

Limelight

Newsletter of the Kingston Historical Society

Kingston Ontario Canada

Volume 7 no 6

ISSN 1488-5565

September 2025



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



Kingston Historical Society Meeting 17 September 2025

presented live at 7pm in the theatre lounge of the Kingsbridge Retirement Community at 950 Centennial Drive
and simultaneously offered via >>>Zoom

Susan W. Smith

will reflect on the history and heritage of
the Thousand Islands, the iconic stretch of
the St. Lawrence River just east of Kingston.

Susan has been the editor of the online magazine, Thousand Islands life.com, since 2008. She is the author of *The First Summer People: The Thousand Islands 1650-1910*, published by Boston Mills Press in 1993.

It is noted with regret, the death of Brian Johnson on 8 May 2025, a long-time member of the Kingston Historical Society, who received the KHS Award (2010) for his work in preserving the history of the Wolfe Island Ferry. Brian was the founding president of the Wolfe Island Historical Society.

It is noted with regret, the death of Eileen Huberland on 18 June 2025, a long-time member of the Kingston Historical Society. Eileen had celebrated her 100th birthday on 1 April 2025.

It is noted with regret, the death of Carol Davy on 11 July 2025, a long-time member of the Kingston Historical Society.

It is noted with regret, the death of Helen Coffey on 18 July 2025, a long-time member of the Kingston Historical Society.

It is noted with regret, the death of Dr. Jack Pike on 20 July 2025, a long-time member of the Kingston Historical Society.

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.

MAILING ADDRESS:

Kingston Historical Society
P.O. Box 54,
Kingston ON K7L 4V6
kingstonhs@gmail.com
www.kingstonhistoricalsociety.ca

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: Peter Gower Vice President: Kat MacDonald Past President: Paul Charbonneau Treasurer: Peter Ginn Secretary: Don Richardson
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Ann Stevens, Publicity; Paul Van Nest, Membership Chair; Peter Gower, Editor of Historic Kingston.

President's Message

by Peter Gower

In case you thought that the Society closed down between the May and September Heritage talks, think again! The week before the May 21st meeting was the reception in the Murney Tower starting off the celebration of our 100th year there. Friends, members and representatives from other museums and various Kingston groups had a preview of the work done by Curator Alison, Co-ordinator Alexa, and this year's student workers under the watchful eye of Liana Shaw, and saw the exhibit of art work especially created for the Centennial and selected by a jury in co-operation with the Modern Fuel Museum.



On June 6th we gathered in fine weather at the Sir John A. Macdonald grave site to hear Roy MacSkimming speak on Reconciliation. On July 12th we were privileged to have Tim Cook visit the Tower and speak on his latest book about the close relationship between Prime Minister Mackenzie King and President Franklin D. Roosevelt, which helped both countries enormously during World War Two. The ironies of Canada's relationship today with the United States and that Dr. Cook stood under a 32 pound cannon aimed at the American shore were not lost on the audience!

Meanwhile, the children's book, *The Time Travelling Adventures of Mr. Murney*, which was published in honour of the Centennial of the Murney Tower Museum, was featured at a day of book reading on August 1st and the Annual Murneyfest was held in gorgeous weather a week later.

And the Cruise! Commemorating the 100 years of the Murney Tower Museum and 50 years of the Island Queen, in partnership with Kingston 1000 Islands Cruises, a Sunday evening harbour cruise was held, giving participants a closeup view of the lake side of the Tower; and as the sun set on a beautiful evening, we could see all four Martello Towers guarding Kingston.

It will be quite restful to return to our much more sedate Heritage talks after all of the summer excitement! I look forward to seeing you at them, in person or on Zoom.

A Kingston Romance



BookRiot, the largest independent editorial book site in North America, reminds its devotees that the romance novel – those “happily ever after” tales of couples overcoming adversity to find each other’s abiding affection – are the most-read genre of contemporary literature. Our May speaker, Ottawa literary scholar and librarian **Christine Lavallee**, reminded her audience that the romance novel has deep historical roots, roots first planted in Canada by a Kingston-based author.

