

Limelight

Newsletter of the Kingston Historical Society

Kingston Ontario Canada

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February 2024



The Kingston Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport.



Kingston Historical Society Meeting

Annual General Meeting

Wednesday, February 21, 2024

7 p.m.

Kingsbridge Retirement Centre

950 Centennial Drive

simultaneously offered via >>>Zoom

Featuring

Presentation of the annual **Kingston Historical Society Award**

Please visit the meeting in person, if possible.

It is noted with regret that three long-time members of the Kingston Historical Society have died recently:

Audrie Cossar on 13 January 2024,

Professor Paul Fritz on 17 January 2024,

Dr. Robert Gardiner on 19 January 2024.

THE KINGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Established 1893

LIMELIGHT is published nine times a year, September to May.

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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Featured Sponsor

The Kingston Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the financial support of Kingston Association of Museums, Art Galleries and Historic Sites and the City of Kingston.



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



President: Paul Charbonneau Vice President: Peter Gower Past President: Vincent Durant Treasurer: Peter Ginn Secretary: Don Richardson
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Duncan McDowall, Programme Chair; Tabitha Renaud, Director of Murney Tower; Paul Van Nest, Membership Chair; Peter Gower, Editor of Historic Kingston, and
Webmaster

President's Message

by Paul Charbonneau

If you meet 29th February, think of something unique, for it is the only day that defines a year as a leap year. It is the only day that makes February truly unique.” – Ernest Agyemang Yeboah

This will be my last letter in my current term as President of this distinguished society. I want to celebrate those who have served with me in the last two years on the Council. These learned and talented individuals bring all their hearts and souls into play to continue the work of the Kingston Historical Society. On Wednesday, February 21st, we will hold our Annual General Meeting. Please consider joining the KHS Council and offering your talents. The AGM is your opportunity to receive reports regarding the business of the last year, including the financial position of your society. It is also an opportunity to provide your input on how the society has operated in the past year and, hopefully, give some suggestions for improvement, including ideas for our speaker programme. The highlight of the AGM will be the presentation of the Kingston Historical Society Award to an individual or organization who has contributed to the preservation of local Kingston history.

This month is also our Heritage Event, in conjunction with the *Frontenac Heritage Foundation*. Please join us in the Memorial Hall of Kingston City Hall for a lecture by Dr. Jennifer McKendry. Dr. McKendry will add to our knowledge about architects who shaped our city from 1920 to 2000.

As we move toward the re-opening of Bellevue House, updates regarding the renovation work will be published in the Limelight. I have personally toured the site recently and am impressed with how the home of Sir John A. is being transformed.

Happy February! Can you feel the love?



Kingston Historical Society

Heritage Event

Sunday, February 18th @ 2:00 pm in the Memorial Hall of City Hall:

In conjunction with the ***Frontenac Heritage Foundation,***
the **Kingston Historical Society**

will celebrate Family Day/Heritage Month in Ontario

with a lecture by well-known architectural historian **Dr. Jennifer McKendry.**

Her illustrated talk will showcase her latest book

Architects Working in the Kingston Region 1920-2000.

Books will be available for purchase and teatime refreshments will be served.



Dr. Jennifer McKendry is an architectural historian, living in Kingston, and the author of numerous articles and books such as

Architects Working in the Kingston Region 1820 – 1920;

Architects Working in the Kingston Region 1920 – 2000;

Modern Architecture in Kingston: a survey of 20th-century;

Portsmouth Village, Kingston: an illustrated history;

Early Photography in Kingston from the Daguerreotype to the Postcard;

With Our Past before Us: 19th-century architecture in the Kingston area;

Bricks in 19th-Century Architecture of the Kingston Area;

Woodwork in Historic Buildings of the Kingston Region;

and Kingston, the Limestone City: stone buildings in the Kingston region 1790 – 1930.

Her PhD graduate work at the University of Toronto involved studying the architectural careers of William Coverdale, John Power and Joseph Power.

She is a member of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada, the Frontenac Heritage Foundation and the Kingston Historical Society. Work includes free-lance reports on the history and significance of heritage buildings, properties and archaeological sites. She enjoys presenting illustrated lectures on 19th- and 20th-century architecture of the Kingston region.

Of particular interest is thinking about the role of architects – their creativity, challenges and frustrations. The verbal wishes of their clients have to be visualized in tangible drawings. Bids for specific projects may be needed and, if successful, technical plans and contracts would be needed that keep in mind the client's needs, zoning and building code requirements, and possible citizen objections. It is a complex scenario and warrants our appreciation.

Barber Shop History

Local history should never rest of its laurels; there are always new windows to be opened and new perspectives taken in. Such was the case at the Society's January lecture at which Queen's history professor Dr. Gordon Dueck discussed his research into the surprisingly prominent role that Black musicians played – quite literally – in Kingston's late nineteenth-and twentieth-century cultural life.

