

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 16 September 2026

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

September 16: Dr. David Lenarčič

will speak on one of Kingston's most prolific and outspoken
historians,

Arthur Lower of Queen's, under the title

**“Confronting the ‘Imperialistic Wolf-Hounds’: Arthur Lower,
Canadian Nationalism and the Coming of World War II.”**

After completing a doctorate at York University, Dr. Lenarčič
pursued a teaching career and then served in various policy positions
in Ottawa at DND and the Privy Council as well as at the Canadian
embassy in Washington.

We note with regret the death, on 25 April 2026, of Maurice
Smith, a long-time member and a one-time president of the KHS.

Welcome New Members

Jennifer Splane

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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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

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.



It was an eventful summer! The Society started off with the June 6th commemoration of the death of Sir John A. Macdonald. The weather was favorable, despite dire predictions all through the previous week. Visitors heard a talk by Dr. Greg Piasetzki which challenged many to rethink their views on Sir John. His talk was subtitled ‘Still our greatest Prime Minister (and how he saved more indigenous lives than any other PM)’. If you were

unable to attend, you can still be there by visiting

<https://tinyurl.com/mrxy3eyv>

We received news that Fort Frederick will be revitalized after years of decay, following appeals to those responsible for its upkeep by the KHS and other groups.

I spent an afternoon in the middle of Bedford Township at a meeting of historically-inclined groups with a display of our books and an explanation of our activities. We are not alone! There are many active clusters of those interested in how their land, their township and their province have developed over the years. We met many more like-minded groups at the Kingston Seniors Centre in August, where our booth attracted much attention – and, hopefully, some new members. I spent a few hours talking with a visiting film crew about why Kingston was chosen as capital in 1841, and why it lost that status so quickly; it has led to some most interesting insights. And I spent a day at Fort Haldimand on Carleton Island. There is now very little left of the fort, but I understand why the British were so reluctant to leave it – and why that was such a necessity.

And now, back to normal. I hope to see you at our monthly meetings.

Speaker's Corner

by Dr. Duncan McDowall

Your History Below the Waves: Probing the Mystery and Mythology of Kingston's Marysburgh Vortex with **Dr. Ken Feigelman**



For most Kingstonians, local history is a terrestrial affair. Our consciousness of local heritage is land bound. Our great deeds, collective failings, and ambitions are framed by solid, earthy geography. We feel only passing appreciation that ours is a coastal community, whose prosperity has been formatively shaped by Lake Ontario and the mighty St. Lawrence River flowing past our shore. Yes, we take some pride in the fact that the Frontenac, the first steamship on the Lakes, was built

on our shores and that the 105-gun St. Lawrence was launched here in the War of 1812 and is now sunken and rotting off our foreshore. And more recently, the Museum of the Great Lakes, with its magnificent museum ship, the liner Keewatin, has admirably raised our awareness of Kingston's maritime legacies. But the fact remains that in many ways we remain oblivious of what the seas around us can tell us about our past. After all, 72% of the earth's surface is covered by water.

At the Society's May 2026 lecture that shortsightedness was addressed by underwater explorer and historian Ken Feigelman. Montreal-born Feigelman reminded the audience that the twentieth century had for the first time allowed those curious about the historical bounty of the seas to probe the depths of the oceans both deeply and safely. The advent of diving aided by the perfection of SCUBA diving, remote-controlled submersible vehicles and depth-probing sonar, has opened the possibility of investigating everything from shipwrecks to the geological bounty of the ocean floor. History has ceased to be a land-locked passion.

Feigelman first donned a SCUBA suit at the age of 15. As a boy, he had marveled at the underwater adventures of divers such as Jacques Cousteau and Lloyd Bridges on television. Studies in biology and marine zoology followed at McGill and Concordia Universities. In 1973, he co-founded an underwater exploration firm, Deep/Quest2 Expeditions, which initially explored Lake Champlain in search of evidence of naval engagements there in colonial times. Since then, Ken's urge to explore deep beneath the waves has taken him to Mexico, the Caribbean and the Great Lakes. Since 1979 he has been based in Belleville, a lakeside perch that has allowed him to dive into history long lost on the floor of Lake Ontario. That curiosity led him to the so-called Marysburgh Vortex, a triangular, choke point stretch of Lake Ontario wedged off Kingston at the mouth of the St. Lawrence, an area long notorious as a graveyard of lake navigation.

