

Kingston Workers' History Project

Spring 2025

Building Kingston's iconic monument

ALCAN WORKERS IN TIME

By John Rose

Kingston is blessed with several public sculptures, and maybe the most famous is *Time* – the aluminum pillars that rise from the earth at the waterfront on King Street near the Queen's University campus. When I moved to Kingston 13 years ago, I heard charming mythologies about the sculpture, and I find it to be a striking piece that compliments the waterfront and engages conversation.

With the recent renovation of the site, I started to think about the history of the piece. When was it created? Who is the artist? What is it made out of? Who built it?

I began to research *Time* and learned (as many Kingstonians already know) that the piece was commissioned by the Ontario government as part of Kingston's 300th anniversary. Renowned artist Koss Eloul created the piece and it was erected in August of 1973. Two other sculptures were also erected over the next few years as part of the same project – Yvon Cozic's *Pollution* on the waterfront next to the KGH helipad, and Ted Bieler's *Tetra* which was erected on the breakwater at Portsmouth Harbour.

Much of the media conversation around *Time* from 1973 to 1975 was concerned with aesthetics and obstructing the view of the waterfront (as residents and city councillors voiced criticism and praise in the newspapers), but little was said about the actual construction of the piece.

In November of 1975, the Etherington Art Centre hosted a Sculptors' Symposium that included Eloul, other sculptors, curators, and people involved in the sculpture project. Although the symposium discussions around public art, and what constitutes "sculpture," and waterfront aesthetics are fascinating, I am also curious how the sculpture was built and the labour behind the fabrication of the pillars and concrete that helped bring the piece to life.

Eloul touched on some of the fabrication specifics in the newspapers and at the Sculptors' Symposium, noting that he visited 10 different fabricators before he settled on one to produce *Time*. He said that a "special aluminum alloy was developed by the Kingston works of Alcan Canada Products Ltd. for the cubical forms of the sculpture," and he chose aluminum because of the importance to the community. For my next KWHP article, I am interested in exploring the relationship between artist and fabricators, and the labour of Alcan and construction workers in the production of *Time*.

As I continue to conduct research on this subject, I am interested to hear from people who have knowledge of the history of *Time*. Do you have information about the fabrication of the pillars, the construction process? Did you work at Alcan, or in construction, in 1973 when the sculpture was built? Please feel free to drop us a line with stories, photos, or contact information at:

kingstonworkershistory@gmail.com



kingstonworkershistory.ca



kingstonworkershistory@gmail.com

KWHP Reports, News and Information

A journey to Montreal

In February 2024, Cameron Willis and Doug Nesbitt attended a conference in Montreal on behalf of the KWHP. The conference, entitled “New Perspectives on Research and Practice in the History of Labour, Social Movements and Capitalism” was hosted by the Canadian Committee on Labour History, the premiere Canadian journal *Labour/Le Travail*, and the Centre d’histoire des régulations sociales.

The bilingual event was well-attended and the presentations spectacular. Cameron and Doug presented the KWHP project, discussing the promise and challenge of doing local history about working people in Kingston where prominent historical figures and events are much more well-known.

Some of the compelling presentations included an account of the decline of Montreal’s garment industry, research on popular opposition to US-Canada free trade in the late 1980s, and the women’s movement in Cape Breton in response to the closure of the DEVCO coal mines and steel mill.

The conference confirmed that KWHP’s efforts are being replicated in other cities. The new connections made were promising and encouraging and the response to the KWHP’s efforts was enthusiastic and constructive.

The rise and fall of Kingston’s biggest call centre

StarTek *June 5, RCHA Club
6pm doors
7pm talk*

For the next KWHP event, historian and labour researcher Doug Nesbitt presents the story of StarTek, the call centre that came to Kingston at the Millenium, and closed in early 2021 with its landmark Highway 15 offices demolished in 2024.

Join us as we trace the story of StarTek’s arrival in Kingston in the wake of deindustrialization, and explore how StarTek was championed as Kingston’s first big step towards a new economy for a new century. Promising and delivering hundreds of new jobs, StarTek and its local boosters declared the call centre would bring new economic growth, a stronger local tax base, and other beneficial spin-offs, such as a new call centre training program at St. Lawrence College dubbed “StarTek U.”

Beyond the boosterism, this presentation will take a closer look at StarTek’s time in Kingston to reveal the untold stories of corporate union-busting, ignored warnings of closure, shady City Hall decision, low-wage jobs and management abuse.

Join KWHP for this muckraking dive into the rise and fall of Kingston’s biggest call centre!

What is the Kingston Workers’ History Project?

The KWHP is a Kingston educational association committed to studying, teaching and preserving the history of working people in Kingston.

KWHP is a registered non-profit organization. Its board is comprised of Doug Nesbitt (chair), John Rose (treasurer) and Cameron Willis. KWHP was founded in Kingston, Ontario in 2022.



***The KWHP thanks RavenLawLLP
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Become a member!

KWHP membership benefits:

- Automatic newsletter subscription.
- All updates on upcoming KWHP’s educational events, workshops, and membership meetings.
- Invitations to practical skills like archiving, research, writing, publishing and more.
- Membership rights as per KWHP by-laws.

Contact KWHP to become a member:

kingstonworkershistory@gmail.com

Annual membership fee: \$5

Building Kingscourt!

