

### **Douglas Mackintosh, Founder of TIARA, 1931 – 2024**

A defiant sound invaded the meeting at the Rockport Recreation Centre. The door suddenly swung open, and Douglas Mackintosh burst in, playing his bagpipes and drowning out the speaker in mid-sentence. The anxious atmosphere instantly changed, and the audience clapped and cheered.

It was November, 1975, and a representative from Parks Canada was speaking to the local Chamber of Commerce. He had expected to be addressing a small gathering, hoping that his announcement would be passively received as good news.

The announcement was startling. Parks Canada, with a huge expansion budget, had grandiose plans for the smallest of all the national parks, with its modest holdings of mainland and islands. So close to Ottawa, so beautiful, and so pristine, the 1000 Islands would be the perfect site for a big flagship wilderness national park. Parks Canada was itching to take over roughly 30 square miles of privately-owned islands and mainland south of the 401. It was confident that would happen easily. Within five years, landowners would willingly sell, the expanded park would become famous, thousands of tourists would visit, and everyone would be happy. Right?

Well, no. Not right!

Douglas was working in Toronto at that time and had heard rumours of Parks Canada's plans. The word "expropriation" was in the air. Before the Rockport meeting that November night, he spread the word among alarmed property owners. So, instead of a few Chamber members, the Parks Canada rep found an angry standing-room-only crowd. These landowners had no intention of selling properties that in many cases had been in their families for generations. When Douglas's bagpipes drowned out the Parks Canada speaker, the crowd roared their approval. Douglas was speaking for them.

That evening, TIARA was born, with Douglas as its founder.

The words "a driving force" certainly applied to Douglas. He got everyone moving, motivating volunteers who scrambled to keep up with his directives. In a few short weeks, TIARA was incorporated, directors were recruited, and hundreds of members signed up.

Douglas was a whirlwind of energy and activity. He contacted people whose property had been already expropriated for a national park. He visited New Brunswick, where fishermen's houses had been demolished to make way for Kouchibouguac National Park, and talked with those who had been displaced. He organized a hard-working committee to fill the Gananoque Secondary School gymnasium with a rally to show support for private ownership of land.

Douglas thought that the fight against Parks Canada needed a two-prong approach. He led the "fighting group", which protested relentlessly, including at the

federal ministerial level. He ensured that TIARA was a clear voice on the advisory committees set up by Parks Canada to try to dampen local fear and anger.

Meanwhile, he organized a complementary approach in the form of TIARA's Study Group, directed by the full-time professional planner that TIARA hired. By coincidence, the first local Official Plan was being drafted at that very time. To ensure the input of a well-informed public, the TIARA Study Group researched and published a study of the 1000 Islands area, and mailed a copy to every property owner. It also organized surveys and small-group meetings, and passed on the results: TIARA was able to show that residents and visitors alike wished to preserve the quiet natural beauty, healthy environment and vibrant social history of the 1000 Islands. Thanks to TIARA, the designation of the 1000 Islands as a "Special Policy Area" is still part of our Official Plan today.

For three years, TIARA consumed nearly all of Douglas's considerable energy. Negotiations with Parks Canada eventually concluded successfully, as their aggressive attitude gradually abated. TIARA's initial focus - to stop government expropriation - could now also change. Today TIARA and the 1000 Islands National Park are good friends, and collaborate with the shared aim of protecting the area's environment.

Douglas resigned as President of TIARA in 1978. During those three intense years, he had set TIARA on the course it follows today. Even after retirement, with his experience, his belief in sound local planning and his respect for the environment, he was often consulted by TIARA's board. Never shy about expressing his convictions, he continued to speak up. For nine years, he was a township councillor, often the only one to advocate for the islands. And as a private citizen, he was always writing letters to the press, speaking at municipal council meetings, and spending hours on the phone to share his views. As you can see in the next article, even in his last few months, Douglas continued to advocate for the 1000 Islands.



