

# LIMESTONE CITY LANDMARKS

*Historical treasures tell story of our rich heritage*

Kingstonians are surrounded by history. It's everywhere, yet many of us take it for granted and never bother to give it a second thought, even when it's right there in front of us.

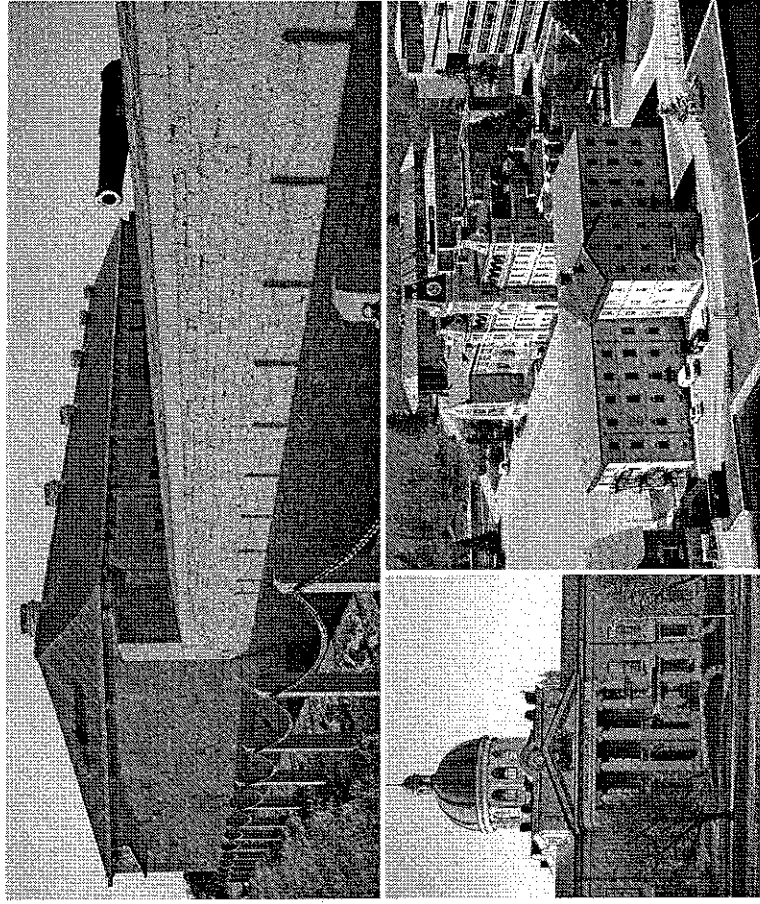
Ed Grenda, president of the Kingston Historical Society, says we aren't alone in overlooking the historic treasures in our own community. While he says we've done "a pretty good job" of preserving the city's architectural heritage, especially in recent years, he notes there's still lots of room for improvement; it's human nature to overlook or take for granted what's right in front of us. "I've lived in several other cities, and we aren't alone in this regard," Grenda says. "Even in London, England, a city that's incomparably rich in the historical sense, I found that people tend to do that."

Chris Whyman, manager of Visitor Services for Tourism Kingston — and the official Town Cher for the past 24 years — echoes Grenda's comments. And although he's Kingston-born and bred, Whyman admits that, as a kid, he never appreciated this city's rich historical heritage.

Now that he's 40-something and is taking the time to stop and look around, Whyman says it's as if his eyes have been opened. "For example, I never used to bother looking up as I was walking or driving around city streets. I've found that when you start to do so, you really gain a different perspective on Kingston."

What Whyman is now seeing is the motherlode of colourful history that's embodied in old buildings, many of them dating from the early decades of the 19th century. Among his favourites are Gildersewe House, that beautiful, 1895 limestone home at 264 King Street East. He's also partial to the buildings around the Chez Piggy courtyard and the restored Pan Chanchco Bakery building on lower Princess Street — "a hidden gem restored to its original beauty by Zeh and Rose Yanovsky," he calls it.

