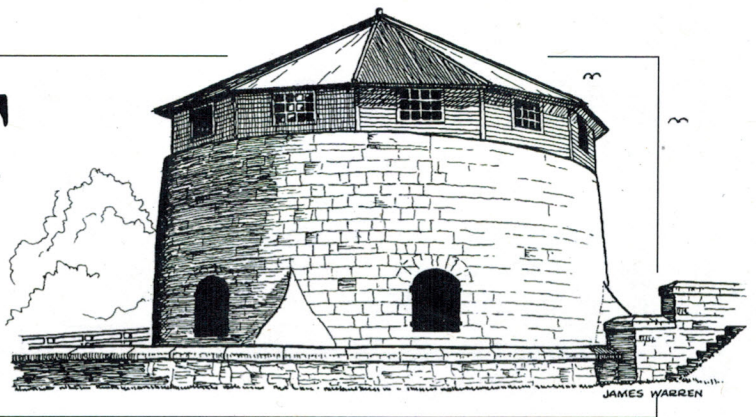


LIMELIGHT

Newsletter of the
Kingston Historical Society

vol 9 no 9 December 2007 ISSN 1488-5565



A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Kingston is one of Canada's pre-eminent heritage cities. Its early chequered history is conveyed through a variety of means. The mere presence of early limestone buildings and military structures are a dramatic manifestation of this aspect. A plethora of historical plaques, erected throughout the city, describing and explaining the significant phases and individuals in Kingston's history contributes to the city's heritage character.

Unbeknownst to many, Kingston occupies a commanding position among heritage cities in the widely employed practice of creating a sense of history through historical re-enactments. As such, re-enactments do not furnish historical explanations. What they do very well is to engender a vivid context in which individuals can vicariously experience past events and practices through actors attired in period costume acting out scenes in a manner faithful to the original events.

In Kingston, 19th century British military manoeuvres, drills, and barrack life are demonstrated at Fort Henry each summer. Individuals dressed in period attire create impressions of 19th century life in Kingston at the MacLachlan Woodworking Museum, Murney

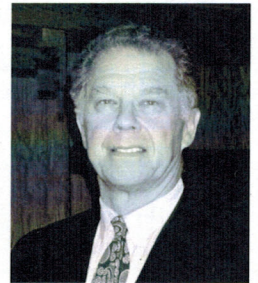
Tower, and Bellevue House.

The most distinctive and most difficult re-enactment (equipment and bodily risks) is a sport re-enactment. Kingston hosts the longest sustained annual sport re-enactment (38 years) in North America. This is the Historic Hockey game organized on Kingston Harbour's natural ice. This event commemorates the first hockey game played in Kingston between Queen's University and Royal Military College in 1886.

Doubtless, re-enactments tend to over-emphasize the entertainment factor rather than convey historical knowledge. However, re-enactments do spark an interest and curiosity in history where none had previously existed. Kingston, through its heritage organizations, has contributed immeasurably to this mode of historical understanding.

To all those Santa Claus re-enactors I wish you the very best of the season. To our Society members I would like to take this opportunity to wish all of you a Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Edward R. Grenda



THIS MONTH'S MEETING

Thursday, 6 DECEMBER, 6:00PM

Annual Christmas Party

Fort Frontenac Officers' Mess

see details on Page 6

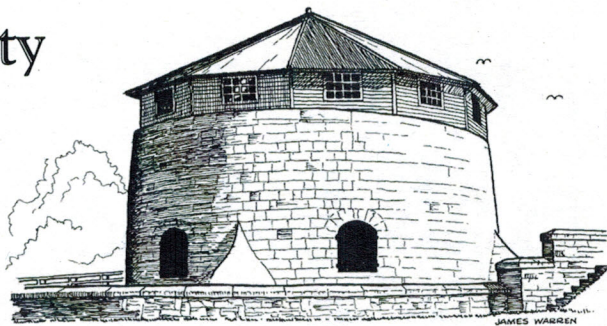
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The Kingston Historical Society

established 1893

Limelight is published nine times a year - September to May. Submissions should be addressed to the Editor, John Fielding at 613-545-5944 or john.fielding3@sympatico.ca. *Limelight* is designed by Versus Business Forms (613-353-7667 or versus@kingston.net) The Kingston Historical Society (KHS) gratefully acknowledges the support of our sponsors in the production of *Limelight*.