What he learned about the environment, he put into practice. He and his wife Blu collaborated with the

Thousand Islands Watershed Land Trust to put a conservation easement on their land to protect its wetlands and forests forever. Ontario Nature recognized their extensive efforts for the environment by making them the recipients of its 2023 Public Service Award

Douglas died on January 14, 2024, at the age of 92. He had led a full and extraordinarily varied life. He had been a soldier, an Olympic skier, a marine contractor, a lawyer, a township councillor, a diver, a crane driver and a boat designer and builder, to name but a few roles. At the Celebration of his Life, his sons spoke about what their father had meant to different people in different ways. They remembered his quiet acts of generosity and support to “underdogs”, people in unfortunate circumstances. They described his life of action, as someone who set an example of working hard and playing hard. They spoke of him as the endless seeker of knowledge, the teller of stories, the tireless dispenser of advice and information, and finally, the courageous warrior. It was these wide-ranging qualities that served him well as the founder of TIARA and as an extraordinary human being.

### TIARA Advocacy in 2023

Most municipalities in Ontario have Environmental Advisory Committees that help inform development decisions and long-term planning. The Township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands (TLTI) no longer does. In the past TLTI did have an Environmental Advisory Committee, but its mandate was not renewed in 2018, and the township has not had a formal mechanism for environmental advice since that time.

On July 4, 2023 Douglas Mackintosh (TIARA founder) and Mike Bell (TIARA board member) presented a statement to TLTI requesting the re-establishment of an Environmental Advisory Committee. Douglas outlined the role TIARA played in establishing the protected Special Policy Area of 30 square miles of land from Hwy 401 to the St Lawrence River (including the Canadian islands). Its “natural beauty and special character was to be protected from overdevelopment to ensure that it remains a natural and cultural showcase for the future.” TIARA emphasized that this mandate requires consistent ongoing environmental stewardship, and that the “visible attractiveness of the environment” as specified in the Canadian Heritage River requirements is a chief element of ecotourism and the economic well being of TLTI.

To date TLTI has not acknowledged or responded to our request to pursue responsible development with the valuable help an Environmental Advisory Committee would contribute.

TIARA has also spoken out against a proposed by-law amendment by Kehoe Developments to rezone the shore of McCrae’s Bay from its current Shoreline Residential, Tourist, Commercial, and Provincially Significant Wetland zoning to Rural Industrial zoning.

At a public meeting held by the Township on September 5<sup>th</sup>, Douglas and Blu Mackintosh and Mike Bell spoke in opposition to the proposed zoning change. They pointed out that the proposed manufacturing of dock components by Kehoe Development could be sited further away from the shoreline, and thus avoid negative impacts to the river and wildlife, as well as neighboring residents, while still providing economic development.

About 50 people attended the meeting, and all attendees except Kehoe opposed the change. The township also received at least 18 letters opposing the proposed zoning change. The mayor and Councilor Lackey recused themselves from this discussion for conflict of interest. Legal challenges are being considered by local residents whose well-being and property valuations have suffered.

### Partnerships

TIARA is working to strengthen connections to the many organizations working to preserve the environment and culture of this special region.

At the end of September TIARA members attended the First Peoples’ Performing Arts Festival in Gananoque. Events included Sky Dancers, an Indigenous Makers Market, two films, storytelling through drumming and song, and a Little Shoes Memorial Ceremony commemorating the children who were forcibly removed from their families and communities and sent to boarding schools.

In October TIARA member Marion MacLeod and Sandra Lawn attended the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual River Symposium hosted by the River Institute, and spoke briefly to the group. The River Institute, located in Cornwall, was established in 1994. Its mission is to provide “new knowledge, education, technical services and community outreach to improve the health of the St. Lawrence River and other freshwater ecosystems.”

### Please renew your membership!

Our membership year runs from May 1 to April 30. If you did not renew in 2023, please consider an extra donation for the 2024-2025 year. The basic cost is \$40 for individuals and \$50 for a family. You can renew, join, and/or make an additional donation with PayPal on our website [www.tiaraweb.org](http://www.tiaraweb.org) (click on the Membership & Survey button), or send a cheque to TIARA, 120 Cross Cemetery Road, Lansdowne ON K0E 1L0.

You can also help build TIARA’s membership by inviting a neighbour to join! We very much appreciate your support and the extra donations that many have made.

#### TIARA

THOUSAND ISLANDS ALLIANCE of RIVER ADVOCATES

120 Cross Cemetery Road, Lansdowne ON K0E 1L0

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