

Limelight

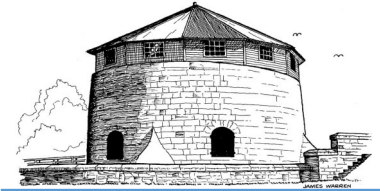
Newsletter of the Kingston Historical Society

Kingston Ontario Canada

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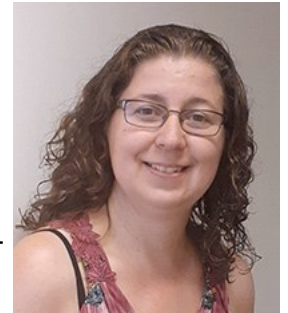
KHS meeting

Wednesday, April 14, 2021 @7:00 pm

>>>>>>via Zoom

Dr. Tabitha Renaud - "Without Words: The Communication Barrier between Indigenous Peoples and the Earliest European Explorers in North America."

For hundreds of years historians have glossed over how First Peoples and the earliest European explorers communicated with one another during their first meetings. How did they convey information back and forth? How effective was this process? This talk returns to seminal episodes of "first encounter" to closely examine how people in reality communicated and how our broadening understanding of this earliest interaction between the settler society and our First Nations can change traditional historical interpretations and why it matters so vitally today.



Dr. Tabitha Renaud completed her PhD in history at Queen's University under the supervision of Dr. Jane Errington and specialized in studying early encounters between Indigenous peoples and European explorers in the Americas. Tabitha serves as the Managing Director and chair of the Murney Tower Museum Committee as well as a Councillor of the Kingston Historical Society. She has also volunteered with the Kingston Association of Museums, Galleries and Historic Sites (KAM), Kingston Regional Heritage Fair, Beyond Classrooms Kingston, Smiths Falls Heritage House Museum Advisory Board and the Lower Burial Ground Restoration Society.



Murney Tower Operated by the Kingston Historical Society

Receive the Murney Tower newsletter by applying to be placed on the mailing list at manager@murneytower.com

Welcome, new members

Kay Cartwright

Jean and John Mair/Cartwright

Victoria Cosby

John Haydon

From the recent past of the Kingston Historical Society's Proceedings

Taken from **THEN** newsletter – November 1993 The Society's exhibition of historic art was a phenomenal success... Vice President Bill Fitts deserves the main credit...

THE KINGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Established 1893

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

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

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The KHS gratefully acknowledges the support of its sponsors in producing Limelight.

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President's Message

by Vincent Durant

From time to time the KHS is asked to support various causes and events. Council normally discusses these proposals, weighing whether they are within our bailiwick. Recently, your Society contributed to a two-day conference, March 20 and 21, titled Scholarship Beyond Boundaries, that was hosted by the Society of Graduate and Professional Students (SGPS) at Queen's University. KHS sponsored a three-member panel of students speaking on the topic of *Heritage, History, and Knowing the Past*. Our own Dr. Duncan McDowall chaired the Zoom-based panel. Here is a link to the conference website: <https://sgps.ca/sbbc/>



At the March meeting of KHS Council the following appointments were made: Betty Andrews – editor of Limelight; Peter Gower – editor of Historic Kingston and Webmaster; Tabitha Renaud – director of Murney Tower Museum. Also, several members and volunteers were appointed to the Museum Committee: Chair – Tabitha Renaud; Treasurer – Peter Ginn; and Don Richardson, Tanya Scott and Liz Watkins were appointed as members at large. Congratulations to the appointees, and thank you all for your willingness to serve in these vital roles with the Society.

Congratulations are due to the Hastings County Historical Society. Their newsletter, *Outlook* recently published its 350th issue, and is a fine tribute to the hard work of President Richard Hughes and the other volunteers of the HCHS, which was founded back in 1957. Their website may be found at: <https://hastingshistory.ca/>

Lastly, I want to encourage all members to *Zoom in* for April's KHS lecture, given by our own Dr. Tabitha Renaud. As you probably know, our on-line presentations have been extremely popular with KHS members and the general public, both in Kingston and in far-away places! Tabitha's talk, titled "Without Words: The Communication Barrier between Indigenous Peoples and the Earliest European Explorers in North America", which is the fourth in our five-part series, draws upon her research conducted while pursuing her PhD in History at Queen's.

Best wishes.

Vincent

The Snake Island Bridge

by Bruce Cossar

Further to John Grenville's excellent article on Snake Island (Historic Kingston 70 (2020):100-132) there is one subsequent incident in the island's history to report: the proposal to build an international bridge to the USA from the vicinity of the Dupont Plant to Cape Vincent in Jefferson County, NY, via Snake, Simcoe and Wolfe Islands.

