

Limelight

Newsletter of the Kingston Historical Society

Kingston Ontario Canada

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February 2026



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



Kingston Historical Society Meeting 18 February 2026

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

Annual General Meeting with a special presentation from Queen's Archives

ALSO in February

Wednesday 25 February
7 p.m.

Joint 'Heritage Week' Meeting with the Frontenac Heritage Foundation

Live at the Kingsbridge Retirement Community at 950 Centennial Drive
and on Zoom

Dr. Joel Konrad, Manager,
Heritage Planning, Heritage Services,
City of Kingston

Presents

***"Kingston Heritage Now:
Goals, Challenges,
and Experiences"***

Kingston Heritage Now
Goals, Challenges, and Experiences

Heritage Hour Talk
by Dr. Joel Konrad Manager, Heritage Planning,
Heritage Services, City of Kingston

Wednesday February 25th, 7 pm
Kingsbridge Retirement Community

A free, public Heritage Week event.
In the Theatre on the lower floor
at 950 Centennial Drive
(free parking beside the building).

Also viewable on Zoom. Email
contact@frontenacheritage.ca for the link.

KINGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FRONTENAC HERITAGE FOUNDATION

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.

Featured Sponsor

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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.

Kingsbridge
Retirement Community *by Signature*

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

We are a society which looks back at what has happened (and why, etc.) rather than a group forecasting the future. It therefore is not surprising that we have done very badly at choosing an appropriate date for the joint meeting with the Frontenac Heritage Foundation as a joint celebration of Ontario's Heritage Week. The first year we struggled through knee deep snow to get into City Hall; last year we postponed the meeting for a week, and only had the chilly winds of Fort Henry to contend with. So, a change. If the Ontario government chooses such a difficult week, we will ignore them, and choose our own date. You will find the result in a full colour poster elsewhere in *Limelight*. The Foundation was an offshoot of KHS when a group of members wanted to spend more time and effort saving Kingston's built heritage, including buying and restoring properties, which they have done for over 50 years. On February 25th we are invited to join with them and hear what the City's goals, challenges and experiences are in the heritage sector. And you will be able to ask your long-delayed question on your favourite heritage topic of a speaker who, hopefully, will give you a straight answer.



And please don't forget our AGM on the 18th. It is another time to ask questions about why we are doing what we are doing, to suggest future paths to consider travelling, and to volunteer for activities that interest you and use your skills.

Enjoy your winter, perhaps in the warmth of the Kingsbridge theatre!

Rideau Heights: A Place to Grow

Like any city, Kingston is a constellation of communities, each one bringing a unique heritage to the whole. Portsmouth, for instance, emerged from its nineteenth-century connection with Lake Ontario seafaring. Barriefield sprouted out of the nearby British military establishment clustered around Fort Henry. Sydenham ward is redolent of its early role in town commerce and colonial administration. Rideau Heights – the residential conclave tucked between Montreal Street and the #401 highway to its north – emerged later in response to the city's twentieth-century quest for breathing space beyond its initial 1846 boundaries for its growing post-World War II population.



At the turn of the twentieth century, local businessman and politician Albert Weller bought up a swathe of undeveloped land in Kingston Township adjacent to the city. In the 1920s, he began selling cheap lots in this precinct to low-income Kingstonians and war veterans, all eager to acquire an affordable place to settle. An unregulated sprawl ensued, often referred to as Kingston's "wild west" and, less kindly, as "an appalling slum" of tarpaper shacks and thrown-together small homes. Finally, in 1952, the city annexed the area in a bid to tame the area's haphazard character and thereby help meet Kingston's post-war demographic surge. But just what model of growth would bring practical reality to this ambition in the area soon to be dubbed Rideau Heights?

David Gordon, a Queen's historical geographer and long-time director of its School of Urban and Regional Planning, provided a fascinating chronicle of the birth of Kingston's newest suburb at our January lecture. Post-war western societies contemplated the challenge of shaping urban growth by pondering two available paths. One, so-called urban renewal, offered a draconian tack – make way for spanking new modern homes and apartments by clearing the slums to create a clean slate for modern living. Gordon pointed to the dramatic urban designs of European architects such as Le Corbusier to illustrate such sweeping prescriptions. Other European urban designers such as the Scot, Patrick Geddes, differed, arguing that worn old communities might be modernizing, not by bulldozing, but by "conservative surgery" by which the better homes of established communities might be saved and rejuvenated by the careful interspersing of new building amongst the preservable old housing stock, thus retaining the old while seeding the new within its bounds.

