

On Kingston by Jack Burnham

To come to Kingston meant to come to the opposite of home. Having walked along its streets, swam in its waters, driven along its highways, seen it from foreign coasts, rode along its rails, ran down its paths, seen in from below ground parking lots and the tops of apartment buildings, I have grown to know the city and love it dearly. Even then, Kingston remains the opposite of home. It is this that forms the basis of its beauty.

At the edge of the water along Confederation Park stands a sign proclaiming the bravery of the Loyalists in fleeing across the water from the fervent American patriots. Scared of their brethren's demands for lower taxation, an end to monarchy, and general interest in revolution, several hundred fled into the night and settled along the shore. Pledging loyalty to the British Crown, they found themselves in a slightly more distant land and took up work just outside of upstate New York. All of this eventually culminated in the rise of Canada proper as Kingston's most controversial son, John A. Macdonald, led the new nation into its proper place as a member of the Commonwealth.

Terror. This is a lesson from the American Revolution that was dutifully absent in history textbooks across the United States. How scared the Loyalists must have been, after the destruction of Cornwallis's forces at Yorktown and Lafayette's advances on other British positions along the coast, blocking access to the sea. This was the end-game scenario for the British and their allies. The United States, an embittered rival, had joined forces with the Empire's most hated foe, to continue to fight on home soil. Destruction of the invasion force was imminent, even after an American victory appeared hopeless, stalling out at Valley Forge. The Loyalists did not flee out of some heartfelt love; they fled home because "home" was coming for them. Leaving was the only sane option left and Kingston was closest. Every tower built was a tower to ensure that "home" could never return. All of Fort Henry's guns point one way. Fear outlasts all but the most solid stone walls.

It was also this fear that led to Canada itself. As a boy, John A. Macdonald came from a Scottish family which had settled in Kingston after crossing the Atlantic. Born in Glasgow, Macdonald left home at five years old to live in Upper Canada where his father sought, and failed, to escape his history of business debts. Growing up among the ancestors of those that fled during that faithful period, Macdonald must have heard stories of a still-vengeful United States, seeking any advantage against its natural enemy. A battle at Prescott by insurgents from across the border with a desire to "liberate" Canada only fed these fears, the first case on which he made his name famous. This must have been on his mind as Macdonald sought to unify the country, those same boyhood fears manifested once more. Once more, "home" had come calling, just as the Loyalists had feared. Kingston could never remain safe if it was to remain a battleground.

Leaving Kingston has become a tradition, as natural as any for a city that prides itself as a chief exporter to the Great Lakes region. An empty dry dock rusting besides apartment buildings leaves only fading memory of the city's maritime history; a Third Crossing over an evacuation route from the new capital to the frontier. Kingston has been a magnet for those drifting between

True North Essay Series

distant shores, quite literally in the case of the pilot lights along the harbourfront. The city is dotted with landmarks to its makeshift nature. On a spit of land across from the yacht club, a solitary cross stands as a lonely marker to the Irish immigrants that came to Kingston in search of work. Another spot commemorates The Tragically Hip, a band that found international recognition and a country-wide following. Summerhill was once the capitol though Parliament now resides several hundred kilometers to the east. The 401 sections off the city to the north while providing a straight path between the hearts of English and French Canada. All cities have generational cycles, though Kingston represents something greater. For as much as Kingston is an exit, it is also a genesis.

Kingston is an exit strategy. It is also an entranceway. The Romans knew this well as Janus, a two-faced god, guarded thresholds across the empire. For Kingston, it is now-ancient fortifications and the blinking alien lights from the turbines that dot Wolfe Island. How many of us have sat along the water, thinking of places we once knew, whether to New York or Glasgow or Ottawa or Cornwall. The city could not have served as a better setting for True North. Beyond its hockey history, True North is a story about home. A story about two people, Alex and Julia, and all the rest, trying to secure a home when home has only meant highway exits and two-story billet houses. For Alex, Kingston represents that same new start, though unwanted on his part as he is caught between his past and future with Grace. Even for Julia, born in the city, Kingston could never be enough as she looks for larger stages and brighter lights. History repeats itself.

And so, our story begins in Kingston. Macdonald is long gone, only his statute remained. The enemy had retreated, perhaps for the last time, focused now on confronting new frontiers. All was quiet and bright on the waterfront and the sun was rising over the horizon. The city was beautiful and Grace turned to look at the clocktower and noticing the time, awoke Alex. Home had come calling.