

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 October 21 2026
*presented live at 7 pm in the theatre lounge
of the Kingsbridge Retirement Community, 950 Centennial Drive,
and simultaneously offered via >>>Zoom*

Alicia Boutilier,

Chief Curator at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre
and a prominent Canadian art historian, will speak on the evolution of the Art
Centre at Queen's from its initial benefaction by local arts patron

Agnes Etherington under the title,

Agnes Etherington's House:

Tracing Changes and Intended Uses, 1926-2026

Alicia is currently involved in the massive expansion and reorientation of the
Centre, scheduled to open in 2027.



The Kingston Historical Society

Established 1893

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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



We welcome Bob Mayo to Council. He has a most interesting background and his varied interests and talents will add to the resources of Council and of the Society in general. If you are interested in playing a larger part in the Society's activities, please let us know by email at kingstonhs@gmail.com or by speaking to us at one of our meetings. We know that we will need a new editor for Historic Kingston for next year and a Vice President and there may be other vacancies. But you do not have to have a specific responsibility to be on Council: an interest in a positive future of the Society is enough.

We are certainly delighted by the numbers who come to the meetings at Kingsbridge. I was very sorry to miss the September talk as I duelled with traffic on 401 late into the evening. This month is a joint meeting with the Frontenac Heritage Foundation and seats may be in even higher demand, so come early!

Thanks to our hired students, paid staff and volunteers, the Murney Tower had another successful year. Read about it in more detail in Liana Shaw's article. And when you see workers at the Tower this fall, don't worry! Our entry bridge is being renovated to make it safer and more secure.

Kingsbridge 
Retirement Community *by Signature*

Welcome New Members

Bob Mayo

Dr. David Lenarčič on Queen's own Dr. Arthur Lower "Confronting the 'Imperialistic Wolf-Hounds': Arthur Lower, Canadian Nationalism and the Coming of World War II"

We all have a smattering of familiarity of the world's transition between the end of WW1 to the beginning of WW2 but most of us have even less knowledge about that transition here in Canada. In hindsight, we wonder how the world watched the inexorable march of fascism in Spain, Italy and Germany, and not acted. What were we thinking! Might history be repeating itself – how topical might our September 16th, 2026 program be! Those who attended were very glad they did.

First a bit about our speaker. Dr. David Lenarčič retired from the Federal Public Service in 2017 and now resides in Westport. With his PhD in history from York University, he taught at Wilfred Laurier. Leaving academia, he joined the Department of National Defence in 1997 becoming a Deputy Director. Of special interest, he served a secondment as First Secretary at the Canadian Embassy in Washington as a policy advisor and analyst. Subsequently he was an advisor to the Commander of Canada Command, and finally served as an analyst for the Foreign and Defence Policy Secretariat in the Office of the Privy Council. From his many writings on the evening's topic, he engagingly led us through his analysis of Professor Lower's thinking through the 30s.

Arthur Lower was non-interventionist and promoted these views. However, Canadians in the Halifax area where he was teaching would not support the isolationist viewpoint or even the word "neutrality". They were in his words "imperialists, colonials and military" so he had to disguise his position in legal terms and logic. The question of the day was if England went to war, did the Commonwealth countries have to as well? At the end of September 1938, Chamberlain waved the Munich Agreement on his return from meeting with Hitler: "our two peoples will never go to war again." However, in March 1939, Lower wrote a treatise entitled "Canadian Unity in War and Peace: an Issue of Responsible Government", which garnered only 75 signatures. "It sank like a stone," he wrote in his memoirs. That spring, Hitler marched into the rest of Czechoslovakia, defying the Munich Accord, and anger in the Canadian public started to rise. War was declared on September 1st, 1939 and, significantly to Lower and many other Canadians, we made a separate declaration of war on September 10th. Lower came on board, reluctantly, blaming Britain and France for not policing the truce of 1919. Following the fall of Norway, the Lowlands, Dunkirk and France, he revisited his earlier stance, concerned that he had erred. Canada, he stated, "should have taken more responsibility and more initiative." He profoundly distrusted the British governments of the 1930s, but did concede that his position in the 30s could have "overstated the case". Between the imperialists and the non-interventionists, he wrote, "the truth probably is in the mushy middle". One stance however was constant: the establishment and agreement on a Canadian identity.