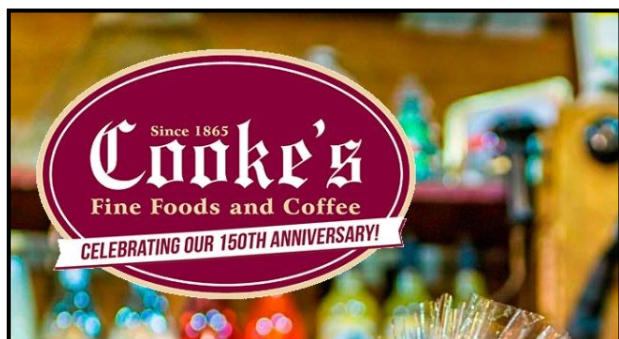
"Barbers in Blackface?" traced the workaday and musical careers of four Black Kingstonians, three of whom were barbers by trade. Dueck reminded us that the "blackface" tradition of white entertainers appearing in imitation of Black minstrels was a central and popular facet of American culture. Indeed, one such white performer, Thomas Rice, popularized the term "Jim Crow" as a pejorative descriptor of Blacks. While the blackface tradition is now deemed racist, in the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century it was mainstage culture. Think of the music of Stephen Foster and Al Jolson, for instance.

Like all North American culture, blackface performances spilled across the Canadian border. In Kingston, Dueck's four Blacks found fame not just as barbers – barbershops being popular male gathering places – but also in the city's theatre district and later on CKWS radio. Things were, however, different in Canada: whereas in America there was strict segregation of whites (even in blackface) and Blacks, in Canada the performances were integrated. Dueck suggested that Kingston's small-town ethos explained this racial tolerance. Whatever the reason, Kingstonians of both races, for instance, frequented the barbershop of Irish-born Black Daniel Reilly, where they might receive a haircut and a backroom music lesson from the city's leading "violinist."

Dueck's research reminds us that our comprehension of Kingston's heritage must always be open to new inclusions and new definitions of what it is to be called a "Kingstonian."

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Bellevue House: Preserving Kingston's Built Heritage By Bruce MacMillan

With Bellevue House reopening this May, Parks Canada is sharing the story of the house's renewal in a series of articles over the coming months.

Bellevue House National Historic Site features one of the oldest and finest examples of Italianate villa architecture in Canada. The historic home was also rented for a brief period between 1848 and 1849 by Canada's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald. To mark Canada's centennial, the house was purchased, restored, and opened by Parks Canada in 1967 to celebrate Macdonald's legacy. For the next 50 years, Parks Canada provided a celebratory interpretation of Macdonald as a founding father of the Dominion of Canada.

As one of the top 'things to do' in Kingston, Bellevue House is an integral part of the city's cultural heritage landscape and identity as Canada's first capital. However, in 2018, routine inspection detected issues with the original plaster ceiling. Parks Canada had to close the site's historic house for repairs. Parks Canada realized that this closure presented an opportunity to advance other planned structural work and initiated a full-scale restoration of all elements of the house, from roof to basement. Removing all the contents for the structural work also opened the opportunity for Parks Canada to fully renew the presentation and visitor experience offered on the house.

Restoration work had to be undertaken in a sequential process, starting with careful planning. Before any construction work could begin, the first step of the project was to protect the heritage elements in the house's interior. This meant that all the contents of the house were carefully removed and sent to the Parks Canada conservation facility in Ottawa for restoration, refurbishment, or repair, including artifacts with direct links to Macdonald, such as one of his office chairs, some of his books and a cradle that may have come with the family from Scotland. Parks Canada also had to protect the decorative architectural elements of the house interior from construction activities and equipment, so great care was taken to ensure features such as fireplaces, wood trim, doors and railings were all padded and covered during renovations.

There are seven different levels to Bellevue House, and to repair the ceilings of every level, the floorboards of the level above had to be removed. Opening the floors provided opportunity to undertake other work, such as installation of new electrical wiring, but only once the ceilings had been stabilized. That was accomplished by spraying a special formulated acrylic glue-type material to the back side of the ceiling assembly which enabled the lath and plaster to once again adhere to each other. The ceiling repairs required a delicate combination of bracing from below and workers from above. Starting from the top floor and working down, the original lath and plaster ceilings were stabilized, one floor at a time. By the end of 2021, most of the primary building components of the 180-year-old Bellevue House had been repaired, undergone preservation work, or been updated. The house had a new roof, stable ceilings, replastered walls, refinished floors and upgraded electrical components. Work continued on window, door and trim restorations, but Parks Canada staff were able to re-enter the home. This access meant that new exhibit development could advance. Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to pose many challenges to the restoration work, the collaboration, and the consultation processes that were intrinsic to the renewal of the exhibits and presentation of Bellevue House.

All photos courtesy of Parks Canada



As a key attraction in the local tourism market and on the historic trolley route, this renewal of Bellevue House National Historic Site is a significant investment for tourism and heritage in Kingston. On May 18, 2024, Parks Canada will reopen the historic Bellevue House, fully restored and fitted with new exhibits that present many viewpoints on Sir John A. Macdonald and his legacies. Watch this space as Parks Canada will be sharing more information about the renewal of Bellevue House in next month's edition.

Scaffolding surrounds Bellevue House during renovation of the historic home. This image was captured in 2019.



