

# Limelight

## Newsletter of the Kingston Historical Society

Kingston Ontario Canada



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



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October 2025

### Kingston Historical Society Meeting 15 October 2025

presented live at 7pm, in the theatre lounge of the

**Kingsbridge Retirement Community** at 950 Centennial Drive

and simultaneously offered via >>>Zoom

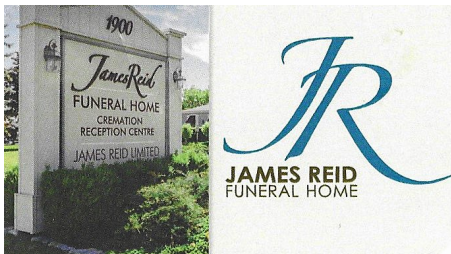
**Paul Van Nest,**

a local historian, will relate

the World War II experience of his cousin, **Glenn Brooks,**

an eastern Ontario farm boy who served as a tail gunner on an RCAF bomber until his death over Germany in 1944.

Brooks' letters home offered a prism through which to probe the innermost experiences of men at war and the ongoing impact of their loss on those left behind.



Congratulations on their **60th anniversary** to longtime members of KHS from Brockville, and the Macdonalds reenactors, Brian Porter and Renee Blackshaw, married August 28, 1965.

## 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](mailto: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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[www.kingstonhistoricalsociety.ca](http://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  
Councillors: Betty Andrews, Editor of Limelight; Duncan McDowall, Programme Chair; Craig Pettis, Webmaster; Liana Shaw, Director of Murney Tower;  
Ann Stevens, Publicity; Paul Van Nest, Membership Chair; Peter Gower, Editor of Historic Kingston.

## President's Message

*by Peter Gower*

It was wonderful to be back at Kingsbridge again last month for the talk on the Thousand Islands – and the audience made it even more special. At least 70 were in attendance, and we had to bring in extra chairs! It was just like the old days in the Johnson Room of the downtown Public Library – except that parking was much easier! I am not sure if and when we will return to live audience only meetings, with no live Zoom aspect. Your views on that would be welcome.

We are also looking at costs with the intent of not raising membership fees. We have already entered the political world by now having to pay a 35% tariff to you know who for each copy of *Historic Kingston* we mail to you know where. Now we are looking at the cost of printing colour copies of *Limelight* to those members who at present do not wish to read it on line, nor to download a copy at home. Each issue costs \$3.38 to print and \$2.27 to mail, a monthly cost of \$6.65 and an annual cost for 9 issues of \$59.85. Again I would like to hear any comments on that: there may be some important points we are overlooking. Send an email to [kingstonhs@gmail.com](mailto:kingstonhs@gmail.com), or write to Box 54, Kingston, ON, K7L 4V6.

We celebrate October with our own Paul van Nest as our speaker on a very personal topic, and you, no doubt, will celebrate the end of the month by being generous to all your little visitors!



## Awardees of the Kingston Historical Society's History Award: June, 2025

Annually, each Kingston High School selects a graduating student, based on the following criteria:

*This award is presented to a graduating student in each of the nine City of Kingston Secondary Schools who has shown an aptitude and passion for history in any of its many forms. As performance in grade 12-level Canadian and/or world history courses will be a factor, the students' teachers will have input into the selection of the successful recipient. The criteria may also include the candidate's intention of pursuing further education in the humanities and/or social sciences. By history, we include its many forms, such as archaeology, anthropology, cultural heritage, social history, museums, etc.*

The award is a certificate from the society and a cheque for \$150.

### Our congratulations to the following awardees:

|  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| Bayridge Secondary School                  | Gabriel Johnson       |
| Ecole Secondaire Catholique Marie-Rivier   | Elie Hueglin          |
| École Secondaire Publique Mille-Îles       | Axle Waters           |
| Frontenac Secondary School                 | Noah Tulkan-Bateson   |
| Holy Cross Catholic Secondary School       | Emily Van Dyke        |
| LaSalle Secondary School                   | Megan Gifford         |
| Kingston Secondary School                  | Abby Sutherland-Class |
| Loyalist Secondary School                  | Jack Graham           |
| Regiopolis-Notre Dame Catholic High School | Ava Chubb             |

Our society owes special thanks to our members who presented this year's awards at each school's graduation ceremony: Grant LeDrew, Duncan McDowall, Peter Radley, Don Richardson, Liana Shaw, Ann Stevens, and Paul Van Nest. Our presence means so much to the schools as well as to the awardees. Consider volunteering for next year's presentations, most on the last Thursday in June.