In 1824, Julia Beckwith Hart (1796-1867), New Brunswick born but by then a Kingston resident, published what is believed to be the first Canadian fiction novel – *St. Ursula’s Convent: The Nun of Canada*. Lavallee framed her talk by describing the essence of romance literature – “inspirational” tales built around couples finding fulfilment against social odds – nurse marries doctor, for instance. Lavallee suggested that Hart was probably influenced by the emotional rhythms of Jane Austen’s novels published in those same years. She also pointed out that nineteenth century fiction could also be a vehicle for the phobias of the age – anti-Catholicism in the case of *The Nun of Canada*.

Hart’s novel was by no means a best seller. Few copies were published and those that were found themselves in circulating libraries where readers rented, rather than bought, books. Nonetheless, Hart stands as a pioneering women writer in Canada, a country whose women novelists – think of L.M. Montgomery, Margaret Attwood and Emma Donoghue – have found global readership. Lavallee ended her eloquent remarks by outlining her ambition to promote recognition of Hart across Canada, most immediately in a Heritage Minute.

Lavallee’s talk is available on YouTube through the KHS website.



KHS President Peter Gower Honoured

In 2017, the Awards Committee of KHS, as well as choosing winners of the Society’s annual awards and informing the Province of those who qualified for long service certificates, recommended to the Governor General that our then President, Peter Gower, be considered as a recipient of the Sovereign’s Medal for long time volunteer

service in the historical and heritage sector.

This was approved in 2019, but Covid and some upheaval in the Governor General’s Office prevented the ceremonial presentation until the end of April 2025 when 60 recipients were honoured in Rideau Hall, and Peter (again the KHS President!), was among them. This photo, taken at the informal reception after the presentations, shows Peter (wearing the Murney Tower pin) with Governor General Mary Simon and on the right, his wife Jean and their grandson Altair, and, on the left, their daughter Sarah.



Obituary of Dr. John Gibson (Jack) Pike

by Paul Van Nest, August 2025

If you have been a member of the Kingston Historical Society between the early 1970s until very recent years, you will know Jack Pike. He was the nicest guy, thoughtful of others, insightful and a “font of knowledge” on many things. He was known for provoking good conversations with our speakers but was always respectful, and therefore always respected. He passed away on 20 July 2025 at the age of 95 in Trenton, supported by Phillip (son) and Lori. He is so missed by his many good friends. He grew up in Hamilton and graduated from the Royal Military College in 1952. In those days, to achieve their degree, cadets finished the final year (5th year) at Queen’s. His was in Mechanical Engineering. He then received his Masters from Birmingham and his PhD from McGill. He returned to RMC as a teacher, becoming a full professor over the next 30 years. He made major contributions in his field of fluid dynamics and was department head. He received the Queen’s Jubilee Medal, was appointed Professor Emeritus and awarded an honorary Doctorate of Engineering from RMC, all amazing accomplishments for which he received consequent recognition. I first knew Jack when I taught at RMC and there met him as a burgeoning expert on the American Civil War. He joined Kingston’s Civil War Round Table soon after it was inaugurated in 1993 and gave papers almost annually thereafter. This was but one aspect of his attraction to things historical. He led tours not only of Civil War sites but also of military sites in Europe. He supported the Fort Frederick Museum, chaired the RMC Museum, and was president of the Organization of Military Museums of Canada and, as you might expect, was chair of the RMC Club for a time.



A Celebration of Jack’s life will be held at St. James Church on Union Street on Tuesday, September 9 at 11 a.m.

It's been a big year for Kingston's **Great Lakes Museum**. S.S. Keewatin has just won the Museum Ship of the Year Award. *On September 7th between 11:00 A.m. and 3:00 p.m. the Great Lakes Museum is hosting a day of activities for the community. Included are exclusive behind-the-scenes Museum tours including 20 minute 'sneak peek' S.S. Keewatin tours.*

The Ontario Genealogical Society Kingston Branch meeting is September 20th, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. The Zoom based meeting will feature a presentation by lawyer Drew von Hasselbach: Marriage Bonds - a Napanee Case Study. Contact [Kingston.ogs.on.ca](https://kingston.ogs.on.ca) for the Zoom link.

The Historical Society of Ottawa has just finished a new *HSO 2026 Bytown 200 Bicentennial Storytelling Challenge* webpage.

They are working to create a showcase of stories pertaining to the Rideau Canal, Bytown (1826-1855).

