



# Historically Speaking

The Newsletter of the Cobourg and  
District Historical Society

January 2010 — Issue 240

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## **Hot Off the Presses: The Role of Cobourg Newspapers in Creating a Community**

The Cobourg and District Historical Society invites you to join us for Rob Washburn's presentation on the history of newspapers in Cobourg. Washburn is a Professor of Journalism at Loyalist College in Belleville and has authored numerous articles for local publications.

Citizens' Forum, Victoria Hall on Tuesday, January 25. Doors open at 7:30 and the presentation begins at 8:00.

All are welcome so bring a friend!

## Our next two meetings:

February 22, 2011	Ian Montagnes	Writing a Small Town's History: Port Hope
March 22, 2011	Catherine Milne	What's Brewing at the Cobourg Brewery?

## Transportation to Meetings

Some of our members have trouble getting to our meetings. Walking is not an option for many and not everyone has a car. To reduce the problem the CDHS Executive will be attempting to match those who need transportation with those who are willing to drive. If you would like a ride to a meeting or can provide one please contact Ken Strauss, 905-377-9854 or email to [ken.strauss@sympatico.ca](mailto:ken.strauss@sympatico.ca). Remember to include your phone number and address!

# Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant Update

by Ciara Ward, CDHS Archivist

In August 2010 the CDHS Archives received an Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant to fund their new project



*CDCI East students Emilco Davila Jonel and Jordan Watson interview Gerald Wilks, a WWII Naval veteran.*

Ontario  
Trillium Foundation



Fondation Trillium  
de l'Ontario

“Cobourg’s Veterans: An Oral History”. This project is a collaborative effort between the archives, local veterans (of any conflict and age) and high school students. Local students from the CDCI East and CDCI West are interviewing veterans

and recording their experiences. The result of this project will be made available through local libraries and schools on multimedia CDs with audio components, and as a bound text for the hearing impaired.

On 22 November 2010 the project began with Mr. Brian Oakes’ grade 10 and 12 history classes. Ten groups with four students each were matched with a veteran. Teams were named for the phonetic alphabet from Tango to Zulu. They were each given a student orientation package with information about the project, timelines pertaining to Cobourg’s military history, and internet links to articles pertaining to Canada’s military history. The interviews took place at the CDCI East high school.

At the end of the first interview session students filed out of the interview room, filled with excitement. “That was the all most interesting thing I will do in school

year! Thank you so much!” gushed grade 12 student Sophie Hough, after her interview with Mr. John Aitken, who served with the UN Emergency Force at Gaza Strip, and in the Sinai Desert.

While many of participating veterans served in the Second World War, there were two Korean War veterans, one veteran who had served in the Bosnian War, as well as a peacetime Naval veteran. Each interview session leaves the students more and more interested, not just in Canadian military history, but in Cobourg’s military history.

Beginning on 6 December 2010 the CDCI West will begin their oral history interviews, which will wrap up the project until February 2011. There are a total of 32 veterans and 72 students participating in this project.

If there is a veteran in your family, we urge you to speak to them about their experiences,

before their oral histories are lost in time. For this reason the CDHS Archives has launched its “Cobourg’s Veterans: An Oral History” project: to capture the memories and experiences of our local veterans, and preserve them for future generations. If you or a family member is interested in participating in this project, please contact the archives.

*CDCI East students Won Yung Chung and Lyssa Keil interview Frances Gage, a former WREN code breaker.*



# Tale of the Traveling Millstone

by Judith Goulin

This tale begins and ends with a large stone and at the heart of the story is a once grand estate by Lake Ontario. In 1902, Gen. Charles Fitzhugh, one of the American summer colonists, acquired just over 100 acres of land overlooking the lake at the east end of Cobourg. On this property he built two magnificent homes, Ravensworth, and a second almost identical dwelling known as East House for his son Carroll. The two mansions were fully landscaped with lawns, gardens and mazes in front and farmland at the back.



