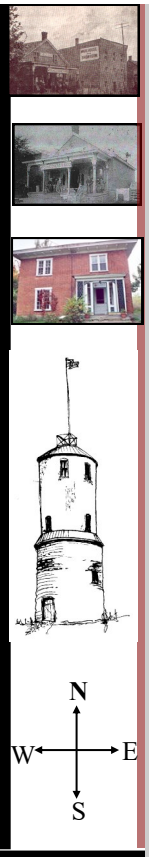
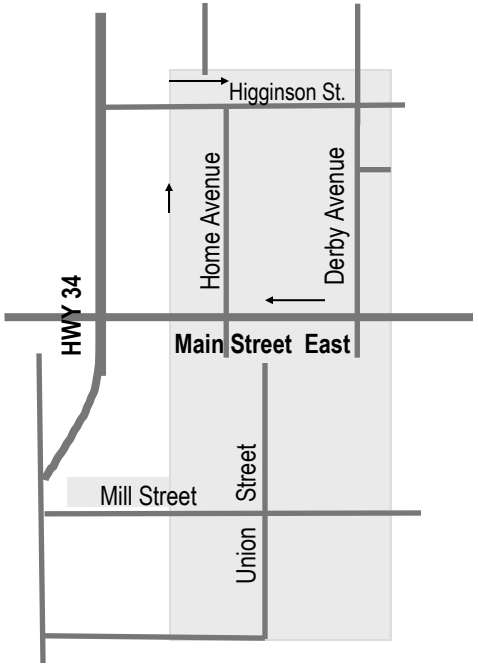


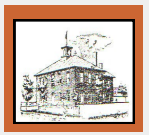
TOUR map



Vankleek Hill Collegiate Institute Tour

Vankleek Hill & District
Historical Society
95 Main Street East, P.O. Box 537
Vankleek Hill ON K0B 1R0
www.vankleek.ca info@vankleek.ca
fb Vankleek Hill Museum

VANKLEEK HILL



Vankleek Hill Collegiate Institute

HISTORY
tour
UNDER ONE HOUR

Vankleek Hill & District Historical Society
www.vankleek.ca FB Vankleek Hill Museum

Vankleek Hill Collegiate Institute

ONE HOUR TOUR

It takes a village to write local history.

This walking tour benefits from the Vankleek Hill & District Historical Society Inventory of Early Homes. J. Denis Seguin Architect provided architectural comments. We are pleased to introduce you to the enduring spirit of our community through histories of some of the houses and buildings that bring to life early settlement

Gentle advice for walkers & drivers:

The tour map is on the back cover.
A successful walking tour is based on goodwill and common sense. Walkers are asked to stay on the sidewalk during the tour, and to not trespass on private property.
For the short time that you are on the sidewalk tour, you are asked to be a good and gracious Vankleek Hill neighbour. Should you choose to drive, please pull to the side and park, rather than slow down to view a home. Thank you for your curiosity. Enjoy the walk, or the drive!

Produced as a companion booklet to the VCI History Class walking tour organized by teacher Randi Tolhurst Hall for May 28, 2019.

Design: Lennie Kuiper & Michelle Landriault

Presence of Indigenous Peoples

It is imperative to recognize the presence of the Indigenous Peoples who lived in this region prior to European colonization.

The locale of Vankleek Hill was on an historic pathway between the Ottawa River and the St. Lawrence. The Algonquin, as well as the Mohawk, who are part of the Iroquois Confederacy, walked this way. Amongst the last of the Algonquin tribes in this region were the Abenaki.

Without archaeological digs we cannot say with any certainty that there was Indigenous settlement around Vankleek Hill. To date, there is no known oral history of such use. Research Archaeologist Jean-Luc Pilon, who was raised in Vankleek Hill and has 30 years of experience, suspects that a search of the creeks in the area may hold answers to many questions. His current project is "Ancient History of the Ottawa Valley."

We do know, from diaries & anecdotes, that in the 1800s, there were Indigenous families living in the Hawkesbury area, and that the first plows on Green Lane Road churned-up arrowheads & axe blades. Also, Mohawk pedlars from Kahnesatake travelled many of our side roads to sell beadwork & weaving door-to-door well into the early 20th century. The Museum is fortunate to have a few examples of these crafts created to supplement Indigenous incomes.

