

Limelight
Newsletter of the Kingston Historical Society
Kingston Ontario Canada

Volume 28 no 5 ISSN 1488-5565 May 2026

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

Kingston Historical Society Meeting 20 May 2026

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

Dr. Kenneth Feigelman

Director of Operations for the Kingston-based undersea
exploration enterprise Deep Quest 2
presents

***The Mysterious ‘Mythical’ Marysburgh
Vortex in Lake Ontario***

**As part of his presentation, Dr. Feigelman will show a video
“Rhapsody in Blue – Around the World Under the Sea.”**

It is noted with regret, the death, on March 22, 2026, of Dr. Brian Osborne, a life member of the Kingston Historical Society.

It is noted with regret, the death, on April 3, 2026, of Donna Ivey, 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 must be accompanied by acknowledgement of the KHS and the date of the Limelight issue. By-lines and photo credits are to be retained.

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Pettis, Webmaster; Liana Shaw, Director of Murney Tower; Ann
Stevens, Publicity; Paul Van Nest, Membership Chair; Peter Gower,
Editor of Historic Kingston

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

Message from the President

by Peter Gower

The Kingston Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the financial support of its sponsors.



Today, it really looks as if summer may be arriving sometime reasonably soon, which means that it is time for the Society to slow down its activities, and for the Murney Tower to speed up. After Thomas Harrison's strange story of the Richard Nixon visit, we may be getting into even stranger Territory in May as we descend into the Marysburgh Vortex.

And on June 6th, we will be remembering Sir John A. Macdonald at our annual graveside ceremony in Cataraqui Cemetery at 1.30. The speaker this year is Greg Piasetzki. He will be talking on the general topic of how Sir John A. Macdonald saved more native lives than any other prime minister.

Shatterbox Theatre in Prince Edward County (<https://shatterboxtheatre.com/>) is presenting *Silent Sky* at The Andrew in Picton, from May 28 to June 6, a beautifully crafted play based on the true story of Henrietta Leavitt and the women “computers” of the early 20th century, who played a pivotal role in advancing our understanding of the universe. It's a compelling and often-overlooked chapter of history — one that speaks not only to scientific discovery, but also to the broader social context of the time and the contributions of women, whose work went largely unrecognized.

Our Murney Tower will be opening on the Victoria Day weekend. All visitors love being taken there.

And watch out for details of the second annual cruise later in the summer.

Speaker's Corner

by Dr. Duncan McDowall

Dr. Thomas Harrison on Richard Nixon's Summer Interlude in the County



Canadians have long been familiar with their nation's bilateral policy diplomacy with its southern neighbour. Auto pacts, defence agreements and tariff spats have resulted in a steady succession of cross-border confabs between Canadian and American leaders. In the immortal words of John F. Kennedy: "Geography has made us neighbours. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners. And necessity has made us allies."

What we tend to forget is that American leaders have often come across our border as tourists in search of recreation. Think, for instance, of Franklin Roosevelt's idyllic summers on New Brunswick's Campobello Island. Or George W. Bush's trips to Toronto to watch his Texas Rangers play the Blue Jays. Less well known is the 1957 holiday junket of Eisenhower's Vice-President Richard Nixon to the shores of picturesque Prince Edward County. This was the focus of **Dr. Thomas Harrison's** April talk to the Society. Harrison, a lawyer by training, but an avid local historian, horseman, artist and stage director by subsequent vocation, stumbled across tantalizing bits of local lore concerning a brief summer sojourn by Nixon in the "County." His curiosity piqued, Harrison set about turning rumours into fact, ultimately resulting in his book, *Searching for Richard Nixon*.

Harrison described Nixon's journey across Lake Ontario in a friend's yacht to Picton with a cluster of prominent American business men. Nixon would later reminisce about the trip, on a state visit to Ottawa in 1972, as one of his "happiest" memories. Harrison spent time trying to divine a deeper purpose behind the visit. Perhaps it had some "synchronicity" with broader and more troublesome Cold War tensions? Here he provided some interesting speculations, but, in the end, concluded that there was "no real evidence" of a "secret" mission. Instead, we were left with pleasant images of an American leader wandering the quiet streets of a small Ontario town befriendng both the local mayor and local lads on the street. If only, one reflected, this pleasantness had been "Tricky Dickie's" only legacy in history.

Dr. Harrison's lecture is available on YouTube through the KHS website.



