

LIMELIGHT

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NEWSLETTER OF THE KINGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



The weather is warmer, the days are longer -- and the golf season is upon us! All of these are sure signs that this is the last issue of *Limelight* for this year. And it has been an excellent one for the Society.

The speaker's programme was varied and first rate. I have seen a preview of next year's programme and it will be equally as interesting and in addition, will offer a unique venue for some of the meetings. On the subject of monthly speakers, it has been suggested that we should encourage speakers from within

the ranks of the Society. I strongly agree with the concept and if the show-and-tell-portion of the AGM was any example, we should have no difficulty in attracting good presenters. The programme chair will make plans for this type of event. My congratulations to Alan MacLachlan for all of his hard work this year to create such an entertaining programme.

I would also like to thank our sponsors for their support of the monthly newsletter. Members of the Kingston Historical Society live throughout the country and abroad; and the newsletter keeps all of us informed of the events and issues of the society. Their financial support has contributed a great deal to the success of *Limelight* and the continued vitality of the Kingston Historical Society.

Thanks too to our editors. Without them we would have neither a newsletter nor a journal. My special thanks to Jane Errington and Brian Osborne for all their efforts in producing these professional and first-rate publications.

In closing, thanks to you, the membership of KHS. So that you don't forget who you are over the summer months, please find enclosed your **MEMBERSHIP CARD** for 2001.

Till September, adieu.

OUR NEXT MEETING

At our May meeting, the guest speakers will be Bill Fittsell and Brian Osborne who will present the last paper that Wally Breck prepared for KHS: "*Major General Charles Francis Constantine, CB, DSO: The General and the Athlete.*"

Date: Wednesday, 16 May 2001

Place: The Wilson Room,
Kingston Public Library

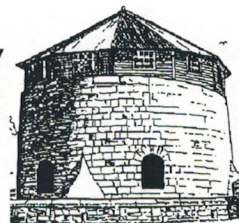
Time: 7:30 pm

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Kingston Historical Society

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Editors: Jane Errington - (613) 533-2150 and Brian Osborne - Phone (613) 533-6042

KHS Web Site: www.heritagekingston.org/khs

AND ONE FROM THE EDITORS...

Of course, we're not the only historical society in eastern Ontario! To remind us of this, several of our fellow/sister societies regularly send us their newsletters and they provide fascinating insights into their respective activities and sense of purpose. What follows is a list of recent arrivals:

Newsletter of the Gananoque Historical Society: "The goal of the Society is the collection, preservation and dissemination of items relating to the rich history of Gananoque and area."

Lennox and Addington Historical Society Newsletter: "Binding the Present with the Past."

History Matters: Newsletter of the Brockville and District Historical Society.

Outlook: Hastings County Historical Society.

Cataraqui Loyalist Town Crier: Published by the Kingston and District Branch, United Empire Loyalist Association of Canada. "Dulcit Amor Patriae."

Recent copies of these newsletters will be made available to members of the KHS at our regular meetings. Do spend a few minutes perusing them. They give us an idea of what other societies are up to.

In the same vein, note the invitation to join with our neighbour, Pittsburgh Historical Society, on their annual bus-tour -- if there's any space after their own members have been accommodated. Last year, Jack Pike and Brian Osborne had a great time with the PHS on an expedition through the Rideau-country. This year, they're off to Peterborough, the Trent Canal, and the Canoe Museum.

Others, of course, find Kingston attractive. On Thursday, 7 June, the Ottawa Historical Society will be visiting us to explore the "head" of the Rideau system. They will have to be reminded that getting to Kingston was the real purpose of By's colossal project. Some Ottawans seem to think the works were intended as a beautification project for the National Capital -- or a recreation project to provide Ottawans with good skating in the winter! Any members wishing to join Brian Osborne in disabusing our fellow historians from Ottawa, please feel free to join him on 7 June.

