

Limelight

Newsletter of the Kingston Historical Society

Kingston Ontario Canada

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2018-19 KHS Executive Council

Graeme Watson: Murney Tower; Peter Gower: Web Master; Don Richardson: Secretary; Marc Shaw: Program Chair; Peter Ginn: Treasurer; Tabitha Renaud: Councillor; Warren Everett: President; Paul Van Nest: Membership Chair; Marcus Létourneau: Past President; Betty Andrews: Limelight Editor; Anne Richardson: JAM Dinner Chair; Alan MacLachlan: June 6 Commemoration Service Chair. Absent: Joe Brites: Awards Committee Chair; Duncan McDowall: Councillor

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COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

KHS Meeting

Wednesday, March 21, 2018 7:30 pm

Seniors Centre 56 Francis Street

Rick Neilson: The Story of Joseph George

The Kingston Branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society will meet Saturday, March 17, 9:45 a.m. sharp at Kingston Seniors Centre, 56 Francis St. Dr. Bruce Elliott from Ottawa will speak on "Irish Settlement of the Ottawa Valley". Visitors welcome. Further info at www.kingston.ogs.on.ca

Your invitation to the Annual Banquet of Kingston and District Branch, United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada

Wednesday, May 30th, 6:00 for 6:30 pm at Minos Village Restaurant in Kingston, 2762 Princess Street.

Author and historian Jennifer DeBruin will speak on ***The History of Slavery along the St. Lawrence River***

Choice among three entrees \$45 per person Door prizes Period attire optional

<http://www.uelac.org/Kingston-Branch/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2018-banquet-flyer.pdf>

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Please forward submissions to the Editor Betty Andrews. betty.andrews@gmail.com

Reprinting of articles from the Limelight must be accompanied by an acknowledgement of the Society, the issue and date. All photo credits and by-lines must be retained.

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Warren Everett



The Kingston Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport.



"Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more". The words of Henry V would seem appropriate on this occasion. Or, as was said 18 years ago "a meteoric rise from obscurity"! On a serious note, I am honoured to have been asked to take on the role of Presi-

dent. The strength of the Society has always been the dedicated volunteers on the council, committees and projects, and indeed all the society members over the years that have supported this very valuable community resource. In that regard, I would like to thank Marcus and his team for the very fine job they have done over the past year. Their good efforts and wise council will be missed. For Marcus and those leaving council, my very best wishes, but don't go too far, we still need your support!

We face new and old challenges in the coming year. Sustainability is an old enemy! When asked to write this message, I looked back to my first President's message in February 2000. It ended with these words: *"Finally, maintaining an active and enthusiastic membership will continue to be a challenge"*. The Sir John A dinner, strategic planning and publicity are but a few of our tasks ahead.

Involvement is necessary for a healthy Society; full and active participation by the general membership is the key to success. In this regard, I encourage all of you to write to me with your thoughts and suggestions for the future of the KHS. I cannot guarantee that all suggestions will be actioned, but having a good understanding of what the membership sees as important is extremely helpful in moving the Society ahead.

In closing, thank you for your confidence in me. I look forward to the coming year and its challenges. With the support of the council and all the members of the KHS, I'm sure it will be a rewarding time for all of us.

warreneverett7@gmail.com

KHS MEETINGS take place at 7:30 pm on the third Wednesday of the month, September to May, except in December, when the meeting takes the form of an awards ceremony and gala, and is held at a different time and location. Until further notice, meetings will be at the Seniors Centre, 56 Francis Street. At regular meetings refreshments are available; a small donation is appreciated. Two annual events are held celebrating Canada's First Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald (1815—1891): a formal dinner on the Saturday closest to January 11th honouring his birth, and a service on June 6th at the Cataraqui Cemetery National Historic Site commemorating his death.

NEW MEMBERS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME!

Membership includes an invitation to attend monthly meetings; nine issues of *Limelight*, delivered electronically or in hardcopy; and a copy of *Historic Kingston*, the KHS annual journal containing the substance of the papers delivered at the monthly meetings. Membership also includes free admission to the Murney Tower, Kingston's oldest museum; and a discount at some of our sponsors' places of business. Sponsors receive monthly advertising in *Limelight* and, it is hoped, the patronage of KHS members. *If you are interested in the advantages of being a sponsor, please speak to the president or to the membership chair.*

MEMBERSHIP RATES		\$300 Sponsor
\$50 Individual		\$60 Family
\$60 Institutional		\$25 Student

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HOMESTEAD

CANYON LOGICS



February is Black History Month, and so it was fitting that on February 21st, we welcomed Jean Rae Baxter to speak to the Society on “Black Loyalists”. Her presentation started with the beginnings of the slave trade and the barbaric transmission of slaves taken from West Africa to the Thirteen Colonies. Her story then progressed to the daily life of the slaves in forced labour in the years leading up to the American Revolution. Following the Revolutionary War, the Loyalist slave owners made their way to Britain or to British colonies. Among them were The Reverend John Stuart and Molly Brant who ended up with their slaves in Kingston. Slavery was not abolished in British North America until 1834.