Photo by Eva Barnes



Alexander Cicolari: Kingston's Confectioner and Custodian of Memory

By Liana Shaw and Derrick Bouchard

A version of this article first appeared in Vol 54, No. 2 of Kingston Relations, the newsletter of OGS Kingston

In March's Limelight, we examined the fate of two insurgents of the 1837 Upper Canada Rebellion, von Schoultz and Woodruff, whose deaths were meant to serve as a warning before they faded quietly into history. One might reasonably wonder how their mortal remains came to rest in St. Mary's Cemetery, which didn't exist at the time of their executions. The answer lies not in military records or court transcripts, but in the stones that mark their graves, and in the quiet actions of a Kingston citizen who refused to let their memory fade.

Today, the gravestones of Nils von Schoultz and Martin Woodruff stand shoulder to shoulder near the vault at St. Mary's cemetery, in the shadow of a prominent monument memorializing the Cicolari family. This placement is not accidental. Unlike many of the graves from Kingston's earlier cemeteries whose markers have long since crumbled and disappeared, these graves are marked by substantial, purpose-made stones that were clearly intended to endure.

St. Mary's Cemetery, Cicolari plot. The graves of Nils von Schoultz and Martin Woodruff at St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cemetery, positioned behind the Cicolari family monument. Their deliberate placement within the family plot underscores the intentional nature of the re-interment.



This points to a re-burial carried out decades after their executions, and even beyond the 1850s when the Upper Burial Ground (now known as McBurney, or, more popularly, Skeleton Park), where they'd been first laid to rest, was closed and St. Mary's registered its first burials. Their remains were placed within the Cicolari family plot at a later time when the fate of the abandoned cemetery had become an urgent and unresolved civic concern. The man responsible for this move was Alexander Cicolari.

Alexander Cicolari

In Kingston's mid-19th-century newspapers the name "Cicolari" appears regularly, not for scandal, but often as a mark of affection and respect toward the man. A well-known confectioner, his long-standing business at the corner of King and Brock Streets across from the Market, was known as a "saloon," though it served tea, coffee, and sweets rather than hard spirits. Upright in both business and principle, he was noted for his temperance, and that "though engaged in that line, he never touched alcohol." An oft-told story centred on the man, in what the Whig called "the most pithy temperance lecture ever heard." When asked if he feared the silver spoons he insisted on in his saloon might be stolen, he replied with a smile: "Oh no — the people who drink coffee do not steal spoons. ... I have no fear,

for only a drunkard would stoop to steal a teaspoon.”

Cicolari’s mid-century life in Kingston placed him closer to the events of 1837/38 than his reputation might suggest. At just seventeen he had stood guard at Fort Henry during the aftermath of the 1838 Rebellion. Serving with the Montreal Loyal Volunteers under Captain Forsyth, he witnessed the executions of the captured insurgents Nils von Schoultz and Martin Woodruff — an experience that reportedly marked him for life, linking the man of temperance and respectability with the violence and aftermath of the rebellion, and perhaps helping to influence his later actions.

A familiar face at Cicolari’s saloon in the 1850s and 1860s belonged to the man who had advised Nils von Schoultz at his court martial years earlier: John A. Macdonald. As Macdonald’s political fortunes rose, Cicolari’s establishment became a favoured gathering place for Kingston’s legal, political and publishing elite. In later years, Cicolari’s name appeared in newspapers alongside the other civic leaders who would routinely meet Macdonald’s arrival on the train platform, and his establishment, more than once, catered the celebratory dinners that followed. Whether the events of 1838 were ever spoken of between the two men in the decades that followed is unknown, but it seems probable.

He was also a volunteer captain of the Deluge Fire Company No.1, and, in 1868 after his retirement, he showed notable courage during a devastating fire across from Market Square. When the heat forced back much younger men, Cicolari, described in news accounts as “elderly” at the age of fifty-eight, heroically broke through the flames to rescue a woman and her daughter trapped on the third floor of their home.