COPENHAGEN AND KYC

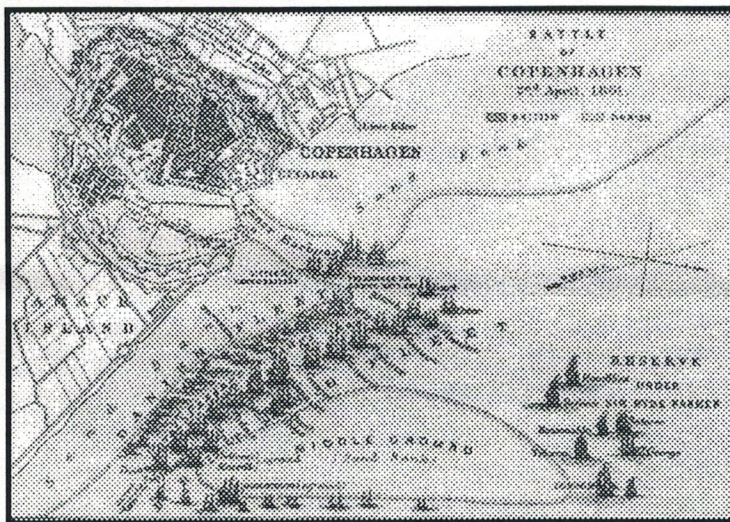


When we first went to Dublin, as university students in the mid 1940's, Nelson's Pillar occupied a prominent position at the centre of the city. Apart from honouring Nelson, it served a number of secondary functions such as providing a vantage point for gulls, pigeons and other high-flyers -- and ensuring that the trams knew where to stop. The inscription on the base of the pillar listed Nelson's four great victories, Copenhagen, Trafalgar, St. Vincent, the Nile.

So, when on April 7th, the Kingston Yacht Club marked the bi-centenary of the Battle of Copenhagen with a dinner and entertainment, we had some idea of the importance of the battle but not much more.

At the dinner, Bill Glover, a well-known local naval-historian, attired in the costume of the period (as were many of the guests) discussed Nelson, his remarkable naval career, and sketched in the background to the famous engagement. He also gave us a tantalizing little sketch of the career of the redoubtable Lady Hamilton.

In the late 1800's, a time of ever shifting alliances in Europe, Russia and the Scandinavian countries formed a league opposed to Britain and supported by Napoleon. Britain decided on a pre-emptive strike aimed at removing the Danish fleet from the equation. The attack in March-April, 1801 was timed to take advantage of a window of opportunity when Copenhagen was accessible from the sea, but the Russian fleet was still ice-bound in the Baltic. Bill vividly described both the background to the action and also the difficulties faced by Nelson in negotiating the confined and shallow waters outside the well defended Copenhagen. The victory resulted in the break up of the league and a significant number of Danish ships were taken by the British. The death of the Czar, whose successor was friendly to Britain, further isolated Napoleon.



It was at this battle that Nelson put the telescope to his eye-patch and thus avoided seeing Admiral Parker's order to disengage -- so demonstrating how we all need to "turn a blind eye" occasionally. Throughout the course of the evening we were reminded of the nautical origins of many other common English language expressions: "son of a gun"; "let the cat out of the bag"; "freeze the balls off a brass monkey"; and "four squares a day."

Nelson was a superb commander and tactician. Though he had his detractors, he became a great popular figure. His funeral in 1805 after the Battle of Trafalgar was the largest ever seen in London -- a record that stood until the funeral of Lady Diana, Princess of Wales.

A fine evening, with a good dinner, port and sherry for the toasts, and a history lesson -- all rolled into one. (Contributed by Desmond and Margaret Moore O'Meara)



SPEAKER'S CORNER



At the March meeting of KHS, Mr. Henk Weaver introduced us to an increasingly prominent member of the Kingston community: the luxury steam launch **PHOEBE**. Built at the Davis Drydock in Kingston in 1914, the next nine decades consisted of an odyssey that took the vessel from Lake Ontario, to the islands of Muskoka, and the Finger Lakes of New York, before returning to Kingston in 1978. In a knowledgeable and enthusiastic presentation, Henk Weaver outlined the skills -- carpentry, engineering, psychological, and fiscal acumen -- that have been directed to the restoration of this important piece of Kingston and Canada's material history and cultural heritage. Arguing how close this project must be to the heart of members of KHS, Henk invited us all to share in **PHOEBE's** story by contacting the Marine Museum of the Great Lakes (542-2261) or sharing in the "rebirth of the Phoebe" on the web-site: www.MarMus.ca.

Over his many productive years of association with the Society, the late Wally Breck entertained us with several papers. Indeed, he has left yet another one for us and at our May meeting, his good friends and colleagues, Bill Fittell and Brian Osborne, will present Wally's last piece of scholarship to the Society: "*Major General Charles Francis Constantine, CB, DSO: The General and the Athlete.*" A distinguished soldier and prominent sportsman, it was appropriate that when RMC built its first artificial ice-rink in 1960 that it was named the "Constantine Arena" in memory of a man who excelled on the training ground, the battlefield, the playing-field, and the sports arena.