Author-educator Jennifer McKendry, heir to the late Margaret Angus's mantle as the doyenne of Kingston's architectural historians, says she's not surprised Whyman and other folks who take the time to become reformed about local history are amazed at how



Top left: Whyman; top right: Grenda; bottom left: Whyman; bottom right: Whyman

PHOTOS COURTESY: KINGSVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY; ROYAL MOUNTAIN COLLEGE (1920)

much there is to see. "Kingston is fortunate in that many of our early buildings have survived, whereas in other cities older buildings were razed to make way for new developments," she points out.

McKendry argues that, from a historian's point of view, it was lucky that Kingston's tenure as national capital lasted just three years, 1841 to 1844. "Once the city became a political backwater again, there wasn't nearly as much pressure for redevelopment," she explains.

It also helped that after some devastating fires in the 1840s, city council passed a bylaw making it illegal to build frame buildings in the downtown core. As a result, many of the grand limestone and clay brick buildings erected from the middle of the 19th century onward are still standing and in use.

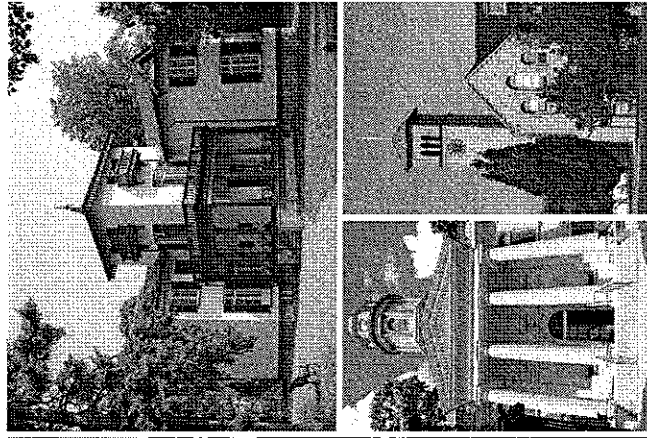
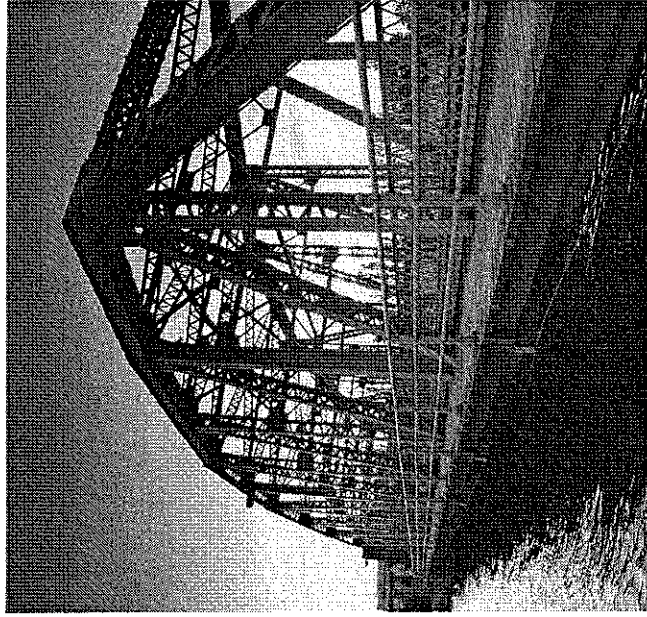
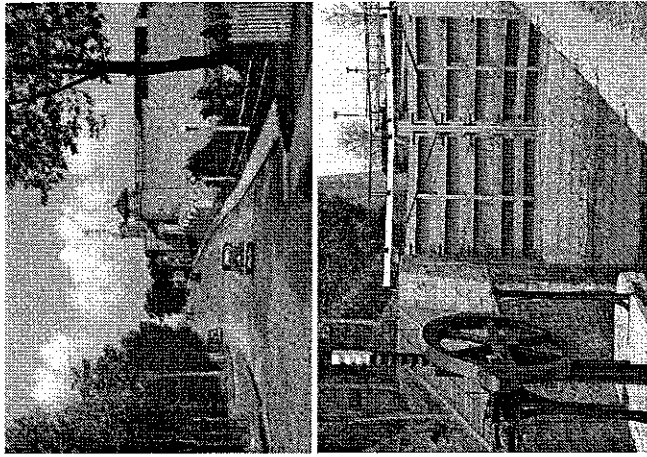
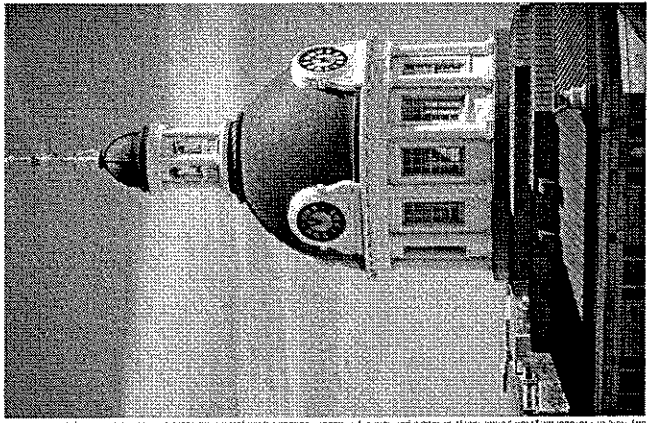
It's with an eye to ensuring that these very buildings and others in historic Sydenham Ward are there for future generations that the city has hired a three-member team of consultants — made up of McKendry, Andre Scheinman and Carl Bay — to write a