The Re-burials

By this point in time, the Upper Burial Ground had become a source of public unease and, increasingly, open disgust. Closed to new burials since 1851, the site had deteriorated into a neglected, foul-smelling field where livestock grazed freely and shallow graves were frequently disturbed. The problem was compounded by the grim reality that bodies were sometimes buried three or four deep as the town’s population outpaced available space. Contemporaneous newspapers make it clear that this was a public concern. In 1863, the weekly *British Whig* published an impassioned appeal, describing the old cemetery as “utterly deserted,” its fences broken down and “cattle roaming at large,” and urged that the grave of “Poor Von Shoultz,” in particular, be saved and that “some benevolent persons” take steps to remove “the stone and what it shades” to a more fitting resting place. Reinterment was publicly encouraged and framed as an act of decency. Leaving anyone behind — rich, poor or executed rebels — was considered an unfortunate and unseemly fate.

The available evidence suggests that the re-interment of von Schoultz and Woodruff occurred sometime between 1863 and 1887, most likely toward the later end of that period, when

public and institutional pressure to address the neglected burial ground had become more acute.

Early in 1887, an account in *The Whig* indicated von Schoultz's remains were in St. Mary's Cemetery, placing the relocation within Cicolari's lifetime, as he would die the following year. A recollection published in 1907 by well-known former alderman and merchant William Allen noted that the remains had been moved by Cicolari to his family plot when the original burial ground was converted into a public park, a process that stretched from the mid 1880s until the park was officially opened in 1893.

It is striking that both Cicolari and Allen recalled being present at, and witnessing, the execution of Nils von Schoultz. Cicolari was seventeen at the time — old enough to serve, but still scarcely more than a boy, while Allen would have been only five or six, attending with his soldier father. They did not share the same vantage point or the same understanding of events, but the execution must have lodged itself in the memory of both, resurfacing decades later through Cicolari's determination that the graves of the men he had watched die would not be lost to neglect, and through Allen's efforts near the end of his own life to record how they came to rest at St. Mary's.

Alexander Cicolari left no public explanation for his actions. Instead, his legacy survives in the stones marking the graves of von Schoultz and Woodruff in the Cicolari family plot.

The Stones

The grave markers of Nils von Schoultz and Martin Woodruff are not the original stones from Kingston's Upper Burial Ground. Their materials and makers' signatures point instead to a sequence of remembrance that unfolded over decades.

Carved in red granite, the prominent Cicolari family monument contrasts visibly with the small, pale slabs of the two graves to its rear. It bears the signature of Greenwood & Co., part of a succession of Greenwood partnerships active in Kingston from the mid-nineteenth century into the 1890s. Members of the Greenwood family, including Joseph C. Greenwood, were among the city's best-known stonecutters during this period. Given the number of deaths within the Cicolari family from the 1850s through the 1880s, this monument probably belongs to an earlier placement and should not be assumed to date from the same time as the stones marking the rebel graves.

The markers for von Schoultz and Woodruff tell a different story. Both are signed by J. Fallon, who in 1890 was still a teenaged apprentice to the stone-cutting trade. This makes it clear that the stones visible today could not be those originally associated with the Upper Burial Ground, nor are they likely to date from the period of re-interment itself. It was only by the late 1890s that Fallon had established his own stone-cutting business in Cornwall, and newspaper notices from around 1901 regularly mention him taking commissions for

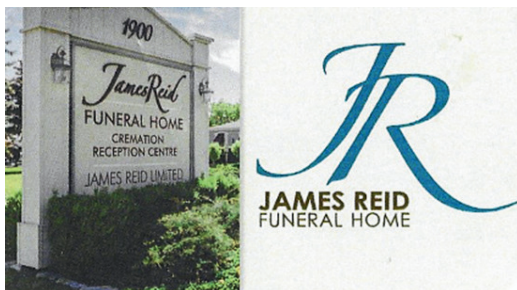
stonework at both St. Mary's and Cataraqi cemeteries. Together, this evidence points to the early years of the twentieth century as the most probable date of the markers now in place. Several scenarios here are plausible. The original markers may have been too fragile or unsuitable for relocation. Temporary stones may have accompanied the bodies at the time of re-interment and been replaced later. It is also possible that the graves remained unmarked at St. Mary's until the Fallon stones were installed.

What can be said with confidence is that the limestone markers now standing at St. Mary's represent a later and deliberate act of memorialization. Their workmanship and signature point to a moment when remembrance was formalized in stone, transforming relocated remains into permanent, readable graves. Whether commissioned during the final years of Alexander Cicolari's life, or later by family members acting on his intentions, the stones standing today speak to a sustained commitment to memory, and taken together with the Cicolari monument, they reflect the memory not only of rebellion and punishment, but also of a citizen who understood that even the most painful chapters of Kingston's past deserved care and dignity.

