



Historically Speaking

The Newsletter of the Cobourg and District
Historical Society

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The Northwest Passage: A Trip through Time

The Northwest Passage is Canada's northern gateway. Come and explore it with world traveller, Phyllis Durnford, who is so passionate about the Arctic that she has visited our Far North three times. "By now everyone knows about the Franklin Expedition, but there's much more to the story of the Northwest Passage", says Phyllis. People have been using that route since the end of the last Ice Age and the discovery of the Bering Land Bridge. So she will take us on a journey that spans a long time, demonstrating just how profoundly the lifestyle of the Inuit has changed. In one generation they have literally gone from igloos to microwaves!

Learn all of this and more in this fascinating presentation on Tuesday November 28, at Victoria Hall. Doors open at 7:00 PM for coffee and cookies, before the meeting begins at 7:30 PM. Admission, including refreshments, is free for members and \$5 for non-members. Annual membership is \$25 for individuals and \$30 for a family. All are welcome so bring a friend or two!

Our Previous Meeting

Sir John A. Macdonald Visits Cobourg

Brian and Renée Porter *aka* Sir John A. Macdonald and Lady Agnes Macdonald were our presenters for our October meeting. The CDHS was thrilled to be able to host our first prime minister and his wife during this sesquicentennial celebration year. Sir John A. commenced his presentation by enacting one of his more famous speeches which included numerous references to our own James Cockburn. Lady Agnes Macdonald then read from her diary including some details of life 150 years ago.

John A. inspired us with his predications for the future of Canada as an independent country assuming its rightful place in North America following Confederation. John A. evoked nostalgia of a more gentlemanly time when issues



were intelligently debated by erudite politicians. John A. amused us with numerous jokes and self-deprecating tales of his many years serving his country.

John A. has recently elicited criticism for what some view as unduly harsh punishment of Louis Riel following his conviction for high treason. Knowledge of the historical context of the time – fears of American annexation of western Canada, the need for additional farmland for an expanding population and just days before driving the last spike of the CPR – should make John A.'s decisions to protect Canadians commendable rather than prompting criticism.



Brian Porter, a retired teacher and his wife Renée, a retired nurse, have been doing historical re-enacting of the Macdonalds for 16 years. They have both been Brockville Museum volunteers for over 20 years. Brian is a founding member of the Brockville Infantry Company – 1862 militia re-enactors. He was awarded the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012.

Canada 150: Celebrating Our History

Cobourg 1867: What Was it Like?

Judith Goulin

Canada 150 is quickly coming to a close. This is our last newsletter of this auspicious year, celebrating both our national history and our local history. You may be interested in what Cobourg looked like in 1867.

At the end of June, 1867, *The Cobourg World* reported that

“Monday next [July 1st] will be a day long to be remembered in the British American provinces. On that day will be witnessed the birth of a new land, the inauguration of a new dominion. The provinces of Canada, (Ontario and Quebec), New Brunswick and Nova Scotia will on that day be drawn together by a bond which will hold its properties in the great principles of liberty, prosperity and peace.”

Mayor John Beatty issued a proclamation for the observance of the first of July as a holiday. The mayor initially expressed concern that the first National Birthday celebration in the town would be inadequate, but Cobourg celebrated the day in grand style. It started as soon as Victoria Hall's clock announced the midnight hour. Every bell in town began to ring; St. Peter's Church, the Wesleyan Church, Victoria College and the Engine House rang out the good news for an entire hour. All night long cannons and guns fired. Cobourgites celebrated around a large bonfire at the corner of King and Division Streets. In the afternoon crowds gathered at Victoria Hall to listen to patriotic speeches. Mayor Beatty, His Honour Judge Boswell, Hon. James Cockburn, Hon. A. A. Burnham and Alexander Fraser, Esq. were seated on a large platform. William Jex and J. C. Field were among the town's Councillors. It was quite a day in Cobourg.

Downtown Cobourg was a bustling and thriving place in 1867. Mr. Joseph Hall sold “ale, wine, the best Canadian and Scotch whiskey and pure French brandy along with fruit, fish and vegetables” in his shop. B. S. Morden advertised “cheap family groceries” while Field and Brother advertised “new dry goods, spring and summer importations from England and Montreal and choice groceries”. In addition Fields stated they had plaster, clover and timothy seed constantly on hand. At Scougle's, The Busy Big Store, Cobourg's citizens could buy the “newest and prettiest creations in ladies' summer attire, just what you see in city stores”.

In 1867, the commercial blocks on King Street looked much the same as they do today. Some buildings, familiar to all of us, were already a part of the Cobourg landscape: Victoria Hall, Victoria College, Dressler House, Market Building, Fire Hall, St. Peter's Church. Trinity United Church, Villa St. Joseph and Kelly's Homelike Inn.

Sources:

Cobourg Public Library Local History Room: newspapers and scrapbooks

Books: *Cobourg: The Spirit of the Place*. Robert Mikel, Lighthouse Press, 2017.

Canadian Expeditionary Force Service Files

Ken Strauss

Approximately 503,000 of 640,000 personnel files from WWI are being digitized by Library and Archives Canada to allow online access. These service files, together with vast amounts of additional information, are available without charge at <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca>. The service files are being digitized in order from box 1 to box 10686. This roughly corresponds to alphabetical order although there are exceptions. Currently they are processing box 8555 which contains records for those whose surname is "Russell". The expectation is that all boxes will be available online sometime in 2018.

As one might expect there are additional sections of Archives Canada's holdings for records relating to the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), Service Ledger Sheets for the Royal Canadian Navy and the Naval Reserve, records of nurses who served with the CEF, details of escaped and repatriated prisoners of war, hospital admission and discharge books of the Canadian Army Medical Corps, enrollment applications, discharge or demobilization forms and separation allowances and the *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War*. There is even a special section devoted to aboriginals who served in WWI.

John Jolie, a member of CDHS for many years, has made invaluable contributions to local history by painstakingly reading through many years of local newspapers on microfilm in the Local History Room at the Cobourg Public Library; then compiling his findings. He wrote a column entitled "Today in History" for the Northumberland News, where he published snippets of history such as this one below. Recently he donated the entire body of his many years of research to the Northumberland Archives. Thanks, John!

It felt timely to talk about Christmas Island, as Christmas will soon be upon us. So, to all, an early wish for a Merry Christmas!

Sir John Murray – Famous Cobourgite

John Jolie

1643- Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean was discovered. The highest point on that relatively small territory is Murray Hill, at 361 metres. It was named for Sir John Murray, who was born in Cobourg. Murray was an oceanographer on the scientific ship, the HMCS Challenger. Murray explored the island and recommended that the rich fertilizer deposits on the island be mined. He was able to use some of the mine profits to publish many volumes of findings made from the three-year Challenger expedition. His work was arguably the first detailed compilation of oceanographic research anywhere. In fact, it was so significant that the Americans named a space shuttle to honour his ship. (Who can ever forget The Challenger?) John Murray had various marine life and underwater formations named after him, right around the world! Cobourg has a street named for our knight, but few people in our area know about him.

Source: John Jolie Scrapbooks, Local History Room, Cobourg Public Library

Membership Matters

Executive Positions

Unfortunately, personal obligations in other areas of their lives have led several members of the CDHS executive to make the difficult decision to resign from the board. If you have some free time and would like to assist our society please consider applying for the position of Treasurer, Membership Coordinator, or Programme Chairperson. Contact any member of the executive to discuss these opportunities.

New Members

Please join me in welcoming our newest members: George Kamphurst and Diana Burge, Ken Bagshaw, Esther Robson, Fred and Jan Appletonn and Laura Ranieri.

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