Still Standing

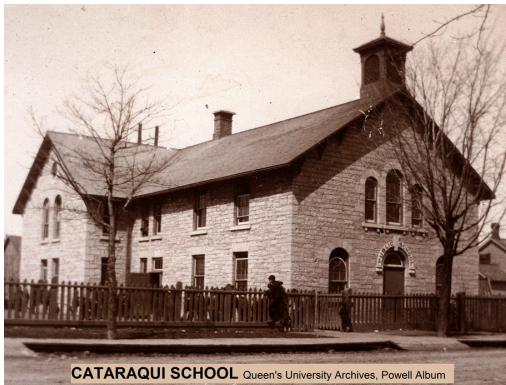
Looking at Regional Architecture with Dr. Jennifer McKendry FRONTENAC SCHOOL BECOMES DEPOT SCHOOL, 610 MONTREAL STREET



This attractive stone building at the corner of Railway Street was known as Frontenac School from 1872 to 1896. It is likely that most of us call it “Depot School, (left in 2017) even though its function as a common or public school ended in 1955. This is somewhat ironical, as the school board in 1896 thought that name was less than appealing and might be replaced over time. The board wanted to call a new school being built on Cowdy Street “Frontenac School” (since rebuilt). “Depot” was a reference to the nearby railway depot.

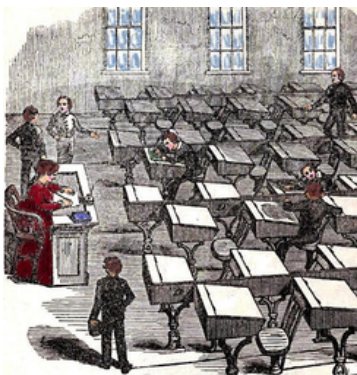
In July 1872, architect John Power called for tenders from contractors for Depot School. He had experience in building schools, for example, Cataragui School (closed as a public school in 1922) at 66 Rideau Street in 1868, plus its rear stone wing in 1877 (left middle).

There are similarities between the two buildings, which were of a form popular for schoolsbuildings, which were of a form popular for schools, as seen in this illustration (right) from H. Barnard’s School of Architecture of 1854.



CATARAQUI SCHOOL, Queen's University Archives, Powell Album

The two Kingston schools have the same arch, keystone and corbels over the entrance door. Depot School likely also had a bellcote.



TYPICAL SCHOOL INTERIORS

Both buildings have served many different functions since their days as public schools: industrial, day care, private school, community and cultural.



Museums in and around Kingston

Brockville Museum

5 Henry Street, Brockville

by Natalie Wood, Curator

People in Brockville were talking about the need for a community history museum as early as 1924. Brockville was, after all, the first incorporated village in Upper Canada and home to a rich history. Thanks to many visionaries and committed community leaders, a permanent, municipally owned, Brockville Museum, opened on June 21, 1981.

Nearly two generations later, the Brockville Museum has grown, matured, and evolved. Located in an early-19th century Loyalist-built stone house, the museum was physically expanded with an addition in 1995 and virtually expanded in 2013 with the adoption of an online collection database. The collection has grown to include over 23,000 objects and documents connected to Brockville's industrial, commercial, and social history; and continues to grow by about 200 acquisitions annually. Over the last decade, the museum has emphasized that "it doesn't have to be old" to be in a museum, stressing the importance of contemporary collecting not just for filling gaps in a collection, but as a means of making enhanced connection, meaning, and relevance between past and present.