The end of the First World War marked the demise of the American summer colony period in Cobourg. In 1920, the Fitzhughs sold Ravensworth, their magnificent estate. Over the next 50 years, it had a succession of owners: Richard Baylor Hickman, Col. John Foote, Dr. D.E. Mikel and Lewis Peters.

The beautifully manicured gardens endured through this post-Fitzhugh period. One of the ornamental gardens on the estate featured two millstones. One can only speculate whether they were part of the original garden design or if they were placed there during another owner's time. Regrettably, the origin of the millstones is also lost to history.

East House was destroyed by fire on Christmas Day 1976.

Don Macklin, a long-time Cobourg resident and source of local lore, enjoys gardening. After the fire, the caretaker was dismissed and the property stood vacant. Mr. Macklin, who lives nearby, with his keen gardener's eye appreciated the beauty of the Fitzhugh estate gardens as he walked his dog through the grounds. Don noted the millstones in particular, and wondered whether they might have potential in another garden. He also knew that the property would soon be developed.

In 1980, prior to the bulldozers moving in, there was a huge auction sale where many people bought treasures acquired by the various owners over a period of nearly 80 years. A couple of items that escaped the auctioneer's hammer, considered treasures by some, were the two millstones.

At that time, Don Macklin was the manager of the Cobourg Marina. He envisioned the millstones as part of a waterfront garden to be located just east of the foot of Hibernia Street.

Through Don's intervention the Cobourg Works Department sought permission from the project manager at the Fitzhugh site to move the two millstones to the harbour. The first of the two stones was moved. In the interim between the first stone arriving at its new destination and the front-end loader returning to pick up the second stone, the construction workers had demolished it.

And then there was one. As a point of interest, millstones were used in pairs, one on top of the other, with the bottom or bed stone being flat and stationary and the top

or runner stone which would rotate 100 to 150 revolutions per minute to effect the actual grinding of grain. The working faces of both stones always had patterns or grooves cut into them.

The Parks Department staff created a garden centred around the surviving millstone. Although this garden was the brainchild of Macklin, its location lay outside of the department's official plan, so he made a gentlemen's agreement with the town workers that in return for staff planting it every spring with annuals, he would undertake to maintain it all summer. This arrangement lasted for many years. This circular garden featured colourful annuals in the shape of an anchor, appropriate for a lakeside planting, with the Fitzhugh millstone at its centre.

True to his word, Macklin faithfully maintained this garden for over 25 years. He also took care of the gardens around the marina and yacht club buildings. As time passed he decided it was time to give up this long-term volunteer endeavour. He knew that the maintenance of the millstone garden would not continue after his time. Once again, with his usual foresight, he wondered where the millstone might go next after the garden was returned to grass.

He was aware of the town's plan to create a new garden on Bay Street and hoped that the millstone could be relocated there. The Fitzhugh millstone now enhances this lovely and lush sensory lakeside garden brimming with annuals and perennials and flat rock surfaces for sitting.

The millstone which was once at the east end of the waterfront in Cobourg, journeyed to the west end, then traveled back to the east end, closer to its earlier location at the Fitzhugh estate, always remaining near the lake. Here ends the tale, but if only it could come full circle... if we knew from which mill the traveling millstone originated.



### ***Books Consulted***

Spilsbury, John R. ed. Cobourg Early Days and Modern Times. Cobourg, ON: Cobourg Book Committee, 1981.

Fischer, George; Harris, Mark. Ontario's Historic Mills. Erin ON: Boston Mills Press, 2007.

### ***Other Sources***

Fitzhugh Family. Vertical File. Local History Room, Cobourg Public Library.

Macklin, Don. Personal interview. Cobourg, ON.



# From the Archives

## *An Excerpt from Fred Field's Reminisces c. 1890*

"When I was young.

The Pond North-west of town was the scene of many of our activities, both winter and summer. In winter when the pond was frozen, ice-boating was a favourite sport. The boats were equipped with sails and wooden skates, two boys to a boat.