Murney Tower by James Warren

KHS holds monthly talks or events, usually at 7:30 pm on the third Wednesday of the month, September to May, usually in the Wilson Room of the Kingston Public Library on Johnson Street at Bagot Street. Special annual events include a dinner and talk honouring the birthday of Sir John A. Macdonald in January and a ceremony marking his death in June.

New members are welcome! Membership rates are \$40 individual, \$50 family, \$50 institutional or \$25 student. Memberships include *Historic Kingston*, published annually by The Kingston Historical Society.

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www.kingstonhistoricalsociety.ca

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THE PARK WITH A GATE

GRENVILLE'S BEGINNINGS:

The 52-lot subdivision built on the 67-acre Mouldey farm "way out in Kingston Township" after WWII-contained its own water tower, sewage system, and 22 acres of parkland, with tennis court, ball field, skating rink and a co-op grocery store. The Grenville Park Co-operative Housing Association chose each share-holding member by ballot and this novel community and exclusivity provoked the rather harsh retorts of "Commies" and "Snobs." Rather, the founders, the Epplet, Estall, Hay, Kropp, Lash and Lee families, just wanted to combine their time and talents to create a different community with spacious 85 x 165 foot lots and convenient facilities surrounded by nature's greenery in housing-short Kingston. Today, ungated and welcoming, with a public park off Phillip Street, the subdivision stands as an exemplary success story.

THE PARK WITH A GATE

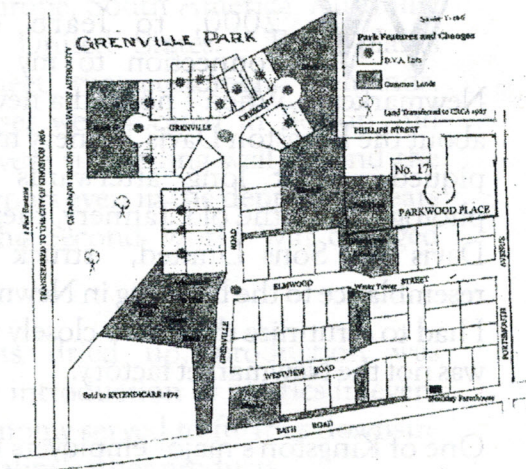
by J.W. (Bill) Fittsell

"When you come to a fork in the road, take it!" the incomparable Yogi Berra advised. I did! Sometimes selecting the wrong path opens up interesting vistas and vignettes. Such was the case when I stated in the October newsletter that the late Joan Finnigan MacKenzie had been a resident of Grenville Park.

That miscue earned me a tour of a unique co-operative housing development (see introduction, bottom of page 2) and introduced a local history lesson through a 90-page book published four years ago by KHS: *To Build a Good Neighbourhood, Grenville Park - the First Fifty Years*. Both were propelled by the poignant words from one of author Finnigan's Kingston poems, that began:

Martha with her long hair tied back this morning /
goes through the gate that Tommy gave us...

The well-documented Grenville history, written by Phyllida Kent and edited by KHS past president Brian Osborne, confirmed what guide Peter Ginn pointed out on a special tour: There are only four streets in the L-shaped "Park," (Elmwood, Westview and Grenville Road and Crescent) and author Finnigan lived 40 years ago on Parkway Place, off Phillip Street, on the edge of Grenville Park. On a glorious fall day Peter, a fellow KHS member, who exudes "pride-of-place" of Grenvillians, led me through the beautifully treed subdivision to an attractive arbour gateway behind an adjoining residence on Parkway.

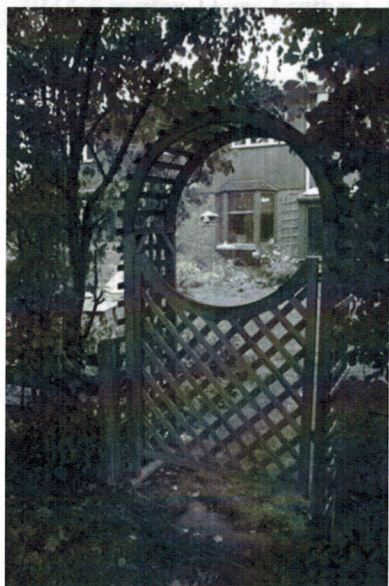


I had wrongly based the Finnigan residency claims on a segment of the 1970s poem, when the Finnigan-MacKenzies lived at No.17 Parkway, bordering the L-shaped Grenville plot." Entitled *Tommy's Gate*, and published in *Living Together* by Fiddlehead Press, the poem expressed a single mother's anguish over the departure of her children.