The "vortex" area has long been known as dangerous waters for mariners. As many as 430 vessels, large and small, are said to have foundered there since modern commerce began on Lake Ontario. But what gave the area an added mystique was the 1980 appearance of author Hugh Cochrane's book *Gateway to Oblivion*. Cochrane compiled a detailed inventory of all the vessels he believed had been lost in the vortex. To this sensible listing, he brought the wildly imagined notion that a powerful, otherworldly force had lured vessels to their fate without plausible earthly explanation. Cochrane's celestial theory came on the heels of Charles Berlitz's 1974 best seller *The Bermuda Triangle*, which similarly argued that an evil force had swallowed up vessels and aircraft in the

environs of the mid-Atlantic island. Now Kingstonians began talking about their own “triangle” – the Marysburgh Vortex.

Feigelman brought diver’s wisdom and historical skepticism to the notion of a malevolent twilight zone off Kingston shores. Geology shows that the seabed of the vortex is dominated by a huge meteor crater rich in nickel and metals that cause magnetic distortion. Ships foundered there because their compasses went haywire under the influence of such metals. The vortex was also treacherous in that it sat at the narrowing passage of lake to river where currents accelerated and where lake weather collided with the shore climate creating fog and late fall snow squalls. There were also shoals, poorly marked on charts. In short, the vortex was the sort of place where navigation would become predictably perilous, not a place of supernatural influence.

Although not a believer in vortex mythology, Feigelman did underscore the nastiness of navigation through these waters by graphically telling the stories of several mid-nineteenth century ships that perished, often without a trace, in these waters. These were grim tales with few survivors and they generated long-lasting rumours. Feigelman reinforced his skepticism of the Cochrane mythology by detailing his career as a diver and demonstrating the tremendous advances of underwater archaeology in the second half of the twentieth century – SCUBA, submersible vehicles and bottom scanning sonar. He introduced “Gertrude,” his deep-diving and free-ranging submersible vehicle which could digitally map sea beds and wrecks at the end of its 200-foot tether. He also displayed objects retrieved from the lake – Native arrowheads, for instance – that conveyed a sense of pre-settler commerce and habitation in the Great Lakes area. The evening ended with a short video showing many aquatic scenes– fish, coral reefs and decaying wrecks – on sea beds investigated by Feigelman’s exploration teams.



Maurice Smith

It is with sincere regret that we note the passing of Maurice Smith, a KHS Award winner in 2001 and KHS President for 2005-2007. Maurice was a professional sailor for 13 years. He had a British Marine Ticket, and served as Navigator and Master on the oceans of the world as well as on our Great Lakes. In 1977 he came to Kingston to assist the Marine Museum Board of Directors develop the site on Kingston’s waterfront, and to help build their collections. Twenty four years later he retired as the

Executive Director of what is now the Marine Museum of the Great Lakes, with its extensive collections for research, regular programming and permanent exhibits.

Maurice served as president of the Ontario Museums Association, of the Kingston Visitor and Convention Bureau, and of the Canadian Nautical Research Society, as well as of the KHS. He was the Canadian representative on the Council of the International Congress of Maritime Museums. His book, *Steamboats on the Lakes: Two Centuries of Steamboat Travel Through Ontario’s Waterways*, was published in 2005, and he also wrote on the Canada Steamship Lines and the RMC’s Stone Frigate.

We will miss his quiet and knowledge-filled presence.

***Awardees of the Kingston Historical Society's History Award:
June, 2026***

This award is available to be presented annually 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 or world history courses will be a factor, the 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 history including its many adjuncts such as archaeology, anthropology, cultural heritage, social history, museums, etc. The award consists of a certificate and a cheque for \$150.

