

Limelight

Newsletter of the Kingston Historical Society

Kingston Ontario Canada

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



Kingston Historical Society Meeting 18 March 2026

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

Jake Breadman on

***The Many Residents of Bellevue of House:
A Microcosmic History of Kingston.***

A doctoral candidate in history at Queen's and a Heritage Interpreter at Bellevue House, Jake took part in Parks Canada's recent remodeling of the focus of Bellevue House.

It is noted with regret, the death, on February 22, 2026, of Leigh Smith, a long-time member of the Kingston Historical Society.

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

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 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



We had a successful Annual General Meeting on February 18 th , though with a lower than usual attendance. We presented the annual Kingston Historical Society Awards – now renamed Kingston Historical Society Centennial Awards – to Mark Bennett and Paul van Nest for their long time work in various ways to promote Kingston's history and heritage. We are stable in membership and our financial status remains satisfactory. We had an excellent 2025 programme, and 2026 looks to be just as promising. Your Executive remains constant: only Paul Charbonneau has left us, and we thank him for his efforts over the past years, and wish him well with a new enterprise, which I hope he will explain in Limelight in the near future. We are looking for new executive members: one to take over the 2026 Awards; one to work with Duncan on the 2026 programme, and then to take over the 2027 programme; one to start to learn the intricacies of Historic Kingston and one to help Paul van Nest in his myriad of tasks: membership, zoom and school awards. Or you may just want to join us without a particular responsibility, and see where your interests lead.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Ken Hernden, Queen's University Archivist, made a wonderful presentation on the documents and photographic materials acquired from CKWS. He instructed us on the challenges an archivist has, and entertained us as we went to the 1958 remembrance of Sir John A.'s death, and drove around the old Traffic Circle, with all recognizing buildings and cars. It was a great end to a very satisfactory meeting.



Ken Hernden , Queen's University
Archivist



Nils Gustaf von Schoultz and the Battle of the Windmill: A Legacy in Stone

Part 1 of 2

by Derrick Bouchard and Liana Shaw

A stroll around Kingston's St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery might take one past the cemetery vault and on to two grave markers for men who died in December of 1838. Since the cemetery didn't see its first burials until 1856, how did these men, who died nearly 20 years before then, end up here?

In November 1838, in the dying days of the Upper Canada Rebellion, a stone windmill near Prescott became an unlikely fortress for a group of American insurgents determined to "liberate" Canada from British rule. At the heart of this doomed invasion stood Nils Gustaf von Schoultz, a Finnish-born Swede and soldier of fortune whose idealism led him to a tragic end. Next to his stone in the cemetery lies a lesser-known comrade — a colonel in the New York militia named Martin Woodruff, whose fate was sealed in the same moment of history. It is their names that are engraved on the two grave markers mentioned above.

A Revolutionary's Journey

Von Schoultz was born in Kuopio, Finland, in 1807 and raised in Sweden after the Russian annexation of Finland. He trained at the Royal Military Academy in Stockholm and served briefly in the Swedish army before resigning for reasons that remain uncertain. His restless pursuit of liberty took him to Poland, where he fought against Russian forces during the November Uprising of 1831, and later to Algeria with the French Foreign Legion. Disillusioned by colonial warfare, he returned to Europe, married in Florence, and attempted domestic life in Sweden, eventually abandoning it all to sail to the United States in 1836.

In America, he reinvented himself as a Polish veteran of the November Uprising, a story that resonated more romantically with patriotic American circles than identifying himself as Swedish would have. He was quickly drawn into the Patriot War, a series of border raids by American sympathizers and exiled rebels. The Hunters' Lodges — secret societies of Canadian insurgents who had taken refuge in the northern United States after the failed 1837 uprisings, along with sympathetic Americans — hoped to ignite a broader revolution in Canada. Von Schoultz joined New York's Salina Lodge and volunteered for a planned assault on Fort Wellington near Prescott.



