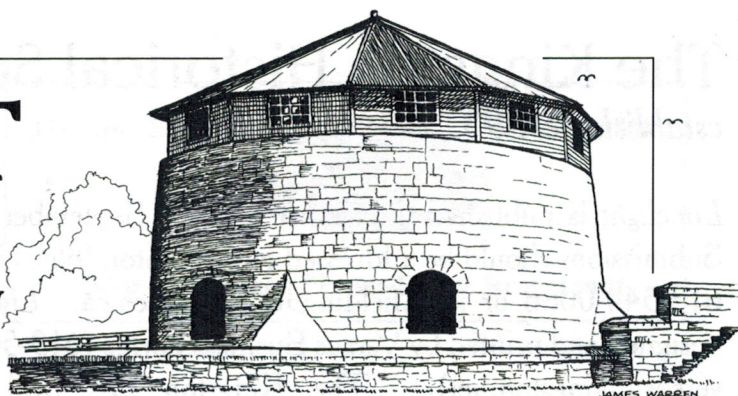


LIMELIGHT

Newsletter of the
Kingston Historical Society

vol 13 no 4 April 2011 ISSN 1488-5565



A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

"The Present is the living sum-total of the whole Past". ~Thomas Carlyle

Ah, the importance of history, but I'm preaching to the converted here. History offers a context, a meaning for those of us living in the present. Its been an active month for the Society. At its March meeting, your Council approved four wide-ranging projects for the 2011 calendar year.

The Society will be supporting the publishing of a book of artistic renderings and essays describing Kingston past and present, by Shirley Gibson-Langille, and titled "Landscapes and Inscapes: Outward Reflection of Inner Things".

The Society is expecting to be partnering with the City of Kingston in the Illumination of the Sir John A. Macdonald statue in City Park.

The plan is for this project to be completed by July 1 of this year.

Another project involves a re-jigging of our website: www.kingstonhistoricalsociety.ca. This work should be completed within the next few months. Be sure to keep an eye on developments. Council member Jeremy Heil is responsible for all the changes, which involve updating of information and a general "cleanup".

Ongoing funding for our 2012 conference "Sideshow or Main Event: Putting the war of 1812 into Regional Contexts" completes the list of projects recently approved. Work is progressing nicely with the conference, with a very impressive roster of presenters being assembled, and funding beginning to fall into place.

The Murney Tower National Historic Site swings into action for its summer season May 16. The tower, as

you may remember, employs three university students each summer, and we're fortunate this year in that all three from last summer are returning. Not only, of course, is the tower a national historic site. It is also part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site

Gordon Sinclair

In this issue...

President's Report	1
Masthead & Announcements	2
Finding a Place for Your Treasures	3
"The Modern Furniture Company"	4
Our sponsors	5
Speakers' Corner	6

The Kingston Historical Society

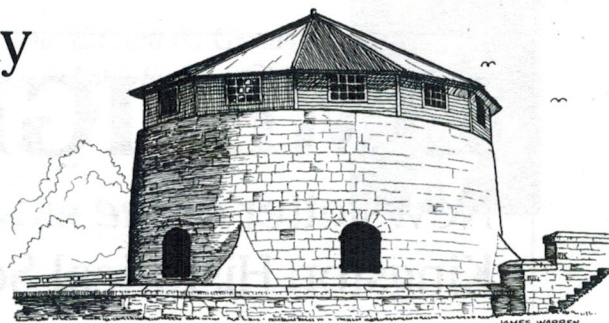
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(KHS) gratefully acknowledges the support of our sponsors in the production of *Limelight*.

KHS holds monthly talks or events, usually at 7:30 pm on the third Wednesday of the month, September to May, usually in the Wilson Room of the Kingston Public Library on Johnson Street at Bagot Street. Special annual events include a dinner and talk honouring the birthday of Sir John A. Macdonald in January and a ceremony marking his death in June.

New members are welcome! Membership rates are \$40 individual, \$50 family, \$50 institutional or \$25 student. Memberships include *Historic Kingston*, published annually by The Kingston Historical Society.



