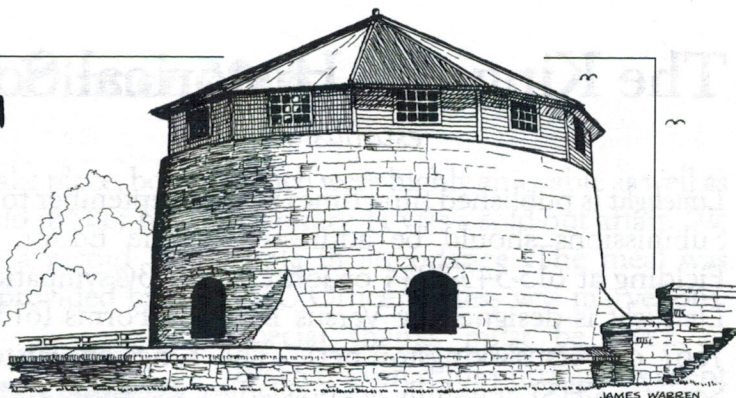


LIMELIGHT

Newsletter of the
Kingston Historical Society

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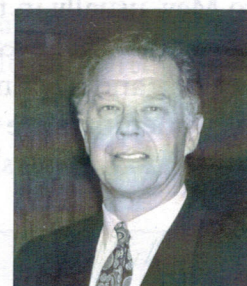
A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

"Kingston Remembers!" This phrase could very well serve as the motto of Kingston's heritage community focusing on buildings, events and personalities of Kingston's chequered past. This motto is undoubtedly applicable to the manner in which a broad number of Kingstonians mark the birth and death of Sir John A. Macdonald. The Kingston Historical Society plays a prominent organizational role in this respect.

In celebrating the life of Sir John A. Macdonald on the anniversaries of his birth and death, the Society, along with others, is appropriately acknowledging the extraordinary abilities and accomplishment of Sir John A. in creating the nation-state of Canada and his role as Canada's first Prime Minister. Indeed, these celebrations are measured and dignified without the hint of spilling over into the hagiographic realm. These celebrations carry an added poignancy that Sir John A. was a native son of Kingston.

On January 11th a person could have made it a solid day of marking Sir John A.'s birth by attending several special events. At noon, there was an informal ceremony involving brief speeches and toasts at the Sir John A. Macdonald statue in City Park. Then at

1:00 p.m., the Bellevue House National Historic Site opened its doors to the public for coffee, cake and a visit to the house where Macdonald once lived.



Though optional, a number of Kingstonians stepped into the Royal Tavern on Princess Street for a bumper in honour of Sir John A. The Royal Tavern in Sir John A.'s day, now called Grimason House, was owned and operated by Eliza Grimason, a staunch friend and supporter of Macdonald. The day was crowned by the Society's annual Anniversary Dinner at the Senior Staff Mess on the RMC campus. The dinner was followed by a talk on Macdonald presented by Richard Gwyn, columnist for the Toronto Star and author of several best-selling books including his most recent, *John A The Man Who Made Us*.

Indeed, Kingston Remembers!

Edward R. Grenda

THIS MONTH'S MEETING

Wednesday, 20 FEBRUARY, 7:30PM

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

"Show & Tell"

(instructions on page 2)

Wilson Room, Kingston Public Library, Johnson St. at Bagot

Refreshments All Welcome

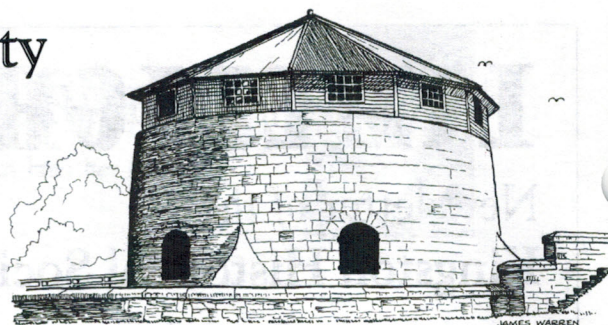
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The Kingston Historical Society

established 1893

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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.

Kingston Historical Society

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www.kingstonhistoricalsociety.ca

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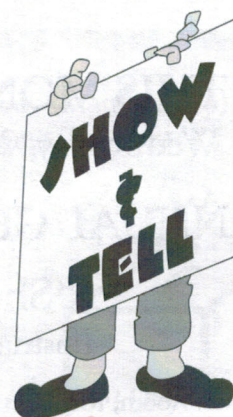
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Paul Banfield	Ted Huber
Ellie Deir	Douglas Petty
Warren Everett	David St Onge
John Fielding	Carol White



precisely what it is. If you wish to bring something in merely for the "Show" and not the "Tell", we will be setting up a table where items can be displayed for other members to view. If you are interested in participating, please contact Doug Petty at 613.546.0422 so he can add you to the schedule. Doug has also kindly offered to assist anyone who may have difficulty in getting the object(s) to, or from, the venue.

