

# Historically Speaking

The Newsletter of the Cobourg and District  
Historical Society

January 2021 — Issue 319

## The Lost Villages

On Tuesday, January 26, Jim Brownell will inform us on the Lost Villages. The Lost Villages are ten communities in the former townships of Cornwall and Osnabruck (now South Stormont) near Cornwall, which were permanently submerged due to the creation of the Saint Lawrence Seaway in 1958. The communities were deemed expendable to ensure future prosperity for the entire Great Lakes watershed.

Jim Brownell is a former MPP and has been deeply involved in the preservation of artifacts and social history of the people from these villages for years. Jim grew up in Moulinette, Ontario and is now the President of the Lost Villages Historical Society in Long Sault.



All members are invited to join us electronically on Tuesday, January 26 at 07:30 PM. Please register in advance by visiting

[https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_kYRynGz7T1eWVPwuX4D9mg](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_kYRynGz7T1eWVPwuX4D9mg)

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar. If you have any questions concerning registration, please contact Brian Murphy, Membership Chair at [brianincobourg@gmail.com](mailto:brianincobourg@gmail.com)

We look forward to you joining our upcoming CDHS webinar!

## Our Previous Meeting

The story of the sinking of the HMCS Skeena — a World War II destroyer that sank ships, saved lives and lost 15 of its own when it ran aground near Reykjavik, Iceland — was presented at our November meeting by Christopher Barker.

Lieutenant Barker was born and raised in Cobourg. He graduated from the Cobourg District Collegiate Institute “West” in 1982. Upon graduation he attended the Great Lakes International School of Marine Technology and went to sea in the summer of 1982. After spending three seasons aboard various great lakes and deep-sea vessels employed as a junior engineering officer, he graduated with a Diploma in Marine Engineering Technology and successfully completed his Engi-



neering Watch Keeper’s exams from Transport Canada. In the fall of 1985, Lieutenant Barker joined the Royal Canadian Naval Reserves, HMCS York in Toronto and had the opportunity to serve aboard several naval vessels including HMCS St Croix and HMCS Assinibone.

In 1993, Lieutenant Barker transferred to the Canadian Armed Forces Cadet Instructors Cadre and attended CFB Borden, where he completed his Basic Officer’s Training Course. After further training at HMCS Cataraqui (CFB Kingston), he completed his Military Occupation Course and was commissioned in the fall of 1994. Upon commission he was granted a transfer to the Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corps “Skeena” in Port Hope. In 2003 he was awarded the Canadian Forces Decoration with a further bar in 2013. Since joining the ship’s company of Skeena, he has been employed in various roles at the local unit and assumed command 2006–2009.

Lieutenant Barker is also a member of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 133 Cobourg, the Crow’s Nest Naval Club in St. John’s Newfoundland and the Naval Officers Association of Canada.

## Future Cobourg Historical Society Programs

The CDHS Programme Committee has planned a great selection of speakers for our 2020-2021 season. Although the ongoing pandemic has forced us to cancel our physical meetings we will have virtual meetings each month. You will be able to enjoy a glass of wine while listening from home. Unfortunately, we have no way to deliver Leona's cookies!

CDHS members will receive a webinar registration email approximately two weeks prior to a meeting. Those who register will be sent a reminder email shortly before each meeting.

**February: *What is Sir John A Macdonald's Real Place in Canadian History?*** Arthur Milne  
Our first Prime Minister's governance has recently become a topic of controversy. Arthur Milne will explore this topic.

**March: *The History of the Cobourg Public Library*** Heather Viscount  
There is evidence to indicate the presence of a public-use library in Cobourg as early as the 1830's. The early library was designed to provide educational opportunities for tradesmen through books and lectures. By 1886 there were 128 subscribers from Cobourg and Hamilton Township..

**April: *The Wreck of the HMS Speedy: The Making of a History Book*** Dan Buchanan  
The History Guy, Dan Buchanan will speak on the challenges of writing a history while also telling the fascinating story of the loss of the Speedy in Lake Ontario off the coast of Brighton in 1804.

### ***After Meeting Social***

When the virtual meeting finishes don't change the channel; stay around for some fun! After each meeting we will open the Zoom webinar to everyone for a "social". You will be able to see all participants who have their camera enabled. If you have a microphone you can ask the speaker questions one-on-one, chat with the crowd and generally do what we usually do at a physical meeting.