report that will help city council decide if it would be fruitful to designate entire blocks of the city core as a heritage area, as historic cities such as Savannah, Georgia, have done.

Many of the oldest buildings on the city's downtown streets already are "historically designated," meaning they're protected by statute from redevelopment. If entire blocks were earmarked as heritage areas, city officials would have the legal tools needed to preserve the character and visual unity of Kingston's unique historic downtown, Jennifer McKendry believes that would be a good thing because it would ensure that a resource that belongs to all of us is preserved and sustained for future generations.

To give you some idea of what McKendry and others who are turned in to the past see when they look around, Kingston Life offers snapshots of local historical buildings and landmarks — from a myriad of other deserving choices — that merit a closer look.

*by Ken Culbertson*



City Hall, from left: Bellevue House, Kingston's oldest building; Kingston Mills, built in 1840; Bellevue House, built in 1840; Bellevue House, built in 1840; Bellevue House, built in 1840.

#### BELLEVUE HOUSE (1840)

In August of 1848, Isabella Macdonald, the chronically ill first wife of John A. Macdonald, Kingston's member in the provincial assembly, returned home from a three-year convalescence in the balmy air of the southern United States. On the advice of doctors, who recommended Isabella get plenty of rest and fresh air, Macdonald rented a country house just south of town. Biographer Donald Creighton described the dwelling as "a large, absurdly ornate villa, with two long wings at right angles to each other and, at the centre, a square incongruous tower, which seemed almost to have a separate and disconnected existence of its own."

Charles Hales, a retired grocer whose wealth enabled him to indulge his eccentricities, had built the 15-room Tuscan-style villa a decade earlier. Snickering locals dubbed it "Tea Caddy Castle." Macdonald evidently shared in the fun, for, in private, he jokingly referred to the house as "Pekoe Pagoda." Publicly, he was a model of privacy, opting to use its proper and more dignified name: "Bellevue."

While the Macdonalds lived there just one year, it was one of the most eventful periods in John A.'s early life and in his political career. Isabella's health began to improve, and Macdonald himself achieved some important political advances. But any joy derived from these developments was dashed by the sudden death of the Macdonalds' one-year-old son, who died suddenly on September 21, 1848. Heartbroken, John and Isabella escaped the grim memories of that tragedy by moving back into town the following year.

Nevertheless, Bellevue is no longer a country house; a mature neighbourhood has grown up around its Centre Street location. Opened to the public in 1967, Bellevue is a national historic site, with its interior and surrounding gardens preserved in the grand Victorian style of the 1840s when Sir John A. lived there. For more information, visit Parks Canada's website at [www.pc.gc.ca/](http://www.pc.gc.ca/).

