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Glancing back to a heritage in the making



Kingston from Fort Henry, about 1822, from a colored aquatint in the Public Archives of Canada.

AT THE GALLERIES

A proud re-creation of Kingston's past

By KAY KRITZWISER

THERE'S ALWAYS ONE, often unpredictable, thing to stop a gallery-goer in his tracks. For me, in Heritage Kingston, the exhibition offered that beautiful old city as a birthday gift for its 300th anniversary, it was the astrolabe of Samuel de Champlain.

To be able to lay a respectful finger on the dull brass instrument and wonder what cold glitter of stars, how many suns this astrolabe aligned for the early explorer of New France. And how did he lose it and did he curse himself in great round French oaths to discover it gone?

Historians are the most cautious of men. When the same brass astrolabe was shown in Ottawa in 1967 in A Pageant of Canada, the catalogue noted "The astrolabe is almost certainly one lost by Samuel de Champlain while he was travelling overland between Muskrat and Green Lakes (near Pembroke, Ont.) on June 7, 1613."

The beautiful and authoritative catalogue compiled for Heritage Kingston elaborates in most interesting detail on the loss of the astrolabe and on its discovery in August, 1867. But the identification is equally cautious: "has traditionally been identified as one lost by Samuel de Champlain."

With this proud recreation of Kingston's past, it's easy to take the advice of Shakespeare himself in the Henry V speech quoted in the catalogue's Preface:

"For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our Kings,  
Carry them here and there: Jumping o'er Times;"

That mood—jumping o'er times—began on a brilliant Sunday in Kingston outside the Agnes Etherington Art Centre of Queen's University. Here was the gazebo, a Victorian pet of an idea, and the focal point for opening speeches, fanfares and pipings by drummer and fifers of Fort Henry Guard. It will be a rallying point for Heritage activities through the summer, to Oct. 28. That includes July 9 to 13, when homecoming visitors to Kingston will observe Gather at the Gazebo day and be piled with coffee and refreshments beneath its circular roof.

A blue-bloused guard from Carignan-Salieres Regiment led guests to a marquee for champagne toasts offered by a Town Crier and bowls of fresh strawberries circulated (eight big crates of them. 'Twas kingly treatment from early King's Town.)

An exhibition of such magnitude—300 years of history, 250 items—is not lightly assembled and much teamwork went into its organization. The idea of so honoring the 300th anniversary of European settlement in this area was hatched three years ago by Ralph Allen, then director of Agnes Etherington Art Centre. Though Allen has

gone back to full-time painting, he, with William Muysson, worked on the visual design and installation, while Frances K. Smith, acting director, was exhibition coordinator, a herculean job.

Apart from the exhibition, the catalogue for Heritage Kingston (price \$5) is a most readable documentation, handsomely designed by Peter Dorn. It's a document owed to Kingston's past and important to its future. For Kingston, like so many Canadian cities with historical background, is at the mercy of that double-pronged word progress.

The book was written by Prof. J. Douglas Stewart of Queen's department of art history and Ian E. Wilson, acting archivist for the university. Both are aware that what remains of yesterday's history in concrete form can be battered down overnight by a bulldozer. The word is community vigilance and the Stewart-Wilson book is an important example of that kind of caring.

Their book points up Kingston's need for a civic museum; its lack they regard as a civic shame. Kingston does have admirable military museums in Fort Henry, Fort Frederick and Murney Tower, but Kingston's civilian past has not been as officially preserved. The city itself, they say, could be virtually a "museum without walls, for much of the architecture of early Kingston still survives. The city still possesses what is probably the most important group of early buildings in Canada, with the exception of Quebec City and Montreal."

They make the chilling observation that the failure rate to save old buildings is rising. "Already, when we are only half way through Kingston's tercentenary year, more of her early stone buildings have been consciously destroyed for 'progress' than in any other year in her history—with the possible exception of 1758, the year Bradstreet destroyed Fort Frontenac . . . It is one of the conscious aims of this exhibition to make a wider Canadian public aware of the plight of Kingston's architecture, with the hope that this part of Heritage Kingston can continue to be part of the Canadian heritage."