On Christmas day many hundreds of young and old came out to skate in the cold crisp air, my father skated with us when he was over sixty-five. In large families such as ours the Christmas party was always an event we looked forward to. My grandfather invited all the relatives to dinner. It took three complete sets of china to set the tables.

One day the west end lads heard there were long red edibles in a show owned by a coloured man, Mr. Rush. We were told they were red bananas, the first to be imported into Cobourg. We ran to the shop each eagerly clutching five cents the price of one banana. Our money spent, the great treat in hand, we proceeded up King Street spitting banana all over the board walk.

I remember quite a commotion going on in the house, especially whispers behind closed doors. Earlier my older brother and sister dressed in the latest fashion had gone to the Powell's house on D'Arcy Street for the wedding of Miss Powell to Mr. Harry Winch of Peterborough.

The guests were told on their arrival that the bride had eloped the night before with a Mr. Beatty. They became the parents of the late Sir Edward Beatty, president of the C.P.R. One of the most fashionable weddings to take place in Cobourg was that of the granddaughter of General Ulysses Grant, a former president of the U.S.A.

In those early days King Street on the North side was called the fifty-cent side, because it had a wooden sidewalk and a wooden roof like a veranda. On a rainy day one could walk from the present bowling alley as far as Fardella's Fruit Store without benefit of an umbrella."

## Books of Interest

*The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History.* Written by Robert M. Edsel with Bret Witter in 2009. Published by Center Street.

History buffs, art lovers, and people interested in documentary war stories will thoroughly enjoy *The Monuments Men* by Robert M. Edsel. The story centres around a handful of American and British men, who left their civilian careers to join the World War II epicentre in Europe. Their mandate was to save the world's great art treasures from destruction by the Nazis. Without vehicles, office support, or even authority, these clever and courageous men accomplished miracles in Belgium, France and Germany. For a similar story about the art rescue in Italy, a good follow-up read is *Venus Fixers: The Untold Story of the Allied Soldiers Who Saved Italy's Art During World War II* written by Ilaria Brey and published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in 2009.

## Notes and Notices

### ***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](http://www.cobourgtourism.ca/video.html), which features some photos from our CDHS archives.

## ***Heritage Days***

The 2011 Heritage Days exhibit will be at the Northumberland Mall in Cobourg on February 25 from 5pm-9pm and on February 26 from 10am-5pm. 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.

## ***Websites***

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

The CDHS website: [www.cdhsarchives.org](http://www.cdhsarchives.org),

Snippets of Cobourg history and current happenings: [www.hardscrabble.ca](http://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>

## ***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 [ken.strauss@sympatico.ca](mailto:ken.strauss@sympatico.ca) or by mail to 24 Pebble Beach Drive, Cobourg, ON, K9A 2C5.

## **CDHS Executive for 2010 – 2011**

Acting President	David Gregory	<a href="mailto:drgreg@eagle.ca">drgreg@eagle.ca</a>
Vice President	Ken Strauss	<a href="mailto:ken.strauss@sympatico.ca">ken.strauss@sympatico.ca</a>
Acting Treasurer	David Gregory	<a href="mailto:drgreg@eagle.ca">drgreg@eagle.ca</a>
Recording Secretary	Jackie Hick	<a href="mailto:mikeandjackie@sympatico.ca">mikeandjackie@sympatico.ca</a>
Correspondence	Norma McGrath	
Archives Chair	Cath Oberholtzer	<a href="mailto:cober@eagle.ca">cober@eagle.ca</a>
Membership	Martha Watson	<a href="mailto:mwatson5@sympatico.ca">mwatson5@sympatico.ca</a>
Programme	Judith Goulin	<a href="mailto:jgoulin@hotmail.com">jgoulin@hotmail.com</a>
Newsletter Editor	Ken Strauss	<a href="mailto:ken.strauss@sympatico.ca">ken.strauss@sympatico.ca</a>
Past President	Libby Seekings	