#### CITY HALL (1844)

No other historic building in this city is more photographed or admired by the thousands

of tourists who come here each year than is City Hall. That's fitting, because it's the edifice that most people — visitors and residents alike — instinctively identify as embodying the spirit and soul of Kingston. They're right. No other building stands as such a stark reminder that while times and faces change, some things about this city remain as constant as the limestone bedrock. Our capacity for discord, for one.

In 1843, when construction of City Hall began, Kingston was in the midst of its short-lived tenure as seat of government of the united provinces of Upper and Lower Canada. So government architect George Browne was asked to design a municipal building that was fit for a capital city. Browne, a feisty Ulster-born Irishman who lived here just three years, left an indelible mark on Kingston. In addition to City Hall (the design of which echoes the 1791 customs house in Dublin, Ireland), Browne designed a half dozen other local landmarks, including the commercial building that's now home to S&R department store and the round-cornered bank building on the north-

west corner of Brock and Wellington streets. On June 3, 1843, Governor-General Charles T. Metcalfe, Mayor John Cunniff and a throng of invited guests attended the cornerstone-laying ceremony for Kingston's new City Hall. Conspicuous in their absence were representatives of the St. Patrick's Benevolent Society, who were excluded because they were engaged in yet another sectarian squabble with the Orange Order. A writer for the weekly Kingston News denounced the snub as "a deliberate and calculated insult." That it was.

The original cost estimate for City Hall was \$29,500, but cost overruns inflated the final bill to \$30,000 (roughly \$75 million in today's Canadian dollars, although you could never duplicate the building for that money). When Browne and city officials quarrelled over this, another architect, William Coverdale, was brought in to finish the job. No matter. Cost overruns proved to be the least of Kingston's problems.

The fickle winds of political change blew through town in June of 1844 when the government moved to Montreal. With

Kingston's salad days at an abrupt end, residents were left only with their anger and a parcel of grand public buildings. The grandest was City Hall, which one prominent observer hailed upon its November 21, 1844, opening as being "the finest and most substantial building in Canada." Other voices, less appreciative and optimistic, dismissed it as a "white elephant." And, for a while, it seemed they were right.

The T-shaped building, 80 metres wide on its Ontario Street frontage and topped by a magnificent 18-metre-high cupola, was too large for the needs of a former national capital. City officials rented some of the surplus space to both commercial and residential tenants, the latter only until 1848, when a hike in the insurance premiums compelled city officials to get out of the landlord business.

Then, even more than now, the threat of fire was constant, and on January 10, 1865, a blaze destroyed the Market Shambles, a wing of City Hall that extended out across what's now Market Square. The rebuilt structure that rose from the ashes, smaller

and less grand, was still a work of architectural beauty.

Today, City Hall is a wellspring of civic pride as well as a national historic site that stands as a monument to the past notion that public structures can be majestic as well as functional. Browne and Coverdale, the architects who designated Kingston's City Hall, did so with grand notions in mind. Yet the building has always been — and remains — very much a people's place.

#### PORT HENRY (1817)

City Hall aside, no other local building is more closely identified with Kingston than is Fort Henry (with its surrounding network of four Martello towers, all built in the 1840s, a decade after the fort itself). Located atop the hillside at Point Henry, "The Citadel of Upper Canada" is a grey, brooding presence with a commanding view of Lake Ontario and the entrance to the St. Lawrence River. The glacis — the open area around the fort — was cleared of trees, and the first fortifications, crude wooden palisades, were built in the early

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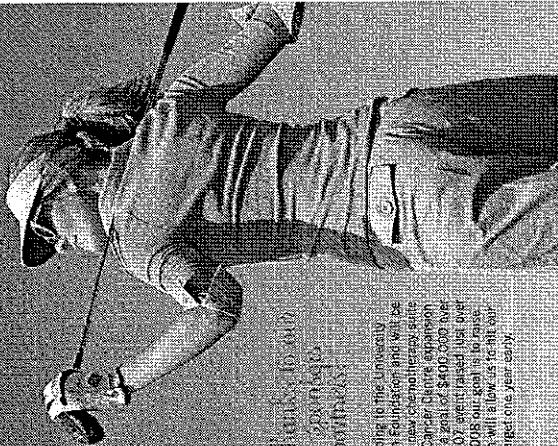
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years of the 19th century. With fears of an American attack running high, the fort was intended to protect Kingston and the British naval dockyards at nearby Point Frederick, now the site of the Royal Military College.

