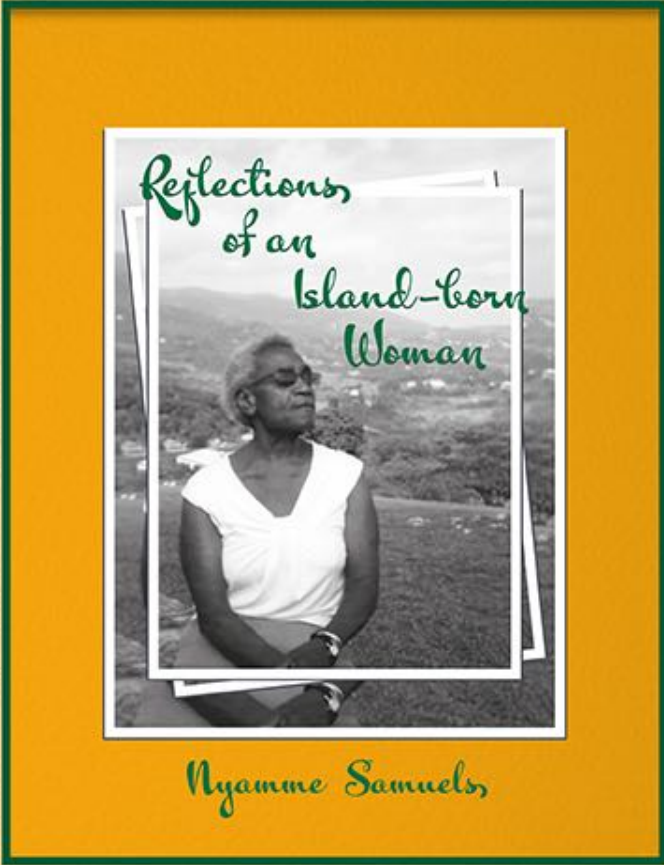




**October Meeting Details**

Rideau Township Historical Society  
*Presents*

**BOOK LAUNCH**



**Saturday, October 22 ~ 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.**  
**KARS R.A. HALL**



*The RTHS gratefully acknowledges the financial support received from the City of Ottawa.*

## President's Message

I trust that everyone is enjoying the mild fall we have had so far. Since our last meeting in Burritt's Rapids, summer activities have predominated and made for a quiet time at RTHS.

Since the beginning of 2022, the Society has presented a series of presentations regarding History. The first was in March when Dr. Dan Woolf talked to us about "What is History?", then the following month Ian McKercher talked to us about the use of "historical fiction". In September, Ira Basen's presentation, entitled "Reconciliation and the Writing of Canadian History" addressed directly the question "What is History" that had been posed by Dr. Woolf. These three presentations helped us to reflect on the way we view stories that have come down to us, and whether we need to periodically take another look at the interpretation of those stories.

The September RTHS meeting was held at the United Church in Manotick. It was first hybrid meeting combining a live audience and Zoom participation. I believe that some on Zoom were able to read the slides but were having trouble hearing the presenter. Hopefully, kinks will be worked out at future meetings. We will continue to use this format over the winter series as I believe it does add to the flexibility of hosting presentations around the old township.

As a change of pace, RTHS is hosting a book launch in October for Nyamme Samuels' book entitled: "Reflections of an Island-born Woman". The poster is included with this newsletter edition.

*Doug Culham, RTHS President*

## SAVE THE DATE!



November's RTHS event will be a group tour of Rideau Hall, the residence of the Governor General.

**Date: NOVEMBER 12**

*This will be a morning tour, with lunch to follow at the Canal Ritz. More details in the November newsletter.*

## RTHS Website & Facebook Update

The RTHS website <https://rideautwphistory.org/> is regularly updated with new information and resources related to the former Rideau Township. October's feature article, extracted from the Tweedsmuir history of Kars, tells the story of the bridges and ferries at Kars over the years.