Our congratulations to the following 2026 awardees:

Bayridge Secondary School: **Cole Brown** Presenter Liana Shaw

Ecole Secondaire Catholique Marie-Rivier no awardee

École Secondaire Publique Mille-Îles: **Conor Williams** Presenter Michael Murphy

Frontenac Secondary School: **Elian Kaiser** Presenter Grant LeDrew

Holy Cross Catholic Secondary School: **Asher Gallant** Presenter Peter Radley

LaSalle Secondary School: **Olivia Chodak** Presenter Duncan McDowell

Kingston Secondary School: **Kaitlyn Caverson** Presenter Bruce Cossar

Loyalist Secondary School: **Madelyn Hook** Presenter Ann Stevens

Regiopolis-Notre Dame Catholic High School :**Alexander Del Prete**

Presenter Karen Pagratis

Our society owes special thanks to members who presented the awards at each school's graduation ceremony. Our presence means so much to the schools as well as the awardees.

Consider volunteering for next year's presentations; most ceremonies are held on the last Thursday in June.

An Award presented by Grant
LeDrew to Elian Kaiser,
Frontenac SS





Piper Eric Gray
Photo by Eva Barnes



M.C. Don Richardson

Photos by Peter Ginn

On Saturday, June 6th, members of the Society and Kingstonians in general gathered in Cataraqui Cemetery to commemorate the 135th anniversary of the death of our first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald. Since the 1970s, the Society has orchestrated this ceremony both to underscore Sir John's lasting legacy in overseeing the confederation of British North America into a coast-to-coast nation and also to reflect our ongoing reconsideration of his place in our ever-unfolding nationhood. Hosted by the Society's gifted secretary Don Richardson, who ably welcomed attendees in English, French and Mohawk, the high point of the ceremony always comes with the remarks of an invited speaker. This year that role fell to Greg Piasetzki, a Toronto lawyer specializing in intellectual property rights. Greg is a frequent columnist in newspapers such as the National Post and is also a contributor to publications such as The Canadian Encyclopedia. He has vigorously objected to many of the allegations made against Macdonald by those who see him as the sole and malevolent author of Canada's Indigenous peoples' policies. Greg's talk, "Sir John A. Macdonald: Still our Greatest Prime Minister (and how he saved more Indigenous lives than any other PM)", can be viewed by accessing the YouTube link available under "events" at the KHS website. It is a talk well worth pondering.

Special thanks to all those who helped organize the day's smooth organization and success, especially KHS President Peter Gower and videographer Dr. Craig Pettis.

Sir John A. Remembered



Speaker Greg Piasetzki



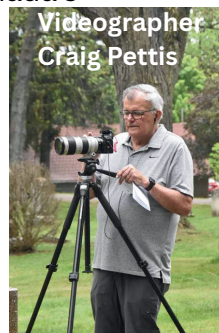
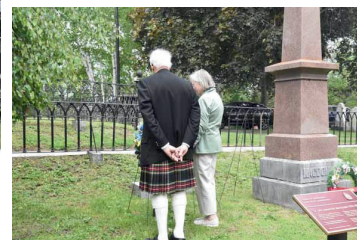
Peter Gower with wreath layers John Selkirk, PC Party; Jeff McLaren, City of Kingston; Liana Shaw, KHS.



Dr. Duncan McDowall



The Reverend Bill Clarke





Tibbetts Point Lighthouse – A Beacon at the Gateway to Lake Ontario

By Glenn Fritz, Vice President of the Board for Tibbetts Point Lighthouse Society

Standing proudly at the point where Lake Ontario meets the mighty St. Lawrence River, Tibbetts Point Lighthouse in Cape Vincent, New York, has welcomed and guided mariners for nearly two centuries. Since first being illuminated in 1827, the lighthouse has served as an enduring symbol of safety, history, and the close connection shared by our Canadian and American communities.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Tibbetts Point is one of the few lighthouses in the United States that still serves as a working Lighthouse under the auspices of the US Coast Guard.

Its beautifully restored grounds, historic Tower and Fog Horn Building, as well as its Visitor Center, invite guests to explore the rich maritime heritage of the Thousand Islands region.

One of the lighthouse's greatest treasures is its magnificent, original 1854 French-made Fourth Order Fresnel lens, based on the revolutionary design created by French physicist Augustin-Jean Fresnel. Still in operation today, it is the last functioning Fresnel lens on Lake Ontario and continues to shine as a testament to the craftsmanship and innovation of a bygone era.

