



# Halifax Women's History Society Monthly Newsletter

*Issue no. 10, April 2017*

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## Woman of the Month: Anna Leonowens (1831-1915)

To most Haligonians, the name Anna Leonowens most likely conjures up the NSCAD art gallery that is named after her; however, there is much more to Anna's life than that. She was an adventurous writer, teacher and activist who travelled all over the world.

She was born Anna Harriet Emma Edwards in 1831 to a British soldier and Anglo-Indian woman in India, where she married Thomas Leonowens in 1849. Anna's biracial and lower-economic status background are often downplayed in subsequent writings, including her own. It is likely that she cultivated a persona as a sophisticated British lady specifically in order to suppress those aspects of her personal life, and that is how most people would picture her today.

Before long she was widowed with two children; in 1862 she and her son Louis moved to Siam (now Thailand) where she was employed as the royal governess to the King's children and wives. These experiences would inspire her later and most memorable writings.

In 1867 she retired from the position and traveled throughout the world, including Singapore and Australia, eventually finding herself in the United States and Canada. It was during this time that she produced the bulk of her writing, including the autobiography that would one day be the inspiration for the renowned 1951 musical *The King and I* followed in 1956 by a Hollywood film of the same name.

She settled in Halifax in 1876 and lived there until 1897 - the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, which is what inspired her to found what was then called the Victoria School of Art and Design (it was renamed the Nova Scotia

suffragette and one of the founders of the Local Council of Women.

The same year she founded what is now NSCAD Anna left for Montreal, where she died in 1914. And while Anne may be buried there, she is immortalized in Halifax through her championing of the local art community. Hopefully, one day, under NSCAD's guidance, Anna will have her own historical monument in Halifax, the city to which she contributed so much.



Anna Leonowens



Deborah Kerr and Yul Brynner as Anna Leonowens and King Mongkut in *The King and I* (1956)

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## Happening in Halifax

### **Dalhousie Feminist Seminar Series**

Notes from a Feminist Killjoy

Erin Wunker

April 7, 12:30-1:30pm, McCain 2021

### **Maritime Museum of the Atlantic**

Arctic Adventures of a Coast Guard Nurse

Theresa McGuire

April 18, 7pm, Maritime Museum of the Atlantic

### **Halifax Women's History Society AGM**

April 20, 5:30pm, Women's Council House (989 Young Ave)

### **Xara Choral Theatre**

The Hours Turn To Nothing

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St. Matthew's Church, 1479 Barrington St

Purchase tickets [here](#)

### **Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21**

Pier 21 Reads with Madeleine Thien

April 29, 7pm, Pier 21

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## **Society News!**

### **The Monument Design is Announced!**

Thursday morning, March 9 at Halifax Hall – what Mayor Mike Savage likes to call the “people’s hall” at City Hall – was overflowing with Second World War volunteers, members and supporters of the Halifax Women’s History Society, and swarms of media. While our winning artist Marlene Hilton Moore unveiled a model of our monument, *The Volunteers/Les Bénévoles*, volunteer Peggy MacAlpine, Mayor Savage and HWHS board member Wanda Lewis revealed beautiful posters of the three female figures which will compose the monument. It was, in fact, Second World War volunteer Peggy MacAlpine who stole the show. After playing a couple of 1940s standards, Charlotte Guy Jeffries, another of our esteemed Second World War volunteers, said she’d like to play one more number: Peggy’s favourite song. The audience cheered its approval, and as Charlotte played, 101-year-old Peggy got up to dance! At the end of the song she turned to face the crowd with grace and charm, and bowed her thanks. For me this was the highlight of our Design Announcement – a moment that reminded us all of the indomitable spirit of the volunteers we are commemorating with Marlene Hilton Moore’s beautiful design. Now we await with excitement the unveiling of the monument itself in the Halifax Seaport in November.

2017 is the Year of the Women on the Waterfront!

Janet Guildford, Chair,  
Halifax Women’s History Society



Above: New Brunswick-born sculptor Marlene Hilton Moore speaking at the design announcement; she won a national competition to sculpt the monument.



Above: A 3D-printed model of the three figures for the monument: A woman making knitted goods with a Mi'kmaq basket to send overseas, an African Nova Scotian volunteer serving a meal at a service canteen and a little girl with a wagon of salvaged scrap metal.





Above: (From left to right) Second World War volunteers Ruth Graham, Charlotte Guy Jeffries, Peggy MacAlpine and Margaret Gordon.



Above: Charlotte Guy Jeffries entertaining the crowd with some of her Second World War numbers, including Peggy's MacAlpine's favourite!

### **Annual General Meeting**

Want to get more involved with society? Learn more about what

### **Contribute to the Woman on the Waterfront!**

While we are well on our way to erecting the first historical

history in Halifax? Consider attending our Annual General Meeting.

**When:** April 20th, 5:30pm

**Where:** Women's Council House (989 Young Avenue)

do. If you would like to be a part of this groundbreaking endeavour, consider making a donation to the society. Any amount helps, and we are always appreciative of community support.

**To donate via Pay Pal, please follow this link to our website:**  
**<http://halifaxwomenshistory.ca/donations/>**

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### About the Society

Founded in 2013, the Halifax Women's History Society (HWHS) researches and makes known the untold story of the remarkable contributions that women have made to the history of Halifax. "A Woman on the Waterfront" is the Society's first project.

Membership is available for anyone who wishes to support us. Lifetime membership is \$25 for adults and \$5 for students, purchasable by paypal on our [website](#).

Women's work is too often invisible to the public, especially in the history of the Second World War, which focuses on men and rarely mentions women's volunteer work. Without the work of countless volunteers, Halifax would not have been able to meet the needs of the huge influx of people into the city or support the military personnel and their families who made Halifax home during the war. There are more than 100 cairns, steles, sculptures and plaques in Halifax. Less than a dozen are of female figures and most of these are from mythology or are symbolic. A monument — The Volunteers/Les Bénévoles — to women volunteers would honour them and provide public acknowledgement of their numerous contributions.



### Newsletter Submissions

Have something you would like to see in our next newsletter? An event, news story, picture, piece of writing or historical figure that is relevant to our cause? Please send us the information and we would be

included.



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