Remember to come to the AGM on Wednesday, February 20th at 7:30pm in the Wilson Room. This year we plan on having a Show and Tell component to the evening and are inviting members to bring in any item about which they wish to share a few words, or about which they may have questions. If you have a letter or postcard, photograph or watercolour, stamp collection or antique that you think the members would be interested in seeing and hearing about, please plan on bringing it in. Or, if you have something that you've wondered what it might have been used for, bring that in too - maybe a fellow Society member knows



The Sir John A. Macdonald Dinner 2008

This past month saw two Society events take place, both of which were highly enjoyable as well as informative. The Sir John A. Macdonald dinner held on January 11 was a sold-out affair. We had our largest turnout to date with a record 132 people in attendance. The meal was wonderful and, as always, the service provided by the RMC Officer's Mess was marvellous.



Former Mayor Isobel Turner proposed a toast to Sir John.

Special thanks must be given to Warren Everett for putting this event together. Among the highlights of the dinner were the toasts. They were of outstanding quality. John Gerretson, M.P.P. and Peter Milliken, M.P., in particular, had the crowd laughing out loud with their comments.

Richard Gwyn, our guest speaker for the evening gave a thoughtful and evocative talk about Sir John A. Macdonald, painting a very human picture of the man who has become myth in our nation. He focussed on what he saw as one of Macdonald's greatest gifts to

Canadians: ensuring that we were not to become Americans. Interspersed with readings from his book, Gwyn ended his talk by raising the question as to whether or not there should be a national holiday in May celebrating Sir John A. or, as Gwyn suggested, celebrating our "Founders". Gwyn's proposal suggests that it is perhaps time to do away with Victoria Day and celebrate a holiday that would have more significance for the people of Canada. Jason Kenney, Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity, did a gracious job of extending thanks on behalf of the Society to Richard Gwyn. All in all it was a highly agreeable evening.



Guest Speaker Richard Gwyn in conversation with President Edward Grenda

Article and photographs by Heather Home

ROUND AND ABOUT:

"A Letter from Kingston, 16 August 1837."

2007 was a milestone year for freedom-lovers everywhere! It was the 200th anniversary of the passage by the British Parliament of the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Accordingly, The Ontario Historical Society marked the occasion with the publication of *Forging Freedom: In Honour of the Bicentenary of the British Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade* as Vol. XCIC of *Ontario History*. Appropriately, the guest-editor was Karolyn Smardz Frost, the Executive Director of OHS and a 2007 recipient of a Governor General's Award for her *I've Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad*. (Toronto: Thomas Allen).

How does Kingston, a port and frontier city, fit into these events? The following account of a visit by one reformer, Hiram Wilson, sheds light on our community as a refuge for those escaping slavery to the south.

The Rev. Hiram Wilson was an American abolitionist who spent the last 28 years of his life (1836 to 1864) living first near Chatham and later in St. Catharines where he tended to the needs of escaped slaves who had arrived in Canada via the Underground Railroad. On 16 August 1837, he wrote a letter to the *Friend of Man*, an abolitionist newspaper, in which he recounted his experiences of a recent visit to Kingston. A Letter from Canada was penned in Toronto and sent to one, William Goodell, "to give you some account of my recent labors among the ransomed captives—especially of a late visit to Kingston, the second town in the province."

Wilson reports that he reached Kingston on 9 August and traveled out to Portsmouth to visit the recently established penitentiary, "where I expected to find a few persons of color." On informing the clerk there that he was an agent for the American Anti-Slavery Society, the good man responded, "Ah! there is a man here who is a great abolitionist, and would be glad to see you: he would go 20 miles to see an abolitionist from the States." The man was Deputy Warden Powers, formerly an "officer of the prison at Auburn," and he conducted Wilson on a tour through the Kingston Penitentiary. The Reverend remarked, "I thought it a very useful institution:—Its iron gates, its massy walls, its solitary cells, and the sullen gloom upon the countenances of its guilty tenants, all testified that the way of transgressors is hard." There were 115 male convicts, 10 females, and 8 "colored convicts," all males.

Wilson's assessment was comprehensive: "Their present condition, aside from crime, is preferable to slavery. They have a good supply of hard work, plenty of plain, wholesome food, comfortable party-colored garments, with a large capital P on them, mild treatment, and the best of religious instruction. No respect of persons is shown there, but all are subjected to the same discipline. I thought that if I had a brother or a sister, guilty of a skin not colored like my own, I had rather see them go to a British penitentiary, than into American slavery."

He remarked further, "Reader! look at that! Five out of ten thousand fugitives from American slavery, have got into a British penitentiary, and even then have bettered their condition. They have preaching on the Sabbath, Sabbath-school instruction half an hour daily in the morning, and the same length of time at noon for learning to read their Bibles, which they improve. These would be rare privileges for slaves, even among Doctors of Divinity."