The grave markers for Martin Woodruff and Nils von Schoultz in St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cemetery. When von Schoultz arrived in New York in 1836, he claimed to be from Poland and gave his name as Nils Sholtewskij Von Schoultz and that is the name that appears on his gravestone. He had gone to Poland in 1831 to fight against the Russians for Polish freedom.

It is their names that are engraved on the two grave markers mentioned above.

The Battle of the Windmill

On November 12, 1838, von Schoultz and roughly 190 men crossed the St. Lawrence River and landed at Windmill Point. Their leader, Major-General John Ward Birge, withdrew early claiming illness, and the remaining insurgents chose von Schoultz as commander after realizing Birge would not return. The insurgents fortified themselves in the stone windmill and surrounding buildings, facing off against a combined British and Canadian militia force of nearly 2,000.

Over five days, the Patriots—many of them young and inexperienced—held their ground. Eyewitnesses described intense exchanges of musket and artillery fire, with the defenders resorting to firing makeshift projectiles like bolts and nails when ammunition ran low. Von Schoultz maintained discipline and insisted on the humane treatment of civilians, reportedly ensuring local residents could leave unharmed.



The windmill as it stands today at the Battle of the Windmill National Historic Site near Prescott.

Reinforcements were expected but never came. On November 16, British and Canadian forces launched a final assault, and 136 insurgents were captured while several others were able to escape back to New York. More still were killed or left on the battlefield to die. Von Schoultz was discovered hiding near the riverbank and taken prisoner. Among those taken was Martin Woodruff, a fellow insurgent whose name would be etched into this same chapter of history.

Trial and Execution

The prisoners were taken by boat to Kingston and imprisoned in Fort Henry. A court martial was quickly convened and sat on 28 November 1838. It started with three of its leaders: Von Schoultz and two other men, Daniel George, the insurgents' paymaster, and Dorrephus Abbey, one of the Hunter Patriots' captains. John A. Macdonald, then a 23-year-old lawyer, agreed to defend all three. However, the court martial rules severely limited his role, as he could not speak directly in court but could only advise his clients on how to conduct their own defence.

Macdonald urged von Schoultz to plead not guilty, but he refused, accepting full responsibility, and was sentenced to death by hanging. As a civilian, his death should have taken place at Kingston's common gaol, but he was granted a "gentleman's death" and was hanged alone from the gallows erected outside Fort Henry's main gate on 8 December 1838.

Martin Woodruff was also tried and sentenced to death; he was hanged ten days later on 18 December 1838. Many other insurgents also received a death sentence, but only ten were ultimately hanged at the Kingston gaol. Sixty others were sent to a British penal colony in Australia; about 40 were acquitted.

Burial and Reburial

Von Schoultz, Woodruff and the others who had been hanged were interred in Kingston's Upper Burial Ground—now known as McBurney or Skeleton Park. This cemetery, active since the early 19th century, had grown overcrowded and unsanitary by mid-century. Most of the grave markers of

those executed and buried there after the rebellion had either never existed or had long since disappeared, but those of Von Schoultz and Woodruff were still visible into the 1860s. Many years later their remains were exhumed and reinterred at St. Mary's Cemetery, where they rest today. Their relocation was not a bureaucratic footnote, but a gesture of remembrance. Alexander Cicolari, a Kingston resident, took it upon himself to transport the bodies of von Schoultz and Woodruff from the Upper Burial Ground to their final resting place in his family's plot. (How these men ultimately came to rest at St. Mary's is a story in itself; one we will explore in the next issue.)

Legacy

Von Schoultz's story is one of romantic idealism colliding with harsh reality. Misled by propaganda and driven by a passion for liberty, he joined a daring but ill-fated campaign to "liberate" Canada from British rule. What he and his comrades failed to grasp—until it was too late—was that most Canadians did not share their revolutionary vision. Martin Woodruff shared in that sacrifice and now lies beside him, a silent witness to the cost of conviction.