### The Frontenac Secondary School graduates at St. Lawrence College.



Photos by G P LeDrew

### Noah Tulkan-Bateson, Frontenac's awardee, and KHS member, Grant LeDrew making the presentation.



# The Making of "*Drain the American Revolution*" on Carleton Island and Cape Vincent

By Kathi and Dennis McCarthy, Cape Vincent, directors of the St. Lawrence River  
Historical Foundation

First published in <https://thousandislandslife.com/> in July, 2020

Sam Taplin, producer and director for Mallinson Sadler Productions, contacted us after reviewing information on [www.forthaldimand.com](http://www.forthaldimand.com) web site in May 2019. The production company was making a documentary for the National Geographic's series, 'Drain the Oceans', and was looking for help in making arrangements to film sections for this program in Cape Vincent and on Carleton Island in mid-July 2019. Why was National Geographic interested in filming on Carleton Island, in Cape Vincent, NY? Today, Carleton Island has no great political importance to either the United States or Canada. However, the situation was very different back in the 1700s. Both modern countries were originally colonies of Britain. Carleton Island occupied a strategic point between the Thirteen Colonies, that declared their independence in 1776, and the loyal British Colony of Canada. Carleton Island was to play an important role during the War of Independence.



## The Past

In August 1778, England's Governor General of Canada, Frederick Haldimand, instructed Lt. William Twiss of the Royal Corps of Engineers to select a site at the eastern end of Lake Ontario for the Royal Dockyards and Navy Base. John Schank of the British Royal Navy assisted Twiss.

After reviewing both the abandoned French fort at Cataraqui (Kingston, Ontario) and an island close by called Deer Island, Twiss and Schank selected Deer Island. Twiss renamed the island Carleton after Major General Sir Guy Carleton, the governor of Quebec. Twiss outlined the design of the docks, shipways, hospital, fortifications, and barracks. After designing the major earthworks known as Fort Haldimand, Twiss returned to Quebec City, leaving men from the Royal Corps of Engineers to oversee the construction.

The shipyard built two major vessels, as well as several gunboats, and maintained the Lake Ontario fleet. *Ontario* was one of the major vessels built at Carleton Island; it was launched in 1780. She was a 22-gun "snow"<sup>(1)</sup> and, at 80 feet in length, the largest British warship on The Great Lakes at the time.

The *Ontario* was commissioned to replace the aging *HMS Haldimand*, a snow-rigged warship built at what is present day Ogdensburg, NY, in 1771. On October 13, 1778, James Andrews was appointed Master and Commander of The Naval Armament on the Rivers and Lakes. His ship on Lake Ontario had been the *Haldimand*. In the spring of 1780 he took command of *Ontario*, but neither the captain nor the ship remained on Lake Ontario for long; the ship sank in a storm on Lake Ontario on October 31 and the captain went down with his ship.

Three years later, in 1783, the *Haldimand* was decommissioned and her remains are still on the bottom of Carleton Island's north bay.

## The Present

In June 2008, Jim Kennard, a diver from Rochester, NY, announced that he and his team of shipwreck hunters, after years of searching, had discovered, using sophisticated side scan sonar and an underwater remote operated vehicle in deep water off the southern shore of Lake Ontario, the remains of *Ontario*.

Today, Fort Haldimand on Carleton Island is owned by the Thousand Islands Land Trust; they granted Sam Taplin's team permission to film on Carleton Island in view of the fact that the ship *Ontario* was built at the dockyards adjacent to the British fort. Then the filmmakers moved to Cape Vincent Museum where they photographed Jim Kennard in the museum as he discussed the building and the sinking of the *Ontario*.



Relying heavily on sophisticated computer graphics, National Geographic primarily tells the story of the discovery of shipwrecks involved in the American Revolution. Light on historical facts, the viewer is compensated by being shown the ships as they were when they sailed, and as they are now on the bottom of the waters.

