



Historically Speaking

The Newsletter of the Cobourg and
District Historical Society

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The Ontario Car Ferry Company: Cobourg to Rochester

On March 22 we will welcome Cobourg's Ted Rafuse. Now retired, Ted was a teacher and Department Head of History at CDCI East in Cobourg. He and his department developed a course in local history which ignited his interest in the rail history of the area. He has researched and written numerous manuscripts on rail history that have been published in railway journals.

Most notable of his writings are two books about Cobourg area rail history. *Wooden Cars on Steel Rails* outlines the history of Crossen Car Companies, once Cobourg's largest employer. *Coal to Canada* chronicles the history of Ontario Car Ferry Company that operated two ships, Ontario No. 1 and Ontario No.2 between Cobourg and Rochester from 1907 to 1950.

Ted has addressed many groups interested in local rail history. His presentation to CDHS will provide an insight to what was once a part of daily life in Cobourg, the ferry whistle announcing its arrival and departure from the harbour.

Join us on Tuesday, March 22, in Victoria Hall's Citizens' Forum. Doors open at 7:00 PM and the meeting begins at 7:30 PM. Coffee and cookies will be available before the meeting. Admission including refreshments is \$5 for non-members. Membership is \$25 for individuals and \$30 for a family. All are welcome, so bring a friend!

See the article on page 4 of this newsletter for a local resident's remanences about the Car Ferry.

Our Previous Meeting

Historical Folk Songs from Eastern Ontario

Folk songs flourished in eastern Ontario's rural culture from the 1820s through the Depression years of the 1930s into the 1950s. Eighteenth and nineteenth century English, Scottish and Irish ballads moved through geography



and time to reside in rural Ontario. These ballads blended with regional lumbering and social songs to produce a folk song tradition in eastern Ontario that rivals the traditions of Appalachia and the Canadian East Coast. Dr. Kirby explains the creation of this Ontario folk song culture, which has evolved over the past 200 years, in a “words and music” presentation. Kirby is a music historian who spent many years researching the origins of Ontario folk music. He is also an experienced banjo and guitar player, which enabled him to present the story utilizing a unique mix of historical lecture and live folk music.



Farewell to Mackenzie

(Reportedly by Anonymous from Cobourg)

Willie's away from the field of contention
From the land of misrule and the
Friends of dissention he's gone over the waves as an agent befitting
Our claims to support the councils of Britain

No more shall the soup-kitchen beggars annoy him nor the Hamilton murderers
Attempt to destroy him, no dread deed of blood shall he dread their committing
He's safe from their fangs on his voyage to Britain

There, there the reformers shall cordially meet him, and there his great namesake
King Will shall greet him. Our patriot monarch whose name shall be written
With letters of good in the records of Britain

Go Canada's patriot, go strong in your mission, go bear our sovereign his
Subject's petition. Our despots unmask show the deed they're committing
Perverting the blest institutions of Britain

This ballad was published while William Lyon Mackenzie traveled to England to meet with King William IV just prior to the Rebellions of 1837.

Future Meetings

Tuesday April 26, 2016, Tom Holden

The 1878 Northumberland Atlas in Google Earth and our Annual General Meeting

Tuesday May 24, 2016, Bus Trip, *Museum Secrets: Trenton and Belleville*

Tour Glanmore House in Belleville, a National Historic site, and enjoy the architecture, furniture, china and costumes of the Victorian Era. Tour the National Air Force Museum in Trenton and see artists' interpretations of SOAR, the social history of WWI and WWII in uniforms, letters and other memorabilia; the Cold War, the evolution of the RCAF, the story of the Halifax Bomber, and other planes that have figured in the history of our air force plus much more.

We will leave Cobourg at 8:30am. in a comfortable coach with a washroom, spend 1½ hours at Glanmore in Belleville, enjoy a delicious lunch at the Trenton Legion and spend 1½ hours at the Air Force Museum returning to Cobourg by 4:30pm.

Invite your friends to join us on this field trip through history. There are many pictures and a video of Glanmore at <http://glanmore.ca/>

Tickets on sale in at our meetings in February, March and April or by calling Leona at 905 372-7624. The cost of the outing is \$44.00 per person including bus fare, all admission fees, guided tour of Glanmore House, lunch and gratuities.

The Car Ferry Through a Dog's Eyes

Mary Corbett was a lifelong resident of Cobourg. She was a font of knowledge of Cobourg over the years and was blessed with a great memory. She generously shared her knowledge with those who were interested in local history and enjoyed writing episodes from her life. Mary passed away in December 2015. The following was originally published in Northumberland Today and is reproduced with their permission.

COBOURG - Octogenarian Mary Corbett was there when the Ontario Car Ferry ran over Lake Ontario between Cobourg and Rochester, and so was her dog Blackie. She has written an essay looking at those exciting days through Blackie's eyes.