Vankleek Hill
Gingerbread Capital of Ontario

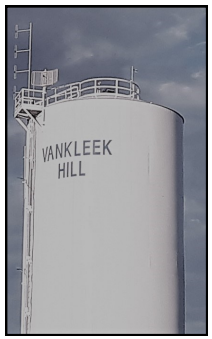
Early governance in Vankleek Hill

In 1808 a meeting to organize municipal governance was held at the VanKleeck Family inn. A group of civic-minded men nominated from amongst themselves the pathmaster, fence viewer, assessors, highway overseer, poundkeeper, reeve, and then the councillors appointed a town clerk. In 1871, clerk John Shields was paid $80 to oversee nine regular council meetings. Shields became the first mayor of Vankleek Hill after municipal incorporation in 1897.

Able-bodied men performed annual statutory road work for assigned days. In 1873, residents could convert their statute labour to a payment of 75 cents per day. These payments became part of the local tax system.

Roaming pigs, cows, horses were the task of the poundkeeper. The first by-laws regulated fencing for livestock. In winter, residents and storekeepers were responsible for clearing the snow from their street frontage.

In 1872, a sign of social community care: council granted $10 to Mrs. Delorme, "for taking care of John Roberts laying ill with smallpox."



Vankleek Hill Water Tower

Utilitarian icons such as the water tower on Home Avenue deserve mention. Until the 1970s, homes in Vankleek Hill had individual wells. Provincial standards changed and a public water system was set-up. Vankleek Hill residents received water from four wells. Water from these four town wells was stored in the water tower for distribution. Today, water is piped to Vankleek Hill from the Ottawa River through the water treatment plant in Hawkesbury, and the water tower remains in operation.

How are projects like this paid for? In our democracy we pay taxes at the municipal, provincial and federal levels. These taxes guarantee a basic level of services for everyone. There are property taxes, school taxes, income taxes, sales taxes. A variety of these taxes are pooled together. A municipality, a school board, a county - these are a few of the organizations that will make applications to pull tax dollars from the pool to put into use in their neighbourhoods. Road maintenance, school improvements, parks, snow removal, garbage & recycling are a few benefits. In Canada our taxation system provides free elementary & secondary education and health programmes.

95 Higginson Street — Hall House

Barrister William S. Hall and wife Florence constructed this home in the summer of 1922. William S. Hall was a founder of the Prescott and Russell Law Association which continues today.

In 1943, their son Barrister William Robert Hall inherited the property. W.R. Hall Q.C. was president of the Vankleek Hill Agricultural Society 1934-1935. Today, third and fourth generations of the Hall family call this home.

The driveway was originally part of Elm Lane. There were several lanes to service the side- and back-yards of homes and businesses for deliveries, such as coal down a basement chute. Lanes gave access to stables, garages, sheds, and neighbours.

The Edwardian Classical style of this house, with its geometric foursquare massing is reflective of a country recovering from the severity of WWI, and marks the break from Victorian frivolity. It is the architectural entry into the 20th Century.

Foursquare offers simplicity and order with a balanced façade; and suggests stability with a large roof.

129 Higginson Street — Église St-Grégoire-de-Nazianze

In 1877, under the guidance of Curé Onésime Routhier of nearby l'Orignal, the first section of the Gothic Revival style church was built by contractor John Chisholm at a cost of $4,500. In 1895, contractor Mr. Fauteaux completed the north addition to the building: the sacristy, vestry and the transept at a total cost of $12,000. Also in 1895, the brick rectory was built to serve the 186 French Catholic, and 50 Irish Catholic families.

It is architecturally significant that the Catholic church occupies such a prominent position on the summit of the Hill. Of the five church buildings in Vankleek Hill, the Catholic church was one of the last to be completed. While the other four churches are located on Highway 34, High St., and Main St., the Catholic church is positioned as a sentinel within the Franco-Ontarian neighbourhood that occupies the northeast corner of Vankleek Hill.

