

LIMELIGHT

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NEWSLETTER OF THE KINGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



As was noted at the Annual General Meeting, the Society is on stable financial ground. In fact, it is reasonably well off and our membership is at an acceptable level. Moreover, I think we would all agree that the programme for this year has been very good, the high point being the Sir John A. Macdonald dinner.

The programme of speakers proposed for the rest of the year promises to be equally interesting. However, I am not entirely sure that the Society is providing a broad enough range of activities for all of our members. Is the membership at large satisfied with seven speakers, a Christmas party, a Sir John A gravesite ceremony, and one AGM per year?

Perhaps we are. If not, I would like to hear members' response to the question, "What is the future of KHS?" Members may wish to share their views on the future of KHS by writing a letter for the editorial page in **Limelight**. Others may wish to contact me directly, care of the KHS PO Box. Your new Council would welcome guidance on the following questions -- as well as any other ideas that you may have:

- Would you like to see KHS located in a permanent building?
- Should KHS be pro-active in matters of heritage conservation?
- How about more meetings like the November one with the OHS?
- Should we organize hikes and field-trips?
- What about excursions to galleries, historical sites?
- Would we like joint-meetings with our fellow historical societies?
- Do you have other ideas?

Personal or public communications on these matters would be much appreciated. Remember, this is YOUR Society! (Everett Warren)

OUR NEXT MEETING

The speaker will be Susan W. Smith, author of **The First Summer People: The Thousand Islands 1650-1910** who will address the Society on "Early Cottage Life in the Thousand Islands."

Date: Wednesday, 21 March 2001

Place: The Wilson Room, Kingston
Public Library

Time: 7:30 pm

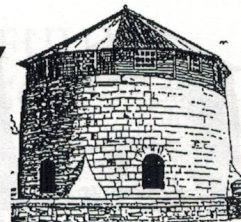
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KHS Web Site: www.heritagekingston.org/khs

AND ONE FROM THE EDITORS...

As purveyors of the Gutenberg-word, it hurts us to ask this question, "Have you visited our new web site yet?" Well, you can "click in" to it at www.heritagekingston.org/khs. It too will help you keep up to date with our latest news and with heritage events and services throughout the community. The "Links" will take you from the **National Archives** in Ottawa, down the **Rideau Canal Waterway**, to the **Marine Museum of the Great Lakes** and other Kingston attractions, including the **Genweb - Frontenac County** and on to the **Archives of Ontario** -- just to name a few.

Most of this is the work of Ken Watson, who has been good enough to really set us up and keep us going. Thanks Ken. And a special thank you to Jennifer McKendry, whose photographic skills are again evident in some pictures on the web of our John A. Macdonald dinner at RMC on 11 January. Remember this is our web site. So if you too have pictures, or announcements or anything else you would like to share with other members of the Society and the community at large, just contact Ken at kwatson@kos.net, or the Editors of **Limelight**. And anyone who would like to exercise their creative and "web" skills and be the Society's "Web Master," please contact any member of the executive!

The web site is also serves as a voice for a new initiative, the **Kingston Heritage Alliance**. As the President briefly outlined in the November **Limelight**, the idea of an umbrella group of local historical groups and heritage groups has been in the works for some time. Now, a joint initiative by KHS and the Frontenac Heritage Foundation has resulted in the formation of the Kingston Heritage Alliance, a network of some 17 heritage organizations in the Kingston region.

KHA has been formed partly in response to a need for such a group being identified in the City of Kingston's Strategic Planning initiative. It is also a means of fostering cooperation and coordination among all of the various heritage groups and to provide a stronger voice in the community for the cause of heritage. Carl Bray has been appointed as President of the KHA, and Paul Ross as Secretary. Sandy Wilson, President of the Frontenac Heritage Foundation, is also on the Executive.

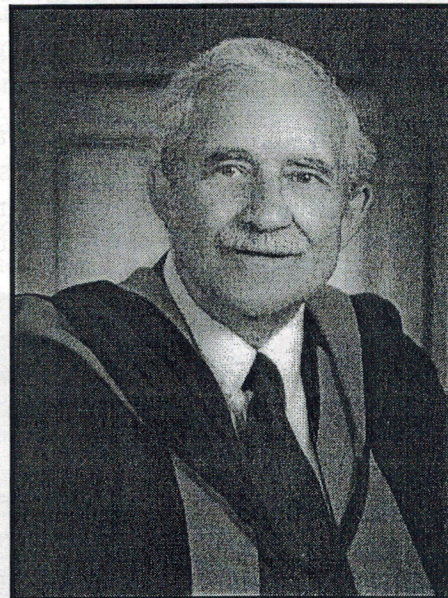
The group has been welcomed by Mayor Isabel Turner to help the City address its heritage responsibilities. It is also considering establishing a Heritage Centre, and will be pursuing a number of initiatives such as collecting, storing, and sharing heritage-related information. It will be the primary source of information on Kingston's heritage for the people of Kingston and the outside world, hosting and maintaining a web site, and addressing a number of common issues and concerns. If you wish to find out more about the KHA or volunteer to help, please contact Paul Ross at 544 6739.