The website also holds copies of RTHS newsletters and reports of past presentations going back to 2005. Newsletters are archived as searchable PDF documents, while presentation reports are saved as Blog Posts; this collection is also searchable. We invite you to check it out: look under "Resources" on the menu bar at the top of the website Home page (address above.)

The Society's Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/rideautownshiphistory> is updated with a new posting five days a week (Monday through Friday.) Under the general heading of "It Happened in Rideau," typical posts include newspaper articles about North Gower and Marlborough Townships, their communities and people dating back to the mid-1800s. We also post photos from the former School Sections in the two former townships, and extracts from the Tweedsmuir Histories of Kars, North Gower and Manotick.

Recent posts included the following:

- North Gower Township news (Ottawa Daily Citizen, May, 1877)
- Deer Hunting in Marlborough (Ottawa Citizen, October, 1942)
- Back to the Land Movement (Ottawa Journal, April 1936; Ottawa Citizen, May, 1915)
- North Gower in 1864 (Ottawa Citizen, November, 1927)
- S.S.#6 Marlborough (Goodstown) 1908

## Report on September's RTHS Event

### "Reconciliation and the Writing of Canadian History" Presentation by Ira Basen

Ira Basen is an award-winning journalist, author and educator. Holding a graduate degree in History, he has had a 40-year career as a producer with the CBC. His articles have been published in major publications and he has lectured at a number Ontario universities.

Mr. Basen began his talk by stressing that he is not a historian, but rather a journalist with an interest in history. He noted that in May of 2022, he had written an article entitled "The Past is Present" which was published in the

Globe and Mail. The article explored a controversy that had arisen among historians on a matter relating to reconciliation with indigenous peoples. The plan in his presentation to RTHS was to explain how he came to write the article, share what he learned, and hear the thoughts of the audience.



Ira Basen presenting at the United Church in Manotick

Mr. Basen first encountered this story of divided opinions among historians when he came across an Open Letter that had been circulated among Canadian historians. The letter condemned a statement issued by the Canadian Historical Association (CHA) on Canada Day 2021. The statement, which addressed the question of whether Canada's treatment of indigenous peoples should be labelled genocide, read: "We maintain that genocidal intent has been amply established in the historical scholarship and by the words of policy-makers at the time." It asserted that there was a "broad consensus among historical experts" on this point. The Open Letter, signed by 53 historians, avoided the issue of genocide but used strong language to question the assertion that there was a broad consensus among Canadian historians on the issue. The signatories demanded that: "the CHA Council retract its statement and commit itself instead to its real mission of upholding the values of viewpoint diversity and open scholarly debate," rather than promoting "a single 'consensus' history of Canada." Mr. Basen noted that the signatories to the letter were mostly white males, many of whom had been, but were no longer, members of the CHA.

The discovery of this difference of opinion intrigued Mr. Basen. In his view, the pursuit of truth is important to both historians and journalists, and investigation of this existing controversy as a journalist provided an opportunity to explore what happens when truth and reconciliation seem to be in conflict. He contacted historians on both side of the divide to try and find out how they got there.

To assist in sharing with the audience what he had heard from historians, Mr. Basen focused on two individuals: Catherine Ellis, professor of History at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson) and Christopher Dummitt, a political and cultural historian at Trent University.

Before outlining what each of these historians had said, Mr. Basen framed the issue by posing the question: *What is history?* He offered two definitions, Napoleon's statement that "history is a set of lies that people have agreed upon", and his own definition as outlined in his May 2022 article, i.e.: "History is the story that a people tells about themselves." He noted that the word truth is not found in either of these definitions.

Catherine Ellis's answer to the question, *what is history?* was that there is no single truth and "historians should not see themselves as truth tellers." She said that historical practice changes over time and this informs our understanding. In her view, indigenous people have been written out of Canadian history, due in part to the use of limited source materials by privileged people who have created written records. She believes that an openness to other sources, such as stories passed down over time by indigenous peoples, provides a pathway away from a Western colonial perspective and towards reconciliation.