By the end of the 19th century the French community in the area was thriving. After the War of 1812, French families from Lower Canada began to arrive to take possession of land grants for military service. From the 1850s, wage labour in Ottawa Valley logging jobs, plus available farm lands ensured the Québecois became the majority migrants here. Today, over 40% of Ontario's Franco-Ontarian population live in the Ottawa, Cornwall, Prescott and Russell region.

95 Main Street East — Musée Vankleek Hill Museum

Duncan MacDonnell, one of a handful of early Vankleek Hill settlers, constructed this timber frame store in 1834. He was bankrupt in 1836 before the store opened. The building was used for a time as a residence. The red brick was added c.1855 after a serious fire swept through Vankleek Hill. This building is historically recognized as the first in Vankleek Hill to be covered in local red brick.

To the west is a Georgian style house, with its balanced façade, built in 1858 by Archibald McLaurin who had lived in the store building since 1847. Malcolm McCuaig purchased the two properties in 1863. He and his partner Arthur Cheney made McCuaig, Cheney & Co. General Store a successful business into the 20th century.

In 1870, McCuaig built the three-storey warehouse to the east for farm equipment, grain sales, and a showroom for large household items.

The architecture of this general store is a strong example of the emerging Canadiana style with its round-headed south facing front windows that frame narrow double doors. The full width decorative front porch added later acted as both a connection to the wood plank sidewalk and a display area for store products during business hours.

Art: Jessica Sarrazin

Union Street is in its direct sight line.

"Every class of merchandise, from the best silks and the latest fabrics in dress goods to a pound of nails or a bag of salt, they buy all kinds of grain, wool and farm produce, and are interested in several cheese factories in the neighbourhood; fine stock of all dress goods, tweeds, furs, carpets, oil cloths and window shades; heavy and shelf hardware of every description, and a full assortment of groceries; with boots and shoes..."
[Eastern Ontario Review & Ottawa Valley General Advertiser, 1895]

Vankleek Hill – Red Brick Town and Gingerbread Capital of Ontario

A fire in 1855 destroyed important timber and log buildings in Vankleek Hill, and sparked production at local brickyards. Our clay deposit produced our distinctive red-coloured, soft brick. Steady production ended in the 1920s. The family names connected to brickmaking include Johnson, Potter, Guindon (Yandow), Steele, Reasbeck. Visitors find the Vankleek Hill red brick warm and inviting.

In 1883, the Vankleek Hill Manufacturing Company sawmill (today the Vankleek Hill Community Centre) manufactured varieties of sash, doors, blinds, mouldings and house finishings, plus turned wood and scroll work. The gingerbread, or wood scroll work, enhancing our home exteriors and interiors was bought at local sawmills, or ordered through specialty catalogues. The end of the gingerbread craze came with WW I, when housing design simplified. We celebrate Vankleek Hill's unique 19th century craftsmanship as the Gingerbread Capital of Ontario.

Champlain Sea

Musée Vankleek Hill Museum

In prehistoric time, a vast sea of melting glaciers formed an arm of the Atlantic Ocean covering the Laurentian Mountains then south into the United States. Archaeologists refer to this as the Champlain Sea. Geology studies show that in our region, as the sea receded, Vankleek Hill was first to rise as an island. Sea fossils are an easy find here. In our region, the Champlain Sea gave us the Ottawa River, the unique Alfred Bog, and flat farm land that is sandy loam on a clay base. When the clay is kiln-fired for bricks, our clay provides a soft brick with the distinctive red that you see on our buildings. The last remnants of the Champlain Sea remain in the St. Lawrence River estuary, where tidal salt-water supports whales.

Van Kleeck's Hill

Simeon VanKleeck (1745-1827) and his wife Cecilia Jaycox (1755-1849) are United Empire Loyalists from the Province of New York who sided with the British during the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783). It was a brutal war that separated families along political lines. Cecilia's brother was hanged by the Patriots. Simon escaped capture; but, Cecilia and the children had to hide from Patriots, former neighbours, in the wilderness. They were guided to safety by Indigenous persons allied with the British.

After evacuation to Canada, and several land petitions, Simeon and his son Simeon Jr. began to clear acreage on Concession 6 in 1797, the start of Van Kleeck's Hill.

From their home, Cecilia operated an inn to serve travellers going from the Ottawa River to the St. Lawrence River, and to villages between Ottawa and Montreal. An inn operating near a crossroad location encourages trades, and soon the inn was joined by blacksmiths, coopers, merchants.