## It Isn't All Bad!

The COVID pandemic has made us all change the ways in which we interact with others. Surprisingly not all the changes are bad – we now have the opportunity to visit many historic sites from the comfort of our living rooms and accompanied by a personal guide. The following are examples of what is available with a little searching.

Would you like to visit Bletchley Park in the UK?

Bletchley is midway between London and Birmingham and was the home of British codebreaking efforts during WWII. Their work was popularized in the recent movie

*The Imitation Game* starring Benedict Cumberbatch. You can visit

<https://www.tnmoc.org/events> for a list of events at the Bletchley Park Museum. Mostly free, you can tour the museum on your own, listen to lectures on the work done there or even have a tour accompanied by a knowledgeable live guide to answer your questions.



If your interest is architecture, the Martin House in Buffalo, NY, is one of the most famous



products of the genius of Frank Lloyd Wright. Due to the pandemic this house is closed to physical visitors, but you can visit

from the comfort of your home on a 45-minute virtual tour. A docent will lead you in real-time through the first floor of the Martin House, down the pergola, and inside the conservatory. Along the way you can view the collections and historic landscape. You can pose your questions in the chat function during this Zoom tour. These virtual tours will be offered on Thursdays at 2pm beginning January 21. You can reserve your spot online by visiting the Martin House website at [https://www.martinhouse.org/tour\\_descriptions.cfm](https://www.martinhouse.org/tour_descriptions.cfm). Unfortunately there will be no chance to sample traditional Buffalo wings at the Anchor Bar after the tour!

# Northumberland County Archives and Museum Update

## ***Doors Open 2021***

In order to maintain consistency with directives for non-essential travel and focus on hyper-local advertising, Northumberland County will not be coordinating a County-wide Doors Open event in 2021 however, there is the opportunity for interested venues or municipalities to participate in Digital Doors Open by submitting expressions of interest to Ontario Heritage Trust at <https://www.doorsopenontario.on.ca/en/pages/resources/site-submission-form>.

There are no registration fees in 2021 for Digital Doors Open, so if you already have digital content, or are interested in developing it to promote your venue on a provincial level, this is a great opportunity to expand your reach!

You can find many great ideas for Digital Doors Open participation from venues all across province on the [Doors Open website](#) – locally, Trent Hills has submitted excellent walking tours for Campbellford, Hastings and Warkworth. As always, Northumberland County Tourism can help market your venue/digital content through social media or the [events calendar](#). Please contact Eileen Lum at [info@northumberlandtourism.ca](mailto:info@northumberlandtourism.ca) if you have any questions about promotion of your venue or events. NCAM has a modest following (please follow us on Facebook at Northumberland County Archives & Museum), but feel welcome to share your initiatives with us so we can profile and promote what you're planning as well! Going forward, Northumberland County will consider the future of Doors Open Northumberland as part of a strategic approach to investment in local tourism to support effective revitalization of this sector and to ensure efficient use of funding and resources.

## ***Construction Progress***

Despite the construction of the new building being delayed due to the pandemic, the date of opening has not altered from summer of 2022. The Archives is expecting to move the collection in and be set up for researchers in the Summer of 2022. The Main Gallery temporary exhibit will open soon after that.

There will be permanent exhibits in the Entry and foyer of NCAM, permanent Outdoor heritage interpretive stops along the landscaped public pathways and rotating themed exhibitions in the Main Gallery. The permanent exhibition in the Entry will orient the visitor to Northumberland County with an interactive map and nine panels curated to reflect the unique character of the seven member municipalities of Northumberland County: Port Hope; Town of Cobourg; Hamilton; Trent Hills; Cramahe; Alnwick/Haldimand; Brighton as well as the independent Alderville First Nation and a history of the Williams Treaties First Nations

in the area. This permanent exhibit will be designed to raise visitor awareness about Northumberland County history and build an appreciation for the unique cultures, identities and connections across our large geographic area. The Faraday Hall window frame will be on permanent display in the Entry and will also be visible to the public from the outside of NCAM. Interpretive script will detail the history of Victoria College in Cobourg, the Faraday Hall Science Department, famed women scientists from the area and the role of science and ingenuity in Northumberland. The window frame will double as a “selfie spot” for social media promotions.