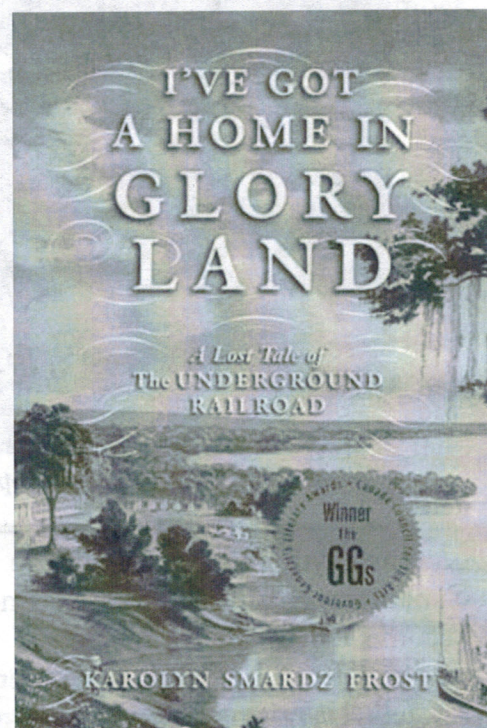


Illustration provided by Brian S. Osborne



Convicts breaking stone at the penitentiary from Dominion Illustrated 1891.

Illustration provided by Jennifer McKendry

Back in Kingston, Wilson determined there were some sixty "colored people" living there, and "some of them very respectable." One man, was "a worthy citizen, member of the Methodist church, lives in an elegant stone house of his own, and has two other buildings which he rents." Another, a "very intelligent man, poor in worldly substance, but rich in faith, gave me a hearty welcome, and manifested a deep interest in the cause of the suffering." Another "clever man" had been a slave in Virginia and Kentucky till he was 40 years of age when "he resolved to have his freedom" and, "having won the affections of his master's daughter," they "cheerfully eloped" and fled to Canada and, eventually, Kingston where they raised a family of seven children, "well bred and intelligent, an

honor to their parents, and useful members of society." Finally, another was an "industrious man," who had escaped from his "chains and hand-cuffs," fled to the mountains, and

traveled "with nothing to eat but moss and leaves of the forest," and arrived in Kingston where he became "a Methodist preacher of no mean standing." Wilson's conclusion was that the "colored people of K. are generally doing well." A "Presbyterian minister" told him that "there was no distinction on account of color. Said he, we have no side pews in our churches, and I pray God we never may have. I trust we never shall, till we have a new revelation from heaven, to that effect." The Methodist Rev. Stimson, invited Wilson to preach from his pulpit to some eight hundred persons. He noted that "all were silent and attentive, except two or three who left the house while I was speaking against American prejudice. Stimson advised him that they were Americans and commented, "you told them the truth, and it cut too close." But others were sympathetic to his words and he noted that the "numerous and deep groans that pervaded the house, evinced that part of the congregation at least, were not unmindful of their brethren in bonds." He also observed that the "colored people generally attended, and were seated promiscuously among the whites in a Christian manner."

The next day, Wilson addressed the "colored people" with his text taken from the 126th Psalm "When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion." The meeting closed with the hymn "Blest be the tie that binds," and Wilson offered them his "parting hand," telling them "not to be afraid of it, because it was white." With this, Kingston's community of blacks gathered around Wilson and with "melting hearts and streaming eyes," urged him to "tarry with them certain days longer," and "each pressed my hand in turn, and with strong affection and evident sincerity, invoking the blessing of Heaven upon me."

With this, Wilson left Kingston with the "sweet consciousness, that my labors had not been in vain in the Lord, and that in blessing others my own soul was by far more richly blessed than if titles, and laurels, and sparkling crowns had been given me." And, as if in gratitude for these blessings, Wilson left for posterity this fascinating insight into an otherwise hidden dimension of our community's history.

(Many thanks to Dennis Gagnon, Past President of St. Catherines Historical Society for bringing this document to my attention.)

Brian S. Osborne

"A Troublesome Berth" Part 2

At night when returning from the Bank, and when the night is very dark, and the frost very severe, I have crossed, when one of these reports seem to be caused by each succeeding step, and so loud, and so quick, and at times so prolonged as to be truly awful, and terrible. The mind shrinks more at an undefined danger, and one of which it cannot form any just conception, than it would at any open danger though more terrible, the more so if it was at all acquainted with that danger or had been accustomed to it: the darkness also adds a very great weight to the terrors of these rumbling noises, for being unable to see to what extent the danger may be, renders it the more fearful; If a person hears this loud Sound, and groaning noise, by day, by the full glare of the refulgent Sun, and can see no appearance of the ice giving way for an immense distance around him, he will naturally feel much less alarmed, than he would, hearing it at midnight with the shades of darkness in their greatest obscurity around him, so as to prevent him even, delineating any object, but a yard or two from him. But even by day the Sensations to the uninitiated are very unpleasant, for if he does not see, he at least

fancys the ice giving way with him. The people of the country, knowing all its properties, judge of the soundness of the ice by it: and when it has once begun in any force they declare the ice perfectly safe, and as long as it last, never fear.