Today, the Tibbetts Point Lighthouse Historical Society preserves this historic landmark through the dedication of volunteers and the generosity of supporters. Visitors from both sides of the border are welcomed to enjoy breathtaking sunsets, spectacular views of passing ships, fascinating exhibits, and a variety of family-friendly events throughout the season.

A visit to Tibbetts Point Lighthouse offers an unforgettable experience and a warm reminder of the longstanding friendship and shared maritime history between Canada and the United States. We look forward to welcoming our neighbors from Kingston and beyond to discover one of the true gems of the Great Lakes.

Stay connected! Follow us On Facebook for the latest events, news, and special activities, or visit www.tibbettspointlighthouse.org to explore the fascinating history of the Tibbett Point Lighthouse and discover all there is to see and do.

The Cape Vincent Historical Museum by Hope Hammond

From an article published in July 2025 in the
Thousand Islands Life Magazine

The Cape Vincent Historical Museum evolved from the Cape Vincent Improvement League's "History Club" that was created in 1930. In the mid-1960s, the Town Historian, Nina Comins, and the Village Historian, Dorothy Allen, began the Cape Vincent Historical Museum in what is now the Cape Vincent Community House. Many artifacts and photographs were donated by local citizens for display.



All photos courtesy Cape Vincent
Historical Museum



In 1992 the museum was relocated to a building at the north end of James Street owned by the Town of Cape Vincent. With generous donations, endowments and grants, the Town of Cape Vincent had the building renovated to house the museum in two rooms; also there is the Chamber of Commerce.

The museum is a community effort; we are a 100% volunteer group.

There is a Board of seven members and almost 40 people volunteer to keep the museum open daily, 10 am to 4 pm, during July and August.

Two volunteers, Tim and Ron Mason, donated materials and their skills to restore the Tallett Rod Winder, invented by a Cape Vincent resident William H. Tallett, patented in 1915. Another, a former Town Historian, Peter Margrey, worked on a model, created by Clarkson Stanley, of a freighter loaded with lumber; lumbering was once one of our primary industries.



During COVID there was an increase in our visitor count from the states of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Once we were allowed to reopen, we met many people who had never heard of Cape Vincent before who had bought property nearby.

Despite dating back to 1930, we only recently petitioned the New York State Board of Regents for a Provisional Charter to incorporate as a “museum.” That charter was granted to us on January 14, 2025. That was only possible because the Town of Cape Vincent gave us total support, and we had a Board of Trustees willing to put in the time and effort to meet all the requirements. We proceeded to obtain our 501(c)3 Non-profit status from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service and the Sales-Tax Exemption Certificate from New York State.

We now have a website and very ambitious goals: the preservation of important town photographs and the digitization of our local and family history collections. The latter monumental task is being done by Julie Merchant Peck and Jennifer Rousseau. The digitization project comprises two key components: fully searchable digitized files, and a relational database of people, places and events. One of the great side efforts of this project is to document the cemeteries.

The museum has hosted children’s groups from the local elementary school and the Youth Summer Camp.

For our collections, one recent donation is a model of the one-room schoolhouse recently demolished. There is an initiative begun by the board’s vice-president: “My Cape Vincent Story”. Its purpose is to capture from residents their memories of years gone by.

Two members of the museum’s Board of Trustees, Dennis & Kathi McCarthy, are Fort Haldimand and Carleton Island experts; they contribute significantly to our collections and the promotion of our town, particularly in the area of shipwrecks.

Their website www.forthaldimand.com

Museum website www.CapeHistorical.org

Visit our museum.

Hope Hammond is the president of the Cape Vincent Historical Museum.



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

"J. B. McIver...will erect a handsome residence" - the Kingston Daily News 1889 prediction has been well met at 162-164 Barrie Street on the corner of Union Street.



In 1895, proud owners and occupants showed off their double house in the British Whig. Accountant John B. McIver's relatives were on the steps (on the left) and Adeline and George Cliff, a real estate agent, were on the balcony (on the right).

McIver purchased the corner lot for \$3,100 in mid-February 1889 and immediately hired architect James B. Reid to design the house. His tender call resulted in William McCartney being chosen as the contractor for the brick work.



Photography by Jennifer McKendry

The attractive late Victorian interior may be familiar to many Limelight readers, while they were enjoying a drink and lunch during its era as the university Grad Club from 1976 to April 2026.