Educational programming has always been at the heart of the Brockville Museum's mandate and today the museum delivers about 150 programs annually including walking tours, lectures, school programs, and talks inside area senior care residences, in addition to creating virtual content for YouTube and social media platforms. Museum exhibits showcase the town's historic wealth and political influence, its manufacturing might – past and present – as well as the stories of resilience by its citizens; the Brockville Museum's permanent exhibit, Travel Trunk: Unpacking Brockville's Cultural Stories, won the 2019 Ontario Museum Association Award for Excellence in Exhibitions.



Many of the museum's exhibits and programs work to subtly shift perceptions and emphasize the continuity of change, while simultaneously using nostalgia and inspiring stories to help enhance civic pride and responsibility.



The Brockville Museum also offers research and archival reproduction services.

Serving both locals and visitors from around the world, the Brockville Museum offers an introduction - and context - to Brockville's unique and fascinating history. Open year-round with admission by donation, groups by appointment. For more information visit:
www.brockvillemuseum.com



**On the End of Season
Murney Tower Cruise
August 30, 2026
Peter and Alison Ginn,
Liana Shaw, Alison
Dringenberg, Betty
Andrews, Elizabeth
Durno**



Murney Tower

Operated by the Kingston Historical Society

www.murneytower.com



Murney Tower Museum Update by Liana Shaw



As happens every year, once the museum opened its doors in May, the season flew by and, before we knew it, we were closing the doors again. It was a busy and successful summer, thanks to staff members Alison and Alexa and our three excellent summer students and tour guides. All told, we welcomed 11,199 visitors; about a quarter were local.

Museum Manager Alison Dringenberg refreshed and curated our permanent exhibition, *Voices of Murney*, putting to excellent use the display cabinets donated by Michael Boire of the Princess of Wales Own Regiment and installed this spring. In the four cases were explorations of the Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment, the domestic lives of soldiers and their families, the tower's site and architecture, and Victoriana from our Gardiner collection.

Visitors contributed to the haiku exhibition, adding 277 poems in 17 languages from 23 countries. Murney Fest welcomed 325 people, while Kids Take Over the Museum drew considerable local media attention. A July concert by Kevin and the Kitchen Sink packed the barracks level and featured Celtic and folk-inspired tunes. Hands-on history activities for children and an August sunset cruise offered still more ways for visitors of all ages to enjoy and support the museum.

A generous grant from the Churchill Foundation is helping Alison refresh our school programs and keep them free for area schools, whether classes visit the tower or the programmes are taken to the classrooms.

A few especially generous donations also made a meaningful difference this year. Economic pressures have hit small museums

particularly hard, and Murney has joined with other Kingston museums to advocate for solutions. Together, we have met with City representatives and a councillor about funding challenges, and also explored other sources of revenue. We plan to speak up for small museums in the local media and at City Council over the coming months, so watch for us there

The artifacts have been packed away for another winter, and a new bridge across the dry ditch is about to be installed. Meanwhile, Alison is developing an exhibition on the environmental history of Murney Point, and the team is already hard at work planning next season.



Bedford Mills: A Case Study of Failed 19th Century Enterprise in Bedford Township

by Dr. John Gray

Many visitors travel north from Kingston along the busy Perth Road. Just south of Westport, some may notice the sign marking Bedford Mills Road, but few bother to take the short detour along the roadway. Those who do will discover one of the most scenic and photographed settings in all of eastern Ontario. There is little indication, however, that this was the site of one of the most industrious communities in all of Frontenac County during the nineteenth century. This essay examines the rise and fall of Bedford Mills over the course of 100 years.