Aided by numerous maps and illustrations, Ms Baxter brought this complex and fascinating story to life.



Jean Rae Baxter

Murney Tower Operated by the Kingston Historical Society



Brent Schneider and Mary Agnes Kennedy

In 2017 we marked the Tower's 171st birthday with a lively celebration of the museum and the history we display. For the event cupcakes and soft drinks were provided and guests were entertained with the music of Fiddle Earth, who serenaded children and adults alike with period-appropriate music. The Tower was decorated inside and out and free guided tours were offered to entice visitors, ultimately drawing in 148 guests and \$471.00 over the course of the day. We were thrilled by the outcome as Kingstonians and visitors from afar were informed about a segment of the city's history.



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Heritage Grant Funds Presentation in January 2018 with Murney Tower representatives Graeme Watson and Danielle Marshall

The City of Kingston Heritage Fund and the Murney Tower Museum

In 2010, the City of Kingston published the Kingston Cultural Plan. The plan has 60 recommendations for building a strong and vibrant cultural sector. In 2013, the City of Kingston Heritage Fund was established in response to the Cultural Plan. The Heritage Fund is designed to support groups and organizations who focus on cultural heritage.

Murney Tower Museum has utilized the Heritage Grant Funds for a variety of projects and upgrades to the Tower. In the last two years the Tower has been able to implement major upgrades including an iPad to facilitate credit card payments allowing more guests to visit the Tower. Another exciting project made possible by the funds was the commissioning of a Tower Portrait: a cutaway of Murney Tower painted by artist Don Connolly. The Heritage Fund has also allowed the Tower to add a security system. This security system helps ensure the integrity of the artefacts. The cameras allow the staff to monitor other floors and ensure the safety of the artefacts in the off hours.

With monies from the 2017 grant the Tower was able to hire a curator. The Curator has started on an exhibition overhaul, a collections inventory and writing and researching for further funding to ensure the Tower can be sustainable.

The Murney Tower Museum has benefitted greatly from the City of Kingston Heritage Fund. The Fund has allowed the Murney Tower Museum committee to ensure that the artefacts in the museum's collections are cared for to museum standards.

Some Community Events

Eva Barnes presented a lecture on February 14, 2018, to the Kingston Handloom Weavers and Spinners Guild. She spoke on appropriate and authentically-styled historical clothing choices for people participating in heritage events in the Kingston area. Alison Ginn models the interpreter's outfit she created last summer.



Jack Barnes studies an historical painting of Kent Monkman, the acclaimed Cree artist who depicts First Nations and Indigenous history from a controversial visual perspective. An extensive display of his work is on exhibit at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's until April 8th.



On Sunday afternoon, March 11th, Agnes Society volunteers invite friends of the gallery to attend a live chamber music performance inside the historic Etherington House residence adjacent to the gallery, followed by tea and refreshment, and a curated tour of highlighted art. The Monkman exhibit will still be on display at that time for visitors to see. This congenial and inviting Sunday afternoon public event for prospective members is free.

Little did I know that my life was about to change on June 27, 1998. The Brockville Infantry Company (1862) re-enactors, of which I was a founding member, had set up an encampment at the Brockville Museum. There was a large marquee tent with seating for 100, live Irish music, and food prepared by the Company.

One of the men suggested that the Minister of Militia should come and review the troops and that I should portray John A. Macdonald, Premier of Canada West and Minister of Militia in 1862.

I found a top hat and a swallow-tail coat and created a rough 1860's look, then prepared a speech to be given at the supper. My wife Renee accompanied me in her 1860's hooped dress and we arrived at Hardy Park in a large freight canoe and proceeded over to the Museum. Floyd Patterson from CKWS television in Kingston interviewed "John A." and ended with the prescient remark that I might have a long future portraying Macdonald.

Having just retired after thirty-two years of teaching elementary school in Brockville, I saw an opportunity to go back into schools to do first-person history. I began to read everything I could find pertaining to Macdonald and his times, what events were happening in his lifetime, who did he know, who were his colleagues, his opponents, his family and his friends. Historic Kingston was an invaluable resource.

I culled all my readings for useable quotes by and about John A. and wrote first-person speeches, so people would hear some of his language and his jokes, which allowed me to play on his sense of humour and his conviviality.