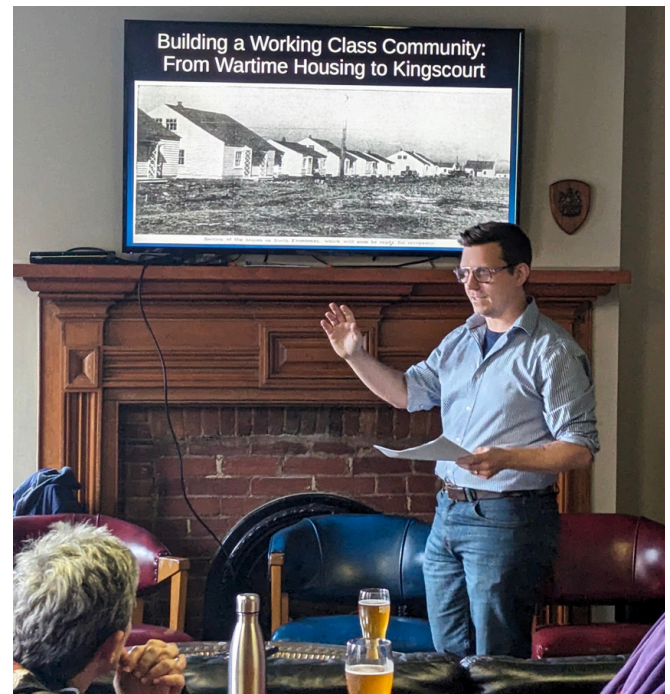
Live from the RCHA Club

From wartime housing to schools

A good-sized crowd packed the second floor of the RCHA Club in downtown Kingston on May 1, 2024. In attendance were Kingscourt residents, local trade unionists, and several scholars from Queen's University. City Councillor for Kingscourt and Rideau Heights, Brendan Tozzo, also attended.

Kingscourt resident John Rose presented his research first published on the KWHP website. John discussed the remarkable story of Kingscourt, beginning with the formation of the ALCAN aluminum mill during the war. Facing a major housing crisis with the influx of hundreds of workers from outside Kingston, the federal government's new War Time Housing Corporation built an entirely new neighbourhood of temporary housing directly east of the big ALCAN property. The homes featured lower rents for hundreds of workers and their families and were often of higher quality than the older existing rentals in the city.

We learned how the new residents organized a tenants' association to demand a local public school, and to make the temporary homes permanent. Both demands were won after years of pressure. The homes were jacked up and permanent foundations constructed, and many were then sold to tenants. In 1950, the first Kingscourt school was built.



Discussion and stories

A rich and lively conversation followed, with many contributions from Kingscourt residents in attendance. Remarkable was the speed and determination with which the federal government built affordable homes to ease a severe housing shortage, and contribute directly to the greater goal of wartime production to defeat Nazi Germany. Also noted was the unionization of ALCAN at the same time as the wartime housing residents pressed the authorities for permanent housing and a school.

During the discussion, John Rose showed how the area was spared a major north-south road running between the ALCAN property and what became Kingscourt. This was to be named the John A. Macdonald Boulevard, which now flanks the western border of the ALCAN property.

During the discussion there was a widely-supported proposal to deliver another presentation in Kingscourt itself. KWHP would like to thank everyone who attended, including Councillor Tozzo, for the entertaining and enlightening evening.

-Doug Nesbitt

KWHP at City Hall!

Kingscourt exhibit opens mid-May

The story of Kingscourt's origins will become an exhibit at City Hall in mid-May 2025 as part of the City of Kingston's "Your Stories, Our Histories" community exhibits program. The exhibit will remain open for one year until May 2026. The KWHP's exhibit on Kingscourt's origins will be one of five new prominent exhibits on display at City Hall.

The display draws together John Rose's research on Kingscourt as well as newspaper clippings, and some artifacts. A professional designer employed by the City of Kingston has transformed the materials and text provided by KWHP into an attractive exhibit for local residents and tourists.

KWHP thanks the City of Kingston for the opportunity and sends special thanks to Jessika Moore, Curator for Heritage Services for their helpful direction and guidance.



Photo and caption: Kingston Whig-Standard, September 3 1949

New publications of note

Black musicians in Kingston, circa 1900

Gordon Dueck, "Barbers in Blackface? African Canadian Musicians in Fin-de-Siecle Kingston," *Historic Kingston*, 2024.

Gord Dueck's contribution to the 2024 Historic Kingston journal, published annually by the Kingston Historical Society, tells the story of several African-Canadian professional musicians in Kingston at the end of the 19th Century, and their work as barbers. Dueck's research illuminates the enormous and enduring influence of the defeated institution of chattel slavery on popular culture and attitudes in Kingston. The extent to which minstrelsy, racial ridicule and sympathy for the lose cause of Southern slavery was part of Kingston's history is remarkable. - DN

1960s: Occupational Therapy in Kingston

Peter L. Twohig, "Preparing for 'intelligent and thoughtful practice': Occupational Therapy Education in Kingston, 1953-1970" *Ontario History Journal*, Fall 2024.

When I first moved to Kingston I was rooming with two Occupation Therapy students attending Queen's University. It was a pleasant surprise to encounter Twohig's research in a recent Ontario History Journal. Twohig provides a history of the OT program at Queen's in the 1950s and 1960s. Twohig marshals an impressive array of source material to answer the questions of why and how Queen's University developed the OT program in the 1960s as a means of addressing healthcare labour shortages. - DN