The idea dated back at least to 1932, but it resurfaced in 1956 when the St. Lawrence Seaway was under construction and Kingston was expecting a considerable increase in shipping. One David Humphries proposed an enlargement of facilities in the outer harbour, including a bridge span from the mainland to Snake Island and a causeway to Simcoe Island to carry both road and rail traffic (Kingston Whig-Standard 23 January 1956: 23).

There was not much immediate interest, but six years later the idea took off. Frontenac County appointed a Frontenac International Bridge Committee, the City appointed its Mayor and two Councillors to work with them and meetings were held with Jefferson County representatives.

Such a bridge was expected to bring great economic benefit to the area through new industry and increased tourism, but construction was not possible without major provincial support. In March 1963, through the local MPPs, a delegation met with the provincial Minister of Highways. Initial reaction to the proposal was favourable and the government undertook detailed studies over the next several years.

Local support continued enthusiastic. A promotional fund-raising banquet was held and many people had "Be a Bridge Booster" pins or bumper stickers. Jefferson County called for New York legislation authorizing similar studies. On 2 November 1970 a US Congress Bill authorizing a new international bridge was signed by President Nixon. The US, of course, had to help only with a bridge between Cape Vincent and Wolfe Island. Canadian authorities would bear a much greater expense getting from Wolfe Island to the mainland.

Alas, it all came to naught. With all the attendant infrastructure (including new highways to and from the bridge itself), cost estimates had ranged widely but all were expensive! There were already three international bridges over the river; this would have made four within 72 miles. In the end the Province decided such was not needed and that the expense could not be justified.

And Snake Island? At barely half an acre it would not have been large enough to anchor abutments for a highway and railroad bridge; they would have overflowed onto the shoal and that would have run up the cost even further. Call it "the bridge that never was" but, had it been built, we would all be able to see exactly where this almost invisible island is located.

(Sourced mostly from Frontenac County Fonds in Queen's University Archives)

Dreadful Fire at Kingston *UPPER CANADA*

The Toronto Examiner 22 April 1840

KINGSTON, April 18 — It is our melancholy duty to announce to our distant friends and neighbours, the destruction by fire of a large portion of the very best part of our good, tho' in this respect, unfortunate town. This morning about one o'clock the Yankee steamer *Telegraph* was preparing leave the Ottawa and Rideau wharf, (late Counter's) where she had been lying all night, in firing up, a shower of sparks from her chimney communicated with the new warehouse, recently erected, on this wharf, and in a very short time it was in flames. The wind was then blowing strongly from the southward, and the fire spreading rapidly and fearfully, extended itself to the adjoining wharf of the company, and spread upwards to the Market-square, Brock and King streets, when, about three o'clock the wind fortuitously changed to the westward, and the fire was got under about daybreak. The results of this dreadful fire are these:— The entire destruction of the Ottawa and Rideau wharves, together with the steamer *Cataraqui*, the schooner *Lord Nelson* and about 10,000 barrels of flour, pork and potash; a large quantity of merchandise in Mr. Frazer's store; also the Lake Ontario steamboat office, and the dwelling houses of Mr. Palmer, baker, and Mr. Fleming, tavern keeper. The stone buildings of Mr. Counter were saved. The fire was prevented from extending to the houses up Clarence street by the pulling down when on fire of that occupied by Mr. J. Dillon, as a tavern. The entire block on the northern side of the Market Square, with the back houses in Brock Street, viz. Those of Messrs. J. Fraser, J. Linton, F. Campbell, J. Reitter, J. Lance, I. Webster, ____ Brown, J. Crommer, J. Trimble and W. Marsh. The entire block of houses (with the exception of 4) formed by King, Store, Water and Brock streets, occupied by the following persons: Doctor Baker, Messrs. D. Leahy, H. Mathison, Miss Wherry, J. O'Reilly, J. Ramage, G. Hardy, H. Mitchell, G. H. Markland, Beal, Mrs. Lynch, J. McFatridge, together with the Chronicle Office (xxxx and Printing Office) and Mr. Bamford's Steamboat Hotel. The Businesses burned in this block were those of the Honourable J. Macaulay, Greenshields, Ross & Co. J. Chesnut, and the Commercial Bank. About two o'clock, a quantity of gunpowder, some say seventy barrels, which were warehoused in Mr. Fraser's store, between the Ottawa and Rideau wharves exploded, — The shock was terrific and the damage done proportionate. Nearly the whole of the windows of the houses in the vicinity were smashed, which was the case with one-half the lights in town. Even distant as this office was from the scene of devastation, the shock was felt severely, and the office windows broken. It is said that the fire to the Market Square and adjoining houses was communicated by the roof of Mr. Fraser's ware-house being blown off by the explosion and carried through the air, alighting in the midst of the doomed dwellings. Fortunately no lives were lost, but several severe accidents resulted, one in particular to Mr. J. McManamee who lies dangerously wounded with a broken leg and arm. The entire of the Military (Regulars and Militia) with their officers and fire engines, navy detachment from the dock-yard, and every man, woman and child in the town were on the spot, striving to outdo each other, in assisting to save property, and relieve the distresses of those burnt out.— The Kingston Volunteer Fire Company mustered in full numbers were uncommonly active, and by their great exertions the fire was got under so soon as it was. The town carters deserve an equal xxxx of praise for their industrious assiduity in the conveyance of water. The quantity of property saved is small indeed, compared with what has fallen prey to the flames.