For those of you who like to plan ahead and fill in your social calendar, here is a first look at our programme for the "lecture season" when we return from our summer activities:

2001

- 19 September: "George Johnson: Molly Brant's Second Son" (Maureen Garvie)
- 17 October: A Visit to the Prison for Women (Bill Paterson)
- 21 November: "Kingston's Role in the Northwest Rebellion" (Patsy Flemming)
- 12 December: KHS Christmas Party, Curry Hall at RMC with Ross McKenzie and Jack Pike

2002

- 11 January: Celebration of Sir John A Macdonald's birthday (Guest Speaker, John Milliken, Speaker of the House of Commons)
- 20 February: KHS AGM and Society "Show and Tell": Members describe their Historical Artifacts
- 20 March: TBA
- 17 April: TBA
- 15 May: TBA

PHOTOGRAPHING KINGSTON



Last month Queen's University Archives Technician Heather Wosley announced that she had completed adding the Kingston Photograph Collection to the Archives on line index. In reality, she was announcing that she had completed a marathon project that has taken up all her spare moments at work for more than eight years.

Normally archival projects like this one require trained archivists who adjust carefully developed established criteria to meet the specific needs of the work being indexed. Then a technician fills in the simple details. In this case, though, much the reverse was the

case. An archivist laid out a very simple outline for the way the material should be indexed. Heather then developed from that outline, with occasional reference to an archivist, the more complex indexing needs for each separate photograph in the collection. Actually, the project went beyond just the Kingston collection because she started work with the even larger collection of Queen's photographs and at one point was required to learn how to use a new computer program for the work. When you consider that there are 7,623 entries in the index of the Queen's Collection and 3,733 in the Kingston collection and that Heather was working at this project in her spare moments with very little support this is quite an accomplishment.

For researchers and individuals interested in Kingston's history, this means that there are over ten thousand individual photographs indexed and available to be searched online, either over the Internet or by going to computer terminals at Queen's Library or Archives. Another twenty thousand entries are also available on line in the index of the George E. O. Lilly collection. This project took some four years using full and part time student help that was financed through grants. In all, Queen's University Archives can provide individuals with internet access to an index of more than thirty thousand images of Kingston in the comfort of their own home. Sorry, this is just an index. Making the images themselves available electronically is some time in the future.

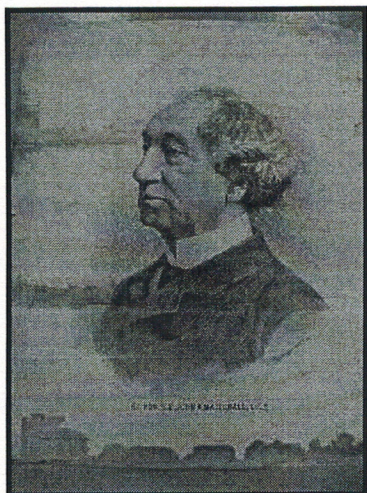
This, though, is just the tip of the iceberg. There are many more waiting photographs to be indexed electronically. For example the Hazelgrove photographs of stone buildings in Kingston and district, the Prosser pictures of the Gananoque area, the Thompson pictures from Prince Edward County, the Vosper Collection of glass plate negatives, and the wonderful new collection of photographs from Jack Chiang.

To access the index go to the Archives web site <http://library.queensu.ca/webarch/> and click on "Search Archives Data Base." Or you can click directly through to Queen's Archives from our own, Heritage Kingston site at <http://www.heritagekingston.org/khs/>. Once you have developed an appetite with the material that is indexed on-line, drop by the Archives. The staff there will be happy to expand your horizons with the material that has yet to be fully indexed.

Over the next few issues we will try to tempt you further with a few samples from this wonderful collection of local images.



COMMEMORATING SIR JOHN



It is becoming increasingly apparent to all Canadians that we do not do enough to recognize our first Prime-minister, Sir John A. Macdonald. . Certainly, KHS does its share, and on this coming 6 June we will be once again commemorating Sir John by a ceremony at his graveside. Do come and join the ambiance of the setting, refreshments, music, and a fine address.

When: 2.00 p.m. 6 June 2001
Where: Sir John A. Macdonald's gravesite, Cataraqui Cemetery
Speaker: TBA.

Later this month we will circulate details of this important event.