By 1840, growth was assured when grandsons Peter and Barnabus VanKleeck began to sell lots to allow for roads and buildings. Vankleek Hill became a natural service centre for the surrounding agricultural community.

Main Street East is the northern property line of the early Vankleeck farm (Con. 6, Lots 6,7,8,9). When Simeon Sr. died in 1827, his lands went to his grandchildren: east half to Peter; the west half to Getty, Barnabus, John, Robert, Jeremiah and William Henry. The family provided land to open streets, and purchases of their lands created the Main Street business district of Vankleek Hill.

Immigration to Vankleek Hill area

Unlike the Upper Ottawa Valley, few United Empire Loyalists permanently settled here. There were Americans, and emigrants from Scotland, England and Wales. However, emigration from Ireland outnumbered all others by more than four to one. [Thomas, Cyrus 1895]

French Canadian in-migration began slowly after the War of 1812 with the awarding of land grants for services rendered; and steadily continued to position a majority French presence in Prescott County by the 1860s. [Gaffield, Chad 1978]

The push & pull of immigration. War pushed the VanKleeck's. Economic viability of the farm land pulled the VanKleeck's here.

When you think of your family's arrival in Canada, their immigration, ask what was the pull? What was the push? The answer is usually a combination.

73-77 Main Street East

Vankleek Hill Public School & Model School

In the mid-1850s this corner site had two modest buildings - a town hall and a grammar school. By 1870, both were used by the school, and there was growing demand for more school space.

New construction took place, and in 1877 the Vankleek Hill Public School House opened.

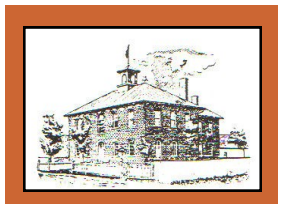
It is a Victorian-style institutional building. The second floor served as a town hall, and as a Model School for up & coming teachers who practiced their skills on the students below. It was completed in time to welcome Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. MacDonald, at the front door in the fall of 1877.

Sir John A. gave a rousing election campaign speech to 5,000 people during a picnic at the old fairgrounds (Mill and Boyd streets), Charles Tupper (the Father of Confederation for Nova Scotia) ascended in a hot-air balloon, and there were fireworks! Sir John A. was elected Prime Minister in 1878.

The 1877 school building had a white picket fence, a tin roof and no porches. Note the decorative brackets that still support the overhanging eaves.

About 1902, when a new public school was built at the bottom of Derby Street, this building was converted to apartments, and gingerbread porches were added to the front and side doors, These were later removed.

Until the late 1940s, the old schoolyard at the rear (today parking lots) was flooded for use as a hockey rink each winter. Water from a nearby well was used, and you brought a shovel if you wanted to be sure to skate!



Sir John A MacDonald, Father of Confederation, made an 1877 election campaign visit to Vankleek Hill where he was welcomed by delegates at the front doors of this building.

Home Avenue rink, Johnny Seguin, Vankleek Hill Flyer c.1947

GUSTY BRUNET

Eastern Ontario Review and Ottawa Valley Advertiser
January 7, 1898

Until cars and trucks became popular after WW I, there was a tremendous business for deliveries by horse and wagon.
By 1896, two rail lines served Vankleek Hill. Farmers sent their products (grain, milk, cheese, meat and more) by rail to markets in Ottawa and Montreal. Local merchants received their goods and merchandise by rail. At times, more than 18 trains a day, a combination of freight and passenger, rolled through. Extra trains were added to bring exhibits and people to the annual Vankleek Hill & District Fall Agricultural Fair.

25 Home Avenue — Victorian Gingerbread

Colonel William Higginson purchased land that contained this lot in 1849, and in 1892 built this house. A leader in local politics, the militia, and industry, he had an abiding interest in education and astronomy.

He lived here until his death in 1905. He left the house to Mary-Jane Constantineau, the retired owner of the Grand Central Hotel on Main Street. This may have been a sale already underway.

This is a classic Victorian era three-storey home. The gingerbread includes porch spindles on the balustrades and small brackets; strong corner brackets at the eaves, a finial at the highest roof peak. The gables are ornamented with decorative half-circle butt shingles.