Thus, Rideau Heights was born in the late 1950s and 1960s. Drawing on research conducted by **Chloe Michaud**, a Queen's MA in urban planning and now the Town Planner of Montague Township, Gordon showed how the hybrid model of urban design triumphed in Kingston. Chief in promoting the development of Rideau Heights was English-trained planner George Muirhead, who served as the City's Director of Planning until his retirement in 1980. Central to this evolution was the 1960 A Planning Study for Kingston (a pioneering document in Canada) which allowed Rideau Heights to retain some of its old Weller frontier culture, while at the same time opening the way to "mod-con" suburban existence. Today, Rideau Heights boasts the highest rate of home ownership in the city.

Dr. Gordon's talk is available on YouTube through the KHS website and will also be published in Historic Kingston.



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Currently on and running until May at **Kingston City Hall** is an exhibit: **Slavery in Canada** with information on local Kingston slaves and slave owners.



On Saturday, February 21, at 10:00 a.m. on Zoom, the **Kingston Branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society** will feature **Christine Woodcock**, speaking on “Exploring the Scotlands People Website” where digital records can be accessed. For Zoom link go to [Kingston.ogs.on.ca](https://kingston.ogs.on.ca)



At **Kingston City Hall** on Sunday, February 22, from 3:00 - 4:30 p.m. there will be an informal conversation with Canadian journalist and **TRC Commissioner Maria Wilson** and **Dene Leader Stephen Kakfwi** on the progress of reconciliation and with related historical context.



On February 23, from 10:30 - 11:30 a.m. at the Great Lakes Museum, 55 Ontario Street, there will be a talk on the social history of Kingston's **Pump House** and how water shaped Kingston's growth. \$6.00 fee



On Saturday, February 28, at 1:00 p.m. the **Kingston & District UELAC** presents on Zoom, **Stephen Davidson**, who will speak on the people of Birchtown, Nova Scotia, a black Loyalist community founded in 1783 after the American Revolution.

Go to www.uclac.org/Kingston-Branch for Zoom link and more information.



There are three special anniversaries of Kingston Institutions this year:



Royal Military College - 150 years in September

Roman Catholic Diocese of Kingston - 200 years in January

Seniors Association - 50 years in January

The Museum of Health Care has been renamed **The Canadian Museum of Health Care.**



Murney Tower

Operated by the Kingston Historical Society

www.murneytower.com



Murney Tower Museum Update

Murney Tower Museum is pleased to confirm that Alison Dringenberg and Alexa Grandy will be returning for another year as Manager/Curator and Programming and Communications Coordinator. Both are already hard at work developing educational programming for the 2026 season. Summer student hiring is now open, and members are encouraged to spread the word to any post-secondary students who may be interested. Details and application information can be found on the Murney Tower Museum website under the *Get Involved* section. The hiring window closes February 15.

This work is made possible through a combination of municipal support and individual generosity, and the museum is grateful for the recent support of Eva Barnes, whose contribution will help strengthen Murney Tower's educational and interpretive work in the coming season.

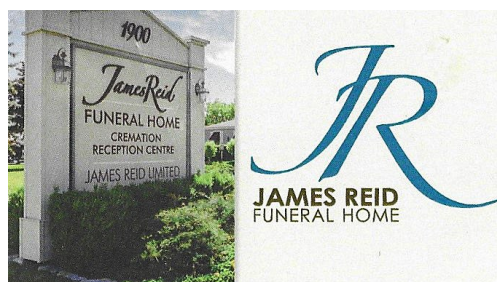


This season also brings exciting opportunities for exhibitions and interpretation. Our friends at the Princess of Wales' Own Regiment Museum have generously donated five display cases that are being retired from their own galleries. These cases will significantly expand what Murney Tower is able to do with displays and interpretation in the coming seasons.