— **British Whig**

(The foregoing account of the late disastrous fire at Kingston we have copied from an Extra of the British Whig, omitting the concluding portion..)

In HK Volume 18 pp 57 –65, there is an article by John W. Spur, "The Night of the Fire".



EDEN FROM THE ASHES...

by Eva Barnes

Reprinted from *Historical Reflections*, St. Andrew's Kingston, 2020

1840 was not a good year to be a Kingstonian.

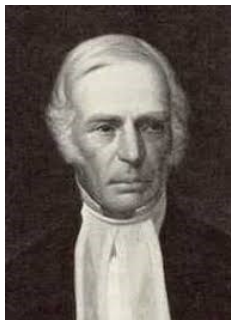
The town's Good Friday church services intensified the somber moods of its 4,870 inhabitants. The 1830s had brought two tragic cholera epidemics, a failed wheat harvest, armed political discontent, the collapse of the local bank, and abandoned plans for a hospital. Kingston's menfolk soaked their daily sorrows in the 162 drinking establishments, legal and otherwise, around the harbour.

As darkness embraced slumbering homes that stormy evening of April 17th, none could have anticipated the horrific catastrophe about to unfold.

A gale-force lake wind carried stray sparks from a moored steamship to the top of John Counter's warehouse and onto the rigging of two sailing vessels. Within minutes, a wind-fanned conflagration ensued. Alarms sounding, teamsters, sailors and soldiers rushed to the harbour with watercarts, clambering with buckets onto endangered rooftops.

Suddenly, Dr. James Sampson, the Mayor, realized that John Fraser's warehouse had caught fire, housing 85 barrels of gunpowder. As he shouted the warning, "She's going to blow! Save the women and children!", a cataclysmic explosion knocked firefighters and fleeing families to the ground. Hundreds of windows shattered. Flaming timber beams were thrust through flimsy wooden walls. Not a soul noticed the breaking dawn because of the intensity of the blaze. Forty-five families were left immediately homeless. The devastation was so great that a visiting English writer by the name of Charles Dickens later remarked that, "Half the town appears to be burned down, and the other half not built up."

1869 Ordnance Plan W078-4860-2 sheet III
plan XVI, National Archives of Great Britain.
Labels added by J. McKendry



The Rev. Dr. John Machar, Principal and Professor of Queen's College, Kingston, and Minister of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. Photo: circa 1860, Queen's University Archives, Kingston.

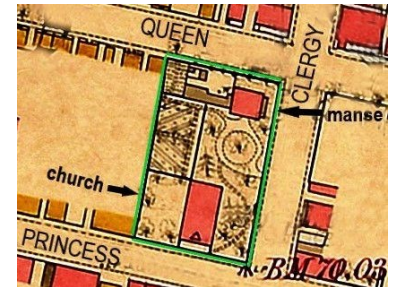
The Rev. John Machar was living in a distant rented house with his wife and three-year-old daughter at 117 Earl Street. As he surveyed the arid, smoldering devastation on Easter Sunday, he envisioned a beautiful garden oasis around a safe and stately stone house on the grounds of St. Andrew's.

In 1841 the good Reverend became resolved to build a manse when baby John Jr. arrived and the cold, small, drafty rented house needed to be shared with two homeless Catholic Sisters. The basement kitchen flooded and the roof leaked whenever there was a rainfall. The situation became untenable.

Providentially, when Kingston was declared the new capital of the United Canadas on February 15, 1841, a local building boom began. Irish architect George Browne won an international competition to build Kingston's City Hall, an audaciously spectacular structure befitting a new colonial capital. The Rev. Machar, strengthened by prayers, approached Mr. Browne with an invitation to design a manse for St. Andrew's, a "dwelling place of timeless distinction".