## Past and Present on Film

For those of us fascinated by stories behind the many ships now lying on the bottom of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River, this project provided an important view to the area's history.

You can see the whole film on IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12440636/>

*The episode is available through Apple TV at a cost of about \$4.*

(1) "Snow" described by Wiktionary:

"A square-rigged vessel, differing from a brig only in that she has a trysail mast close abaft the mainmast, on which a large trysail is hoisted."

Drain the Oceans

• **S3.E6** 47m

The American Revolution

• Episode aired June 2, 2020

## Roland Chip Stevens, "HMS Ontario in 1780"

Artist, architect, sailor, historian, and traveler, Roland "Chip" Stevens has recently combined his love of art, history, and sailing in working with a team of explorers to locate and identify ships which sank in Lake Ontario and to graphically reconstruct their remains using data and images from a remotely controlled, submerged vehicle.



The oldest confirmed shipwreck and the only fully intact British warship ever to have been found in the Great Lakes.

**Ear to the ground**

**Elizabeth Durno reporting on items of interest to history buffs**

After years of neglect the 12 hectare site of the former **Davis Tannery** is being developed by Jay Patry Enterprises as a 1600 unit housing complex.

The Kingston Branch of the **Ontario Genealogical Society** meets at 10.00 a.m. October 18th at the Seniors' Centre, 56 Francis Street . Speaker Mags Goulding, the highly respected genealogist, will speak on "WikiTree - Why You Need It".

To attend by Zoom register at <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/CpXyckTPCsPc-AjppUg> or use the link [Kingston.ogs.on.ca](https://kingston.ogs.on.ca)

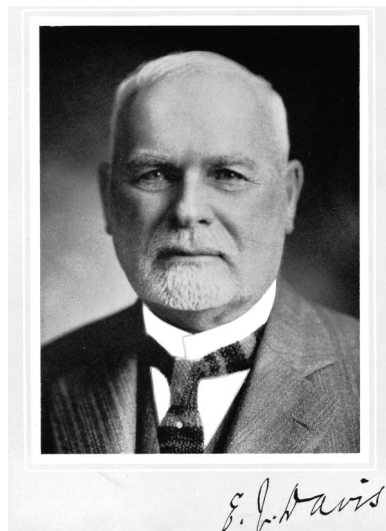
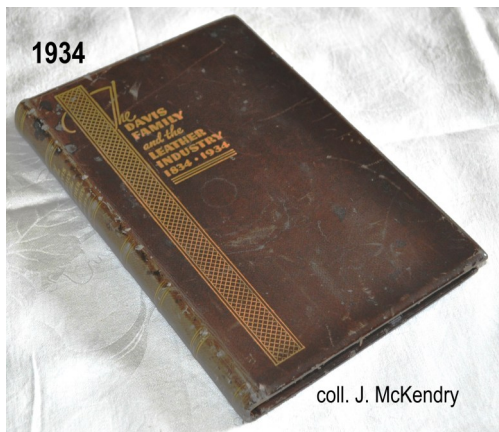


## STILL STANDING: Looking at Regional Architecture with Dr. Jennifer McKendry

### THE DAVIS TANNERY

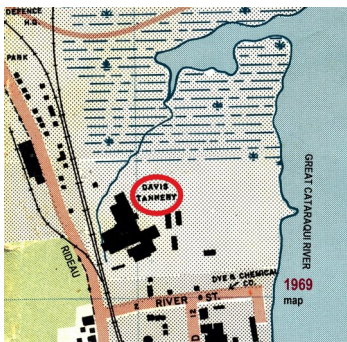


**The Tanner** (1866 description) "...Leather is made from the skins of animals, which are tanned, or prepared with some substance having the power of converting the perishable skin, that decays readily when wet or moist, into a lasting and comparably imperishable leather."