Plans are also underway to welcome members of Haiku Canada to Kingston for Murney Tower's opening weekend.

Using the tower and its surrounding grounds as a source of inspiration, participating poets will create work that will be displayed in the tower throughout the summer, offering visitors a fresh and creative way to engage with this historic space.


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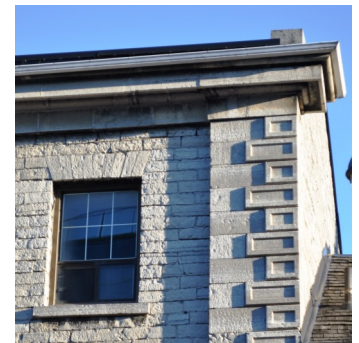
ELAINE DUWORS

Still Standing

Looking at Regional Architecture with Dr. Jennifer McKendry

Fire attacks 354-356 & 358 King Street East on 22 December 2025

Fortunately, the exterior of the corner building (358 at Princess St) appears much the same as it did previous to the fire. This property remained from 1803 to 1865 in the Cassady family, who gained rental income from it. This three-storey building replaced one damaged by fire in 1847. The stonework is particularly fine with paneled quoins, eared window surrounds and plain, paired pilasters on the Princess Street façade. On the more formal King Street façade, there are Tuscan pilasters on the main storey. The 1873 drawing was made during the time it was occupied by the McNaughton & Co. clothing store.



It joins a two-storey, five-bay, stone structure, 354-356 King East. Likely built in the mid 1870s, the large upper windows once were all the same size and had small panes. Hopefully, they will now be restored to their original form.



There is attractive detailing on the storefronts. The oval transoms once had an intricate pattern of latticework, as seen in this 1970s photograph by Jennifer McKendry.

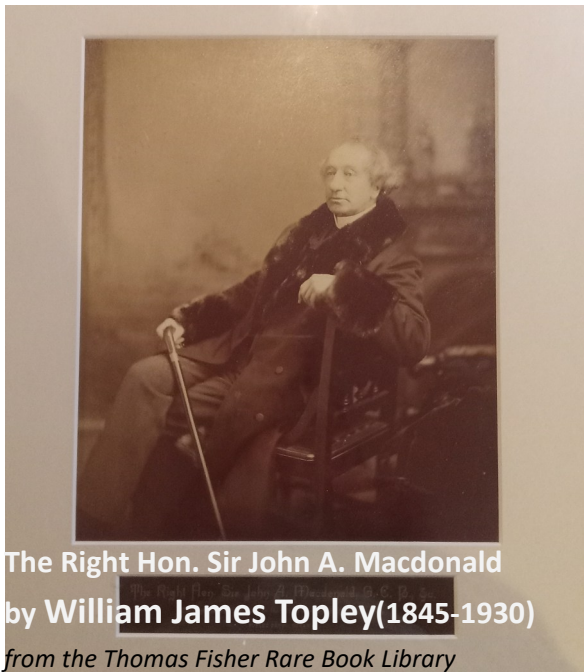
The visual and historic importance of 354 to 358 King Street E. for downtown Kingston cannot be overstated.

Happy Birthday, Sir John

by Peter Gower

In 2002, the Liberal government made January 11th an official day on which to remember our first prime minister. This year in Kingston, the Conservative Party hosted a remembrance on January 10th (which may have been his birthday). There was friendship, a speaker (our own **Duncan McDowall**), a very full room, and food both for thought and for stomach. The Party acknowledged that Sir John 'laid the foundation for what we are today' as JDM Stewart had written in that day's Globe and Mail.

Despite (and perhaps because of) his early years in the slums of Glasgow, and his formative years in a very English Kingston, Sir John, as McDowall pointed out, realized early on that such an exclusive society would not be successful. He met other immigrants, including freed slaves from the United States, from Britain and its colonies, and from Europe; and he met First Nations members who had been resident here for many years. His Canada included them all, while remaining loyal to Britain. He realized that the hinterland around Kingston would not support a city, and so encouraged the business community, a canal through Wolfe Island, and a railway connecting Ontario communities and beyond. He suggested workable solutions to difficult problems such as responsible government, separate schools, and the clergy reserves, being as fair to all as he could be.