Benjamin Tett was a well-educated man who was born in 1798 in Hinton St. George, Somerset, England. Trained as a teacher, he found it difficult to find employment in England because of the poor economic conditions prevailing at the time. In 1820, he emigrated to Perth, Upper Canada, where he was immediately hired as a teacher at the government school. He continued to teach for a few years, and he also began to receive a variety of public administrative appointments. However, he found it difficult to make financial ends meet. His cousin, Mary Ann (Poole), the wife of Samuel Chaffey (who had established a successful milling complex at Chaffey's Mills, now Chaffey's Lock), asked him to move to Chaffey's to help her operate the business after Samuel died of malaria in 1827. She was also facing demands from Colonel John By that she sell most of her property to the Crown. Between 1826 and 1832, Col. By supervised the construction of the Rideau Canal, and his engineers deemed it necessary to acquire the Chaffey milling property in order to construct a lock there. Tett moved to Chaffey's Mills in late 1827 to assist Mary Ann with the business and with her negotiations with Colonel By. Tett Sr. acquired additional employment while at Chaffey's, including paymaster for the civilian workers employed to construct the lock at Chaffey's and at nearby Isthmus (now Newboro). He also opened a small store at Chaffey's to sell supplies to the workers and their families.

Tett was one of the first in the area to realize that the Rideau Canal, while being built for a military purpose, also had the potential for commercial use. He could envision the development of a lumbering industry in the sparsely populated yet heavily forested area of Bedford and nearby townships, given that many of the lakes in the townships were interconnected and a few drained directly into the Rideau system. He also recognized that the Canal would provide a conduit for the large tracts of pine and oak forest in the area to markets near and far, and he soon identified a site for a business opportunity. In 1831, he was granted the lease for Lot 12 in the 14th Concession of Bedford Township in Frontenac County and, six years later, he was able to reach an agreement with the government to purchase the property. Later in 1831, Tett Sr. took over the operations of a small sawmill being operated by squatters at the site, called "Buttermilk Falls" at that time, where there was a brisk flow of water through a 30-foot drop from Devil Lake into Loon Lake (part of the Rideau Canal system). Tett later renamed the property "Bedford Mills". The strategic advantage of Bedford lay in its geographic location. The products of the sawmill could be easily assembled into rafts to be towed through the Rideau Canal to Newboro. From there, they could be transported

south to Kingston and then, after being reassembled into much larger rafts at the facilities of the Calvin family at Garden Island, through the St. Lawrence River to markets in Montreal and Quebec City.

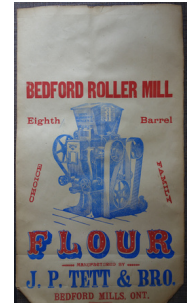
The first sawmill was primitive, cutting a few boards for local consumption only. With the assistance of two brothers, William and Edmund, who joined him in Canada in late 1831, Tett rebuilt the sawmill to allow increased capacity, adding a gang saw to complement the original single upright saw. In 1832, he set up a small store near the sawmill to supply goods to the lumbermen and settlers in the area. In 1843, a boarding house and sleeping annex were built nearby to accommodate the mill hands and the loggers who, during the winter, harvested the trees which were floated to the mill in the spring. The sawmill was expanded again in 1842 and 1847. Both sawn lumber and square timbers were produced, with some of it sold in Kingston and some shipped to Quebec City for export to England.

Benjamin Tett never lived at Bedford Mills. He moved from Chaffey's to Newboro in 1833, where he spent the rest of his life. There, he was again appointed to several administrative and public positions. Later, he became active politically, serving as Member for Leeds for terms in both the Parliaments of Canada and Ontario. He died in 1878.

While Tett always retained ownership of Bedford Mills, he decided to retire from business in 1850. He leased Bedford Mills to three Chaffey brothers, George, William, and John, who established a partnership to operate the mill. Their father, Benjamin Chaffey, was a brother of Samuel Chaffey and a co-founder of Chaffey's Mills. George and his brothers already owned shipbuilding and forwarding businesses at Brockville and Kingston, and Bedford Mills was a logical addition to their enterprises. In 1850, they opened a gristmill there and, a few years later established a shipbuilding facility. John Chaffey was the onsite manager, and he further expanded the sawmill including the addition of a circular saw. It soon became one of the largest sawmills in Frontenac County. At the shipbuilding facility, over 30 large wooden tugs and barges (both powered and unpowered) were built by the Chaffeys, and it was the largest shipbuilding facility in the Rideau corridor. Several wharves were constructed from logs slabs (produced in the sawmill) in Loon Lake, adjacent to the gristmill. There, lumber was stored until it could be shipped on their barges through the Canal.