Re Fort Frederick

To Peter Gower from J.C. Scott, Colonel, Base Commander, Canadian Forces Base Kingston

This is a follow-up to our previous correspondence regarding your concerns surrounding the state of Fort Frederick, and more specifically, the Martello Tower.

Since then, there have been new developments that I would like to advise you, along with an updated timeline to the project's progression.

After an in-depth 7-month tendering and two-step bid evaluation process, the Martello Tower Restoration Project was recently awarded to Roof Tile Management (RTM) for \$5,861,830. RTM is very familiar with heritage infrastructure on CFB Kingston and RMC as they have been involved in many other heritage restoration projects since 2012. The contractor began work on 19 May 2026 and will work over the next several years to dismantle, restore, repair, and rebuild the Martello Tower. The work is expected to be completed by 2030. While it will take several years to complete, this will allow the proper care and attention required to ensure an important historical building is restored in accordance with applicable DND and UNESCO heritage standards. The construction will occur in three broad phases as detailed below:

Phase 1 - 2026 and 2027

Masonry cleaning;
Masonry repointing tower and counterscarping;
Window restoration;
Metal door & shutter restoration;
Roof reinforcement;
Wood siding replacement; and
Begin stone replacement.

Phase 2 - 2028

Dismantle and rebuild counterscarping;
Complete stone replacement;
Stone refacing, crack repair, and reset; and
Stone surface mortar repair.

Phase 3 - 2029 and 2030

Complete rebuilding of counterscarping; and
Dry ditch restoration.

The KHS received a letter from Jamie Emerton, a local historian, who asks for information on **Elder's Beverages** and its founder, Jack Findlay Elder, for a project he is working on to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Elder's Beverages in 2027.

Jamie wants a place to display the collection of the last remaining Elder's bottles and related items he has gathered from all over Ontario. He has an almost-complete set of the bottles used between 1927 and 1975.

He would like photographs of the Elder's Beverages trucks, stores and workers from any time in the last century.

He would like memories or accounts from anyone knowing about the business or about Jack (he died in 1975).

Contact email
finditallantiques@gmail.com

Murney Tower

Operated by the Kingston Historical Society

www.murneytower.com



Murney Tower Museum Update by Liana Shaw



Visitors this year were in for a special treat: four new exhibits on the Barracks Level, a special pop-up exhibit from the Kingston Scout Museum in the basement, and a one-of-a-kind poetry exhibition created in collaboration with Haiku Canada.

In May, Murney Tower welcomed conference attendees from across North America, who were given a tour and then invited to explore the tower and its surroundings, inside and out. Their experiences inspired poems that reflect the site's architecture, atmosphere, natural environment and layered history. The resulting exhibition featured



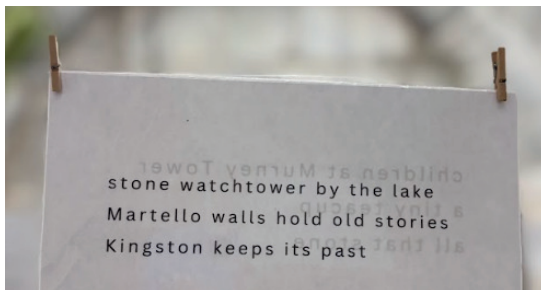
**Showcases for the Tower
courtesy of PWOR**



170 VISITOR POEMS

42 English- and French-language poems. Together, the haiku offer many different perspectives on the tower, weaving together themes of nature, place, history and connection across time.

When the exhibition was installed for the season, an interactive writing station was included with paper, pens and some basic guidance so visitors could try composing haiku of their own. The response went far beyond anything anticipated. By mid August, visitors had submitted 170 poems; they represented 17 countries and wrote in 11 different languages. Children and adults alike responded to their own experiences of the tower through poems covering a wonderful variety of themes. It has proved to be one of the museum's most popular visitor experiences of the season.



Ear to the Ground

by Elizabeth Durno
Events of interest for history buffs

Saturday, September 19th the **Ontario Genealogical Society's** meeting between 10:00 and 11:30 a.m. deals with the new Library and Archives of Canada website and records. For the zoom link:

<https://kingston.ogs.on.ca/events/tags/kingston-branch-meeting/>