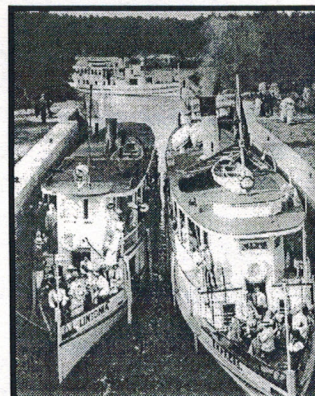


PITTSBURGH H.S.'S ANNUAL BUS TOUR

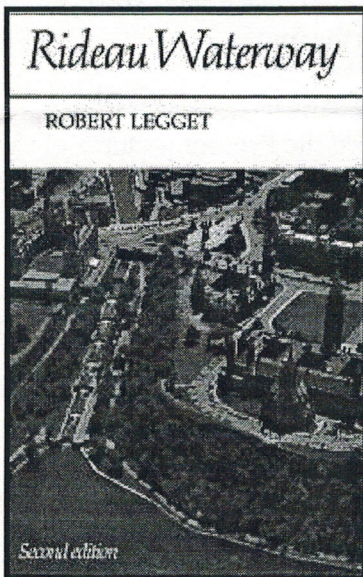
On Saturday, 26 May 2001, the PHS will be heading out on its annual excursion. This year, they are venturing farther afield to Peterborough where they have planned an exciting programme: a visit to the famous lift-lock; a river-boat cruise with lunch; a visit to the famous Canadian Canoe Museum. Details are as follows:

Cost: \$50 per person
 Depart: 8.00 a.m.
 Return: 5.30 p.m.

Non-members of P.H.S. may purchase tickets after 24 April from Peter and Libby Skelton, 230 Gore Road, Kingston K7L 5H6 (544 -0151).



BOOK SHELF: LEGGETT'S RIDEAU



The definitive work about the historic Rideau is back in print. Robert Legget's *Rideau Waterway*, first written in 1955 and updated in 1986 has been republished in 2001 by the University of Toronto Press, through the initiative of Friends of the Rideau, with the financial support of KHS.

Robert Legget offers a rich history of the Rideau Canal – an adventure in engineering, built by soldiers and civilian labourers through swamp, bush and rocky wilderness – as well as a guide to places of interest along the waterway and stories of the pioneers who settled there. The book truly stands the test of time. It is as interesting to read today as it was when first written almost 50 years ago.

Legget brings the story of the Rideau to life. He has provided a lively guide for boaters and other travellers, and for all those interested in the history of eastern Ontario.

The reprint is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Robert Legget, who passed away in 1994. Dr. Legget led a long and distinguished life. In 1989 he was made a Companion of the Order of Canada for his contributions as an engineer, geologist, educator, historian and writer. Because of KHS' contribution, members may

purchase the volume at the discount price of \$15.



LANDSCAPES/INSCAPES: THE OLD VAULT IN THE NEWBURGH CEMETERY



Would you like to see inside this vault? Don't answer until you have read my account of this dramatic happening!

I first met Mary Cook of **CBC Radio Noon** in 1987 when she did a story on Kingston's "\$Bill" and my **Kingston Waterfront** art show. After that, when she wanted to come to this area, she would call me and I would line up some interesting people for her to interview for her programme.

On June 15th, 1993, she arrived from Carleton Place with her friend, Deana. Mary had arranged a meeting in the afternoon with Basil Balance in the Newburgh Cemetery. This sounded fascinating as he witched for bodies!

It was a beautiful hot sunny day with not a cloud in the sky when we arrived at the cemetery. Basil was there waiting for us and he proceeded to show us how he witched for bodies. He held two iron rods, one in each hand. When he came to a grave, the rods would suddenly swing up and vibrate until he reached the end of the grave and then they immediately fell down. It was really amazing! He then handed the rods to me and I was sure that I could do it. I tried and tried to no avail. On the other hand, Mary and Deana were successful. They had the gift.

Basil then asked, "Would you like to see in a vault?" Both Deana and I did, but Mary said, "No way!" We followed him to the west side of the cemetery and down into a gully. It started to get cool and very dark. He opened the heavy steel door. We had no sooner stepped inside when all hell broke loose! There was loud thunder, lightening, pouring rain, and then hail the size of golf-balls came down.

Mary was screaming outside and wouldn't come in. I went to her and we both got soaked running away from there. When we reached the car, the sun was blazing down and the sky was blue.

I went back in 1994 to do this painting. Would anyone like to see inside? Don't worry, I had got the message loud and clear: the vault is sacred and our intrusions will not be tolerated. I contented myself by painting the "outscape" this time! (Shirley Gibson-Langille).

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