IN MEMORIAM: DR. W.G. (WALLY) BRECK

1 January 1917 - 8 February 2001

Wally Breck took up the tenor drum in the Rob Roy Highland Band at the age of 66. A few years later, he mastered the mace and became drum major. In the ensuing years, he marched to a steady beat in everything he tackled and no organization benefited more from his energy, enthusiasm, and exemplary efforts than the Kingston Historical Society. Dr. Wallace Graham Breck served as KHS president for two terms, 1988-90 and presented an impressive array of papers: 1987 - "A Model of Fort Frontenac 1738"; 1988 - "\$ Bill, the Anatomy of a Legend in Our Time"; 1989 - "The Le Moynes: Longueuil, Kingston and Wolfe Island"; 1989 - "Fort Frontenac in 1688-1689"; 1993 - "A Hectic Decade at Fort Frontenac 1680-1690"; 1995 - "Kingston: Gateway to the North West Mounted Police"; 1997 - "The Careers of Lt. Gen. Sir Archibald Cameron Macdonell"; 2001 - "Charles Frances Constantine: The General and the Athlete."



We also salute him for his trip to Scotland to meet with the Chief of Clan Macdonald and to visit Sir John A.'s birth-place. As a result, Chief Macdonald travelled to Canada to join us at the grave-site in Kingston for the 100th anniversary of Sir John A.'s death on 6 June 1991.

It was most appropriate, therefore, that when the centennial of our society was celebrated in 1993 with the inauguration of the KHS Award for the presentation and interpretation of local history, Wally Breck was one of the first recipients. The citation paid tribute to his generosity and dedication and read in part: "The Society has been favoured by the rare combination of his deep historical sense and the ability to organize and attend to detail on numerous occasions." But Wally did not restrict his good services to KHS. He shared his talents throughout the community, using his keen research skills and infectious speaking style to spread the Kingston story to people of all ages. A sterling advocate of the dissemination of multi-cultural history, perhaps his crowning accomplishment came in 1996 with honouring the memory of Molly Brant. In that year, he supervised the creation and erection of a John Boxtel bust of the Mohawk leader in the courtyard of Rideaucrest Home.

Wally also made numerous contributions of his time and money to various projects, including historic publications. He was a member and director of both the Marine Museum of the Great Lakes and the Cataraqui Archaeological Research Foundation. Another initiative close to his valiant heart is the soon to be published history of his beloved St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, **The Rock and the Sword**.

Nor did Wally ever forget his military roots. While medical problems prevented him from joining the RCAF, he nevertheless served in the RCN until discharged with a heart murmur. He then transferred to the army and ended his career as an artillery lieutenant in Holland. Reflecting this distinctive background, Wally created a distinctive, "wavy-navy" tie for veterans of the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve, and also enjoyed the conviviality of the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery Brigade Association.

Wally's stamina and zest for life were just as evident at Queen's, where he graduated with honours in engineering chemistry in 1950 and served with distinction as a professor for 26 years. Brian Osborne knew him as a friend and colleague who brought a rigorous analytical mind accompanied by a gentle mien to the ordeals of thesis defences: "He was a real gentle-man and a scholar who will be missed by former students and colleagues alike."

At a memorial service on 17 February, Wally's brother, William A. Breck of Peterborough, recalled Wally's fighting spirit and struggle against almost insurmountable odds and quoted his son, Alan: "Dad got every ounce of life out of a tired body." Our sympathy is extended to his wife, Viola, son Alan, daughter Jean Christie, and five grandchildren. (Prepared by J.W. (Bill) Fittell, with assistance from Isabel Trumpour).



KINGSTONS WIDOWS

I have always been struck by the number of widows in Kingston between World Wars I and II. Why were there so many? Who were they? How did they survive?

There were few of today's social safety nets, and pensions were meagre. If a woman's husband were retired, a civilian pension ceased on his death. For an army widow, the pension ceased if she remarried. With dependent children, the struggle was even more acute. Then there was the power of Kingston's class system in determining the position of widows. Middle class and middle income widows suffered most. Women of "the lower orders" could "go into service": charwomen; maids; the black-uniformed and white-capped waitress that ladies got in for big parties. Widows from well-to-do families may have had some reduction in circumstances but were still



secure. But middle-income women thrust into widowhood found life drastically changed. Army pensions or insurance barely provided food and shelter and, during the Depression, few could rely on family help. It was not only the necessities which were threatened. It was also a matter of social position, and the feeling of self-esteem, and pride.