Ten Outdoor permanent exhibitions (interpretive respite stops) will be established throughout the park-like setting around NCAM to reveal the intriguing historical events that have occurred on the site and convey the natural ecology of the region. The stops will detail:

- History of Amherst and the construction of the first courthouse in Northumberland County
- History of the courthouse (*E.g.* relocation of Council operations from Courthouse to Victoria Hall)
- Trial and hanging of the infamous Dr. Billy King
- History of the House of Refuge
- Fire at House of Refuge
- Transition to Home for the Aged/Long Term Care
- International Ploughing Match & the naming of the Golden Plough Lodge
- Renovations in 30s, 50s and 80s
- Indigenous History
- Plants and wildlife

Additional information on the new Archives and their plans is available is available at [www.northumberlandcounty.ca](http://www.northumberlandcounty.ca). If you have any questions or suggestions you can contact Katie Kennedy, Curator, at [ncam@northumberlandcounty.ca](mailto:ncam@northumberlandcounty.ca).

The Archives has been closed to the public since March, however, their staff take turns going into the Archives as needed to fulfill municipal and public research requests.

## Victoria Park's Bandshell

From early times, Cobourg has had a town band or a musical organization that could entertain, lead parades, and take part in community affairs. There have been some good band leaders along the way. During WWI era, Cobourg Citizens Band served well at various functions and in return received a town grant to defray expenses.

Following WWI and the return of military to civil life, there were quite a number of well-trained musicians in town. A number of these people joined up with the local band. Gradually there developed some dissatisfaction with leadership and a splinter group broke away to form their own organization. It was this group that grew and finally emerged as the Kiltie Band, with kilts as uniforms.

Early in the 1920's the writer has witnessed on the same evening, both of these bands line up at the same time and march away from the town hall. The Cobourg Citizens Band marched east to Victoria Park for their concert. The Kiltie Band marched west to Ontario Street, then to the Lake for hold their concert at the Cedarmere Hotel. Naturally, the kilts attracted the crowds.

Finally the Citizens Band "dried up". The Kiltie Band then received the annual town grant. This organization grew strong, produced high quality music, and became very popular throughout the area.

The bandstand in Victoria Park was of the Victorian era type, with a raised platform, columns supporting an attractive roof cover under which was a flat ceiling. When the band was playing, while seated on the platform, the sound waves hit the ceiling and bounced back to the floor, but the finer tones did not get out to the audience.

Early in the 1930's, a new type of bandshell was developed in the south-western United States. It had an entirely different concept to that of the old traditional type. This new type gave the playing musicians a specially shaped background "shell" that delivered the finer musical tones to the audience. This shell-type of bandstand proved to be a success.

Joe Goldring, bandmaster, obtained a set of plans for a shell bandstand that would accommodate thirty-five musicians. He and his band decided that Cobourg should have such a structure in Victoria Park. The severe economic depression was in full bloom at the time.

Many had no employment. Money was scarce. A building fund was started which grew very slowly. It was nickels and the dimes that fed the fund.

By early 1934, it was decided to proceed with the band shell construction early that spring in order to have the new structure ready for the summer concert season. The people of Cobourg came up true to form. As with many other local improvements, a severe controversy developed. There were those who were violently opposed to placing such a structure in Victoria Park, of all places! There were those who supported the idea. But, among this latter group there was a second controversy as to where the new bandshell should be placed in Victoria Park. Some wanted it in the south-east corner in order to project the sound waves up town. Some wanted it erected in the south-west corner, to favor wealthy donating residents. This caused the actual start of construction to be delayed until the first week in June.

A citizen's construction committee had already been appointed. Local contractors had already been consulted. Apparently, they did not want the contract to build. The writer was invited to superintend the work. Local labour was to be hired and all material to be purchased through local outlets. As an assistant, Charles Kennaugh was hired to direct the carpenter work. Plans from Arizona were followed in producing the structures.

The controversy as to location delayed the early spring start. To settle the dispute. Mayor Jack Delanty called a meeting on the site early in June. He listened to the arguments, pro and con. Then he said: "Gentlemen, we will place the Bandshell here (pointing) and face it due north." That settled the dispute. Construction started immediately. Incidentally, he selected the very spot that I had recommended in a report to the Board of Parks Management and the committee. Within a few days the official sod turning ceremony took place with the Mayor doing the honours.

