



Historically Speaking

The Newsletter of the Cobourg and
District Historical Society

February 2011 — Issue 241

Writing a Small Town's History: Port Hope

The Cobourg and District Historical Society invites you to join us for Ian Montagnes's presentation on the history of Port Hope. Montagnes was formerly editor-in-chief at the University of Toronto Press and has a keen interest in local history. His well-received book *Port Hope: A History* is "a series of snapshots of progress through two centuries, pictures of what is and what was, connected by words. In them may be found many of the personalities, the aspirations and achievements, sometimes the disappointments, and the social and economic trends that have shaped the modern town."

Join us in the Citizens' Forum, Victoria Hall, on Tuesday, February 22. Doors open at 7:30 and the presentation begins at 8:00.

All are welcome so bring a friend!

Our next two meetings:

March 22, 2011	Catherine Milne	What's Brewing at the Cobourg Brewery?
April 26, 2011	Various	Cobourg Memorabilia plus our Annual General Meeting

Paul Kane's Cobourg Connection

by Ciara Ward

The CDHS Archives has received several exciting new donations so far this year, but one of the most exciting was a new addition to our reference collection. Kenneth Lister, the Assistant Curator within the Department of World Cultures at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto donated a copy of his new book *Paul Kane The Artist/ Wilderness to Studio*. The CDHS Archives owns two portraits by Paul Kane, making this donation all the more special.

Paul Kane, the son of Michael and Frances (nee Loach) Kane, was born in Ireland on 3 September 1810. Kane is best known for his paintings of the First Nations and scenes from western Canada. While still young he immigrated with his family to Upper Canada, settling in Toronto. In 1834 he moved to Cobourg, Upper Canada (now Ontario), and worked in the Clench furniture factory. It was here he met his future wife, Harriet Peek Clench who he would marry in 1853. Harriet was the daughter of his employer Freeman Clench and Eliza Cory.

While living in Cobourg, Kane painted several portraits of local individuals, including Freeman and Eliza Clench, Harriet's youngest sister Eliza, as well as Cobourg's first Mayor and his wife, William Weller and Mercy Wilcox Weller. These portraits hang in the reading room of the CDHS Archives.

Kane left Cobourg for Detroit Michigan, and toured the American Midwest, working as a portrait painter, until he reached New Orleans. Once in New Orleans

he left for France where he travelled Europe studying the works of the Great Masters and honing his style. Eventually he returned to Toronto in early 1845, and embarked on his trip into the Canadian West, where he travelled with the Hudson's Bay Company, documenting the Canadian First Nations. Kane died in Toronto on 20 February 1871.

William Weller and Mercy Wilcox Weller

William Weller was born 13 May 1798 in Upstate New York. In 1820 he married his first wife Mercy Wilcox, with whom he had eleven children. In 1825 he started his



William Weller by Paul Kane

career as a stagecoach operator, and from there he expanded his routes and cultivated partnerships, this lead him to eventually invest in the coach line which would one day make him famous. By 1830 Weller had developed his own coach line from York to Prescott, and by 1832 he was the sole proprietor of the York – Kingston line. In 1834 he further expanded his investments by purchasing the International Telegraph Company. By 1835 Weller was operating coach lines between Cobourg, Port Hope and Peterborough as well as Hamilton, Toronto and

Holland Landing. It was around this time that he also acquired the Steamboat Hotel (later called the Albion). In 1838 he became the President of the Police Board.

On 18 February 1840 the Governor General Lord Sydenham (at the time known as Poulett Thompson), challenged Weller Coach Lines to get him from Toronto to Montreal in thirty-eight hours; a trip that generally took five or six days and was 360 miles long. Weller accepted the challenge and did it in thirty-five hours and forty minutes, and was rewarded handsomely for his troubles.

Three short years later, after his rise to fame Weller suffered the loss of his wife Mercy who is buried at Cobourg's St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church Cemetery.

By 1845 Weller had invested in the Cobourg-Rice Lake Plan Road and Ferry Company, which would later prove to be the undoing of his fortunes. Also in that year he married his second wife Margaret McKechnie, with whom he had an additional eleven children, making him the father of twenty-two. From 1852-1857 Weller served as a Town Councillor, and from

1850-1863 he served as Cobourg's Mayor. On 21 September 1863, after suffering for three weeks from an illness Weller passed away. He is cited as being buried with full Masonic Honors, as he was a distinguished member of that order.



Mercy Wilcox Weller by Paul Kane

From the Archives

Name That Building

Where in Cobourg is this building? See March's Historically Speaking for the answer!



Photograph courtesy of the Cobourg Public Library.