All my children have gone through his gate /
crossing Grenville Park on the way to the world.

Her last child to pass through the wrought iron gate, given as "a house-warming present here on the park," was Martha MacKenzie, who used the nearby green spot as a shortcut on the way to her final year at Loyalist Collegiate Institute. This rite of passage through the gate perplexed the budding author who had lost her husband unexpectedly seven years before.

What shall I do when it doesn't swing back and forth /
On school-hours any more, Find some neighbour's children. /
Find some grandchildren? Find some mythical children? /
Or do what so many do when they come to these /
frightening narrows. MOVE from the house with the gate.



Photograph by Peter Ginn

Joan Finnigan moved from Kingston, northward to Hambly Lake, near Hartington, which became a summer home. She eventually relocated to the Ottawa area and in the years before her death spent winters with the subject of her poem, daughter Martha MacKenzie Vezina. Martha, her brothers Jonathon and Roderick and their seven children, after recovering from two grievous family occurrences recently, will hold a memorial service for their illustrious poet/mother and grandmother in Kingston in the New Year.

KINGSTON AND NEWMARKET: The Leather Connection

By Barbara Fear

Photographs by Jennifer McKendry

What a surprise it was for me, following my move to Kingston in 2000, to learn of its close connection to my hometown of Newmarket. When I noticed a newspaper article about the Kingston Davis Tannery my curiosity was piqued. Not long afterwards a newspaper photograph of the old Tannery, then known as A. Davis and Sons Limited, struck my eye by its resemblance to the building in Newmarket. In fact, I had to scrutinize the photo closely to make sure it was not the Newmarket factory.

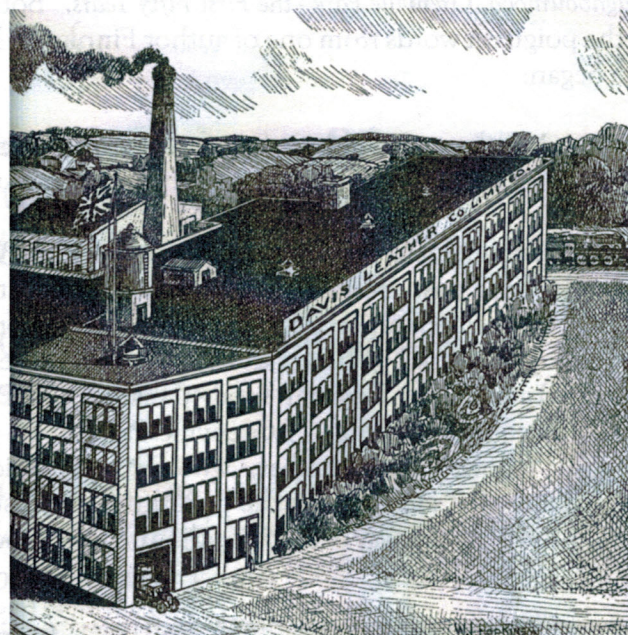
One of Kingston's major employers from 1904 had been the Davis Leather Company, and I knew there just had to be a connection. And there was.

With information from the Newmarket Historical Society, of which I am a member, and other sources, I was able to learn about the two companies and their industrial relationship from the early days of the 20th Century.

Even though I had lived in Newmarket for thirty-five years, and the Davis Leather Company (known as The Tannery) was a very visible member of the community, I was unaware of a "branch" plant in Kingston. Actually, it was not a "branch" since it was purchased in 1903 by Andrew Davis prior to the opening of the Newmarket factory. His son, E. J. Senior, became a partner in the undertaking. E.J. (as he was always known) then charged his two sons, Elmer and Harold, with the management of the business. Elmer became Vice-President and Managing Director until 1959, when he died and Harold assumed his responsibilities.

The Newmarket factory was not fully operational until January of 1905, when it moved from Kinghorn north of Toronto following two devastating fires. In fact, the community of Kinghorn was wiped off the map of York County. At the time, the town was in need of employment for its citizens and the town council attracted the Davies by offering them generous financial support and a location adjacent to the Holland River and the railway station. Water both for the tanning process and as fire protection was mandatory, and the railway line was a transportation necessity.

The plant hired eighty men and since many of those employed in Kinghorn moved to Newmarket, a housing shortage resulted. Rents increased from \$2.50 and \$3.00 per month to more than \$7.00. It was a difficult time.