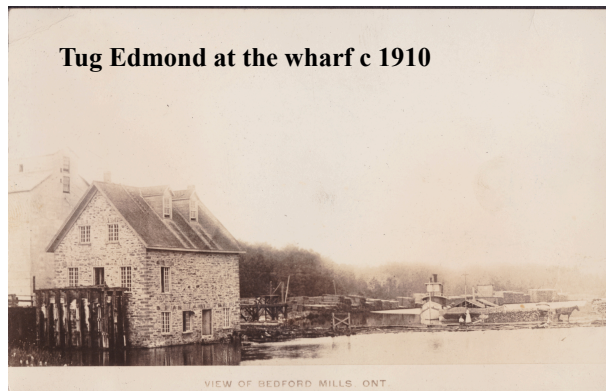
John Chaffey married Benjamin Tett's oldest daughter, Mary Ann, and they had two children. Chaffey was also a successful businessman in his own right, the owner of a large sawmill nearby on the outlet of the Mississauga Creek where it drained from Buck Lake into Mosquito Lake (part of the Rideau system). Soon the two sawmills were each producing between five and six million board feet of lumber annually, most of it now being exported to the United States. In 1863, George and William Chaffey ended their partnership at Bedford Mills and, after that, John Chaffey continued to lease Bedford Mills on his own. 1863 was a difficult year for John as his wife also died that year, soon after giving birth to their second child, leaving him living at Bedford Mills with two very young children. The sawmill, gristmill, shipyard, and forwarding business all continued to flourish under Chaffey's management. In 1871, however, John decided not to renew his lease at Bedford Mills, planning instead to concentrate on his other businesses including his own sawmill, his forwarding operation, and an iron mine at Newboro. He moved to a house he had built near his sawmill at the Mississauga Creek.

In 1872, Bedford Mills was leased by Benjamin Tett Sr. to his sons, John Poole Tett and Benjamin Tett Jr. During the decades that followed, through a partnership they named “J. P. Tett & Bro.”, they expanded both the sawmill and gristmill. Using improved technology, additional lumber products were produced at the sawmill, including door and window mouldings and railway ties. Great quantities of a finer grade of flour were produced at the gristmill, which now incorporated steel rollers instead of the older millstones. The Tetts also entered the forwarding business themselves. Between 1879 and 1885, the brothers constructed a tug and several barges at Bedford Mills. The store was modernized, with post and telegraph offices incorporated in the expanded building. Bedford Mills began to take shape as a community, with several houses constructed there for the workers. In 1885 a cooperative cheese factory was opened, in 1893 a new one-room school was built, and in 1899 a mica mine was opened nearby at the head of Devil Lake in part of what is now Frontenac Park. The mica was transported by horse and carriage to Bedford Mills where it was cleaned and then shipped in barrels by barge through the Rideau Canal to markets. For a brief time, the Tett mica mine was the largest in Ontario.



**Flour sack
from the
Bedford
Roller Mill**

The forwarding business proved to be the most profitable for the Tett brothers. In addition to shipping their own produce, they shipped a variety of wood products from other lumbermen, including saw logs, shingles, railway ties, cedar poles, floats, tannery bark, and cordwood.



Tug Edmond at the wharf c 1910

Large quantities of mineral and ore products (some produced in their own mines but most by others) were also shipped, including lead, mica, phosphates, iron, and salt, as well as some feldspar, granite and soapstone. Coal was transported up the Rideau to the railway terminal at Smiths Falls. Western grain for their gristmill was shipped from Kingston by the Tetts to Bedford Mills, and flour from their mill

was delivered to area merchants. Agricultural products, which were produced at Bedford Mills (notably cheese from its factory) and from farms nearby (including corn and meat such as pork), were shipped from the village. Goods and merchandise for the store, which was catering to a growing number of workers and farmers in the area, were brought in.

