

# 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.



### *Farewell to Simge: A Remarkable Five Years*

*by Murney Tower Director Liana Shaw*

After five incredible years with us, we bid a fond farewell to our Murney Tower Museum Director, Simge Erdogan-O'Connor, as she embarks on an exciting new chapter at the Museum of Health Care.

Simge has been an integral part of the Kingston Historical Society and the Murney Tower Museum, and her departure will be deeply felt by our members and the public alike. Her friendly and welcoming presence made every visit to the museum a memorable experience, and the events she organized during her tenure brought our community together in meaningful ways. Her thoughtful curation work helped breathe new life into the museum's displays, ensuring each artifact told the tower's story with clarity and impact.

Beyond her public-facing work, Simge mentored countless student staff, interns, and volunteers, encouraging them to explore and grow in their understanding of history and museum work. Her "nothing is impossible" attitude brightened the stone walls of Murney Tower, as she revitalized its collections and introduced innovative ideas to make the space more accessible and engaging for all.

Simge's presence at the museum has left an indelible mark on the tower and become part of its long and storied history. While we will miss her greatly, we are excited to see the wonderful contributions she will bring to her new role. Please join us in wishing her the very best in this next chapter of her career.



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# THE KINGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Established 1893

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*Please forward submissions to the Editor [betty.andrews@gmail.com](mailto: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.*



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Duncan McDowall, Programme Chair; Liana Shaw, Director of Murney Tower; Paul Van Nest, Membership Chair;  
Peter Gower, Editor of Historic Kingston, and Webmaster

## President's Message

by Paul Charbonneau

***“December is a time to reflect on the blessings of the past year and to embrace the opportunities of the coming one.” – Oprah Winfrey***

Yet another year comes to a close and we are grateful to all of the speakers who have regaled us during our 2024 Lecture Series. The line-up for 2025 looks to be as entertaining and educational as the past year's.

One of the highlights of 2025 will be the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the KHS curatorship of the Murney Tower. At our Heritage event in February, we will hear from the former Director of the Museum, Dr. Simge Erdogan-O'Connor.



Yes, you read that correctly: *former* Director, as Simge is leaving us to further her career. During the past five years the museum has progressively become one of the top tourist attractions in the Limestone City because of Simge's leadership. Simge, we will miss your enthusiasm, creativity and love of this little gem.

In February the “Kingston Historical Society Award” will be presented at the Heritage Month event hosted with the Frontenac Heritage Foundation. Please mull over nominations for this award and submit them before December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024.

Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Happy Holidays.

No matter what faith or manner in which you may celebrate the holidays, be led by kindness and hold near those that most fulfill your life.

## Kingston Historical Society 2025 Lecture Series

All lectures to be held on Wednesday evenings at the lounge at the Kingsbridge Retirement Community (950 Centennial off Princess) at 7:00pm with simultaneous ZOOM and subsequent YouTube posting. The February Heritage event will be at a different location, details on the HS website.

**January 15, 2025:** Dr. Duncan McDowall on “HMCS Thiepval: Kingston’s Little Ship That Could,” a tale of a World War I warship built on Kingston shores that found fame and eventual misadventure on the high seas.

**February 16, 2025:** A celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Society’s curatorship of Kingston’s historic Murney Tower featuring a lecture by the Museum’s former Director Dr. Simge Erdogan-O’Connor. Lecture to be followed by a high tea. Details and location to follow on the KHS website.

**March 19, 2025:** Professor Ralph Boston of Queen’s biology department will speak on “A History of the Mississauga People North of Kingston.” Professor Boston’s research seeks to set the Queen’s University Biological Station in the context of the Indigenous People who inhabited the area long before white settlement.

**April 16, 2025:** Dr. Sandy Campbell, emerita professor of women’s studies at Carleton University, will speak on “Kingston’s Kathleen Hammond, the Lusitania and the White Plague,” a story of World War I, happiness and tragedy.