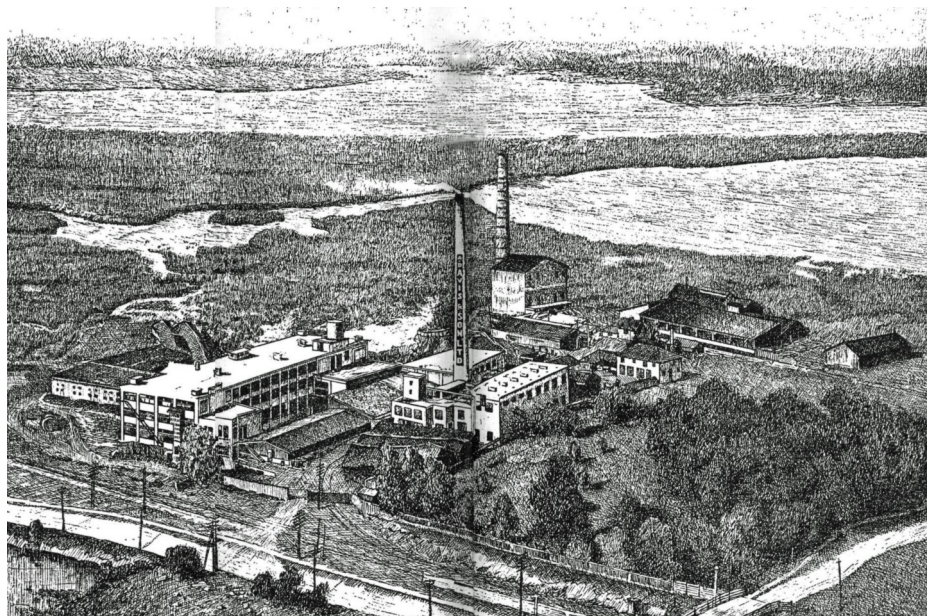


The Hon. Elihu James Davis, 1851-1936, president of the company. His grandfather had started a tannery in York Twp. in 1834.

*The Davis Family and the Leather Industry 1834 – 1934*, written in 1934 by the Davis family, was "bound in Davis calf leather."



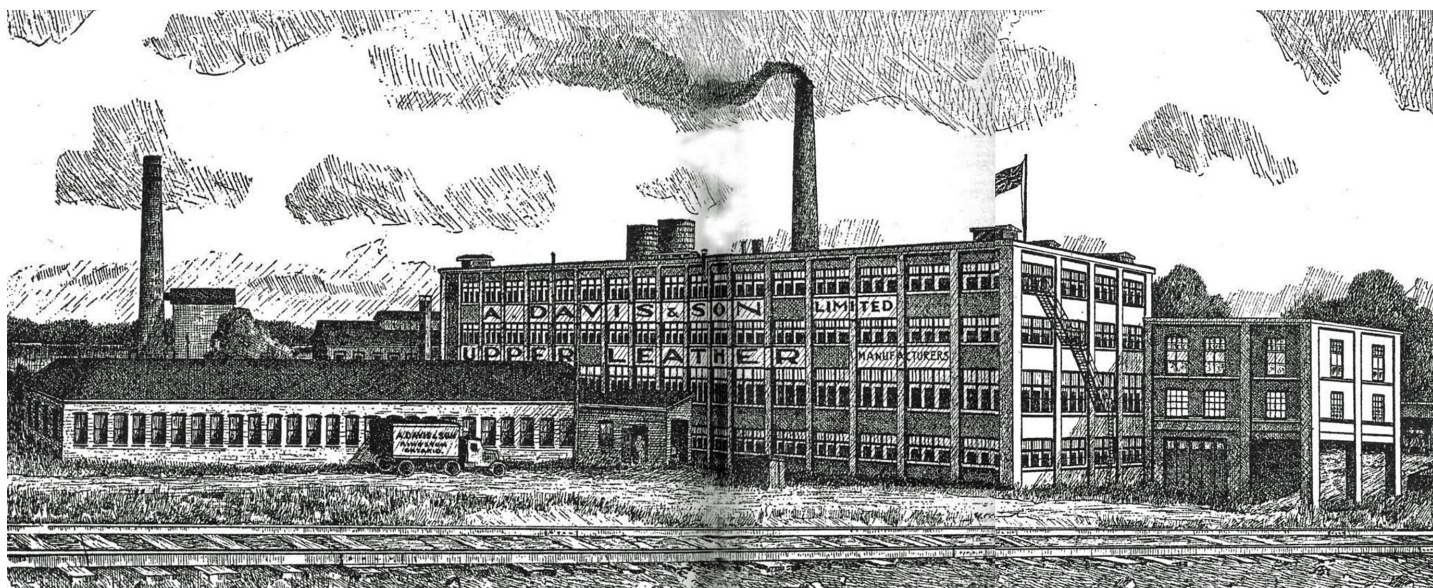
Bird's-eye view in 1934 (Davis book) with Rideau Street in the lower left corner and looking in the distance towards the Great Cataraqui River.