Murney Tower by James Warren

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The Kingston Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Ministry of Culture of the Government of Ontario

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Announcements of Historical Interest

The Kingston Branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society hosts the Region VIII Ontario Genealogical Society AGM and Genealogy Day on Saturday, April 16th, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Edith Rankin United Church, 4040 Bath Road, Kingston. Speakers, book tables and displays. Cost is \$22, includes lunch, free parking. Visitors are welcome. For further info, visit our website www.ogs.on.ca/kingston.

including numerous Loyalists and their families. Visitors always welcome - info 613-546-2256.

THIS MONTH'S MEETING

Wednesday, 20 April, 7:30 PM
Unravelling the Histories of the
Sir John Johnson House and the Parish House

Jennifer McKendry
Wilson Room, Kingston Frontenac Public Library
Johnson St. at Bagot

Refreshments

All Welcome

Finding a Home for your Treasures

by *The Scribbler*
Bill Fittell



"DEACCESSIONING is the kind of word that makes eyes glaze over and can seem to be the preserve of dusty intellectuals and large museums. But it's just a fancy name for the sale or giving away of art and artifacts by museums and other cultural organizations."

--Robin Pogrebin, *New York Times*, Dec. 28, 2010.

Just by chance this quotation with its fifty-cent word popped up a few weeks before our society's annual general meeting and a successful fundraising auction on February 16. It struck a note with me because I am one of those mere males under pressure to deaccession some of the "treasures" accumulated over three score years and whatever.

Despite the need to reduce storage space, I came home from the auction with three books and a unique framed photograph, a bargain at \$5. Ironically, the "provenance" of the latter was inscribed on the back—in my own handwriting! I originally acquired it along with some sports ephemera from the estate of W.D. (Wally) Elmer, who died in 1978 and had donated it to Kingston Historical Society in 1979.

The 8 by 10 inch glossy photograph by Wallace R Berry, was signed "Sincerely, T. Ashmore Kidd," (1889-1973), former Member of Parliament, MLA and speaker of the Ontario Legislature. Carefully framed and sealed by Gartland's Gift Shop, 338 Princess Street, the photograph shows a flag-waving Mr. Kidd and his family, and females all in their finest frocks, greeting Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip, as they drove past Kidd House at 100 Stuart Street, next to Kingston General Hospital, during the Royal visit of 1967.

Also written on the back were the letters: "KHS and accession numbers '79-05-01." These were similar to other numbers carefully recorded on ice tongs and scythe won by other lucky bidders. Accession numbers discovered on other treasures drew puzzled queries. There were no deaccession numbers noticeable, but obviously the historical articles put up for auction did not fit the mandate of the society's collection policy.

Decades ago, KHS executive officers and the Murney Tower committee members, faced with donations of furniture and artifacts fitting a social history museum, decided to limit collecting to items

fitting a Martello tower of the second half of the 19th century. In spite of this policy, the Heritage Room at Queen's Archives became a clearinghouse for family treasures. Apparently, some were retained in hopes that KHS would eventually be involved in an initiative that would provide Kingston with a museum that reflects the broad history of the city and area.

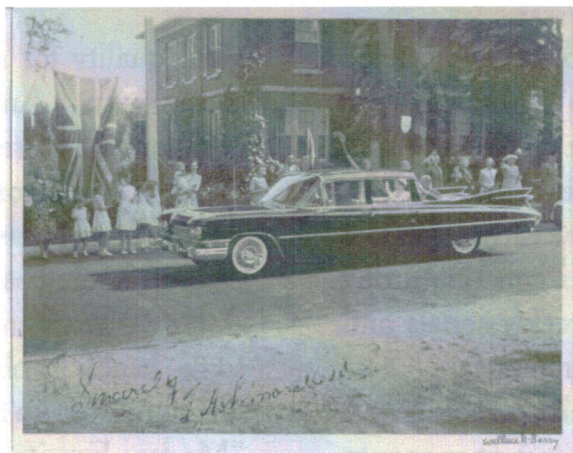
This hope was still prevalent a score of years ago. James Warren, editor of *THEN*, the KHS newsletter, addressed the topic--"Does Kingston Need Another Museum," which was published in *Historic Kingston*, Volume 41, 1993. At the time Kingston was graced with a baker's dozen of museums, art galleries and historic sites at the time, but not one all-embracing museum.