**May 21, 2025:** Christine Lavallee, a St. Lawrence College librarian, writer and literary scholar, will talk about her research into nineteenth-century Canadian author Julia Beckwith Hart, whose pioneering novel, *St. Ursula’s Convent*, was partially set in Kingston and is said to be the first indigenous work of Canadian fiction.

**June 6, 2025:** The Kingston Historical Society will host its annual commemoration of the 1891 death of our first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, at his grave site in Cataraqui Cemetery. Speaker and details to be announced in Limelight and on the KHS website.

**September 17, 2025:** Susan Smith, the long-time editor of Thousand Islands Life online magazine and author of *The First Summer People: The Thousand Islands 1650-1910*, will reflect on the history and heritage of the Thousand Islands, the iconic stretch of the St. Lawrence just east of Kingston.

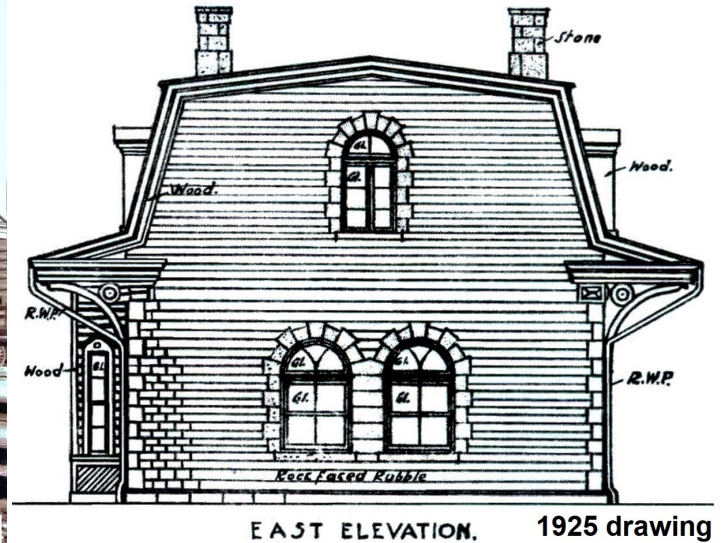
**October 15, 2025:** Paul Van Nest, a local historian, will relate the World War II experience of his cousin Glenn Brooks, an eastern Ontario farm boy who served as a tail gunner on an RCAF bomber until his death over Germany in 1944. Brooks’ letters home offer Van Nest a prism through which to probe the innermost experience of men at war and the ongoing impact of their loss on those left behind.

**November 19, 2025:** Warren Everett, military historian and collector of military medals, will reflect on the significance of military decorations, not just for the immediate recipient, but also for the society he/she served. Warren will bring samples from his expansive collection.

For further information about any of these lectures, please contact **Dr. Duncan McDowall** (duncanmcdowall@hotmail.com) or Vincent Durant (vincentdurant@icloud.com).

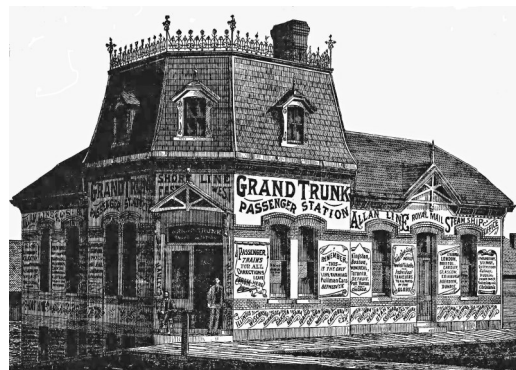
STILL STANDING: Looking at Regional Architecture with Dr. Jennifer McKendry

Will the Outer Station ever rise again like a phoenix from the ashes?



Architecturally, an important contribution of the 1856 Grand Trunk Railway (GTR) passenger station, 810 Montreal Street, by architect Francis Thompson, is the introduction to Kingston of the gambrel roof (two slopes on each of the front and rear roof areas), which will become an important form in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Extra head-room with dormers makes the attic area liveable. The round-arched windows and doors edged by emphatic stonework are associated with the Empire style.