Personally, he knew black days: the death of John Alexander at thirteen months, and of his first wife, Isabella. In later life he treated his hydrocephalic daughter Mary as normally as possible and introduced her to all the important visitors who came to see the Prime Minister. He would have been delighted to know she outlived him by 42 years.

McDowall saw him not as a saint, but as a cabinet maker who always tried to provide the best product and solution for any situation – certainly not the person of whom Omeasoo Wahpasiw (Professor of Indigenous Studies at Carlton) recently said 'we don't even know what kind of person he was besides an alcoholic'. He accepted Residential Schools, but no primeminister until Jean Chrétien would close them – and few were asked to.

Cheers Duncan McDowall, the local Conservative Party and Sir John for a wonderful gathering – and a Happy Birthday!

Re historian Leopold von Ranke (1795 - 1886)

Determined to see every epoch in its own terms (as opposed to the terms dictated by his epoch), he searched for the ideas and tendencies that rule it, comprehending rather than passing judgment, applying scientific principles where, before, murky humanistic ones had prevailed...a methodology he summed up...how it really was.

Judy Jones and William Wilson, An Incomplete Education

From Kingston to Canada: A New Chapter for the Museum of Health Care

Written by Dr. Simge Erdogan-O'Connor

Museum Director, Canadian Museum of Health Care

I'm writing this with a mix of gratitude and excitement — and with a particular softness in my heart, because I'm sharing this announcement with my Kingston Historical Society community. For those who don't know me, I began my journey in Kingston's heritage community back in 2020 at Murney Tower Museum, thanks to the belief the Kingston Historical Society placed in me. I now serve as Director of Kingston's Museum of



Health Care (recently renamed the Canadian Museum of Health Care), but I still carry those Murney Tower years close. During my almost five years at Kingston's treasure, I developed a deep admiration for how much this city cares about its stories and museums. Kingston has a way of treating history not as something distant, but as something lived: held by people, preserved through place, and passed forward through community. That spirit is exactly why this moment feels so fitting to share with you.

Very recently, the Museum of Health Care has changed its operating name to the Canadian Museum of Health Care.

On the surface, this may seem like a simple name change — but it reflects a deeper evolution in the museum's role and mandate, and it signals the direction we are headed. The museum was founded in 1991 by a Kingston physician, Dr. Jim Low, to preserve and share stories of health care in Canada and to trace the evolution of health care in the country. What many people don't realize is that, from the very beginning, our museum has had a national mandate, with collections from across the country.

Over the last 35 years, we have seen growing interest in our work from far beyond the region: artifacts sent on loan to organizations across Canada; research collaborations and international symposiums with organizations and individuals in the field of health history; and educational programs streamed virtually to Northern communities. Being home to one of the largest medical collections in the country — approximately 35,000 artifacts — is no small task. Doing that work as an independent charitable organization makes the responsibility feel even greater, and it also brings a real sense of pride and meaning. I feel that deeply in my role as a Kingston-based museum leader — carrying national stories while staying rooted in a community that understands the value of preserving the past with care.

At the same time, this move allows us to deepen the local connections we care about so deeply while also shining a brighter light on Kingston's role in Canada's health care story. Historically, and still today, Kingston has been a centre for hospital care, military medicine, medical education, and public health. That legacy deserves nationwide attention and recognition.

It is also what makes Kingston a natural home for Canada's only museum dedicated entirely to the history of health care. We hope this name change sparks new conversations among heritage and health history lovers across the country — and helps more people realize that Canada's health care museum is right here in Kingston.

Becoming the Canadian Museum of Health Care is, for me, an extension of what Kingston already does so well: stewarding heritage with care and confidence and sharing it generously. My hope is that this new name marks a meaningful next chapter in the museum's 35-year journey — helping us build stronger national partnerships, expand our educational reach, and attract the support that lets us invest even more in accessible exhibitions, youth programs, and inclusive community collaborations here at home. I'm grateful to be carrying this work forward from Kingston, with a community behind us that understands that preserving the past is not about standing still — it's about creating meaning, connection, and possibility for the future.