Christopher Dummitt wrote the first draft of the Open Letter questioning the CHA claim of a consensus on genocide. He stated that: "By pretending there is only one interpretation, the directors of the CHA are insulting and dismissing the scholars who have arrived at a different assessment." Mr. Dummitt does see the seeking of truth as a first priority and argues that the CHA statement was more about activism than good scholarship. He noted in his interview that: "The commitment to reconciliation over truth, or instead of truth, negates what historians are supposed to do." He also fears that the notion that inquiry in certain areas must be avoided so as to avoid

being harmful or hurtful to others will have a chilling effect on historical inquiry.

As Mr. Basen interviewed historians, two significant issues emerged:

One revolves around the use of sources, i.e., whether or not it is legitimate to use eyewitness testimony and stories passed down through generations.

A second is “presentism” or “the practice of judging historical figures by the moral and ethical standards of the present day,” which can involve seeing the past through a particular lens.

As an example of presentism, Mr. Basen referred to the recent decision to remove the name of Egerton Ryerson from what has now become Toronto Metropolitan University. Ryerson has been determined by some to have been an enemy of indigenous people. While he was no longer alive when the residential-school system was created, his ideas are seen as having provided the intellectual foundation behind these schools. Others assert that Ryerson’s ideas were progressive for his time. They adopt a balance-sheet approach in which positive and negative attitudes are assessed, with the positives regarded as outweighing the negatives.

Catherine Ellis, who was the co-chair of the task force that recommended renaming what was Ryerson University, rejects this kind of balance-sheet approach. She says the job of the task force was to examine the totality of Ryerson’s historical legacy. She believes that the positive assessment of Ryerson that had dominated historical accounts of him was the product of a “Western colonial structure” based on the premise that imperialism was legitimate. In her view, to celebrate Ryerson is to celebrate imperialism.

Mr. Basen then turned to the audience to hear their views and engage in discussion. He began by asking for a show of hands in relation to the decision to rename the former Ryerson University. The results of this informal survey were that the largest group supported the renaming, a middle group was uncertain, and the smallest group did not agree with the removal of Ryerson’s name. Mr. Basen placed himself in the middle group of those who are uncertain.

During the discussion period that followed, the audience sought further information on the results of Mr. Basen’s interviews with historians, and asked for his suggestions on what can be done to bridge the divide that has emerged in the historical community.

Participants also offered their own thoughts on a path forward.

Mr. Basen was asked if he had seen evidence of the chilling effect on historical inquiry that interviewees had identified. He replied that he believes this is happening in journalism, where journalists writing about the discovery of unmarked graves from any perspective can expect to be strongly attacked on social media. This happened to a respected Canadian journalist who wrote an article in the National Post last spring questioning the media’s coverage of the unmarked graves story, and he found himself accused of residential school “denialism.” As a result, stories that are worth doing may not be pursued because journalists might be reluctant to put a target on their backs, and that’s not a good thing.

Critics of the CHA Canada Day statement believe that something similar could happen among historians. They argue that graduate students will now be reluctant to engage in fields of study that run counter to the announced position of the Canadian historical establishment on the genocide question. They say a blanket is being thrown over research. The CHA denies that this will be the case.

In response to a question on what individuals or organizations can do to contribute to reconciliation, Mr. Basen said that he was not sure. He believes, however, that it is important to be thoughtful and listen, and not get involved in knee jerk reactions. Rather, one should try and think in a larger context and treat ideas that one does not agree with in a respectful manner. When asked how to prevent discussions on reconciliation from becoming political, he said that you can’t have reconciliation without truth. It is critical to find out what really happened, and since decisions in the past were made by politicians and religious leaders, there inevitably has to be a political component. He conceded, however, that it is becoming difficult to come to agreement in the face of differing views. The CHA seems to have tried to impose consensus, but there doesn’t seem to be one. We are still at the stage of finding out what happened.