1934 Newmarket Davis Leather Co.



1934 Kingston Davis Leather Co.

The Kingston operation was able to proceed with production quickly since the building already existed. Eventually its production of quality cowhide, in which it specialized, was deemed some of the world's finest. In Newmarket, production of their fine calf leather, its specialty, matched that of the Kingston factory. The reputation of both companies spread world wide with markets in Great Britain, Europe, South America, Australia, China and the United States. Both plants expanded to meet the customers' demands. Branch warehouses were located in Boston and Quebec. They were succeeding well beyond the hopes of their owners even in the depression years of the 1930's. The Second World War changed everything.

Overseas markets dried up, production was reduced, and the introduction of plastics in every aspect of the economy served to further downsize the market for quality leather products.

By 1945, the Davis brothers decided to retire from the company's management. Their expertise and near-obsessive control were part of the secret of their success and when the company was sold to

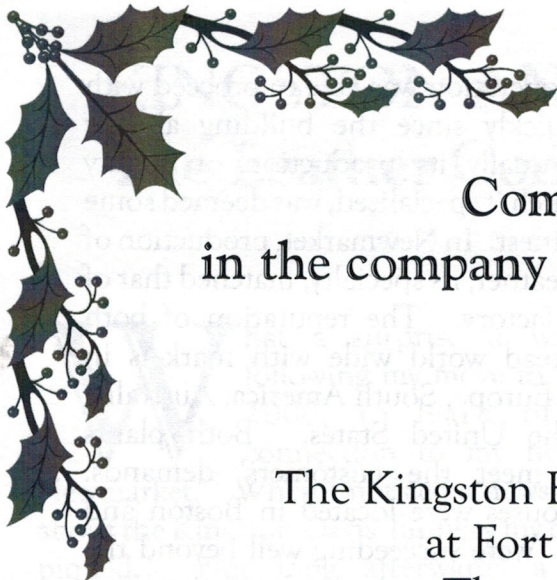
outside interests with little knowledge of the leather business, its demise was inevitable. The operation closed in 1962, a major economic blow to the town of Newmarket.

The Kingston factory was closed in the late Sixties and later demolished but the property remained in the hands of Harold Davis until 1984 when the family abandoned the site and stopped paying taxes on it. Attempts had been made by the family to clean up the property which was well polluted with toxic chemicals. By 2003, the outstanding taxes amounted to \$2.5 million, a sad end to a once great success story.

However, there are plans afoot by a Kingston developer to clean up the 'brownfields' and build affordable housing and a number of condominiums on the riverside site bordered by the Cataraqui River and Rideau Street.

The Newmarket plant fared slightly better, although it stood empty for twenty-five years until it was converted into a retail shopping centre in 1985 by a developer. It was completely redesigned and renovated to the tune of \$6 million. The GO Station relocated its ticket office there after the closing of the local CNR station. Since then, the centre has evolved from a retail centre into an office building housing financial companies, provincial and federal government offices, and courts.

And so ends the Davis Tannery and Leather Company saga, a victim of changing times, but no doubt still alive in the memories of those deeply affected by the changes.



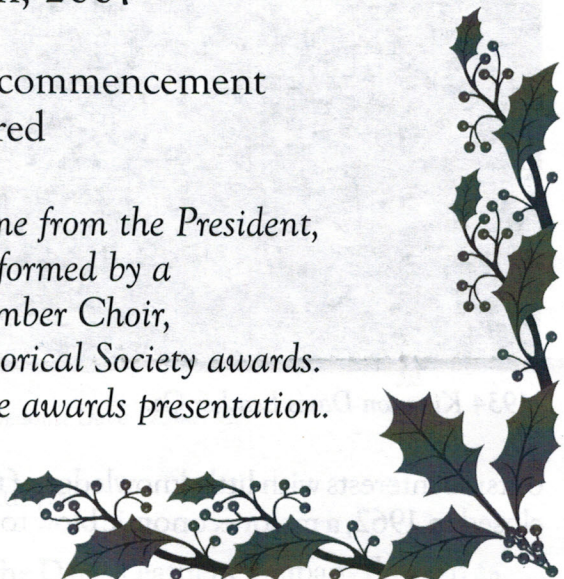
Come ring in the season
in the company of your fellow Society members

Please join us for

The Kingston Historical Society Christmas Party
at Fort Frontenac Officers' Mess
Thursday December 6th, 2007

Meeting at 6:00PM for a 7:00PM commencement
Business attire required

*The evening's events will include a welcome from the President,
several Christmas selections performed by a
quartet from the Kingston Chamber Choir,
and the presentation of the Kingston Historical Society awards.
Refreshments will be provided following the awards presentation.*



Mark your calendars...