It was my first task to lay out the work, hire the help, interpret the plans to the carpenters, purchase material and give general supervision. I was also timekeeper and paymaster. This required about 12 to 14 hours each working day. The workers gave of their best. They had a mind to work. By late July, the structures were completed. The official opening took place on Sunday, August 5, 1934 at the time of the "Old Boys Reunion" celebration. Mayor Jack Delanty officiated.

Actually, there are two separate and independent structures. The outer casing and the shell. Both stand on their own foundations and are not tied together in any way. The curved shell

structure is faced with Sitka spruce, the vertical back is of California redwood. The facing and back are fastened to specially framed supports.

With the band in place, the shell vibrates to the sounds of music, thus sending out to the listeners the finer tones. The structure still gives good service to audiences as it did when first constructed.

*Written by Percy Climo with minor edits by Patricia Davidson and reproduced here by permission.*

## **Museum Foundation Book Shop**

The Cobourg Museum Foundation recently announced that it is now online with a new digital Book Store. With their Gift Shop at the Sifton-Cook Heritage Centre closed for the past year due to COVID-19 restrictions, volunteers were looking for ways to be open online. Then, along came the books.

A donation of a large number of new and good used books arrived, making the need for a sales outlet more pressing. With the growing move to online shopping, an online Book Store seemed the logical solution. "Fortunately, the problem and the solution arrived at about the same time", says Treasurer, Stanley Isherwood, "and the Christmas shopping season looked like a good time to be opening, as well!"

The new e-commerce website, [www.cobourgmuseumbooks.ca](http://www.cobourgmuseumbooks.ca), allows shoppers to easily view, order and purchase books for pick-up or delivery. They are categorized as History, Military, Local or Sundry and the site can be searched using such input as title, author or ISBN number.

Since shipping books is generally quite expensive, pick-up at the Heritage Centre, 141 Orr Street, Cobourg, is the best option. Alternatively, they can arrange to deliver locally for a small fee.

The new store is part of the Digital Main Street's ShopHERE program run on the Square platform, with set-up funded by the Federal and Provincial Governments.

For further information contact Stanley Isherwood at [stan.ish@hotmail.com](mailto:stan.ish@hotmail.com) or phone (905)372-0698.

# Belgrave Tower: A Smart Man at the Helm

*Judith Goulin*

If you look at things with curiosity, there is a structure in Port Hope that is sure to make you wonder. Along Peter St. on the north side is a tower that at first glance would appear to be the vestige of an earlier structure, but a closer look confirms that in fact is a free-standing structure. The architecture of the tower mirrors that of the elegant Italianate mansion, an architectural gem, immediately to the west of it. Why a tower? Was it merely a folly, a decoration beside a rich man's house or did the tower serve a purpose?

This house and tower belonged to John Helm Jr. who was a successful businessman in Port Hope during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He learned the foundry trade from his father, John Helm Sr. who owned a foundry on College St. in Cobourg. The foundry was later

purchased by James Crossen, renowned as the largest builder of railway cars in Canada. In 1849 John Jr. began his own foundry and machine shop in Port Hope. A visible measure of his success is the 30 acre estate named Belgrave, that he established at 160 Peter St., in Port Hope.



Not long after Helm's mansion was completed, when there had been many fires around Port Hope, it was evident that there was inadequate water to extinguish them since the volunteer fire brigade had to draw water from the Ganaraska River.

Thus it became obvious that Port Hope needed a municipal water works and the town fathers were keen to get it done. Helm offered his services and based on his reputation he was hired. He installed a system of underground iron pipes from the lake to supply water to hydrants along the downtown streets and supplied a rotary pump and turbines to the municipal water works building located at the Queen St. dam he owned. The innovative technology of Port Hope's water works was at least 10 years ahead of developments in surrounding communities.

Next, Helm turned his attention to his own 30-acre property. Clearly he already had the technology, so he decided to build a water system on his own land to provide water that could be used to extinguish fires and to irrigate his five acres cultivated in lawn and gardens. Helm designed a system to pump lake water that was then stored in a cylindrical pressure tank that stood three storeys high and had a holding capacity of five thousand gallons. Below the tower was a brick lined well, 75 feet deep and 10 feet in diameter. The system has been described as an engineering marvel.