In 1903 the Kingston Tannery of A. Davis & Son Ltd, having moved from from King, Ontario, where it was established in 1867, acquired an existing tannery on Rideau Street. New buildings soon were constructed by architect Oliver E. Tench of Newmarket. There was a complex of structures (now demolished) including a concrete leach house built in 1909. In that year, the business employed 50 to 60 men (80 to 125 by 1914) creating leather hides sold across Canada and the British Isles. The use of reinforced concrete as a building material was in tune with modern ideas in architecture. *The Contract Record* noted that it was the first reinforced concrete tannery building in Canada. It was three storeys and 62 x 212 feet with two wings.

The glowing descriptions from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in newspaper ads and books did not include the toll that was being taken on the property through severe pollution, including that created by the American Smelting Company on the east side of Orchard St. The tannery closed in 1973 and the 35-acres, now stripped of buildings, remains forested, but plans are underway by Jay Patry for a residential development.



The complex in 1934, as shown in the Davis family book



Welcome New Member

John Gray

**HOMESTEAD**



Who would you like to see receive the Kingston Historical Society Award this year? Nomination form will be in November Limelight.

**please Renew Your Membership Now**



## Speaker's Corner

by Dr. Duncan McDowall, Programme Chair

### *The Islands Are Calling*

Our fall lecture series began with a scintillating tour of the Thousand Islands with historian and magazine editor **Susan Smith** at the helm. Since 2008 Susan has been the editor of Thousand Islands Life Magazine (<https://thousandislandslife.com>), a vibrantly successful online magazine that celebrates and investigates the history and heritage of the picturesque island group that has figured so largely in eastern Ontario's commercial, diplomatic and touristic development. First the facts: Susan told us that there are actually 1849 "thousand" islands. First "discovered" by French explorers such as Daniel de Rémy de Courcelle, the islands, given their strategic position at the head of the St. Lawrence, soon became a bone of contention between the British, French and later the new American republic. Smith traced this tension by focusing on pivotal personalities who left their mark on the area. In particular, she discussed the hydrographers who mapped the scattered chain of islands, men like the Royal Naval surveyor Captain William Fitzwilliam Owen whose 1815-17 survey named many of the numerous islands after prominent British military figures: Wellesley, Hill, Picton and Murray. The islands were so numerous that many were simply given numbered or alphabetic names. Smith folded into her telling of the white man's occupation of the islands an acknowledgment of the experience of the local Mississauga Indigenous peoples who surrendered their claim to Grape Island in 1856 in return for treaty rights and a reservation. Today, the Thousand Islands enjoys a uniquely bi-national and copasetic sense of identity that straddles the Canadian-American border.

The late nineteenth century saw the islands once again discovered, this time by wealthy Canadian and American patricians such as railway mogul George Pullman and even President U.S. Grant. They built palatial homes and hotels on the islands where the fishing was splendid and the social prestige enviable. Susan has captured this Gilded Age invasion in her 1993 book *The Summer People: The Thousand Islands 1650-1910*.

Society members are urged to visit Susan's magazine online (address above) to renew their own love of the Thousand Islands – it's free and full of fascinating articles and gorgeous photography – an electronic tour boat with a very professional crew.



## Murney Tower

Operated by the Kingston Historical Society

[www.murneytower.com](http://www.murneytower.com)



### **The Murney Tower Museum Update – by Liana Shaw**

In its centennial season, The Murney Tower Museum welcomed 10,062 visitors and raised \$26,561 in donations and gift shop sales. Summer students completed creative projects (articles, podcast, story) that will be shared this fall. Staff and students took part in Parks Canada workshops. In September there was a well-attended Mr. Murney children's book reading at KFPL.

We are pleased to welcome two new team members: Queen's intern Kallista, and Beatrice, a cultural translation student providing bilingual support. In October, Murney Tower will host *Phantoms of Yore* ghost tours and a Halloween event for families.