Our guest speaker for this year's annual Sir John A. Macdonald anniversary dinner on Friday January 11, 2008 will be Richard Gwyn, O.C., LL.D. His talk will be: "John A, The Man Who Made Us; How he did it, and Why he did it".

The dinner will take place at the Senior Staff Mess at the Royal Military College. We can gather in the Mess any time after 6:00PM to meet our guest. The dinner will commence at 7:00PM. The cost for the dinner will be \$40.00 for Society members and \$50.00 for guests of members. Please contact Heather Home no later than January 4, 2008 with the number and names of those attending.

Sir John A Macdonald Dinner
c/o Ms. Heather Home
Queen's University Archives
Kathleen Ryan Hall, Queen's University
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SPEAKERS' CORNER

with Heather Home



On Wednesday November 21st, the members of the Kingston Historical Society were treated to the story of the murder of Henry Traill, the first Penitentiary Guard killed in the line of duty, based on the research undertaken by David St. Onge. Despite the weather there was a good turn out for what was a fascinating and engaging talk. Henry Traill was the son of Catherine Parr Traill, the well-known author of the Canadian classic *The Backwoods of Canada*, and Thomas Traill, a retired law enforcement officer. Raised in an industrious Christian environment and living in the "backwoods" of Ontario did not afford young Harry Traill the luxury of an extensive education. Nor it seems was he, a man of delicate health, cut out for a labouring life.

After marrying Liliias Maclean, the daughter of a Kingston doctor, Traill felt the need to find a job which would support their growing family. St. Onge surmised that it was with the assistance of Traill's uncle, John Moodie, who was a Sheriff in Leeds, that he was able to secure a position at the Penitentiary. The job suited Traill well as it was not too physically strenuous and fit into his religious upbringing of helping those less fortunate.

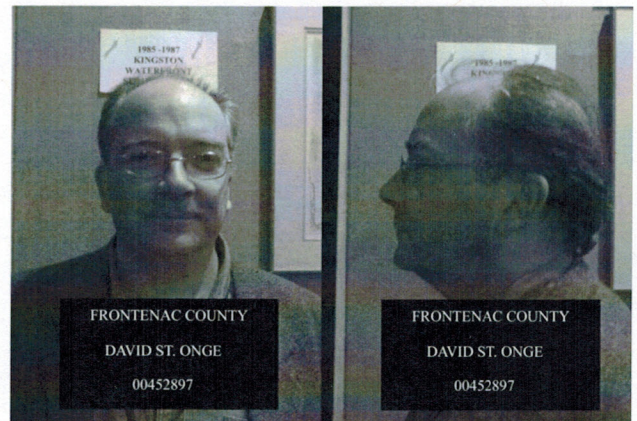
Traill soon moved into guard duty beyond the perimeter walls of the Penitentiary, watching over the convicts who were sent out to undertake work. It was generally convicts who displayed good behaviour that were allowed this privileged employment, and it was later revealed that the two convicts that murdered Traill had purposely sought out these positions with the intention of escaping.

On July 7, 1870 during a dinner break when there were no other guards or prisoners present, John Smith, prisoner #7059, distracted Traill with some small articles of carved bone while Daniel Mann, prisoner #6307, snuck up behind and struck the guard over the head, breaking his neck and rendering him unconscious. Not realizing the extent of the injury they had inflicted they bound and

gagged Traill and fled the scene. Traill died at the scene prior to being found.

Once it was learned what had transpired, an extensive manhunt was undertaken. There were sightings of the escapees in various places around Kingston but the majority of them were false or incorrect. It was approximately two weeks later that Mann and Smith were captured 14 miles west of Brockville. After evading capture for so long the convicts made the mistake of lighting a fire to ward off mosquitoes. The smoke drew the attention of a band of farmers who proceeded to capture the fugitives.

Upon their capture, the convicts were returned to Kingston Penitentiary and tried at the Frontenac County Court House. The verdict was quickly reached with Mann being sentenced to death, for having struck the fatal blow and Smith receiving 14 years for manslaughter. St. Onge concluded the talk with a reminder of the work that is undertaken on a daily basis by the men and women who work in the service of Corrections Canada. He then proceeded to answer the many questions put to him from the audience before the evening was concluded with a very thoughtful thank-you on behalf of the Society from Ron Ridley.



David St. Onge really is the Curator of the Correctional Service Canada Museum.