Sources are available upon request.

**Upper Burial Ground, 1900
Moving of the gravestones
from Frontenac Park (also
known as Skeleton
Park). Courtesy, Queen's
Archives**

<https://hdl.handle.net/1974.1/1d6a4ddc-b16a-41b3-96ef-13b858f281ee>



Murney Tower

Operated by the Kingston Historical Society

www.murneytower.com



Murney Tower Museum Update by Liana Shaw



Murney Tower Museum is gearing up for a busy 2026 season. We are pleased to welcome three new summer students—Rihanna, Kallista, and Ben—who will be welcoming visitors and giving tours at the tower this season. Preparations are well underway for several new exhibits, including: *The Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment (RCRR)*, *Children in the Tower*, *Constructing the Tower* (a collaborative exhibit with Queen's Archives) and a display

featuring our Gardiner Collection's Victorian-era commemorative chinaware. The first two will become permanent additions to the museum's *Voices of Murney* series, while the latter exhibits will rotate seasonally.

The museum has also been active in the media, with recent appearances on Cogeco YourTV's *Limestone Lens* and *Your Local Show*, as well as on Kingston daily radio, helping to promote both Murney programming and Kingston Historical Society events.

A highlight of the upcoming season will be the result of a collaboration with Queen's Engineering students: a scaled down model of the Blomefield cannon on top of the tower gun platform. Additional models will also be retained for display and hands-on educational use.

Our annual Easter event, held in partnership with the Museum of Health Care, was a great success, with approximately 250 advance tickets sold and increased attendance and revenue over last year.

Looking ahead, we'll be reprising last year's popular **boat cruise** on the Island Queen in partnerships with our friends at Kingston 1000 Islands Cruises in late summer, with further details to be announced.

Murney Tower Opening May 16, 2026

Join us to commemorate Sir John A. Macdonald

Saturday, June 6, 2026, at 1:30 pm

Cataraqui Cemetery – Macdonald Historic Site

follow signage off John Counter at Princess

For over a century, members of the Kingston Historical Society and the public at large have gathered at the graveside of Canada's first prime minister on the anniversary of his death, June 6, 1891.

The speaker is

Greg Piassetzki

A legal counsel specializing in intellectual property law with the Toronto law firm of Piassetzki, Nenniger, Kvas LLP,

Greg attended the Queen's Law School. Beyond his legal calling, Greg has been an avid researcher of Canadian history, a frequent writer for The National Post, for the Residential Schools Research Group and for the Canadian Institute for Historical Education.

Born in Manitoba with family roots in Canada's French, Acadian and Métis communities, Greg has written eloquently and incisively on the contested place of Sir John A. Macdonald in Canadian history.

Donna Ivey

Donna Ivey was a long-time member of the Kingston Historical Society. She died on 3 April 2026. She is remembered, with her late partner Norma Kelly, as the owner of 110 Rideau Street, one of the first places where John Macdonald, later Canada's first prime minister, lived. Donna was the compiler of the Index for Historic Kingston, volumes 45 to 54 and the creator of Tributes in Music to Sir John, performed at a Grand Concert held in City Hall in April 2004 with the words and music later published as The Sir John A. Macdonald Music Book. She was a dedicated member of the Society, contributing through her enthusiasm for local heritage and her music. She will be missed.



Awarding the Kingston Historical Society's History Prize, 2026

This will be the fourth year for the presentation of the KHS Historical Prize to grade 12 graduating students who qualify under the guidelines. Awardees, one for each of the nine Kingston area high schools, will receive a prize of \$150 and a society certificate at their respective convocation ceremonies. It is very meaningful for the awardees to receive this honour from one of the society's members. Would you like to be one of these?

Most ceremonies are held on the last Thursday of June, the 25th this year, in the afternoon, although two or three are held in the early evening. It might take 2 hours of your time, but it is very rewarding. Special seating is arranged for the presenters. No speeches are even allowed. Presenters simply walk up onto the stage, smile, say "congratulations," shake hands, and deliver the envelope. Two of the schools are Francophone and, although not necessary, bilingual skills would be welcome.

If you would like to represent the Society in this way, please email or phone Paul Van Nest: pvannest@cogeco.ca
613-532-1903.

You may request a particular school if you wish to do so.

Did you know?

The City of Kingston keeps a **public list** of all of the properties that have been identified so far as having **cultural heritage value**.