Fort Henry's walls were rebuilt with stone during the War of 1812, and the current structure — a "five-sided casemate rebuild" — was completed just days before the outbreak of the Rebellion of 1837 at a cost of \$88,000 (\$51.3 million today). Originally, the fort was to have been built of granite quarried at nearby Carwright's Point. But when that stone proved to be "intractable for working," the walls instead were crafted from limestone excavated from the Highway 2 "rock cut" at Barridefeld.

Fort Henry proved to be such an imposing obstacle that the American enemy never dared attack, and so those menacing-looking 32-pound smoothbore cannons mounted atop the walls have never been fired in anger.

The development of rapid-fire breech-loading artillery during the American Civil War (1861 to 1865) rendered Fort Henry obsolete — "if the Americans had attacked them, they'd have turned the fort into a gravel pit," notes Stephen Meszery, the fort's curator from 1984 to 1990. As a result, the British garrison withdrew in 1871. Canadian militia maintained the fort for another 20 years, until it was abandoned to the elements. It was, however, used as an internment facility for German prisoners during both World Wars. The fortifications were restored during the 1930s as a public works project.

The Department of National Defence ran Fort Henry until 1999, when its administration was transferred to Parks Canada. Today, this national historic site and living-history museum is — along with the Rideau Canal and Kingston Fortifications — a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This summer, the fort, along with its red-coated guards, the branchchild of Ron Way, the fort's director from 1996 to 1995, is celebrating its 70th anniversary. For hours and other information, visit Parks Canada's website at [www.pc.gc.ca/](http://www.pc.gc.ca/).

FRONTENAC COUNTY  
COURTHOUSE (6838)

In England in the year 1800, there were more than 200 capital offences. Small wonder then, that among the earliest buildings erected in British-ruled Kingston were court and jail facilities.

The first courthouse, built in 1796, was on King Street, where the customs house now stands. By the mid-19th century it was evident that Kingston, as the area's economic, political and military hub, needed a larger courthouse. So in 1855, work began on a

new building situated on provincially owned land on the west side of City Park (the proposed home of the legislative buildings if Kingston had retained its status as national capital). Designed by local architect Edward Horsely, the courthouse cost \$25,000 (\$14.6 million today) to build. The stone used in its construction was quarried on site. The only exceptions were the Ionic columns at the front entrance, which came from Chatham Bay, New York.

The first court sessions at the new courthouse were held in November 1858. The building has been in continuous use ever since, although fires seriously damaged the interior of the building in 1874 and again in 1931. On both occasions, extensive restoration work was required. Additional renovations were completed in 1965 and 1966.

The beautiful dome atop the centre section of the courthouse was rebuilt after the 1874 fire, and at that time workers raised it higher by adding a ring of windows below. Writing in her 1966 book *The Old Stones of Kingston*, historian Margaret Angus commented, "Although the height of the top of the dome is only 80 feet, the building seems much taller because of its size on a small rise and the upward thrust of the six massive pillars of the portico."

## GRANT HALL

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY (1829)  
Queen's University, established in 1829, is one of Canada's oldest and most historic post-secondary educational institutions. Its campus is also one of the most scenic. And no building is more photographed or closely identified with Queen's than Grant Hall, the university's trademark structure.