The Battle of the Windmill, though a military failure, left a lasting imprint on Canadian consciousness. For von Schoultz and Woodruff, it was the final chapter in a life defined by restless pursuit of justice - however misguided. Their graves in St. Mary's Cemetery are more than markers—they are reminders of a moment when ideals met reality.

The Battle of the Windmill National Historic Site Towering sixty feet with sturdy rubble stone walls and perched atop a steep embankment rising some thirty feet above the river, the windmill commanded a strategic vantage point. At the time of the invasion, it was used for grinding grain. In 1873, the windmill was converted into a lighthouse and remained in service until 1978.

The site was designated a [National Historic Site](#) in 1920. Located near Prescott, and about an hour's drive from Kingston, the windmill can be visited during summer months and is maintained and operated by the Friends of Windmill Point, in association with Parks Canada.

For more information:

- A book in the genealogy collection at the Main Branch of the KFPL provides a detailed account, with drawings and photos, of the battle and its aftermath: Scott, K.F. *The Battle of the Windmill*. Prescott, ON: St. Lawrence Printing Ltd., June 1970. (Shelfmark Geneal 971.373 SCOT)

[Dictionary of Canadian Biography – Nils Gustaf von Schoultz](#)

[Canada's History – Death of a Liberator](#)

[Thousand Islands Life – Eyewitness Accounts](#)

More on Horne's Ferry

In December of 1964 the William Darrell filled in for the Wolfe Island Ferry while it was in dry dock addressing possible damages caused by frequent brushes with the bottom of the lake at the Marysville dock, due to low water. The Horne ferry could not load vehicles because the ramps would not reach the dock on the Kingston side. Dredging was undertaken with the hope of remedying the situation. Horne's Ferry was free to fill in because the Cape Vincent run had been closed for the season.



Mark Bennett

The Kingston Historical Society recognizes Mark Bennett, the Guard Commander for the Fort Henry Guard a long-time supporter of the Kingston Historical Society. As Guard Commander, Mark was always willing to make members of the Guard available to assist with the Society's programs. This included supporting the annual program to commemorate Sir John A. at Cataraqui Cemetery. Recently, he helped Murney Tower celebrate the 100th anniversary of KHS's operation of the Tower as a museum by supplying display items. In 2012 he was nominated by Senator Hugh Segal and awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for "his efforts in making history real for the tens of thousands of visitors at Fort Henry every year". Mark's 27 years of service make him the longest serving Guard Commander since Ronald Way founded the Guard in 1938. As a friend of Kingston heritage and the Kingston Historical Society, there is no question that Mark has enriched the Kingston Historical Society and Kingston during his time, and he is richly deserving of this award.



Kingston Historical Society 2025 Centennial Award

In commemoration of the one hundred and thirty-second anniversary of the founding of the Kingston Historical Society in 1893, this award is presented in recognition of outstanding contributions to the preservation and interpretation of local history.

Signed and sealed at Kingston, Ontario this 18th day of February 2026

Peter Gower

President



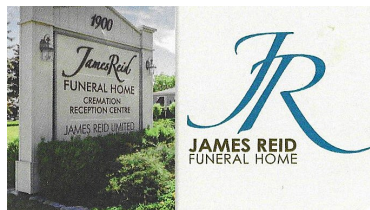
Paul Van Nest

The Kingston Historical Society recognizes Paul Van Nest for creating and maintaining the membership database; creating our website; webmaster; he initiated Zoom and hybrid technology for our meetings in response to Covid; scanned and uploaded Limelights from 1992 to the present and indexed them; initiated the KHS High School History Prize; presenter. Paul is also a founding member of the Kingston Civil War Round table and has organized and led many Kingston City history walks. There is no question that Paul enriched the Kingston Historical Society and Kingston during his time, and he is richly deserving of this award.