"It is time that we built a better monument to our city's history," said the former industrial designer. "We would take advantage of the provincial standards to collect, preserve, research, interpret and display relevant artifacts...There must be adequate secure storage space for artifacts not yet on display and an office for accessioning, identifying and labelling each artifact."

Sadly, Jim's dream never reached fruition. Historically minded citizens seeking a home for their treasures continued to offer donations. Some were discreetly declined and apparently some borderline items were accepted and eventually created storage problems. And that's why some items—plus valuable donations from members—are put up for auction annually and the proceeds added to the society's coffers.

N.B. The deaccessioning quotation above appeared in *The Times* under the heading, "Small Town, Big Word, Major Issue." It's a cautionary tale about a library in the New York State town of Little Falls that disposed of artifacts deemed "not historically significant." The director, who thought the library board trustees "played fast and loose" with its artifacts, resigned in protest and drew support from the town's historical society. "You can't get your history back," warned Marietta Phillips, 42. "People don't realize: once its gone, it's gone."

Has Kingston lost some of its heritage or will auctioned items be recycled and eventually find a home in some permanent institution? Stay tuned!



THE MODERN FURNITURE COMPANY, KINGSTON, ONTARIO

On 21 June 2010, the Modern Furniture Company at 262 Princess Street closed its doors for good. Two days later, I painted a picture of it. It brought back a memory of when my Scottish grandfather came to live with us when he came to work on the construction of the PMQ (Permanent Married Quarters) at CFB Kingston. My Mom spoiled him with her good cooking and, in return, he promised that he would buy her a new chrome dining room set. She was very disappointed when he left with no mention of it. It took Mom a long time to save up for one. It was a memorable day when Mom, Dad, and I went to Modern Furniture and picked out a beautiful red chrome dining room set. Modern Furniture was first started by Benjamin Kay, a Polish immigrant who had arrived in 1935.

It was then located at 45 Princess Street and carried mostly used and traded items. In 1946, the store moved to 262 Princess Street with Benjamin's son, Morris Kay, taking over the business. That address had been the Tivoli Theatre since the early 1930's. I remember going to the Tivoli on Saturday afternoons. They had exciting weekly serials and always a cartoon with no commercials. The admission in those days was only 12 cents. I remember collecting bottles to have enough money to go. If you had 25 cents you could also buy popcorn and a package of Milk Duds from one of the two

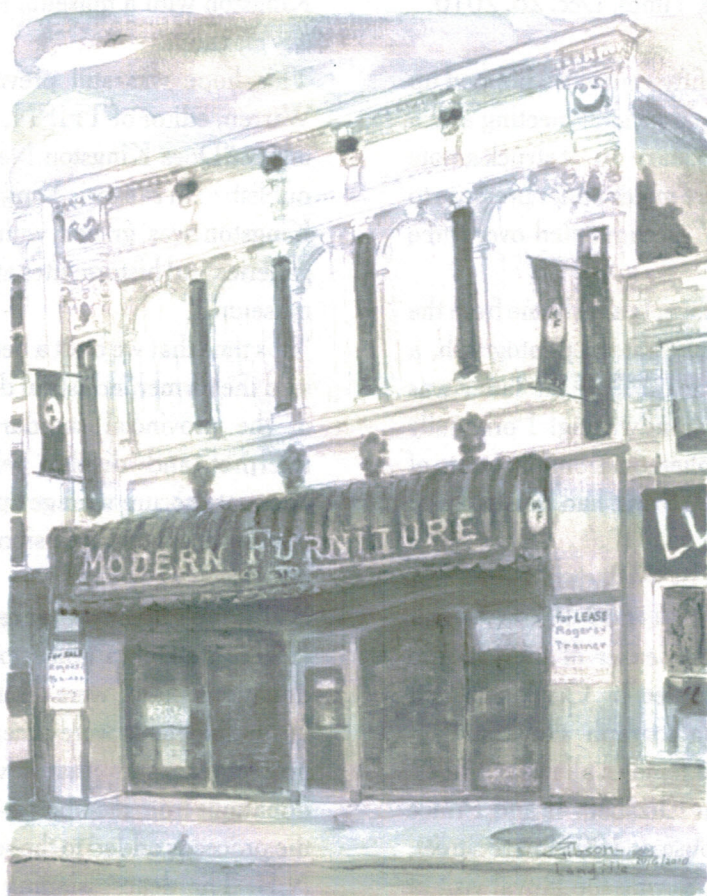
candy machines in the small foyer. The Theatre was quite narrow with a small stage and no balcony. The exit door was half way down on the right. Some of the children stayed most of the day there watching the movie over again.