Link: <https://www.historicalsocietyottawa.ca/resources/bytown-200>

Of interest to you?

A 9 June 2025 National Post article about historical statue restoration: **Patrice Dutil: Ryerson's toppled statue should be restored at Queen's Park**. *Egerton Ryerson embodied the best of his generation and today must be recognized as the founder of Canada's public education system* <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/ryersons-toppled-statue-should-be-restored-at-queens-park>

For March 2025 issue of HSO quarterly Newsletter "Capital Chronicle", editor Richard Collins, go to

<https://www.historicalsocietyottawa.ca/publications/capital-chronicle-newsletter/capital-chronicle-2025-03> (press view)

Although they've been active since the 1930s, the **Cape Vincent Historical Museum** only recently received its official NY State charter as a museum along with nonprofit status.

Find the full story: <https://thousandislandslife.com/all-about-the-cape-vincent-historical-museum/>

41 years as Kingston's Official Town Crier! Kingston's **Chris Whyman**'s name is back on the **Provincial Town Crier Championship Trophy** after the May contest held in Gananoque. **Liam Cragg** and **Bill McKee** were tied for second place.



Murney Tower

Operated by the Kingston Historical Society

www.murneytower.com



Pictured at the opening event May 17, 2025: Alison Dringenberg, Alexa Grandy, Victoria (Tori) Payne, Anandi Dajka and Mackenzie Fitzpatrick.



On Canada Day, Alexa Grandy, Murney Tower Coordinator wearing a period shawl of her own making.
Photo by Eva Barnes



At the Murney Tower Museum, on 12 July 2025, the celebrated Canadian author and historian, **Dr. Tim Cook** lectured on the complexities of Canada-U.S. relations during the Second World War.

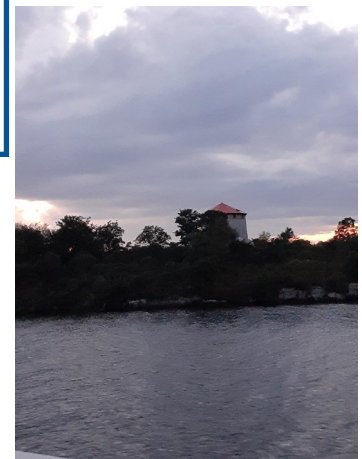
The Time Travelling Adventures of Mr. Murney



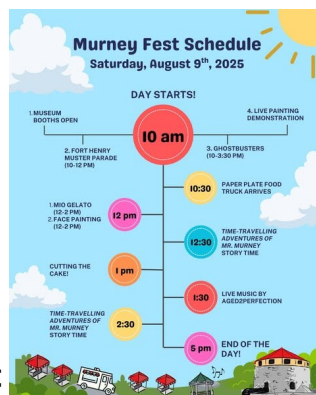
**MURNEY TOWER MUSEUM
100TH OPERATING SEASON**

On **Friday, August 1, 2025**, at Tourism Kingston's Visitor Information Centre, a special storytime event for children and families was held to read the new children's story-book, *The Time-Travelling Adventures of Mr. Murney*, created to celebrate the 100th birthday of the Murney Tower.

Murney Fest, 29 August



Elizabeth Durno, Betty Andrews, and Peter and Jean Gower on the Island Queen, celebrating 100 years of the Murney Tower Museum and 50 years of the Island Queen.



Throughout July, many focus groups were held to connect with the community before the forming of the 2026-2031 Strategic Plan.

Mayor Bryan Paterson officially proclaimed August 1, 2025, as **Murney Tower Museum 100th Anniversary Day.**

Annual Kingston Historical Society Sir John A. Macdonald Graveside Ceremony

by Dr. Duncan McDowall, KHS Programme Chair

June 6: “Should old acquaintance be forgot?”

Almost immediately after Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada’s first prime minister, was laid to rest in Cataraqui Cemetery in 1891, Kingstonians fell into the annual habit of gathering to celebrate his legacy on the date of his death, June 6. Initially the gathering was orchestrated by the local Conservative Party as an act of Tory devotion. In the early 1970s, that duty was assumed by the Kingston Historical Society, which has conducted the ceremony in a more inclusive fashion, one with an overtone of national homage. Subsequently, as with our other prime ministers’ graves, Macdonald’s grave has been designated a national historic site by the federal government.