A letter in the CDHS Archives: Lenah Fisher's letter to her mother relating the Royal Tour

McDonald Hall

Guelph Ontario

My Dearest Mother,

Well the excitement is over. The Prince was here yesterday and it certainly was terrifically exciting. He arrived at twelve thirty just in time for lunch. The girls were all at the front windows and just as he was coming up the walk we sang "Jonnies in Town" which is his favorite song. There were about umpteen reporters, movie men and official photographers who took the Prince's picture as he entered. After having lunch with us in the big dinning room we all assembled in the gym, which is on the second floor. The Prince came in and shook hands with all of us, I was the second one to be honoured. We were all simply thrilled to death as he was going down the steps at the front door the photographers and movie men again got busy. They ask the Prince to remain on the steps a minute and the

girls all crowded round. And my dear “I” was standing beside his Royal highness. So where the movie of his tour through Canada is shown when it comes to his Guelph visit first look for this child and you can’t miss the Prince of Wales.

On the way from our residence over to the boys gym, we were singing Johnnies in Town. The movie men got in front and took a movie of us singing, I was in the front ranks. Half-way across the campus I found myself walking on the grass just opposite the Prince so he said to me “Do you like dancing?” I said, “yes I love it,” he said “Do you do very much of it here?” I said “we usually dance for a while after supper in the gym,” he said “that’s great.” And then the crowd shoved me (the great big brutes). Later on one of the official photographers said to me “Have you any souvenirs,” and I told him, “yes.” He asked to see it so I produced the end of a cigarette which the Prince had just thrown away. The photographer asked me to hold it up and my dear he took my picture holding the cigarette.

When he was seated in the car some of the girls who were gathered ‘round the car ask him for cigarettes for souvenirs. He produced his case and gave all the girls on that side of the car. I was standing in a mob on the other side he only had one cig. left so what do you suppose he did? Simply reached out over the heads of all the girls close up to the car and handed his last cigarette to me. Was I thrilled?! I simply looped.

This morning when I went in for my mail what should there be in my box but a package with just these words from the Royal Prince. On opening I discovered a huge box of cigarettes in a box, each cig. is marked with the Prince of Wales our private best. I feel as though I were in heaven. Its getting late so must close. So write soon, and tell the news.

Love of your own little daughter,

Lenah

P.S. For heavens sakes don’t have this put in the paper!

Submissions

The CDHS Newsletter welcomes submissions – short articles, announcements, book reviews, letters to the editor, etc. – that will be of interest to members in the Cobourg area. Articles should generally be limited to 300 words although exceptions can be made. Submissions should be sent to the editor at 24 Pebble Beach Drive, Cobourg, ON, K9A 2C5 or by email to ken.strauss@sympatico.ca.

Notes and Notices

Cobourg Museum Foundation

The Annual General Meeting of the Cobourg Museum Foundation will be in Victoria Hall, February 10, 2011 at 7 pm. A presentation at the meeting will detail “The Sifton-Cook Heritage Centre” which is planned for the corner of Orr and Durham Streets in Cobourg.

Period Costume Dinner

Come in pre-1867 period costume to a dinner on Wednesday, February 23, 2011 at 6:00 pm in the Calvary Pentecostal Church (former Bingo Hall), 401 Croft Street, Port Hope. Cost is \$20.00 per person. Please call 905-342-2657 for tickets. This event is hosted by the Port Hope and District Historical Society (formerly EDHS).

Historical Festival

Visit the Pre-Confederation Historical Festival on Sunday, March 27, 2011 from 10 am to 4 pm at the Port Hope Lions Centre, 29 Thomas Street, Port Hope. A light lunch will be available. For additional information on this event visit the website at www.porthopehistorical.ca phone 905-342-2657. This event is hosted by the Port Hope and District Historical Society (formerly EDHS).

Heritage Days

The 2011 Heritage Days exhibit will be at the Northumberland Mall in Cobourg on Friday, February 25 from 1:00 pm to 9:00 pm and on Saturday, February 26 from 9:30 am to 6:00 pm. Volunteers are needed to attend our display. If you are willing to help on either day please contact Jean Coghlan at 905-372-9912.

Book Sale

The CDHS will hold a sale/exchange of books of historical interest prior to our March meeting. Please plan to bring any books that you would like to pass to a new home.

Ontario Heritage Conference

Mark your calendar—the 2011 Ontario Heritage Conference will be held in Cobourg June 3 to June 5, with activities centred in Victoria Hall. The theme is “Creating the

Will” and explores strategies for promoting heritage and architectural conservation. All who are interested in local history will surely have an interest in this topic.

We will be able to provide more information in future editions of the newsletter. Meanwhile, you can see a video promoting the conference (and Cobourg) at www.cobourgtourism.ca/video.html, which features some photos from our CDHS archives.

Websites

There are many websites with great Cobourg-related historical material.

The CDHS website: www.cdhsarchives.org,

Snippets of Cobourg history and current happenings: www.hardscrabble.ca

Cobourg History: <http://www.cobourghistory.ca/>

Ontario Veteran Archive: <http://www.ontarioveteranarchive.ca/>

Trent University Archives:

<http://www.trentu.ca/admin/library/archives/exhibits.htm>

CDHS Executive for 2010 – 2011

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