

# The Crown In Kawartha Lakes: Lindsay's Regal and Vice- Regal Heritage

The forthcoming marriage of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle has captured the interest and imagination of Canadians and other peoples in the realms over which His Royal Highness' grandmother reigns as Queen. Once again, the magic, mystique, and mystery of monarchy is hitting the newsstands – to the bemusement of some, and to the delight of many.

Few residents in the contemporary City of Kawartha Lakes are likely aware of the place their community has in the ongoing story of Canada's regal and vice-regal tradition. Like so many places across Canada, many familiar landmarks – Adelaide Street, Alexandra Public School, and Victoria Park, for instance – derive their names from members of the royal family. Our town has played host on several occasions to Governors General of Canada and Lieutenant Governors of Ontario, one of which was born and raised here in Lindsay.

I shall have more to say about these topics momentarily, but first let's have a refresher course in basic high school civics.

Canada is a constitutional monarchy operating within the framework of parliamentary democracy. Individuals representing a variety of political persuasions are chosen through popular election every few years to represent our interests in the federal and provincial legislatures. Usually, but not always, the party which secures the greatest number of seats in the legislative chamber secures the confidence of Parliament and is invited to form a government overseen by an individual we call the prime minister, or premier. The government exercises a considerable number of powers affecting everything from

finances and external affairs, to healthcare and environmental stewardship. But these powers are not possessed by governments in and of themselves. They are vested in the Crown.

What is the Crown? It is not the popular series on Netflix. Nor is it merely an ornamental headpiece locked away in the Tower of London. Personified by the queen and represented in Canada by the governor general and ten lieutenant governors, the Crown is an institution encompassing the fiduciary obligations of a sovereign to his or her people and allies, ranging from administering justice and upholding treaties, to making laws for the maintenance of peace, order, and good government. In a modern democracy, the government takes responsibility for these matters, resulting in a system over which no one person rules in absolute terms.

Does this mean that the Crown is a meaningless symbol? Not at all.

Aside from those almost unthinkable situations in which they may use what are called 'reserve powers' to protect our democratic inheritance (for example, if a government refuses to step aside after being defeated in a general election or decides to forego elections entirely), the queen's vice-regal representatives have the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, and the right to warn.

The Crown also plays a significant role in strengthening the social fabric of Canadian society. We saw this in Vancouver two years ago, when the duke and duchess of Cambridge paid a visit to a centre for young parents living in that city's notorious downtown eastside neighbourhood and listened to their stories. We saw it when former Lieutenant Governors James Bartleman and David Onley facilitated the shipment of books to remote indigenous communities in northern Ontario. We see it when the governor general recognizes Canadians from all walks of life with the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers, among many other honours and awards.

In a world where the polarizing forces of party politics make headlines, inspiring cynicism and apathy instead of civic engagement, Canadians are fortunate indeed to enjoy the leadership of not only a royal family whose appeal transcends political and national borders, but also the wisdom of vice-regents like Georges Vanier, Pauline McGibbon, Lincoln Alexander, Elizabeth Dowdswell, David Johnston, and Julie Payette.

What does all of this have to do with Lindsay? Well, did you know that the longest-serving lieutenant governor of Ontario was born and raised in Lindsay? Albert Matthews (1873-1949) represented the King in Ontario between 1937 and 1946. The son of George Matthews, a prominent Lindsay businessman who ran a meat-packing company, Albert graduated from Lindsay Collegiate Institute and eventually married Margaret Maud Whiteside, of town.

Though he was active in Liberal circles and personally acquainted with Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, Albert Matthews never held elected office. He worked as an investment broker in Toronto, served on the board of governors for McMaster University, was active in the Baptist Church, and headed Canada's delegation to the League of Nations in 1927.

Appointed during the Great Depression, Albert Matthews took up his post at a difficult time both politically and economically. Committed to cutting back on lavish expenditures, the provincial government of Mitchell Hepburn withdrew provincial funding for the vice-regal office and closed down Chorley Park, the Lieutenant Governor's palatial residence in Toronto. Albert Matthews graciously carried out his vice-regal duties in austere circumstances, a testimony to his character and unwavering belief that service to one's fellow citizen need not be defined by opulence.

Not all was doom and gloom, though. In 1939, Albert Matthews had the pleasure of welcoming to the province Their Majesties

King George VI and Queen Elizabeth on their cross-country tour of Canada – a tour designed to lift the spirits of a nation beset by economic depression and to reinforce Canada's place on the world stage ahead of the Second World War. Said Matthews in a speech about a month after the tour's conclusion: "His Majesty is King of Canada, 'not by might nor power,' but because he is to Canadians a vivid symbol of their nationality. His presence has infused us with fresh courage, a renewed spirit of enthusiasm, and a keen sense of unity."

Albert Matthews died in 1949, but the vice-regal presence continued to be felt in Lindsay, with the Hon. John Kellier MacKay opening the Victoria County Historical Society's first museum in 1962; the Hon. Earl Rowe opening a refurbished Academy Theatre in 1963; and the Hon. James Bartleman opening the 150<sup>th</sup> Lindsay Central Exhibition in 2004.