At the turn of the 20th century the Tetts were optimistic for the future. By 1900, the population of Bedford Mills had grown to about 150 and in 1907 a church was constructed to serve the growing community. However, there were warning signs of difficult times ahead. Due to overharvesting and several wildfires, the forests were becoming depleted of suitable timber. Area farmers were increasingly turning to dairying rather than growing grain, resulting in a shortage of local wheat for the gristmill. The mining of local mica became increasingly difficult, while much cheaper sources were being developed abroad. Roads and railways were providing increasing competition for commercial transportation, leading to a rapid decline in the Rideau Canal forwarding business.

The community suffered additional setbacks: a world war which took away many of the young men, some forever; next an influenza pandemic which hit young workers in Kingston and the surrounding area particularly hard; and then the great depression.

Bedford Mills began to enter a progressive downward spiral. First the forwarding business closed in 1911, then the gristmill in 1915. The closure of the mica mine followed in 1923, then the sawmill closed in 1929 and the cheese factory in about 1930.



Bedford Mills c 1920. The store is upper left, sawmill in middle, hydro plant in former gristmill building on right.

In 1919, the Tetts made one last desperate attempt to keep the community active by establishing a hydroelectric plant, harnessing the rapidly flowing waters through Buttermilk Falls. The plant was expanded a few times, eventually providing power by 1923 to

Newboro and Cosby as well as farms along the route. However, demand soon began to exceed the capacity of the small plant at Bedford Mills, and it was shuttered in 1948. The various buildings and assets at Bedford Mills were sold shortly thereafter. Some of the buildings were dismantled and moved, while some were consumed by fire. A new Perth Road highway bridge was built in 1962, bypassing the community entirely. The store ceased operations in 1964, and the school was closed two years later.

The key to the success of Bedford Mills was the abundance of readily available natural resources including timber, minerals, agricultural products, and water. Unfortunately, the decline in availability of those same resources and the inability to diversify were the root causes of the failure of the community. Today, Bedford Mills is a ghost town, with little evidence of the once-thriving village to be found. Small scraps of mica can still be found in the vicinity of the former mica shed. Slabs of lumber from the sawmill, which were used to form the base of an old plank road, can be seen below the surface of the water adjoining the part of Bedford Mills Road which passes along the shore of Loon Lake. Remains of the old wharves can be seen as small islands in Loon Lake,



Bedford Mills as it is today. Photo courtesy of Adam Correia.

gristmill building. In the waterfall are remnants of the concrete pillars which once supported a steel flume connected to a large concrete tower which housed some of the power generating equipment. For those with a keen eye, a few stone block remnants of the sawmill's foundation can be observed lying at the outer perimeters of the waterfall.

Otherwise, there is no evidence of the

sawmill to be seen now.

The old store and the few remaining dwelling houses are, to this day, used as residences, many of them seasonal. Several of these residences are still owned by descendants of Benjamin Tett Sr. St. Stephen's Church is still active, with services held on Wednesday mornings in July and August. An historic plaque, which provides a brief history of Bedford Mills, stands adjacent to the church. The picturesque stone gristmill building, now also a private residence, remains as a proud reminder of the historic roots of the community. Nearby, the names Tett Crescent and Tett Park pay homage to the founding family.

The KHS meeting this month will be joint meeting with the The Frontenac Heritage Foundation at Kingsbridge at 7 pm on Wednesday, October 21.



Ear to the Ground

by Elizabeth Durno

Events of interest for history buffs

Ontario Genealogical Society Kingston Branch October 17, 2026 10:00a.m.
David Woodcock will speak on 'Three Ways to Use Artificial Intelligence in your Genealogy Research'. Go to OGS Kingston to register and get the Zoom link.

Chris Whyman was one of just 25 town criers from around the world to be invited to compete in the 2026 World Invitational Town Crier Tournament held in Chester, England, from September 22 - 26,

from **The Kingstonist** 28 September 2026
Kingston Town Crier Chris Whyman just returned from the World Town Crier Championship in England with several awards, after more than four decades of representing the city.



HOMESTEAD