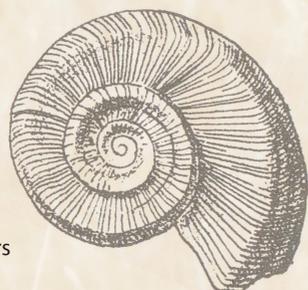
As it grew, the great glacier worked like a bulldozer, smashing everything in its way. The glacier was so large, it went from the Rocky Mountains to Newfoundland.

10,000 years ago: the modern climate begins

Finally free of its heavy load of ice the earth's crust began to rebound.

This left bald limestone and water at Rockwood, as well as interesting rock formations that are visible today.

First lichens appeared on the land and algae on the water. Together, they formed the first moss. Then ferns evolved, followed by grasses, wild flowers, shrubs and eventually soft wood.



Rockwood's caves were formed as the Wisconsin glacier melted. The power of the fast-moving meltwater streamed down from the glacier, wearing away softer stone and creating cracks. These cracks turned into tunnels and then over time, became caves.

The potholes were created during the retreat of the glacier. Pieces of stone — mostly hard granite from the Canadian Shield had been carried along by the glacier. They got caught up in fast-moving meltwater. They swirled in the whirlpools, ground away the softer limestone, and eventually left large round potholes in the rocks.



Zebra Rock is the equivalent of two million years of aquatic life build up. The black streaks in the rock are due to chemical weathering—carbon attaching to the limestone formation.

## Rocks and woods make great habitat

Rockwood's biodiversity is uniquely intertwined with the local geology. The plant communities and species on the property were inventoried intensively in the late 1960's and early '70s as part of the International Biological Program. Recently, over 300 plant and animal species were found during a 24-hour inventory. Much of Rockwood is designated as Provincially Significant by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.



### Walking fern

This fern is rare and very unique. The leaves are very long with a pointed end. They grow on top of limestone in moss. When the leaf tip touches moist ground, a new fern can grow; so the fern can seem to "walk" across the ground.



### Ancient cedar trees

Cedar trees grow all along the banks of the Eramosa River, including through Rockwood Conservation Area. Some cedars that cling to the limestone cliffs are as old as 500 years. Some are very small due to the shallow, nutrient-poor soil. Trunks of older trees on cliff faces have a signature J-shape.



Photo: Charles Warren at life.nbil.gov

### Mink

Mink are dark-colored, semi-aquatic meat-eating mammals. A mink's rich, glossy coat is brown and looks silky. Mink stoles were prized possessions during the 1960's. Mink stay in their territory and seldom stray far from the water's edge. Unless it is to look for their favourite food, which is rabbit.



Bat photo: Ralph Eldridge

### Belted kingfisher

This attractive blue and white bird can usually be seen perched on a riverbank scanning the water for fish. It will plunge head first into the water. The kingfisher's call is loud and sounds like a rattle. Great blue herons are also commonly seen by the water in the park and occasionally the smaller green heron.



### Little brown bat

Stick around beyond sunset and you will likely see bats flying about. Known to love caves, little brown bats have dark brown fur across the back. They are found throughout Ontario. They can live to a ripe, old age. One banded in Ontario holds the record for longevity at 31 years old.

### Protect bats, stay out of caves

As recommended by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, please do not enter caves without a guide. This will prevent the possible transmission of white nose syndrome, a bat disease that is linked to the death of bats in the United States that is spreading to Ontario. There is no known human health risk associated with this disease. People transmit it by moving from cave to cave.

# Harris & Co.

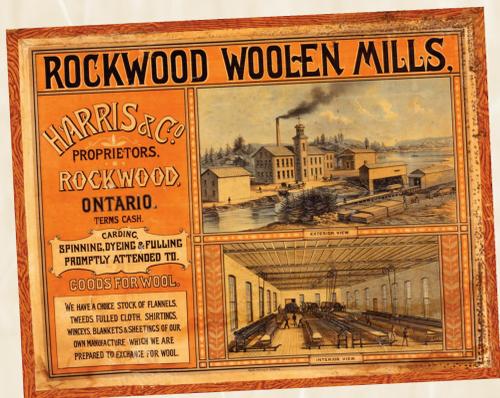
# Rockwood Woolen Mills



## Built on a solid family reputation

Three sons of pioneer John Harris – John Richard, Thomas and Joseph – and their brother-in-law Thomas Wetherald started the Rockwood Woolen Mills in 1867, the year of Confederation – a date that can still be seen carved into a square of limestone at the top of the ruins.