And so it was done, with the Machar family moving into their fine new Regency abode in June of 1842. The determined Rev. Machar had financed this labour of love himself, to be purchased later by the growing congregation. He took great care in landscaping a beautiful garden oasis of civilized serenity around the church for the enjoyment of all.

The 1861 census indicated that the Machars resided comfortably at the Manse, along with two domestic servants, while providing accommodation to a young Presbyterian woman from Gananoque. (Mention was made also of a milk cow kept in a shed on the premises.) With the kind Reverend's passing in 1863, a professional Scottish gardener was hired by the church Elders to maintain the extensive grounds.



For decades, Kingstonians have fallen into the habit of thinking of Kingston as a *university town*, a *military town*, a *civil service town* or a *limestone city*. At the same time, we have lost the habit of thinking of our town as a *port*. Yes, the occasional small cruise ship drops anchor in our harbour and, of course, the Wolfe Island ferry comes and goes throughout the day. But the glory days of Kingston as a busy port are long passed; the freighters bypass us on the other side of Wolfe Island and the one-time telltales of maritime activity – dockside warehouses, coal piles and grain elevators —are all gone, replaced by condos and hotels.

At its March meeting, the Society was reminded by local marine historian Marc Seguin that Kingston found its initial prosperity thanks to the comings and goings of ships heading up and down the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence inland waterway. The city was strategically well situated to transshipment of goods from river to lake transit, whether the cargo be timber, wheat, potash or immigrants. But getting to Kingston was a dangerous proposition. Shoals, rocky islets and vicious fall storms preyed on ships steering for Kingston, so much so that the eastern reaches of the lake acquired the sobriquet of “the graveyard of Lake Ontario.” “Lost at sea” became a familiar epitaph in local cemeteries.

Early in the nineteenth century, colonial governments in Upper Canada began to assist the colony's beleaguered mariners. Lighthouses were built at crucial promontories on the lakeshore. In 1833, Kingston's first lighthouse began guiding vessels from Nine Mile Point on Simcoe Island. By the end of the century, as many as 45 lighthouses and light towers guided ships to safe harbour in Kingston. Using superb illustrations, Seguin told the story of this unfolding covering everything from the evolving technology of lighthouses – crude oil lanterns to Fresnel lamps – to the lonely life of a lighthouse keeper.

Seguin concluded his talk on a nostalgic note: the lighthouses of our lake are now largely abandoned, derelict and forgotten. Modern technology and larger ships guided by radar and GPS have made navigation easier and safer. Seguin eloquently called for the preservation of those lights still standing, outlining the frustrations of dealing with the Coast Guard and Parks Canada in trying to preserve this significant bit of our maritime heritage. Seguin spearheads this desire through his “Save the Lighthouses” foundation and through books on the subject published by his own press – Ontario History Press – most notably *For Want of a Lighthouse: Guiding Ships Through the Graveyard of Lake Ontario*. The evening ended with a lively audience discussion of ways to ensure that our heritage include preservation of the lighthouses that once made Kingston prosperous. Marc can be reached at marc@ontariohistory.ca.



JOHN WALTER (BILL) FITSELL 1923-2020

By Edward R. Grenda

There was a mournful poignancy in the passing of Bill Fittsell in early December 2020. A former Society president, Bill diligently chronicled the late twentieth century socio-cultural state of affairs in Kingston through his many "People" columns in The Kingston Whig-Standard and he wrote of Kingston's history in newspapers and journal articles and books. Also he was the foremost hockey historian, writing a lengthy series of journal articles and four books on Canada's national winter sport. He was a personal friend for forty years. His loss for the city, the hockey world and me is irreparable.

What made his friendship so exquisitely special was that we shared a multitude of interests and values ranging from historical research on a wide variety of topics, local and national, to literature, sport and involvement in organizations. We both served on a number of local, national and international organizations. Through the years we exchanged essay papers, newspaper articles, and books, thus engaging in an incremental accumulation of knowledge, theoretical and factual. In addition to this, we travelled frequently to other Canadian and American cities for meetings and conferences. In doing so, the hotel rooms we shared often contained a mountain of books and newspapers we collected. Doubtless, this tendency led to another undertaking we shared: clipping and filing!

At meetings where personal introductions were requested to attendees, Bill would succinctly provide details of his background and finally add, much to the amusement of the audience, "And I am six months behind in my filing." Sometimes it would be nine months or a year in which he was arrears in his filing. He was an inveterate clipper of newspapers.