Renee was willing to move with me into the 1880s. "Sir John A. and Lady Agnes Macdonald" could travel together, which added a whole new dimension to the presentations. By studying 19th century photographs we began to build up some costumes, paying attention to detail, in order to create an accurate look of the times.

On February 24, 1999, at the Brockville Museum, was my first presentation. In the years since, we have been all over Ontario, going places and attending events we would never have attended otherwise. It has been a busy, exciting time meeting new people, visiting new places, and helping to keep alive the memory of our first Prime Minister and his second wife Agnes Bernard.

Canada 150 celebrations in 2017 proved to be an exceptionally busy year for Renee and me as we portrayed Sir John A. and Lady Agnes Macdonald at twenty-nine historical events around the province, and there were six more events I attended on my own.

Historical Societies and other historically-minded groups wanted to celebrate our history and our accomplishments since Confederation.

Everywhere we went "Sir John and Lady Agnes" received a very warm welcome. From the Victorian Ball at Fanshawe Pioneer Village in London to the historic village of Queensborough north of Belleville, and the O'Hara Mill Homestead at Madoc, the Wolfe Island Historical Society, the National Trust Conference in Ottawa, the Presqu'ile Yacht Club, Cobourg Historical Society, Napanee Museum, Kemptville Presbyterian Church, Bellevue House and two huge parades in Bath and Brockville, hundreds of proud Canadians were eager to celebrate and wave the maple leaf flag. The "John A. speeches" went over well, corny jokes and all.

John A. Macdonald played a critically important role in the formation and consolidation of the Dominion of Canada, now one of the oldest democracies in the world along with the U.K. and the U.S.A.

Macdonald had the people skills and the political skills essential in leading the formation of this huge new transcontinental nation, next door to an assertive neighbor ten times our size harbouring strong annexation sentiments.

Over forty-seven years in Parliament, his leadership showed the necessary vision, courage, determination and perseverance to set this new nation on the firm foundation of a British Parliamentary system of government based on the rule of law with a strong independent judiciary.

I would agree with author Richard Gwyn that, “no Macdonald, no Canada,” as we know it today. He was the right man, in the right place, at the right time, for Canada.

2018 will be our twentieth year “on the road with Sir John A.” as I like to say. Over all these years, at more than three hundred and fifty events, the audiences have been quite varied. Interest is there, but knowledge is lacking. The story of Sir John A. Macdonald and his importance is not well known, and Lady Macdonald, later Baroness Macdonald of Earnslcliffe, even less so.

Macdonald is being forgotten in this country as historical amnesia continues to spread. So Renee and I continue to look forward to more historical presentations, helping to keep the story alive. We still have miles to go, as we “hand down his name in history and song.”

This five- year old immigrant boy from Glasgow, Scotland, who arrived in Kingston in 1820 and led the formation of a new northern nation in 1867, needs to be commemorated for his great accomplishments. He skillfully maneuvered between the world’s two pre-eminent powers of Great Britain and the United States in the creation of Canada, beginning with only three-and-a-half million people in four scattered provinces.

Today, thirty-five million Canadian citizens share a peaceful, prosperous, democratic society, still welcoming people from around the world.