In recent years, however, the place of Macdonald in our national panoply has come under intense scrutiny as the issue of the nature of Indigenous citizenship in our nation has justifiably demanded attention. As a nation, we have come to recognize that nineteenth-century racial attitudes and policies have no place in our modern society. The reorientation came to a head and found its future course in the deliberations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission under Mr. Justice Murray Sinclair, who boldly agreed to speak at the Cataraqui ceremony two years ago. Sinclair praised Macdonald as both a “remarkable man” and a man tainted by the acculturationalist attitudes of his time. In this respect, much tarnish has been accumulated on Macdonald’s reputation, some deserved, but much exaggerated. Macdonald has often, for instance, been cast as the sole author of Canada’s policies towards its Indigenous peoples.

This year’s June 6th speaker, journalist, novelist, poet and published author, Roy MacSkimming, sought to “reconcile” our new sensibilities about Macdonald with his storied image. MacSkimming called for balance in our understanding of Macdonald as a nation builder – a recognition that he embodied his times with all its challenges and faults. MacSkimming called out some of the recent mis-uses of Macdonald in the public debate. In particular, he decried the representation of Macdonald in the recent reinterpretation of Kingston’s Bellevue House, in which the national achievement of our first prime minister is left in the shadow of the “evils” in mid-nineteenth century Canadian society.

Those who attended this year’s commemoration took away more than memories of a piper’s lament and a fluttering maple leaf flag above Macdonald’s grave. They took away the realization that history is a moveable construct, one that adds new dimensions to its old verities, not one that simply demolishes the old in the interest of present expediency. Roy MacSkimming’s incisive and eloquent address will be reproduced in this year’s Historic Kingston.

Photos by Peter Ginn



Brian Porter, who often plays the role of Sir John A. MacDonald in historical re-enactments

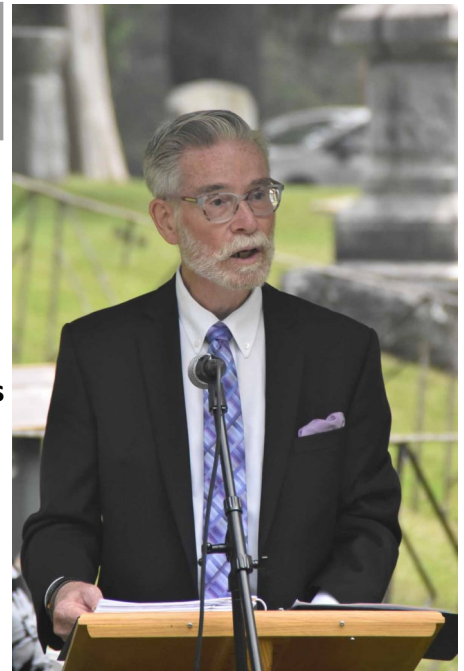
Annual Kingston Historic Society Sir John A. Macdonald Graveside Ceremony

Photo by Eva
Barnes



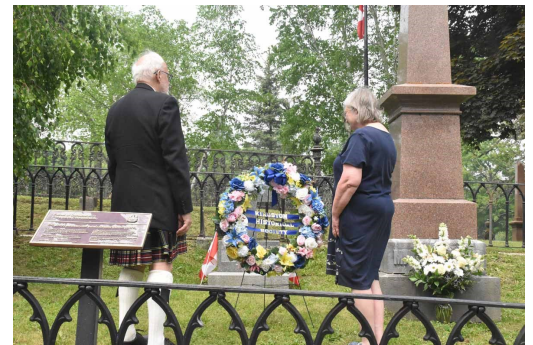
Roy MacSkimming,
the guest speaker

Master of Ceremonies
Don Richardson



Photos by Peter Ginn

Piper Doug Green

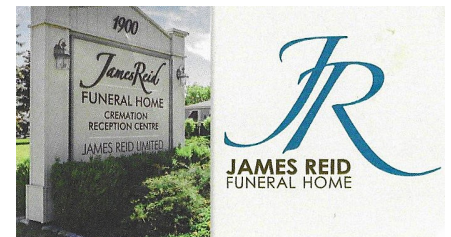


KHS President Peter Gower and Liana
Shaw



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