In our travels, we came across experiences that were notable in their significance for our research interests and the people we met. And some were simply humorous:

- In June 1989, Bill made a presentation to a meeting of the Toronto chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) at the Ontario Centre in Toronto. His topic was the identification of "Casey" in the famous piece of American comic verse. "Casey at the Bat" by Ernest Thayer, published in 1888. Through an examination of documents, early newspapers in Syracuse and correspondence with various people in Canada and the USA, Bill proposed that "Casey" was a Canadian who came from Newburgh, Ontario. Bill was suggesting that Casey was not a fictitious person but a real person with Canadian roots. I had the privilege of reading aloud the sections of the poem that were quoted in the paper. The paper was eventually published in the Magazine section of the Kingston Whig-Standard in 1990.
- In February 2002, Bill and I were invited to a film shoot for a documentary to be released by the National Film Board of Canada at the Governor-General's rink at Rideau Hall by the film director, David Battistella. Along with several other hockey players, we were asked to play shinny on the Governor-General's rink, which we did. At one point in the game, Bill, at the age of 79, was skating with the puck at centre ice and nobody near him and he fell on the ice. Apparently, one of his skates struck a deep gouge in the ice. He picked himself up and said that his right side hurt but, being undeterred by the discomfort he experienced, he continued to play after a halt in the proceedings when he fell. All the players began to jest that it was the ghost of former Governor-General Lord Stanley that gave him a body check. During the lunch we and the players had at Rideau Hall following the shoot, Bill said that he was fine and his ribs hurt only when he laughed – and there was copious laughter indeed. Eventually we learned that Bill suffered from some bruised ribs. Bill and I were invited to Rideau Hall because we were consultants for the documentary which was issued in late 2002 as "Shinny: The Hockey in All of Us". Bill's fall, or Lord Stanley's body check does not appear in the files.

- On May 22, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper (a member of the Society for International Hockey Research) unveiled a plaque commemorating the National Historic Significance of James George Creighton (one of hockey's early pioneers) at the Bell Centre in Montreal. Bill's research on Creighton constituted major parts of the Prime Minister's address. Prime Minister Harper generously praised Bill for the historical research he undertook to honour an almost forgotten individual in hockey's history. At the same time, the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) unveiled a plaque marking the significance of the Victoria Skating Rink as the starting point for organized hockey on March 33, 1875. Bill and I were invited to this function by the Prime Minister's Office – Bill's historical research and writing about Creighton played a critically important role in this plaque presentation also, and I was Chair of SIHR's Creighton Memorial Project. Reaching Montreal for this event was another experience. Bill and I travelled by train to Montreal expecting that the train would arrive in Montreal an hour and a half prior to the event which was scheduled for 12:30 pm. Unfortunately, the train's arrival was an hour and fifteen minutes late. I telephoned the Prime Minister's secretary to tell of our plight. What occurred is that Prime Minister Harper delayed the start of the event. We scrambled by taxi to the Bell Centre and were led to the Montreal Canadiens dressing room where a small reception was being held. The prime minister was pleased to see Bill and sought some additional background on Creighton for some off-the-cuff remarks. Interestingly, Rene Fasel (President of the IIHF) was also in the room. Our meeting with him was strained, largely because Fasel, in 2007 when Bill and I met him in Toronto, peremptorily dismissed any prospect of the IIHF continuing its contract with Kingston's hockey museum to be the official museum of the international hockey body.

Bill Fitsell from the KHS newsletter 1994



- In 1987-88, Bill was a member of the Kingston Olympic Torch Relay Committee. He was prominent in assisting the Committee in naming deserving Kingstonians who were to receive "Celebration 88" certificates of recognition (a Federal government initiative connected with the 1988 Winter Olympic Games held in Calgary, Alberta.)

Bill was the consummate gentleman. His judgment was always measured and clearly articulated whether dealing with his written work or his involvement with organizations in which he held director or executive positions. Many of the proposals he advanced in organizations were creative, practical, and illuminating. His interest in the arts was aptly demonstrated when he proposed and carried out art shows for the Society and also the International Hockey Hall of Fame and Museum in Kingston.

It should be mentioned that the hockey art show held in 1986 was the first of its kind for hockey anywhere. Bill was admired for his sharp intellect, and fierce determination. His reading of history books and essays was enormously expansive and he possessed the intangible facility to ascertain immediately whether a written work was original or recycled. He was an ardent supporter of those

who aspired to write history on the local level or on the historical aspects of hockey.

All these qualities were threaded together by a subtle sense of humour.

Bill's passing leaves a void in all the worlds of endeavour he touched.

REST EASY, BILL , REST EASY