One prime reason for Kingston's unique concentration of widows was that it was a military centre. Some were Great War widows. Also, some of the military who were stationed in Kingston after the War succumbed to their old wounds and ended their lives here. There were other retirees here, too, such as professors. These aspects accounted for local widows.

Another reason was the influx of widows to Kingston from other places. What attracted them? First, a widow could rent a house, and take in students as roomers or boarders. Before the days of men's residences, this was a golden opportunity. It was a respectable activity and the market was rarely saturated. Secondly, if you were a widow with a son or daughter with university aspirations, it was cheaper to move the whole family here and cash in on the room rental bonanza. Thirdly, if you did have a daughter, there was the presence of

hundreds of young men at Queen's and RMC who would soon be of marriageable age -- many of them with good prospects! Many an attractive Kingston girl found her partner this way. Indeed, it sometimes seemed to the rest of us that, with the example set by a far-sighted mother, some of these children of widows developed a persistence, and an ability to take advantage of opportunities which we lacked! Another woman -- she was English -- could not educate her children at home as befitted her perceived class and so they went to live cheaply in France. They all acquired fluent French and later arrived in Kingston with a marketable skill. Though they knew no one at the time, they all prospered.

Another widow of a colonel was accustomed to a well-to-do life. On her husband's death she found she had to give up the car, the maid, the house, boarding school for a daughter, and move to a small flat. To augment her income, she decided to sell Jaeger sweaters which were very expensive items at that time. The District Officer Commanding's wife arranged for the sale to take place at a tea held at her house. Friends came and bought sweaters they could ill afford -- just to help Grace stretch her meager pension. Two weeks later Grace was back in town with a splendid silver fox fur! There were other ways widows coped. They trained for local occupations such as teaching -- but not if you had a young family. Others went to work as house-mothers in

women's residences, or as companions to rich old ladies. Others went into a Kingston business if they were young and adaptable. Some went into a family business, and there they prospered, or faltered, or failed.

Sometimes widows with children attached themselves to relatives here, and were helped by those who were prosperous. Or the widow and family took in a biddable granny with a good income. I remember one widow with several clever and attractive sons, who attached herself to a patron, one of the city's richest women. Opportunities presented themselves in time for the sons.

Then there were the bridge players, the Mah-Jongg players and the poker ladies, all playing for money, every day all year, and these ranks contained widows. One player who was not a widow banked her winnings and in two years bought an antique set of dining room furniture. One of the widow-players, however, got her son through Queen's on hers. Others probably lost the housekeeping money!

Last in this list of specific cases, was the courtesan. I remember this attractive woman of Canadian-French origin. She boasted that she never bothered with any man below the rank of brigadier -- even though her husband had only been a major! After five years, she left Kingston and moved on to a well paid hostess job in Montreal.

Things have changed greatly since then. Looking back, I admire the way in which these women showed courage and ingenuity in dealing with their difficulties, and trying to do their best for their children. When war came in 1939, it was in many ways, "a bountiful jade," as Kipling said. Many sons of widows were ready for employment, and after the Depression, when a fellow with a B.A. ended up as a door-to-door salesman, the services looked very attractive. Many sons and daughters signed part of their pay over to their hard-pressed mothers. Inevitably, some of the young men, for whom their mothers had struggled so long and so hard, lost their lives in the Second War, sometimes more than one in a family. At the end of the war, veterans grants allowed those who did return to earn university degrees much more easily than they otherwise would have. Some of these men and women are still here in Kingston, and have made great contributions -- and some of them are people who were brought up by one of Kingston's widows. (Submitted by B.M.B. Corbett).



KHS AGM: THE FIRST ANNUAL SHOW AND TELL

At our February 2001 AGM, the audience of 60 members was treated to a wealth of artifacts that are in the possession of various members of the society. The members participated in the Show and Tell portion of the meeting with wonderful regaling of the significance, discovery, and descriptions of their prized possessions:

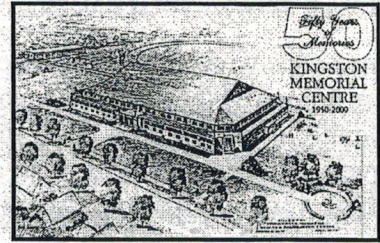
George Vosper (a pipe bowl, a Japanese candle stick and piece of sculpture by A. Laliberte). **Jack Pike** (Col. W.R. Sawyer's battle dress). **Sharon Cadieux** (two original photos of Sir John A. Macdonald, and a funeral card and ribbon from Sir John's funeral). **Patsy Flemming** (photos of Sir John's first wife, Isabella). **Nan Yoemans** (artifacts concerning the Tall Ships, 1986). **Stewart Renfrew** (air photos of Collins Bay, post WWII). **Doug Petty** (photos and water colours of the Murney Tower). **Isabel Trumpour** (photos of the 150th birthday of Sir John A. Macdonald attended by John Diefenbaker and John Robarts). **Lou Grimshaw** (collection of medals from the War of 1812). **Bea Corbett** (c.1900 volume, "A Pioneer's Life on the Bay of Quinte"). **Warren Everett** (photographs of Canadian militia units and officers).

