

## Arts & Culture Wall of Fame – 2009 Inductees

### Robert Bracken

Robert was born in Midland, Ontario, on June 15, 1950 and resided in Niagara Falls for over fifty years. Robert attended Stamford High School and Brock University. He worked for James Studio for many years and his hobby was model airplanes.

Robert has always had an avid interest in Canadian aviation and in 1985 he decided to write a book in recognition of 2nd World War Spitfire fighter pilots and ground crew, which had never before been documented.

Robert became a member of the Canadian Air Force Association and an associate member of Canadian Fighter Pilots Association. These groups had lists of membership with names and addresses, which he interviewed for his books. Realizing time was of an essence to gather this information he went about documenting all he could for future reference.

Over the next ten years Robert located, contacted, and personally interviewed many of these veterans. He recorded personal stories and collected photos never before seen even by historians. Several of the pilots were from Niagara Falls, and in doing this project he was able to reunite several pilots with the planes which they flew.

Several years into the research he realized that one book would never be enough and that a series of 3 would be his goal. In 1995 Spitfire Volume 1 was published and in 1999 Volume 2. He finished his third manuscript shortly before his death on September 29, 2008 which remains at the publisher.

Robert's interest in Spitfire's led to a significant contribution to the City of Niagara Falls and to Canadian aviation history.

### Olha & Mykola Kolankiwsky

Olha and Mykola Kolankiwsky, in founding and developing the Niagara Falls Art Gallery, created an internationally recognized culture legacy for our city. The gallery houses, among other works, an important William Kurelek collection including the passion of Christ series and the more recently acquired John Burtiak Niagara Collection. The Niagara Collections includes representations of the falls and other regional landmarks. This gallery exists because of the vision and commitment of the Kolankiwsky's, who immigrated to Canada in 1950 from France.

A journalist and a beautician, they were not wealthy art patrons; rather they were exceptional community-minded individuals who recognized the need for a gallery in our city and dedicated their lives to developing a world-class culture resource. In 1970 they purchased the Passion of Christ series with plans to make it the central focus for the gallery.

They bought two acres of land and financed the building of the gallery 1970. They had a special interest in the works of Mykola Krychevsky, a well known Ukraine-born post-impressionist painter, and those of William Kurelek a Canadian artist known for his representation of twentieth-century prairie life and of various ethnic groups.

In 1979, they were the driving force in setting up a charity to take over the collection and building on their deaths, to ensure public access to important works of Canadian art. Over the years, they worked hard to attract volunteers to help run the gallery and their enthusiasm was infectious. They bequeathed over 700 art pieces to the Niagara Falls Art Gallery and the permanent collection continues to grow.

### **W. Bruce Leslie**

Bruce Leslie was born on September 27, 1909. He was an only child whose early days were filled working with his father learning the tricks of the newspaper trade before he officially joined the The Review staff in October 1928.

Starting in the editorial department, Bruce held several positions including telegraph editor where he was responsible for gathering and editing stories that came across the newswire. He matured into city reporter, covering everything from the collapse of the Honeymoon Bridge in 1938 to the latest goings-on at city hall. By the 1940's he moved to the papers advertising department and eventually assumed the role of general manager, editor and acting publisher of The Review in 1956.

Over the years, Bruce was also a popular columnist and wrote several daily columns for The Review including "Scouse" (a comic news column that ran from 1931 to 1940) and "Letters That Missed The Mail" (a folksy humour column that ran from 1958 to 1969) featuring a character named "Joe Swampweed". In local circles, Bruce was often nicknamed "Joe Swampweed" due his strong connection with his column. His most well known column was "From One Angle" which started in 1970 and largely reflected on small moments that took place around his rural Willoughby home. His column featured several recurring characters including his two Yorkshire terriers, his pet cats and notably "Mrs. Green thumb" a pseudonym he used for Wyn, his avid gardening wife. He sold The Review in 1973 to the Thomson Corporation.

Bruce Leslie passed away on December 19, 1995 at the age of eighty-six having spent seven decades as writer, publisher and an active member of the Niagara Falls community.

### **Francis Petrie**

Francis J. Petrie was born in Niagara Falls, on July 19, 1920 and attended Maple Street School and Niagara Falls Collegiate Vocational Institute. He was employed as a research technician at Cyanamid of Canada - Welland Plant, but his great passion was local history. He was best known

for his "History in The News" column in the Niagara Falls Review, starting in 1961 and his 1092nd column had just been published at the time of his death on September 23, 1983.

Francis was appointed in 1970 as the first Official Historian for the City of Niagara Falls. He served as the first Chair of the Niagara Falls LACAC and was a member of the City's board of Museums, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, and the Niagara Falls Public Library Board. He was also a member of various local historical societies and held office in them.

Francis was a popular speaker and taught local history classes in a number of high schools. He also wrote a number of popular local history publications. In 1976, he received a Murie Misty Award for promoting Niagara Falls without being connected to the tourist industry.

Francis accumulated a vast collection of local historical material, of which the major portion, known as the Francis Petrie Collection, is housed in the Niagara Falls Public Library.

His love of local history inspired others to discover their own appreciation for history.

### **Niagara Falls Concert Band**

The Niagara Falls Concert Band has been in existence since 1871. W.A. (Billy) Phillips formed the Clifton Citizen Band in the then newly formed Town of Clifton.

Later when the town of Niagara Falls was created the band changed its name to the Niagara Falls Citizens Band. The band played concerts, parades, socials, and fall fairs. In the early days of the band they had to play evening concerts by kerosene lamps on steel rods stuck in the ground nearby. They played in a new bandstand erected behind the Town Hall (Old City Hall) on Queen Street, later moving to Hanan Park.

The First World War split up the band as some of its members enlisted. It was soon back in service playing for wartime functions. This time the band was named the Niagara Falls Kiltie. Throughout the years the band had many notable bandmasters.

In the 1960s, the band changed its uniform from kilts to trousers and red jackets. The band changed its name to the Niagara Falls Concert Band and it still remains active in the community playing for many city functions.

The Niagara Falls Concert Band has represented the City of Niagara Falls proudly and with dignity and has provided high quality entertainment for 137 years. It has undergone many changes but remains active in the community performing at functions as well as at summer concert series and retirement residences. The band has been instrumental in promoting live music in Niagara Falls and provides a place in which talented musicians can use their skills.