The exhibition itself is divided into distinct areas. This is not an exhibition to whirl through, for there is much to read and absorb. Every man to his own relic, but I found the Archeological Evidence section—um—dullish, with the exception of the diorama of an Iroquois village. With its orderly row of longhouses, its people's need to move every 10 to 30 years in search of firewood and game, it was our first trailer city.

The Indian and French Period, when Louis XIV ruled France and New France, when it took nine months to send a letter from Quebec to Paris, when the dashing Count Frontenac put up a wooden fort in

1673, when Samuel de Champlain had already been through the Kingston area as early as 1615—this is the period for stirring old roots. There are Frontenac's maps and his documents and there his signature, a big, bold scrawl.

There are the historical haves and the have-nots: the Sun King, etched in white marble, laurel wreath on his flowing curls; a habitant's room, about 1740, small, dark, crowded; the implements for trade, glass beads for beaver pelts.

The Loyalists and the War of 1812 provide evocative areas, but on the strength of a paper heritage, rather than actual object, with the exception of portraits. Their graves remain in Kingston churchyards, but their homes, their household artifacts, even the workshops they built in the harbor have disappeared.

The portraits for the most part are by unknowns, with the exception—and there's ironic justice here—of the famous portrait of Joseph Brant, the Mohawk chief, painted by George Romney in 1776. Brant far outclasses the grandly attired King George III painted by Benjamin West.

Kingston was fortunate in the late 1820s with its artists who have left a useful and quite beautiful legacy of watercolors of Kingston. The military and the government brought painters like Col. James P. Cockburn and Lt. H. O'Brien and Coke Smyth and the indefatigable Bartlett. But there were also gentlewomen trained in drawing-room graces, like Mrs. Harriet Cartwright, and they too make this Artists' Kingston section a delight.

Kingston's churches, the university, its statesmen, its elegant lifestyle, its transportation, its distinguished visitors (such as handsome young Charles Dickens, who liked Kingston not at all except for "the admirable jail here, well and wisely governed") round out the documentation.

Capping the exhibition is the section, Progress, Stabilitas; A Long Victorian Afternoon, literally summed up in a Victorian drawing-room, where any moment the ladies will come in for tea and the child to its playing blocks.

Authors Stewart and Wilson make a wry apology: "To some our selection of material may appear 'elitist' to which we would reply that, had we been able to find more visual material on the poor in early Kingston, we would have been only too happy to include it. The 'annals of the poor' may be short, but the tangible evidence they leave behind is even scantier."

APPOINTMENT

Michael Bell has been appointed director of Agnes Etherington Art Centre. He has been head of the paintings, drawings and prints section of the Public Archives of Canada since 1968.