We thank all those who attended the AGM and brought with them their treasured artifacts -- and those who shared their enthusiasm in them. (Alan MacLachlan).

HISTORIANS MARK KINGSTON MEMORIALS

Two of Kingston's most popular public buildings were saluted at special events in the closing months of 2000 with the help of two members of KHS.

In October, the Kingston Memorial Centre celebrated its 50th anniversary. A four-day event culminated in a ceremony rededicating the structure as a memorial to the city's war dead, it being noted that "This form of memorial was chosen by the people of Kingston by popular vote" (1944). Construction of Kingston's first municipally-owned rink was commenced in April 1950, the corner stone was laid by Governor General Viscount Alexander of Tunis on 6 October 1950. And fifty years ago this month, the facility was officially opened by Mayor C.A. Curtis on 5 March 1951. It was given the all-embracing name, "The Kingston Memorial Health and Recreation Centre" -- though the more popular usage of "Memorial Centre" soon took over. The entrance was inscribed with the immortal words oft recited by Legionnaires: "Lest We Forget, They Served 'till Death, Why Not We?"



Gala Dinner

Days Inn

October 19, 2000

*Commemorating the 50th Anniversary
of the
Kingston Memorial Centre*



DR. J.J. HARTY

Early in December 2000, the genesis of another facility, the Jock Harty Arena, was formally marked with the unveiling of a plaque citing the life of popular sportsman, Dr. John Joseph Harty (1874-1919). Opened in 1971 as part of the Queen's University Athletic Centre, the arena building, apart from an entrance sign, lacked any reference to the former hockey player and coach, whose name was memorialized by the original rink built on Arch Street in 1921. A speedy centreman, Jock Harty led three Kingston teams to provincial championships and helped popularize the game in Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Washington, and New York. He starred for Queen's in a Stanley Cup bid and coached the tricolour seniors to an Allen Cup championship. A Queen's medical graduate, he interned in New York, married in Montreal, and died in London, England, during the post-war influenza epidemic of 1919-20.

Two KHS members played a role in these events: former Queen's Professor Emeritus of History, Stewart Webster (Queen's B.A. 1943, M.A. 1944), donated the pictorial plaque; Bill Fittell provided the historic research and articles on the events marking the commemoration of the Memorial Centre. (Prepared by Bill Fittell)

LETTERBOX

A note to KHS from Robert and Wendy Mayoff as they commence their KHS membership:

"We live directly across Sydenham Road from where John A. Macdonald is buried. After having spent four years fighting in every way we knew how for Canadian unity in Quebec, we turned 50 and knew life was getting shorter and we fell in love with Kingston both present-day and with its rich history. As the fates would have it, John A rewarded our efforts by having our home become available at precisely the right moment and, although the move has been wrenching and the renovations and settling interminable, we feel extremely blessed in our home in our beautiful small city and our Canada. We may not be able to fully involve ourselves in the society's activities as we set up a small business but we look forward to an increasing learning experience and commitment to the wonderful heritage we enjoy."



LANDSCAPES/INSCAPES: THE MYSTERY BUILDING

It seems that in every township I paint I find a mystery to uncover. Indeed, in 1992, when I painted throughout Portland Township, I felt like Sherlock Holmes as my final clue was found with a magnifying glass! It all started when I noticed this apparently undistinguished building just off Peter's Road, an insignificant track to the east of Harrowsmith. It had a false front on it and was the kind of building you might see on a main street. I asked Charles Day, a lifetime resident of the area, and he confirmed that it had once been a harness shop on the main street of Harrowsmith. Local historian, Flora Goslin, consulted her records and discovered that it had been Elmer Chalton's Harness and Shoemaker Shop and that it had been moved to an unknown location before its final destination on Peter's Road. But its exact original location was still a mystery.



And then I visited "Spike's Corner's Antique Shoppe" on the north side of the Masonic Hall in Harrowsmith. An old postcard caught my eye. The proprietors, Syd and Ola Shoom, handed me a magnifying glass.

That's when I made an amazing discovery! There, in the postcard, on the south side of the Shoom's store was my mystery building. This meant that it had been moved in 1871 to build the Masonic Hall. And that was where my art show was to take place.

Doesn't it seem strange that my drawing of the building would end up being displayed on the original site where it had stood so many years ago? (Prepared by Shirley Gibson-Langille).



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