In 1856, passengers had to depart and arrive on Montreal Street, as the line running into the town proper was for transporting goods. It was not until the 1870s that a passenger station was built downtown. In 1886, a new station was constructed in brick on Ontario Street at Johnson.



1887 GTR Passenger Station, Ontario St. at Johnson. (Kingston News, 5 Jan.)



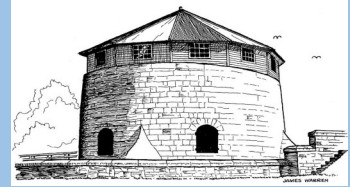
The Montreal Street depot burned in late October 1996 and today remains a ruin – hopefully to be restored.



# Murney Tower

## Operated by the Kingston Historical Society

[www.murneytower.com](http://www.murneytower.com)



In December, the Murney Tower Manager and Curator, Dr. Simge Erdogan-O'Connor, leaves to join the Museum of Health Care staff.

### Murney Tower update

A few events were cancelled due to the Murney Tower bridge closure: two school tours, the Queen's Cultural Studies student tour, Phantoms of Yore, and the Halloween event. An interim repair will be made to the bridge by Parks Canada to ensure access to the tower for next season.

In October, Murney Tower Manager and Curator Dr. Simge Erdogan-O'Connor gave a guest lecture for the Queen's Cultural Studies Department on community-centred initiatives at the museum.

The Murney Tower intern, Alison Smith, has been posting on social media on behalf of KHS as well as of the Murney Tower Museum.

The 2026-2031 five-year strategic plan for the Murney Tower will be drawn up in 2025.

### Centennial Projects

The book project is in progress. The book will be 30 pages long and will be about the time travel adventures of Mr. Murney. The book launch will be in partnership with the Kingston Public Library and will be held at the main branch. The art project will explore the past, present and future of the Murney Tower. The deadline for submissions of art is December 12th. A gala dinner is being planned for early in the year.



### A Murney Tower float was entered in the Santa Claus Parade



*Welcome, new members*

*Brian O'Donnell Jennifer Day Trevor Turnbull*

**Congratulations to Dr. Sue Bazely** on being granted a PhD in Geography. Her research was based in historical geography and critical heritage studies on the Rideau Canal and Kingston Fortifications World Heritage Site.

## Speaker's Corner

by Dr. Duncan McDowall

### “On the Street Where You Live”

One of the abiding joys of local history is that it allows us to look beneath the surface of life in our communities, to see the people and landscape around us illuminated by research that sets them in the context of their times. Such was very much the case at the Society's November meeting when veteran local historian **John Grenville** took us on a tour of Kingston's streets early in the twentieth century by focusing on the career of local architect Ernest Beckwith (1879-1963) and his Kingston legacy.

Grenville's interest in Kingston heritage began as an undergraduate student at Queen's when he joined the Fort Henry Guard. Further education in history and business followed before Grenville embarked on a long career with Parks Canada as a researcher and site manager at the Halifax Citadel and Bellevue House. In retirement, John has further explored Kingston's past. That exploration led him to chronicling the career of Beckwith as an engineer and architect.

Born in Essex, England, Beckwith began his career as a civil engineer in Colchester before joining the flood of Laurier-era immigration into Canada. Initially hired in 1905 as a Marine and Fisheries Department engineer in Ottawa, he moved to Kingston in 1906 to head the city's engineering department, overseeing everything from sewer installation to fire inspection. City Hall infighting led Beckwith to strike out on his own in 1908, becoming a consulting engineer. In one way, he proved a modernist in his embrace of concrete construction in a city traditionally reliant on limestone and wood for construction. In another respect he proved a traditionalist by designing and building solid brick-faced residential homes in the Aberdeen, Earl and William streets enclave. Later he partnered with what we would now call developers in pioneering subdivisions further west in the city around Kensington and Victoria streets. Grenville showed us pictures of these houses as they stand today along with blueprints and promotion material from the period. Probably Beckwith's crowning architectural achievement was the Princess Street Orpheum vaudeville theatre now home to Reid's furniture store.