A high-ceiling porch along the length of the house controls the sun hitting the south wall, and the west (front) porch is interrupted by a street-front bay window. Interior shutters on all the windows keep the house cool.

The decorative gingerbread continues inside the house. The ground floor rooms with 10'6'' ceilings are separated by decorative grille work.

Home Avenue Mural Wall

The Home Avenue Mural was created over two summers (1990, 1992) by the Mural Group. Artists Liz Skelly and Odile Tétû courageously painted the entire detailed project on-site; standing on scaffolds for long hours. Their organizational partner was Phil Arber. The mural presents true historical depictions of Vankleek Hill storefronts and products, local residents from the past and present, and a mystery or two.

Their Quilt Mural is presently in restoration and once complete will return to the corner of Main Street West and Highway 34. The remnants of their Agricultural Fair Mural painted on brick can be seen on High Street.

36 Home Avenue — Higginson House

We offer you these capsules of their integrated history.

The house was built by Colonel William Higginson & his brother John (1850-1857), as the retirement home for their parents Thomas (1794-1884) and Nancy [Park] Higginson (1798-1854), and sister Ann. It remained in the Higginson family until 1978.

This family, successful in agriculture and business, took part in local politics to advocate for education, commerce, and community services in Prescott County. Thomas Higginson was the youngest of four brothers, of English descent, who emigrated from Ireland for economic opportunities in c. 1819. Before departure from Ireland, the four brothers sold their family holdings in Corkermain, County Antrim. [Higginson, T.B., 1958] As with many immigrants, there was no expectation of turning back.

The house design is not embellished; it is simple and vernacular - using Vankleek Hill materials - brick and milled details. There is an over-extended flat tin roof to protect the brick from water damage.

Art: Windmill, Vankleek Hill, 1845 Rev. Jacques Fréderic Doudiet (Library and Archives Canada)

Higginson Tower

Higginson Tower was constructed c.1830 as a windmill by Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Higginson. He bought land in Vankleek Hill in 1826, and settled here by c.1829.

Among many civic undertakings, Thomas was a founder and president of the local Mechanic's Institute in 1857 which offered the first library services. He was a published writer and poet.

The windmill, built c. 1830, was to harness wind to grind local wheat and corn, but the plan failed due to lack of consistent wind. Years later, Colonel William Higginson removed the fans and added a wood frame tower to create the "first private observatory in Eastern Ontario."

In the 1970s, the 'look-out' tower was torn down due to concerns for public safety. The tower has since been restored. There is a full history panel on-site.

Art: Higginson Tower J. Denis Seguin Architect OAA

St. John's Anglican Church

Built on land donated by Thomas Higginson, St. John's Church opened for divine service in 1854 in unfinished condition. The long driveway, Church Street, was provided by John Potter, and adjoining land came from Thomas Kerr. The church bell was purchased in 1855 from Troy, New York for 36 Pounds, 10 Shillings. This early brick building is derived from Gothic architecture.

Pen & Ink, Estate of Peter Dobush Architect (1908-1980). (Library and Archives Canada)

18th Prescott Volunteer Militia

The Militia Act, 1855 created a small volunteer militia to be armed, clothed and paid at public expense. The Active Militia was to receive regular training, so that it could assemble immediately in a crisis.

The public response to the formation of a volunteer force for part-time soldiers was enthusiastic. The 18th Prescott Volunteer Militia is infantry. Training took place at least twice a year. Volunteers gathered at a designated farm for drill exercises and shooting competitions.

In 1866, in answer to a government call to defend against the impending Fenian Raid, the Prescott Volunteer Militia mustered at the property of Lieutenant -Colonel Thomas Higginson in Vankleek Hill on March 9, 1866 with orders to proceed to Cornwall.

At this time, Thomas' son Major William Higginson was given command of the 18th Battalion, Prescott Volunteer Militia. The battalion spent several months in and around Cornwall. They kept busy with drills awaiting a battle that did not take place.