ART CALENDAR

<b>ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO</b> The Art of Jean Hugo, to June 27. At the Gazebo.	<b>CITY HALL</b> Early 20th Century Architecture, photos, through June, on second floor.	<b>GIBSON HOUSE</b> William G. Parlane, to July 1. At 5172 Yonge St.	<b>MORRIS GALLERY</b> Open Studio prints, closes today.	<b>PICTURE LOAN GALLERY</b> Spring Show, to June 16.
<b>AGGREGATION GALLERY</b> Images: Earth, Water, Sky, to June 14.	<b>CENACLE HOUSE</b> Willowdale Art Group, June 12, 13, 14. At 318 Lawrence Ave. E.	<b>THE ARTISTS</b> James Steeves, George Hemphill. At 607 Yonge St.	<b>MERTON GALLERY</b> John Henry Martin, drawings, to June 16.	<b>RM GALLERY</b> Richard W. Major, to June 16.
<b>ALBERT WHITE GALLERY</b> Four From Haiti, to June 30.	<b>DAVID MIRVISH</b> Helen Frankenthaler, paintings.	<b>HART HOUSE GALLERY</b> Joe Plaskett and His Paris, to June 15. Michael P. Czerewko, sculpture.	<b>ME &amp; MY FRIENDS</b> Wendy Topgood, Soft Sculpture, to July 5.	<b>ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM</b> Bronze mammals, by Robert Glen, to June 30. Prints of Canada after Kriehoff, to Aug. 15, at Sigmund Samuel Canadiana Building.
<b>A SPACE</b> Shirley Clarke, June 11-16.	<b>GALERIE DRESNERE</b> Group Show.	<b>ISAACS GALLERY</b> Walter Redinger, to June 15.	<b>NANCY POOLE'S STUDIO</b> Shirley Raphael, banners, prints, to June 14.	<b>SHAW-RIMMINGTON</b> Ralph Fasanello, New York, closes today. Sculpture in the Garden, June to September.
<b>ART IN THE PARKS</b> Group of 100 Artists, Kew Gardens, tomorrow, 11 a.m. to dusk.	<b>DREW SMITH GALLERY</b> Antique print show, to June 30.	<b>INNUIT</b> Eskimo Art.	<b>GALLERY MULTIMEDIA</b> James Girvan, At 100 McCaul St.	<b>GALLERY 76</b> Ann Jordan, to Sunday. Dagmar W. Turkewitch, to June 17.
<b>BALDWIN STREET GALLERY</b> Pot Bourque, to June 18. Miriam Bokser, June 22 to July 16.	<b>ELECTRIC GALLERY</b> Juan Downey, today to June 14.	<b>KAR GALLERY</b> International graphics, to Aug. 30.	<b>NANCY FINSTEN GALLERY</b> Pre-Columbian Art.	<b>THEATRE IN CAMERA</b> Jiri Lgdocha, to June 30.
<b>BIG BROTHERS HOUSE</b> Art Show, today, 1 to 4 p.m. At 504 Jarvis St.	<b>GALLERY ELAJANA</b> Gallery artists.	<b>LILLIAN MORRISON</b> Gallery artists.	<b>OISE</b> Annex Rolepayers' Association, photos, maps, art for 50th anniversary, to June 18.	<b>TATE GALLERY</b> Geraldine Sinclair, paintings, to June 16. At 46 Hayden St.
<b>LA CIMAISE</b> Limestone, lithos by Dennis Geden. At 705 Church St.	<b>EVANS GALLERY</b> George Rauch, paintings, to June 22.	<b>MICHAEL COLLECTION</b> Group of Seven and Contemporaries, Tuesday through Sunday, 1 to 5 p.m. At Kleinburg.	<b>O'KEEFE CENTRE</b> Art of the Dance, to June 30.	<b>THIRD GALLERY</b> Studio Potters of Ontario, opens June 18.
<b>GARMEN LAMANNA</b> Denis Juneau, to June 14.	<b>ESTEE GALLERY</b> Salvador Dali: Memories of Surrealism, to June 30.	<b>GALLERY MOOS</b> Lester Johnson, paintings, to June 15.	<b>GALLERY O</b> Canadian artists, at 602 Markham St.	<b>VALHALLA INN</b> Nanou Matellan, Justin de Santos, to June 27.
<b>CRAFT GALLERY</b> Metal Arts, East-West, to June 30.	<b>367 GALLERY</b> Three Plus Three, to June 18. At 567 Queen St. W.	<b>MARLBOROUGH GODARD</b> Jacques Hurtubise, to June 12. Juan Genoves, June 16 to July 7.	<b>POLLOCK GALLERY</b> Sylvia and Ralph Massey, sculpture, June 11-28.	<b>YORK UNIVERSITY</b> Fine Arts student exhibition, to June 23. At Burton Auditorium.
<b>CANADIAN FINE ARTS</b> Gallery artists.	<b>GADATSY GALLERY</b> Ray Robinson, today to June 29.		<b>GALLERY PASCAL</b> Summer Choice.	
<b>CANADIAN GUILD OF POTTERS</b> Dawn Zver, ceramics, to June 23.				

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