This University Avenue landmark, with its soaring clock tower, is named in memory of legendary principal George M. Grant (the maternal great-grandfather of federal Liberal deputy leader Michael Ignatieff), who headed the university from 1877 until his death on May 10, 1902. "Wee Geordie," as Grant was affectionately known, shepherded the school through some of its most difficult years and became a beloved public figure of national importance. That fact was underscored when, in the fall of 1901, as Grant lay dying, the visiting Duke and Duchess of York (later King George V and Queen Mary) came to his hospital bed to bestow a royal honour upon him.

Following Grant's death, the university announced plans for a new convocation building to be called Promenade Hall, but when county council turned down a request for a \$20,000 donation to the project, Queen's students, faculty and alumni stepped forward to pledge \$55,000. As Queen's historian D.D. Calvin noted, changing the

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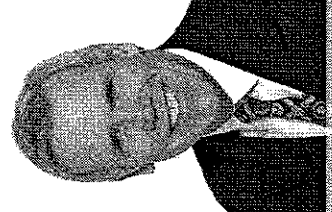
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tions — military, educational and penal. And none of the acute nine prisons is more widely known than Kingston Penitentiary (KP).

Built on what was originally a wooded hillside overlooking a small bay just west of the old town, KP took in its first inmates in 1835. Modelled on American prisons of the day, the limestone-block facility cost £12,500 (C\$73 million today) to build, and supposedly was designed so that inmates could be held in clean, safe conditions that allowed for gentle (and silent) daytime employment and education and absolute solitude at night. At the same time, an 1871 report prepared by a committee headed by Hugh C. Thomson, Kingston's first representative in the Upper Canada assembly, recommended that KP was to be "a place in which every means not cruel and not affecting the health of the offender shall be rendered so inhumane and so terrible that during his after life he may dread nothing so much as a repetition of the punishment." The authors of that report could have replaced the masculine pronouns in their prose with gender-neutral phrasing because it wasn't long before female inmates were also being housed in KP.

In those early days, members of the general public could pay a small fee to tour the prison and gawk at inmates. Even author Charles Dickens took a look when he visited Kingston in 1842. Later, he wrote, "There is an admirable jail (in Kingston), well and wisely governed, and excellently regulated in every respect. The men were employed as shoemakers, ropemakers, blacksmiths, tailors, carpenters and stonecutters . . . female prisoners were occupied in needlework."

Of course, conditions for KP inmates are far different now than they were on that day 173 years ago when the gates first opened (and closed!) for business. But what remains unchanged is that, while life behind the walls is still a topic for wonder, KP still isn't a place where you'd want to spend much time.

**LASALLE CAUSEWAY (1820)**

There's been lots of talk recently about what's being called a "third crossing" of the Cataraqui River. Finding ways to traverse the half kilometre-wide river has been a concern as long as there's been a town here.

In the early 19th century, when Kingston was emerging a vital British naval base and military outpost, a primitive scow ferry plied the waters between Fort Frontenac and Point Frederick. Soldiers from the local detachment hauled on the ropes that pulled the ferry back and forth. Problem was, this was a hazardous, and accidents were common. So were drownings.

name of the proposed new building to Grant Hall "undoubtedly increased the flow of contributions."

With its numerous commemorative plaques, ornate stained-glass windows and rich history, Grant Hall has become the symbol of the university. It's also served as the backdrop for the memories of successive generations of students over the 104 years since the building opened in 1904. Grant Hall has been the venue for countless lectures and examinations, as a makeshift field hospital for victims of the great influenza epidemic of 1918, as a dance hall, a reception centre, and much more. And these days, at least until the new Queens Centre facility is completed, Grant Hall is again serving as the venue for convocation ceremonies.

**KINGSTON MILLS LOCKS (1817)**

Although they're not part of Kingston per se, the historic locks located seven kilometres north of the city at Kingston Mills have always been tied up with the city's history.

A government-run saw and gristmill were set up here in 1783. And in 1826, when work crews under Colonel John By began work on the 210-km Rideau Canal system that was intended to link Kingston with Ottawa, the spot became the site of the first locks north of the city (or the last, before Lake Ontario, depending on which way boats were travelling).

The Rideau Canal system is one of the engineering marvels of the 19th century, a fact that was made clear in 2007 when it earned a coveted designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (along with Fort Henry National Historic Site and Kingston Fortifications).