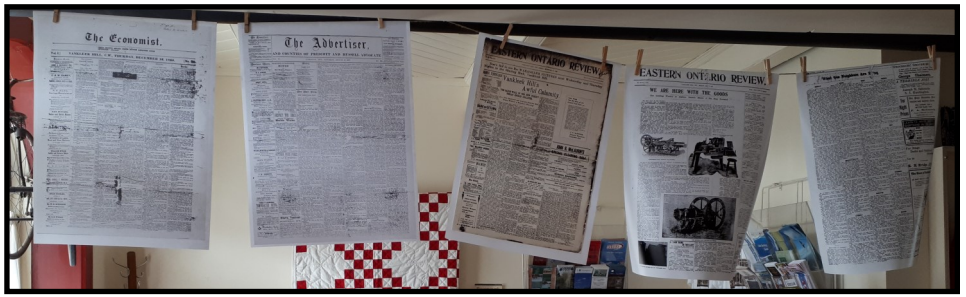
The various **Fenian Raids** between 1866 and 1870 led to the mobilization several times of tens of thousands of Canadian volunteer militiamen. The militia were stationed along Canada's border with the United States. In one instance, a group of Fenians at Malone, near Ogdensburg (New York), planned to attack Fort Wellington in the town of Prescott but their hopes were shattered. Some 300 Canadian volunteer militiamen accompanied by field artillery arrived to occupy Fort Wellington. Nearby, Brockville had 200 men, and another 800 with field artillery were stationed at Cornwall. The Fenians cancelled their plans. The Canada General Service Medal for service in the Fenian Raids of 1866 & 1870 was created in 1898, and awarded in 1899 to only those who were still living. They had to apply and attend in Ottawa to receive it. Library & Archives Canada has a database for Military Medals, Honours & Awards.

Comment: The American Revolution followed by the Civil War caused the citizens of the United States to become very well armed, and to subsequently maintain this level as an inherent constitutional right - "the right to bear arms."

Following the Civil War, the Fenians, Irish immigrants in the U.S. who were opposed to British rule over Ireland, took advantage of this ease of having arms. They rallied to attack the nearest British outpost, and that was Canada. They thought the Irish population in Upper Canada, and the French population of Lower Canada would support them. They were wrong.

War of 1812
Prescott County was a part of Glengarry County until 1817. Our participation in this war came under the Glengarry Fencibles. Re-enactors perform annually at the Glengarry Pioneer Museum in Dunvegan.

76 Main Street East — The Review



This c.1890 boom-town style building was the McIntosh General Store with its two front windows for window-shopping, and its decorative trio of Canadiana style rounded windows upstairs. By 1905, it was the John Wilson General Motors Dealer showroom, with enough space to have two cars on display. The oil stains from the dealership are still evident on the original floors.

Today, it is home to The Review weekly newspaper which proudly celebrated 125 years of publication in 2018. What is the importance of a community newspaper? It provides a central news resource, it is answerable to its community, and it can act as a watchdog. The Review is a member of both provincial and federal newspaper organizations which require that it meet high levels of reporting and production standards. A newspaper, in print or digital, provides value in researched reporting and opinion.

Independent news on the web and on social media, with few exceptions, tends to focus on scattered topics, favours bias, and avoids answering to standards.

Today, we can enjoy the benefits of many forms of reading and viewing. At the same time, we need to keep our critical thinking caps on so that we recognize who is attempting to grab our attention to wrongly influence us, as opposed to informing us.

Auction Sale

"Mrs. (Dr.) Jas. McIntosh will offer for sale by public auction, at her residence, corner Main street and Derby avenue, on Wednesday, April 13th [1898], a lot of valuable household furniture, comprising in part:"

"Square piano, rosewood sewing machine, parlor suite, 6 parlor chairs, 3 fancy chairs, 3 oak rockers, 2 arm chairs, 3 verandah chairs, 3 bedroom suites, iron and camp single beds, mattresses, sideboards, tables, book cases, large office desk, floor carpets, stair carpets, linoleums, curtains, curtain poles, window shades, parlor, hall and study hanging lamps, household lamps, cooking stove, single stove, chinaware, glassware, and many other household articles."

"Terms—$10.00 and under cash; over that amount 6 months credit upon furnishing approved joint notes."

Ref.: Eastern Ontario Review and Ottawa Valley Advertiser
April 1, 1898

A glimpse into a 19th century household.