There are men who, to be sure, would be satisfied with the look of a water tower beside their



home, but John Helm was not that person. He went to great lengths to conceal his water system by surrounding it with an elegant structure that matched his mansion...the *piece de resistance*... the tower!

As a piece of architecture, Helm's tower is a classic example of Victorian exuberance, in other words it's over the top! As one observer put it, few utilitarian structures were treated to such a wealth of playful detail. Helm's red brick tower stands an impressive and eye-stopping four storeys high. The ground level windows feature aesthetically pleasing metal coverings, probably placed there to protect the glass, but add charm to something functional. The next levels sport large rectangular windows that are fronted by elaborate wrought iron structures that lend the appearance of balconies. The top storey features circular spoked windows encircled by buff

brick, which adds a lovely contrast to the red brick. Atop the tower sits a gabled roof in a soft shade of green, then crowned, as it were, by a metal structure more delicate than the metalwork on the lower levels. It is sometimes called a widow's walk. The metalwork, of course, was crafted in Helm's foundry. Inside the tower, above the water storage tank, there is a wooden winding staircase that allows access to the highest level.

John Helm's tower is a masterpiece within a masterpiece: the inside exemplifies the engineering feat he created with his brilliant technological mind and the outside showcases the architectural gem he executed. Marvel at his wonderful tower and his stately mansion to truly appreciate the genius of a Port Hope citizen of an earlier era.

Today the Peter St. complex is called Greenwood Towers and includes the mansion, the tower and many affordable housing units.

#### *Sources cited*

Files from Port Hope Archives

Internet article: Two Old Guys Walking: Port Hope Greenwood Tower

(<https://2oldguyswalking.wordpress.com/2018/03/21/greenwood-tower-port-hope-ontario/>)

## **Announcements**

### ***Hastings Historical Society***

The Hastings County Historical Society invites you to browse the latest edition of their *Outlook* newsletter. Go to

<http://hastingshistory.ca/photos/custom/Nov%20Outlook%202020%20Final.pdf>

### ***Archives Survey***

The Northumberland County Archives has a survey to gather input from residents about how they feel the new museum and archives will be of use to them. The survey is available through <https://joinin.northumberland.ca/> which is a collaborative tool utilized by many municipalities. You need to register to be able to fill out the survey, but you can still remain anonymous if you so wish. If you are not interested in filling out the survey this way, you are invited to email them anytime with your thoughts, or we would be happy to set up a phone chat. If you do choose to fill out the survey, you will be entered to win one of four \$25 gift certificates to local independent bookstores!

## We Get Letters

Hello Ms. Woods,

When I befriended Paul Bennett in Toronto, around 1962, he was much involved in the Arts & Craft world of Ontario.