A large format poster advertisement created for the mill by Rolph, Smith and Co. of Toronto, fine lithographers and printers (1849-1904). The original measures over 2 feet wide.



Business flourished and the Harris family's good reputation was solid. The firm advertised in numerous local publications from Guelph to Milton to Georgetown – not only for their goods for sale, but requesting shepherds to bring their wool to the Harris factory and in turn buy reasonable goods from

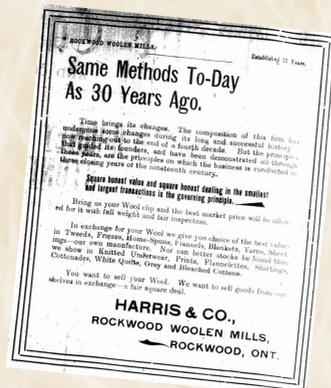
their shelves – blankets, tweeds, knitted underwear, flannelettes, bleached cottons, yarns, shirtings and sheetings. The owners stressed "full weight and fair inspection," encouraging locals to get an honest deal at their office.

## Powered by the Eramosa River



▲ The mill and mill pond in the 1890s, shortly after the factory was rebuilt of stone.

Over the decades the mill was powered by the water of the Eramosa River, steam and hydro. When business was thriving the Harris' added several new areas to the building which produced a rather rambling development. The mill was damaged by a major fire in the early 1880s. In 1884 the mill was replaced by the present stone structure.



▲ An advertisement for Harris & Co. Rockwood Woolen Mills, as seen in *The Canadian Champion* (Milton), 1899.

## The mill closes its doors

John Richard Harris died in 1899 and his sons took over the business. Between 1915 and 1918 Harris & Co. Ltd. secured vast orders for Canadian army blankets, and for a time the mill operated 24 hours per day. Due to increasing competition from other mills in Ontario, the Rockwood Woolen Mills closed its doors circa 1925.

## From mill to conservation area

After the closure of the mill, William Harris, son of John Richard, and his son Edgar, decided to use the stunning surrounding landscape for a private park named Hi-Pot-Lo Park to which they charged admission. Numerous people visited the area for its quaint and rugged scenery, including author Lucy Maud Montgomery.

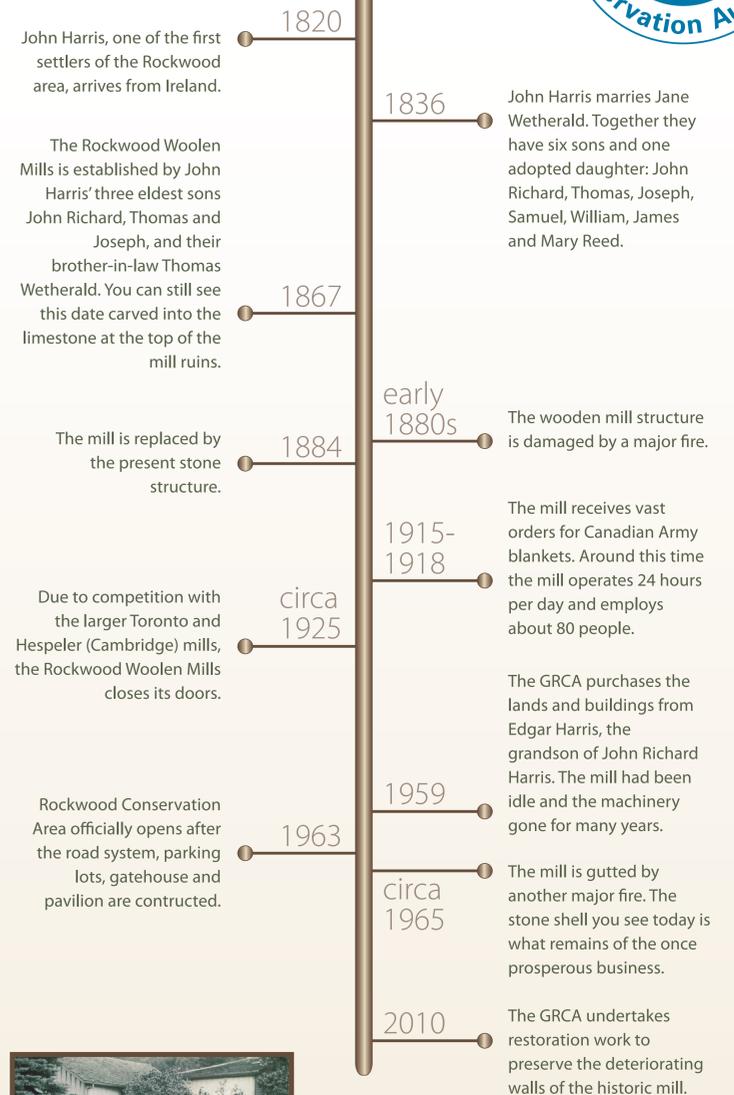
The GRCA acquired the mill and 79 hectares of land from Edgar Harris in 1959. Soon after, the development of the land began to form the Rockwood Conservation Area. The official opening of the park followed in 1963 with the layout of the road system, parking lots and the construction of the gatehouse and pavilion. In the late 1960s the beach area, picnic areas and campsites were developed.