The ice remained durable and Strong enough for sleighs till about the 20th. March about the same time it did last year; last year it was crossed for the last time by foot passengers on the 1st April and this year on the 31st. March. Long before this it had gone at the edges, which it invariably



Ice-boating at Penetanguishene on Lake Huron, U.C., circa 1840. Ice-boating was a popular activity on the frozen ice of the Great Lakes in the 19th Century.

does and renders getting on and off very difficult. Some where about the 20th March I was crossing and when near the shore by the bank I found it impossible to land. There was a Schooner laying at a wharf, and the ice appearing sound under her bows, I attempted to get up, and get on shore from her. I went close under her bobstay, and made a spring to get hold of it, the treacherous ice gave way as I made the spring, and down I went souze into the water; my right elbow struck the ice so violently that I thought the arm was out at the shoulder, it being paralyzed; there were numbers standing on the Wharf enjoying the fun, and one fellow from the bow of the Schooner gave me a rope the end of which I put in my mouth and holding on with my left hand, thus they hauled me up like a fish or some submarine animal. I landed and made the best of my way to the bank of U. C. where the kind folk gave me dry things and hospitality a chair at their family table and in good sooth I would not mind another Souze, for such a pleasant sequence, my shoulder though was very painful and remained so for Several weeks. On asking how I felt, if not very cold, when I went in? I replied, "on the Contrary it was a nice bath, the air being colder than the water "it certainly was an ice bath" said the oldest young Lady. Last year the ice was totally gone on the 7th. April, this year on the first. . .

NOTE: The family at the Bank of Upper Canada was that of Hilary and Sophia Dupuy. The "oldest young Lady" was Myra Dupuy.

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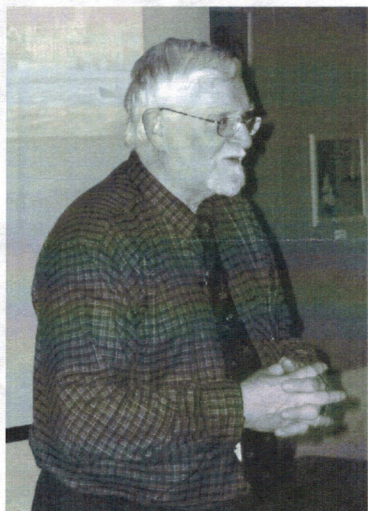


SPEAKERS' CORNER

with Heather Home



The second event in January was Maurice Smith's talk on Sir Robert Barrie and the Stone Frigate, given at the regular Society meeting of January 16th. Smith relayed how this magnificent stone structure was built in the face of many physical and logistical difficulties. Smith focussed his talk on Sir Robert Barrie, the man ultimately responsible for seeing this building through to completion. Directed by the Navy Board to build the Store House in May 1819, the construction of the building was delayed until there was some indication of where a new fortification on Point Henry, intended to protect the Dock Yard, would be located. Barrie hired Mr. Archibald Fraser as the project manager to undertake this task. Fraser, from Quebec, was 'best known as the architect of St. Raphael's Church', and other buildings in Kingston. By 26 October 1820 Barrie was able to report great progress on the Store House, with the project coming in on budget at less than £4,700. For over a decade after the construction of the Store House, Sir Robert Barrie and his staff had some other successes building up and maintaining the dock yard of which the Store House was the centre, but declining budgetary allotments from England soon made this an impossible task and the formal order was issued to Barrie in 1834 to quit the venture and return to England. The evening ended with Jack Pike from the RMC Museum extending thanks to Smith from the Society.



I look forward to seeing you all at the AGM in February.

Photo of Maurice Smith provided by Jennifer McKendry

There are Fourteen Nominations to the Council of the Kingston Historical Society with one Nomination, that of Treasurer to be determined.

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President: Ed Grenda

Vice President: Alan MacLachlan

Treasurer:

Secretary: Ted Huber

Limelight Editor: John Fielding

Historic Kingston: Paul Banfield

Council

Doug Petty

Robert Andrews (Publications)

Gordon Sinclair

Carole White

Ellie Deir

Betty Andrews (Membership)

Heather Home (Programme)

Murney Tower: Warren Everett

Past President: Maurice D. Smith

Respectfully submitted to the Membership by the Nominating Committee:

Maurice D. Smith, Robert Andrews, Alan MacLachlan