This picture captures work underway in the dining room. Carefully constructed supports were used to secure ceilings of Bellevue House while plaster conservation specialists worked on them from the floor above.

Work to stabilize the original ceilings of Bellevue House required careful removal, and then reinstallation, of the hardwood floors as seen in this picture of the house dressing room.



The repaired walls in the house kitchen are receiving their first coat of a historic period colour. Salmon pink colours like this were often used in kitchens of the period.

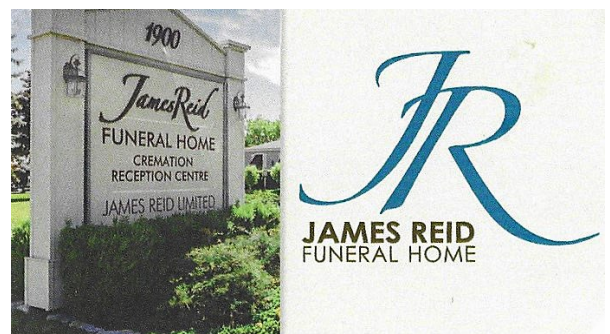
In Limelight of October 2017 there is an article in the Still Standing column by Dr. Jennifer McKendry discussing the architecture of Bellevue House.



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The Kingston Horticultural Society is celebrating its 125th anniversary this year. The Society planted and tended to public gardens in Kingston until the city took over the planning sometime in the latter half of the 1900's. If you have any older pictures of the gardens before the city took over, the Society would appreciate copies. Email: kingstonhortsoc@gmail.com

The Kingston and District Branch, UELA, will meet February 24 at 1:00 p.m. at St. Paul's Anglican Church Hall, 137 Queen St. West. Zoom at 12:30 p.m. Dr. Tim Campeau will discuss Joel Stone (1749-1833), founder of Gananoque. For the Zoom link for the meeting, visit the website www.uelac.org/Kingston-Branch

The Historical Society of Ottawa, on Wednesday, February 7, 7:00 p.m. (on Zoom) will feature Dave Tulloch's presentation on how people from the Caribbean have come to make Ottawa their home. <https://www.historicalsocietyottawa.ca/activities/meetings>

On February 24th at 10:00 a.m. **the Kingston Genealogical Society** will hold a virtual meeting featuring a presentation by Amy Gilpin who will be speaking on Scottish genealogy. See Kingston.ogs.on.ca for Zoom link to the meeting.

Peter Gower writes:

Dear kingstonhs@gmail.com: questions for which you may have an answer

KHS receives a number of questions on a wide variety of topics. This new occasional column will reprint some of those to which we do not have immediate answers, in the hope that you can help the correspondent.

So, from Scotland:

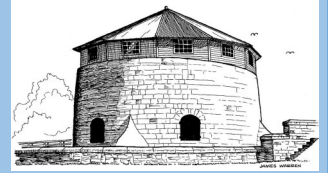
My name is Peter Lowens and I am doing research on the time Charles Dickens spent in Canada. I understand Dickens stayed in Kingston at Daley's Hotel, later called the British American Hotel, which burnt down in 1963. Evidently during that fire, a plaque that identified that Charles Dickens once slept on the site melted during the fire. Presently, the site is occupied by a Sheraton hotel. May I ask a few questions? First, is there any photographic image of the plaque? Second, was this melted plaque ever replaced so the location of Dickens' stay is once again noted. If you are aware of any other historical records of Dickens' stay (I've done a general Google search), I would appreciate it if you could direct me to the source. I am quite willing to cover the cost of any reasonable amount for records or images pertaining to my requests.

Please send any helpful suggestions to kingstonhs@gmail.com

Murney Tower

Operated by the Kingston Historical Society

www.murneytower.com



Murney Tower Update

Winter interns from the Queen's History department who have worked on research and in the storage unit are finished. New interns will be working until April on educational activities for March Break and the Easter event and helping with the day-to-day tasks. Hiring of three students for the Murney Tower next summer is in progress.



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Filming at the Murney Tower was completed in December and will be aired on APTN in the fall.

The 100th Anniversary Planning Committee is in place.

Welcome, new members

Michael Boire Gordon Hall David Nicholson

Kim Carter Gordon Thomson Laurie Lloyd Eben Prevec

Have you paid your membership fees for 2024 yet?

Methods of Payment:

1. Mail this completed application form and a cheque made out to the 'Kingston Historical Society' to
Kingston Historical Society, Box 54, Kingston ON K7L 4V6
2. Online with Visa or MasterCard or PayPal: <https://www.kingstonhistoricalsociety.ca/> >Membership
3. eTransfer to treasurer@kingstonhistoricalsociety.ca

☐ \$40 for individual membership; ☐ \$50 for family; ☐ \$10 for student; ☐ \$50 for institution; and ☐ \$300 for sponsor.

Paul Van Nest, Membership Chair, KHS, 613-532-1903 (text or phone), pvannest@cogeco.ca

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Membership includes the annual journal '*Historic Kingston*' and 9 issues of the newsletter '*Limelight*', some sponsor discounts and some special event discounts. '*Historic Kingston*' may be purchased by non-members for \$35.