Not only is the engineering science behind the design and operation of the lock system ingenious; the story of how it was built would be the stuff of Hollywood films and popular novels if the Rideau Canal were an American creation. It's a tale of larger-than-life characters, human ingenuity and perseverance, and incredible hardship. Deaths among the workers who built the canal system were an everyday fact of life. It's estimated that as many as 1,000 of the labourers and their family members — a majority of them Irish — died from malaria. The swampy area around Kingston Mills was particularly bad for this. Hundreds more workers were killed in falls, blasting mishaps and other accidents.

These days, Kingston Mills is a wonderfully relaxing spot to spend a lazy summer afternoon. It's also a history buff's delight. If only the towering granite rock faces there could talk, what tales they'd tell.

**KINGSTON PENITENTIARY (1835)**

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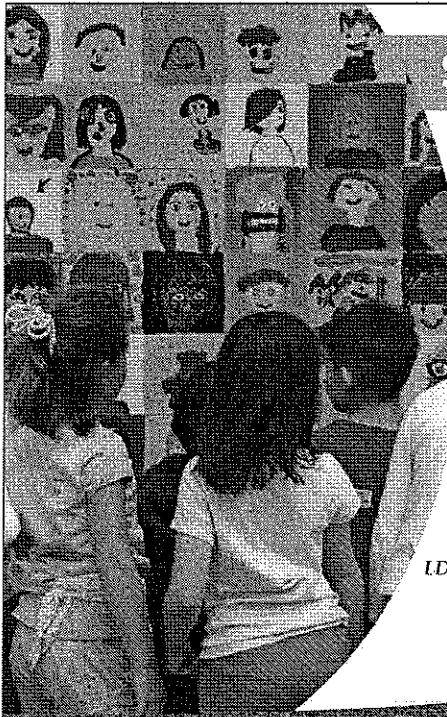
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Soldiers and sailors from the Barriefield side routinely came across to town on payday to drink and make merry. In summer, they came by boat. In winter, they often hiked across the harbour ice. Coming over usually wasn't a big problem, but returning after a night of carousing was. In fact, so many people drowned that a writer for one of the local newspapers suggested a waterside morgue be set up in order to put a stop to the stomach-churning sight of "disfigured or putrified or naked human bodies lying exposed on the shores of the town, or kept afloat and fastened by a rope while preparations for interment were being made."

Happily, this problem was solved when a group of local investors chipped in the £6,000 (C\$3.5 million today) needed to build a toll bridge. In August of 1828, the Cataraqi Bridge Company opened its new Penny Bridge, so named because it cost a penny for a pedestrian to cross. Horses and wagons paid more, but sailors and soldiers had free passage because the military paid the bridge's owners an annual levy.

That original wooden bridge was in service until 1912, when the Cataraqi Bridge Company sold it to the City, which, in turn, transferred ownership to the federal government. Soon afterward, the Department of Public Works built a new causeway and the bascule bridge — the steel-girder lift bridge — that's become such an integral element in daily life on the inner harbour. The LaSalle Causeway was opened to traffic on April 16, 1918.

The bridge has undergone numerous upgrades over the years, and more work is being done this summer. Yet, there's one thing that's remained constant over the last 90 years: no one who's ever crossed the LaSalle Causeway in a car forgets the distinctive sound speeding tires make on the bascule bridge's steel-grid roadway.

Whrrrrrr!

#### ST. GEORGE'S CATHEDRAL (1825)

The Church of England being "The Establishment" church in Upper Canada, it's not surprising that one of Kingston's first houses of worship was St. George's Church on King Street. A clergyman of the day described it as a "long, low, blue wooden building with square windows and a little cupola or steeple." That original church, built in 1792, was located near the present-day intersection of King and William streets. Work on the "new" limestone-block St. George's at King and Johnson streets, designed by architect Thomas Rogers, began in 1825. In subsequent years, as Kingston's population and influence grew, so too did its Anglican "cathedral." The impressive neo-classical

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