In 1916, Beckwith, still a patriotic Brit, left Kingston to join the war effort, eventually serving in the Royal Flying Corps. After the war, he returned to Canada to work in Ottawa as a natural resources bureaucrat and then with the International Paper Company. There he died in 1963. His Kingston homes however remain to remind us of a time when the city started to push its boundaries away from its downtown core. His lecture and its illustrations are available on YouTube via the Society website.

## Ear to the ground

*Elizabeth Durno* reporting on events of interest to history buffs

The Kingston Historical Society's Heritage Event will take place on Sunday, February 16, 2025, as a joint event with the Frontenac Heritage Foundation. Dr. Simge Erdogan-O'Connor, in recognition of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Murney Tower, will talk about how the tower fits into Kingston's heritage. *Details to follow.*



Great Lakes Museum  
S.S. Keewatin tours  
ended on  
2 November 2024 and  
return in May 2025.

The book launch, sponsored by the CIHE, of  
***Sir John A. Macdonald: and the Apocalyptic Year 1885***  
by **Patrice Dutil** may be seen at [www/cihe.ca](http://www/cihe.ca)

**Christopher Dummitt** is a historian of Canadian culture and politics at Trent University and a senior fellow at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute. See his book report on Patrice Dutil's new book on John A. Macdonald at:

<https://www.msn.com/en-ca/news/other/christopher-dummitt-john-a-macdonald-a-reputation-trashed-so-hatefully-suddenly-and-thoroughly/ar-AA1uj0xA?vid=60be33c708cd4109952257326130552e&ocid=sappioshp>

**FY INPUT**

## ***The Kingston Historical Society***

### ***Award Nominations Request***

The Kingston Historical Society Award is given to individuals, groups and institutions in recognition of their contributions to the preservation, understanding and interpretation of local Kingston history. Kingston Historical Society members are asked to nominate those that they believe meet these criteria. Please send nominations by email to Paul Charbonneau at [Bearsden1017@hotmail.com](mailto:Bearsden1017@hotmail.com) or by letter to Chairperson, KHS Awards Committee, Box 54, Kingston, Ontario, K7L 4V8. Include contact information for your nominee and the reasons for your nomination. The deadline for nominations is December 31, 2024. The awards will be presented at the KHS/FHF Heritage event on Sunday, February 16, 2025.

# Thank you to the KHS Sponsors!

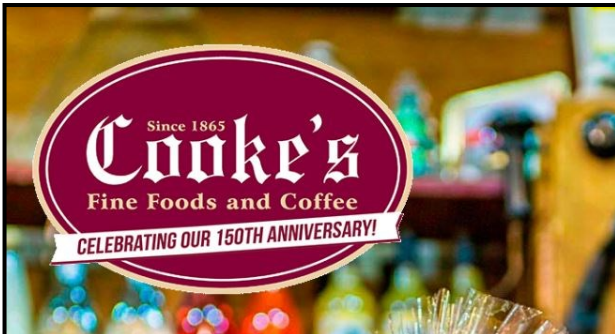
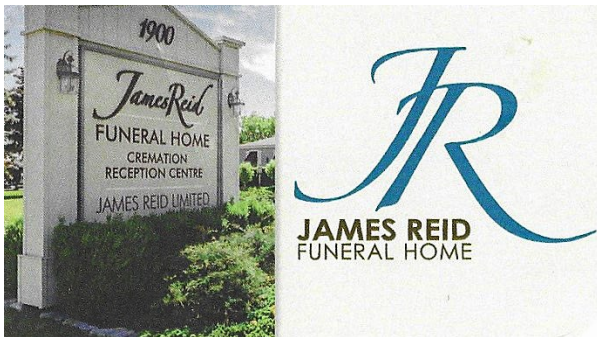


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