Today, over 75,000 patrons visit every year to enjoy the geological wonders of the park and visit the historic and beautiful mill ruins.

## Inspiration for a Group of Seven artist

The small frame houses on Valley Road in Rockwood were originally constructed for workers, but at 24 by 16 feet in size, they couldn't have offered a very comfortable family lifestyle. They were, however, immortalized in a painting by A.J. Casson of the Group of Seven in 1928 entitled *Mill Houses*. In 1995, the painting was used on a specialty 43-cent Canadian collector stamp.

## A timeline...



▲ Andrew McAlear (back - right), an employee of the Rockwood Woolen Mills. Also pictured (back row) are his mother, Ann Murray, and wife Elizabeth (nee Bachman), and their children (front), standing along the river behind their house in Rockwood. Circa 1911.

## An employee of the mill

In the early 1900s Andrew McAlear (1873-1969) left Stormont County, Ontario for Rockwood where he was employed at the Harris and Co. Rockwood Woolen Mills. According to the 1911 census, Andrew made a salary of \$940 a year working at the mill. He was a weaver - and had worked previously as one at a large woolen mill in the Town of Cornwall. By 1939, Andrew had moved his family to Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. He may have moved there to work at the town's woolen mill when the mill in Rockwood closed its doors.

Andrew McAlear family history and photo (above) courtesy of Michael Harrison. Used with permission.



Rockwood Woolen Mills circa 1900. The immensely tall chimney at the mill that belched out smoke could be spotted from any location around the village.

## A pioneer of Rockwood - John Harris (1789-1857)

John Harris was one of three Irish Quakers who arrived in present-day Rockwood in 1820, one year after the very first settlers. John settled in what is now downtown Rockwood and erected his first log shanty. A few years later his half-sisters arrived to start the first school, but attendance was a scant six pupils who could only attend in summer because winter snows made the journey impossible.

The pioneers were very self-sufficient and capable of performing numerous occupations. John, a former seaman and captain, could fashion leather shoes, clear land and farm, teach school and bake large batches of bread. He also sewed the coats and trousers of other bachelors. John and other local forefathers cleared what is now Highway 7 and other roads.

## Thank you

A special thank-you to Deb Quaille who graciously provided much of the historical information that appears on this panel including the history of the Rockwood Woolen Mills and of pioneer John Harris.

When John (far left) married Jane Wetherald in 1836, he gave away three acres of land and timber for the construction of a Religious Society of Friends Meeting House (Quaker church) and cemetery - an exciting step forward for the Rockwood community. The Friends first erected a log shanty in 1838-39 and later a clapboard-sided building in 1844. Photo circa 1850.