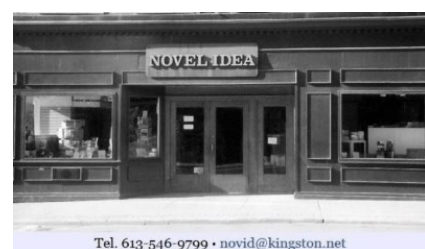
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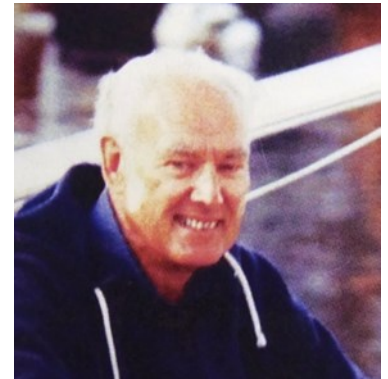
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Kaleidoscopic might be the word to describe George Muirhead's life. Toronto-born, served with the Royal Canadian Artillery during World War II, Audrey and George marrying at a military base in New Brunswick in 1943 and heading for their 75th anniversary when George died at age 102. His career was launched as a professional planner at consultants Dryden and Smith in Kitchener, continued as Director of Planning in Etobicoke, and as Kingston's Director of Planning and Urban Renewal. His grounding at Trinity College, and at the School of Social Work in the University of Toronto's Town and Regional Planning Course were signs of George's broadened concept of municipal planning – more than maps and graphs, it was adopting policies that enhanced the quality of life of a community by respecting its founding story and preserving its building heritage while getting rid of blight, upgrading the street plan and beautifying neighbourhoods. Mr. Muirhead was a visionary. He and consultant professor Gordon Stephenson provided the leadership to a committee set up by former Mayor George Clark Wright to list the pockets of substandard housing from Rideau Heights to the city core. After two-and-a-half years the survey had become A Planning Study of Kingston, Ontario. It explained the historical background of Kingston, from French fur-trading post to a Loyalist settlement in the 1780s, a British military centre in Upper Canada, and a transshipment centre with a railroad shunting past a majestic city hall in a City of 50,000 in the 1960s. The professional insight stoked a populist interest in fixing run-down building stock, or promoting limited private land transfers to get the space redeveloped. The study, in effect, rescued Kingston from further aimless poor planning and re-established it as a thriving historic anchor of Eastern Ontario. A parallel citizen's heritage preservation movement emphasized the need for strong regulations that would halt the destruction of historic limestone houses and public buildings. With Muirhead's guidance, Mayor Valerie Swain and heritage advocate Margaret Angus wrote The Kingston Act, and asked the province to pass it into legislation to give Kingston City Council the legal power to disallow demolition of historic buildings. The Act wasn't enacted but the province used its ideas to create the Ontario Heritage Act proclaimed in 1975 to protect heritage sites throughout Ontario. Professor David Gordon, Director of Urban and Regional Planning at Queen's University, at Muirhead's 100th birthday party told the gathering Mr. Muirhead " ...opted for careful reconstruction and rehabilitation of neighbourhoods, rather than the destruction of entire communities." Further, Gordon recalled "Muirhead and Stephenson recommended that the municipal building be restored, the adjacent railway yard be replaced with a park, the abandoned waterfront become a marina, and the parking lot be transformed into a permanent market square." In 2005 George Muirhead was awarded the Gabrielle Leger Medal Lifetime Achievement Award. Its citation said in part "A pioneer in heritage conservation, Mr. Muirhead has inspired municipal and provincial governments, heritage organizations, businesses and citizens to recognize and appreciate the importance of their historic building stock. He also spearheaded the revitalization of Kingston's downtown, which involved the restoration of several prominent 19th century commercial buildings ..." In support of the award, former Mayor Helen Cooper said "George has always recognized the critical importance of Kingston's architecture not only for its intrinsic aesthetic value, but also as an incalculable economic resource ". Former Mayor George M. Speal, Q.C. remarked that George Muirhead awakened in all of us a sense of pride in, and responsibility toward, our historic buildings." Dr. Gordon of Queen's said a monument or a plaque might be used to commemorate Mr. Muirhead's contribution, " ...or you could use a Latin saying, "If you seek his monument, look around you."



KHS Annual Meeting February 21, 2018



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JAMES LAXER

by Alan MacLachlan and Brian Osborne

Our guest speaker for the 6 June Commemoration Service on the death of Sir John A. Macdonald was to have been James Laxer. Unfortunately, Dr. Laxer died suddenly on Friday, February 23, 2018.

At the time of his death, Dr. Laxer was researching the third book of his trilogy on the relationships of Canada, the United States and Great Britain. The first in the series was *Tecumseh and Brock: The War of 1812* which was followed by *Staking Claims to a Continent: John A. Macdonald, Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis and the Making of North America*. His current volume was to have been, *Choosing War Against Hitler: How Mackenzie King Steered Canada Between Churchill and Roosevelt*. This was the historical context in which Dr. Laxer was positioning his 6 June address to the Society. Originally considering the title, “John A. as the Master Craftsman of Confederation”, after much pondering, he settled on “Sir John A. Macdonald: Old Tomorrow”.

According to his son Michael, James Laxer came by his socialist and left wing views “having grown up in a Communist household”, a background he wrote about in his award-winning memoir, *Red Diaper Baby*. He studied History at Queen’s University where he received his M.A. in 1968 under the supervision of Professor F.W. Gibson. Later, in 1970-71, Laxer was a Visiting Lecturer at Queen’s where, some may remember, he was active in a protest against the Ottawa developer, William Teron, and his “Marina City” on Kingston’s waterfront. Originally a member of the NDP party, Laxer was a founding member of the “Waffle Group” and, when it was forced out of the NDP in the early 1970s, he ran unsuccessfully as a Waffle candidate in the federal election of 1974. With the eventual disbanding of the Waffle party, Laxer turned to teaching at York University where he was a Professor of Political Science in the Department of Equity Studies. He was the award-winning author of twenty-five books, and a journalist.

On looking back on this full life, Michael Laxer made the final assessment of his father, the scholar and the man: “Not one to shy away from what he believed, he provides a lesson to all of us on the left of how to stand up for what we think is right no matter the short-term cost and irrespective of careerist goals.” James Laxer will be missed. The Kingston Historical Society extends our most sincere condolences to the Laxer family.