In 1932, the car ferries were running. Grandfather (William John Corbett) was the engineer on the shunter. Mom was a housewife with three children to raise — two sons ages ten and eight, and a daughter age four.

Mom had helped an elderly gentleman to straighten out his life. He'd hit bottom and, through Mom's intervention, he now owned a variety store and was well established.

Charlie came to the house one day with a black water-spaniel pup, stating children should have a guard dog, a pet to play with.

What a dog! Over the years, the dog learned to play hockey, stealing the puck and running



home. He also went to pick-up ball games and raced home with the baseball.

Each time the dog pulled one of these actions, voices were heard: "Mom, catch the dog. He's ruined our (hockey) (baseball) game."

As the years passed, he learned to swim with the boys, jump off the diving board and roughhouse with the boys and their friends. But if Mary was in

the group, Blackie changed tactics and played with a softer touch, like carrying five baby bunnies home, one at a time, from a nest a block away from home.

Then, one day, he discovered that he could save his paws from slipping on painful stones if he could butter up Grampa for a ride on the shunter. Blackie found out he could work with Grampa each day.

He was older now. He left his playful days behind, particularly after he went swimming with the boys and their friends in the gap between the east and west piers in 60 feet of water while the car ferry laid off the piers, blasting the horn and trying to get the boys and friends out of the water.

Blackie went to work each day by 8am. He'd leave home, his lunch fastened to his collar, and head to the pole yard where he joined the rest of the crew and rode the shunter up and down Spring Street until quitting time.

He went hunting with one of the crew members and caught a skunk, and the spray — Grampa, who always considered Blackie his dog and work companion, brought the shunter (with Blackie riding the coal car) down to our house on Spring Street and brought the dog in to Mother, saying, "Here, Elsie, here's your dog."

Mother had to clean him up, bathed in tomato juice. He cleaned up nicely. After Blackie was bathed and deodorized, he went back to work.

Over the years, on four occasions Blackie didn't come home at night and we subsequently learned he had gotten on the car ferry to get a bone from the cook in the galley. When the car ferry sailed off to Rochester, so did Blackie.

We were told he checked the shunter on the other side. Since Grampa wasn't in the cab of the engine, he got back on board the ferry and sailed home again to our waiting arms.

At the end of January 1938, Grampa retired from his job. With a call to Blackie, they retired, walking away from the shunter. With tears in his eyes, Grampa walked away and Blackie followed him into retirement.

Staying home with Mom and waiting for walks with Mary, or playing sorts with the boys, Blackie kept up his activities until 1942, when Bill disappeared. Then Jack left home too.

Blackie waited for the boys, his health declining. He scrambled to his feet when, one day, the boys came back. But they were dressed differently and took Blackie for a walk over the Grampa's house. What was going on?

Blackie watched as the boys and their friends marched away. Grampa came over every week and played with him. Then one winter's night, the shunter became stuck on the tracks. When Grampa offered to help the new engineer, Blackie scrambled up into the coal tender and assisted Grampa as he helped get the shunter up the street. The two old friends, Blackie and Grampa, worked for at least two hours that night — the last ride on the shunter for both of them.

By 1944, ill health consumed Blackie. He lay on the porch in the sunshine waiting for the boys to come home from the war.

Blackie's last thoughts were of Grampa and the boys. He hoped they would come home so he could see them again and play hockey or baseball or go for a swim. But it was not to be. Blackie slipped away without seeing his buddies again. But he knew he would ride the heavenly railroad and wait for Grampa to join him.

Announcements

Searching for Jex

Judith Goulin is researching the Jex family in Cobourg. Her particular interest is in Martin Jex and any other Jex men who were involved in the building trade around Cobourg in the early 1900's. Is it possible that there was a connection between the builder Jackson, who is renowned for his Jackson Houses in Cobourg and Martin Jex, who also built some houses. Please help if you any information. You can contact Judith at 905 372 7684 or email to jgoulin@hotmail.com

Halton Hall Heritage Centre

The Friends of Hilton Hall Heritage Centre invite you to enjoy a Cultural Heritage Workshop on March 31 at 2pm at Hilton Hall in Brighton. The Brighton Heritage Advisory Committee presents a workshop dealing with the preservation of heritage assets led by Heritage Outreach Consultant Bert Duclos.

Membership Matters

Help!

We are looking for speaker ideas for 2017. Since it will be Canada's 150 birthday, we want some speakers and topics related to Canada's, Ontario's or Cobourg's history that will really grab listeners. We know there are a lot of members with very good ideas and connections. Please let us hear from you. If you would like to be part of the Programme Committee, that would be a real asset. Contact Judith at jgoulin@hotmail.com or 905 372 7684.

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