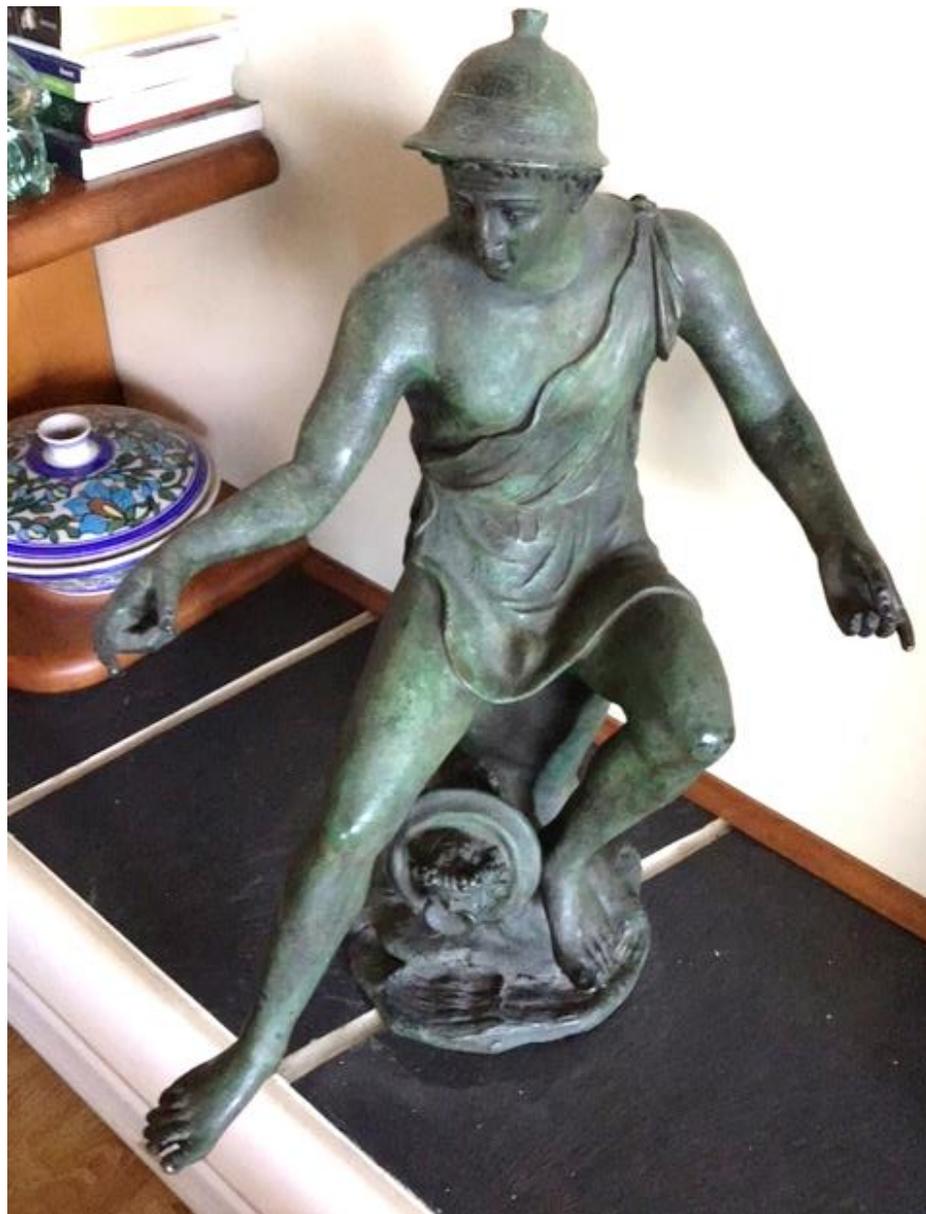
Paul passed away, in Cobourg on May 5th, 2014 and sent me this bronze statue about a month before his death, ostensibly as a “goodbye”, since he knew I admired it.

I am not sure if there was a connection between Cobourg and this statue, which is about 50cm tall and apparently a remnant of a fountain/garden ornament, but I am curious to know if you might have any knowledge about this.

Friends gave me your name and address, as head of the Cobourg Historical Society, hence this enquiry.

Regards,

Fred Pattje,  
Nanaimo, B.C.



If you can help, please contact Leona Woods at [leonawoods@sympatico.ca](mailto:leonawoods@sympatico.ca) or (905) 372-7624

## Member Matters

### ***New Members***

Please join me in welcoming our newest members:

Linda Gibson

Harriet and Gregor Binkley

### ***Dues Reminder***

CDHS memberships usually run from April to April. All 2019-2020 memberships were extended to compensate for cancelled meetings. However, dues are now due for your 2020-2021 membership. Our usual physical meetings will be replaced with an outstanding lineup of virtual presenters. In addition to our "virtual" Zoom Webinars each month, we are still providing our newsletter and continuing to keep our Facebook and <https://cdhs.ca/> website updated. Even without meetings we will be incurring costs that include hosting of the Zoom webinars and our website; honorariums to our presenters, preparation and production of promotional materials (pamphlets, banner), and contributions to permanent historical features that are part of our town. Unfortunately, we have no way to deliver Leona's cookies!

We have kept the membership fees the same as last season:

Individual Membership:       \$30

Family Membership:           \$50

Payment can be made by either Cheque or eTransfer. Please make your cheques payable to the Cobourg and District Historical Society and mail it to :

CDHS Membership Chair

P.O. Box 911, Stn Main

Cobourg. ON K9A 4W4

If you wish to use eTransfer, please send the transfer to our Membership Chair:

[brianincobourg@gmail.com](mailto:brianincobourg@gmail.com)

## CDHS Executive for 2020 – 2021

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