A member of the audience commented that one should focus on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, as a starting point. It was noted further that since truth is subjective, the emphasis should be on looking at issues through an indigenous lens. As a settler, this is difficult to appreciate. Mr. Basen replied that while the Calls to Action are driving the CHA, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission concluded that there has been cultural genocide, which does not include an intent to harm as was implied by the CHA’s Canada Day statement. One participant added that there are lots of places to start, but the conversation over genocide has become an enormous distraction. Mr. Basen agreed, noting that the genocide question will likely never be settled.

*Maureen McPhee (with Ira Basen)*



*RTHS President Dough Culham presents Ira with an honorary RTHS membership*

### Rideau's Built Heritage (NEW!)

We are introducing a new feature to our newsletter: each month we will profile properties in the former Rideau Township that have been identified as having heritage value

**6836 Rideau Valley Drive South,  
Kars (the Lindsay Homestead)**



This classic stone house was built in 1850 by James Lindsay (1802-1880). James, his wife Ellin Goodwin and their first child moved to Lot 25, Concession 1 of North Gower in 1830. James was aware of the construction of the Rideau Canal, and he was keen to explore the economic opportunities the new waterway might bring. The Lindsays built a log house near the water, and by 1832 when the Canal was officially opened James had also built a wharf and wharfhouse.

Business boomed. People and goods increasingly poured into the new territory opened up by the canal, and Lindsay's Wharf became an important part of the expanding commercial traffic business, both incoming and outgoing. A community began to grow around the wharf, and was given the name Wellington.



*This photo, taken about 1890, shows David (son of James & Ellin) and Jane (Scobie) Lindsay and family (with a couple of neighbours) in front of the homestead.*

By 1850 the Lindsays could afford to build a more substantial home for their growing family (ultimately six sons and two daughters.) James and Ellin chose a site on the knoll across the road and just west of their log cabin. Here they constructed a handsome stone house that has remained in the family ever since.

The original log house became a store and post office in 1856. It was the establishment of the post office that necessitated changing the community's name from Wellington to Kars to avoid duplication with the existing village of Wellington in Prince Edward County.

The Lindsay house was one of the first buildings to be given heritage designation by the Rideau Township Council. It is historically significant due to its age and architecture, as well as for the important role that James and his family had in establishing and growing the community of Wellington/Kars.

Sources: Tweedsmuir History of Kars, Volume 4; Rideau Township Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee (LACAC) files. Courtesy of the Rideau Branch, City of Ottawa Archives, North Gower.

### How to Connect with RTHS



<https://rideautwphistory.org/>



[www.facebook.com/rideautownshiphistory](http://www.facebook.com/rideautownshiphistory)



[rideautwphistory@gmail.com](mailto:rideautwphistory@gmail.com)



<https://twitter.com/RideauTpHS>

# Sign me up as a member of RTHS



Members of the Society enjoy:

- Monthly meetings featuring engaging presentations, followed by refreshments
- Group excursions to historical points of interest in Eastern ON
- Local books published by the Society, and a monthly newsletter
- Opportunities to participate and contribute as volunteers

For more information visit <https://rideautwphistory.org> and facebook.com/rideautownshiphistory.

Please mail this form with a cheque for membership dues payable to: Rideau Township Historical Society, Box 56, North Gower, ON, KOA 2T0, OR pay by e-transfer to [rideautwphistory@gmail.com](mailto:rideautwphistory@gmail.com) and email a scanned copy of the form to the same email address.

Name:

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Address:

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City & Postal Code:

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Telephone:

Email:

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Date:

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Are you a new RTHS member?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

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Individual Membership \$15 \_\_\_\_\_

Life Membership \$100 \_\_\_\_\_

Family Membership (2 adults & school-age children) \$20 \_\_\_\_\_

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Donation \$50 \_\_\_\_\_

Other Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Receipts for paid memberships will be issued when we are able to meet face-to-face, but tax receipts for donations will be issued at the end of the year.*

**Thank you for supporting RTHS!**