Morris Kay ran a successful business for 44 years. During that time, his son, Larry Kay, helped his dad during his summer holidays and part time during the year. He learned all aspects of the business and, when Morris retired in 1990, Larry bought the business.

Larry Kay continued a thriving business. When the Big Box Stores came in with their enormous advertising budgets and payment plan options, Larry decided it was time to change the niche of the store. He began carrying medium to high-end pieces, featuring really

good quality for good prices. This worked quite successfully. Another important change was the addition of a store dog, his Nova Scotia Retriever, "Boston". Boston would welcome all the people to the store and was a real charmer. Many people enjoyed coming back just to visit him.

After 20 years in the store, in 2010, Larry faced some health problems. He decided to put the furniture store up for sale ending three generations of "Modern Furniture".



Text & Painting by Shirley Gibson-Langille

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Speakers' Corner

"Collecting Stories: The Heritage Quilt Collection"

*Presented by Alicia Boutilier, Curator of Canadian Historical Art
Agnes Etherington Art Centre – Kingston*

*with Edward R. Grenda
and photos by Peter Ginn*



Until recently, quilts have been viewed as a traditional craft practiced by women as an undertaking that was not regarded as "high" art. During the 1970's, there was a growth of interest in quilts and came to be viewed as women's work and significant works of art. The quilt became a graphic symbol of women's culture and lives. The turning point in this connection occurred in 1970 when the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York) featured an exhibition called "Abstract Design in American Quilts" organized by Jonathan Holstein and Gail van der Hoff. The focus was on the usual aspects of quilts emphasizing the abstract and pictorial elements of the quilt patterns. Not only did quilts cover beds, but now they were hung as serious works of art on art gallery walls.

Ms. Boutilier then commented on the general developments with the local art scene.

In 1981, the Agnes Etherington Art Centre was approached by three members of a recently formed Kingston Heirloom Quilters (namely, Diane Berry, Frances Crandall, and Margaret Rhodes) to form a Heritage Quilt Collection at the Art Centre. This would

effectively prevent numerous local valuable quilts from irretrievable deterioration, damage, or leaving the local area. Through an exuberant campaign by the local quilters, gifts of quilts were received by the Art Centre. By 1985, the Centre's Heritage Quilt Collection attained a number that made a viable exhibition of quilts feasible.

Ms. Boutilier elaborated on the various types of quilts that the Art Centre's Heritage Quilt Collection now possesses – log cabin quilts, geometric quilts, wholecloth quilts, Victorian crazy quilts, signature quilts, commemorative quilts, and variations on heirloom designs. The Art Centre's Heritage Quilt Collection now totals over sixty-five impressive works. Since 1985, works from the Quilt Collection have appeared in regular exhibitions at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre. Ms. Boutilier concluded her presentation by stressing that quilts overtly and subtly contain stories of family, community, creativity and ingenuity. They are fraught with meaning.

Society member, Donna Ivey, thanked Ms. Boutilier on behalf of the Kingston Historical Society for her fascinating talk and presented her with the Society's pewter pin.