Signed and sealed at Kingston, Ontario this 18th day of February 2026

Peter Gower

President



Still Standing

Looking at Regional Architecture with Dr. Jennifer McKendry

Ashton, 826 Princess Street



John Metcalfe's handsome stone house in Williamsville does not appear on a map of 1842 but is on one from 1849. It may date from c1844. The architect is not presently known. George Browne, architect of City Hall, has been suggested, although William Coverdale, architect of the penitentiary, is also a good candidate. One of the visual links to Browne is the shallow projections of the outer front bays in his design for St. Andrew's Manse (146 Clergy St), which he tendered in 1841. However, that is the only specific tie, and one must point out that Coverdale also used the same projections for his 1850 design of Henderson's house at 90 Johnson Street. Lacking documentation and forced into attributions via design, we need to look out for more idiosyncratic aspects, namely, stone chimneys with the corners of the stacks angled vertically and end walls with gables sweeping up to the chimney bases. Ashton's style is Classical based on its proportions, symmetry and central emphasis.

Regardless of the uncertainty about who was the designer, one stands in admiration of the final product, in which generations of Metcalfes lived.

Photos by Jennifer McKendry

Iron shoe scraper anchored in stone



Murney Tower

Operated by the Kingston Historical Society

www.murneytower.com



Liana Shaw Reports:

Around the Tower: Looking Ahead to 2026



As we head into a new season, planning is well underway for an exciting year at Murney Tower Museum. Our 2026 calendar is shaping up to include a mix of well-loved favourites, new collaborations, and a few fresh ideas we're excited to explore.

Spring begins with *March of the Museums*, where you will find us at the Tourism Kingston's Visitor Information Centre. This will be followed by our annual Easter Scavenger Hunt in partnership with the Museum of Health Care. In May, we look forward to reopening the tower for the season featuring a poetry exhibition following a Haiku Canada site visit. And of course, we'll again be participating in the Kingston Regional Heritage Fair. Summer will bring talks and lectures, children's programming, live music, and Murney Fest, while fall favourites like *Phantoms of Yore* and our Halloween events will round out the year.

Behind the scenes, important collections and archival work continues, including ongoing cleaning and inventory care, and the adoption of a new collections management system to help us better track and care for our artifacts. Planning is also underway for several new exhibits, including a collaborative project with Queen's University Archives and some new ways of sharing the stories of those who lived and served at the tower.

Our partnerships with Queen's University continue to grow. A recent highlight is the launch of a virtual exhibit created by a student intern, now available on the Murney Tower website. We are also collaborating with students in APSC 103: Engineering Design, who are designing and constructing a working model of Murney's Blomefield cannon for educational use — a project we look forward to quite literally adding to our arsenal.

We are continuing to prepare grant applications to support our operations and programming for the coming season. We're also working toward the launch of a *Friends of Murney* program this spring — an initiative designed to strengthen our community of supporters and provide new opportunities for the public to be involved with the tower's future. More details will be shared in the coming months, and we hope many of you will consider becoming part of this next chapter at Murney.

We look forward to sharing more details as plans continue to take shape and the season draws closer.

In January, students from Queen's University's APSC 103: Engineering Design course braved the snow for a tour of Murney Tower, gathering measurements and insight to inform their Blomefield cannon model designs. Manager/Curator Alison Dringenberg (left) joined them for the visit.



Ear to the ground

Elizabeth Durno reporting on events of interest to history buffs

UELAC Kingston meets 4 times a year at regular membership meetings on the fourth Saturday in September, November/AGM, February and April. <https://kingston.uelac.ca/>

Canadian Club March 12, 2026 – March is fraud protection month and Rotarian Paul Van Nest will bring important information on contemporary and ever-evolving fraud, “Fraud Awareness How to Deal with Fraud and Scam Attempts”

Kingston Branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society (OGS) on Saturday, March 21, 2026 from 10:00 to 11:30 Hybrid Branch meeting and presentation. Speaker Daniel Mitchell, Museum Assistant, who will be presenting [Last of the Edwardian-Era Liners: S.S. Keewatin and the Legacy of Passenger Travel on the](#)

[Great Lakes](#)

Kingston.ogs.on.ca