This list is called the **Heritage Register**, and it is required by the province through the **Ontario Heritage Act**.

The Heritage Register is a great source of information about historical properties in the municipality, and is available through the **City's website** on its Heritage Register Map.

Protecting our
built heritage



HOMESTEAD





Dr. Brian Osborne, C.M.

Brian Stuart Osborne (1938–2026)

The Kingston Historical Society mourns the passing of Dr. Brian Stuart Osborne, a scholar of remarkable breadth, a tireless community volunteer, and one of the most influential interpreters of Kingston's past.

Brian came to Canada in 1967 and soon made Kingston his intellectual and spiritual home. He rose quickly through the ranks in the Department of Geography at Queens' University to become Professor in 1977 and serving several terms as Head of the Department. His scholarly reputation was international, but Kingston remained the centre of his intellectual gravity. A prolific writer, Brian authored or edited dozens of books and hundreds of articles, many of them foundational texts in Kingston history. His early work, *Kingston: Building on the Past* (1988, with Donald Swainson), became a touchstone for understanding the city's evolution. Brian served as Vice-President (1999–2002) and President (2002–2005) of the Kingston Historical Society. He was a Director of the Museum of the Great Lakes at Kingston (2005–10), a Board Member of the Cataraqui Archaeological Research Foundation (2004–10), and a long-time contributor to the Friends of the Rideau. He served as Editor of the Kingston Historical Society's newsletter, *Limelight* (1999–2005) and of *Historic Kingston* (1999–2006).

Among his many honours, Brian was awarded the Order of Canada.

Brian's passing leaves a profound absence in Kingston's intellectual and cultural life. But his legacy endures in the institutions he strengthened, the students he mentored, the books and articles he wrote, and the countless talks, tours, and conversations through which he helped Kingstonians see their city with fresh eyes. He taught us that history is not merely what happened, but how we understand ourselves in relation to place.

We honour his memory with gratitude for a life spent illuminating the past and enriching the present.

By Dr. David Gordon

Ear to the Ground

by Elizabeth Durno
Events of interest for history buffs



Submit a nomination for **Canada's Volunteer Awards**

The 2026 Call for Nominations is now open!

It is time to nominate an outstanding individual, a non-profit organization, a social enterprise, or a socially responsible business who has made a significant contribution in improving the lives of others in their community through volunteering. Help them get the recognition they deserve. The nomination period is officially open and will run until June 17

About the Awards

The Canada's Volunteer Awards (CVA) consists of twenty-one awards, including one national award, the Thérèse Casgrain Lifelong Achievement award, and 20 regional awards. The regional awards are distributed across five regions in the following four categories: Community Leader, Emerging Leader, Business Leader, and Social Innovator.

Award recipients will be recognized at an award ceremony and will be given the opportunity to select a non-profit organization to receive a grant.

https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/volunteer-awards.html?utm_campaign=esdc-edsc-cva-pbc-2026&utm_medium=email&utm_source=cva-call-open-2026-pbc-appel-ouvert&utm_content=cva-program-en-GH-20260423

Saturday, May 23, 2026

(OGS)

Kingston Branch-Ontario Genealogical Society

10:00 am at **Cataraqui Cemetery or on Zoom**

Duncan Jamieson, the Assistant Manager of Funeral and Client Services at Cataraqui Cemetery, traces the cemetery's origins.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/join/zoom/register/oy8cg2w-QfKylfDDnlzehQ#/registration>



Jane's Walks Are Back

Friday 1st to Sunday 3rd May

Nine New Walking Tours This Year

There is something for everyone in this year's program of walking tours. Take some time and join us. For those who haven't been on one of the Jane's Walks in Kingston, there is a fantastic choice of eighteen different tours throughout the city.

Nine new tours:

Remarkable Point Frederick: from hunting and tool making to shipbuilding and military officer training

Urban Birding for Families: What does the Chickadee know?

·Flying in YGK: Kingston's Norman Rogers Airport

·Lake Ontario Park: From Military Outpost to a Public Park

Rhythm & Roots – Kingston's Music History

Lemoine Point: Walk in the Footprints of the Ancestors

The Rockwood Asylum: Its History and Its Architecture

Gentrification in Kingston

Kingston's Corner Stores

May 1-3, 2026 Jane's walks. Here is the link

<https://janeswalkkingston.wordpress.com/>