



# Historically Speaking

The Newsletter of the Cobourg and  
District Historical Society

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## ***Traveling on the Great Lakes***

The Cobourg and District Historical Society invites you to join us for a presentation by Walter Lewis. In an hour we'll dash through Great Lakes history touching on things like the War of 1812, emigration to Upper Canada, leisure travel in later years, moonlight cruises and the changes brought on between World War I and II.

Lewis was named the Great Lakes Historian of the Year by the Marine Historical Society of Detroit and received the Henry N. Barkhausen Award for original research in Great Lakes Maritime History from the Association for Great Lakes Maritime History.

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

All are welcome so bring a friend!

## Our next two meetings:

November 22, 2011	Sandy Pratt	Pratt's Mill
January 25, 2012	Doreen West	Not the Bayeux Tapestry but the Baltimore Tableaux

## CDHS Membership

Our records show that several renewals for the current membership year are still outstanding. The renewal date was March 2011. If you are not sure whether your membership has lapsed, you can check at the membership table at the October meeting or contact Martha Watson at [mwatson5@sympatico.ca](mailto:mwatson5@sympatico.ca) or 905-372-2490. Please send cheques to Martha Watson, 381 Ontario Street, Cobourg, ON K9A 3B9 or pay at our next meeting.

Last year we waived the usual \$5.00 guest fee in an attempt to encourage attendance of potential new members. This year we will be resuming our past practice of charging non-members this nominal fee, although from time to time we will plan a special "bring a friend for free" meeting.

The Program Committee will continue to hold a book sale at our monthly meetings. If you have any non-fiction books of historic interest, please bring them in to the next meeting. Besides clearing out your bookshelves of no longer wanted books, we hope that you will find other books of interest to fill the spaces. Books will not be priced, but we ask a monetary donation for each book. All proceeds go to support our society. Please bring and buy!

## Submissions

The CDHS Newsletter welcomes submissions – short articles, announcements, book reviews, letters to the editor, etc. – that will be of interest to our members. 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](mailto:ken.strauss@sympatico.ca).

## Marie Dressler – A Cobourg Legend

*Alma Draper*

Marie Dressler was born as Leila Marie Koerber in Cobourg on November 9, 1869. She went on to become one of the great Hollywood movie stars of her time. Her heritage home on King Street West, Cobourg, houses a small museum of artifacts relating to her life and home.

In the world of stage presence, once you saw Marie, you would not forget her. Despite her age and weight, she became one of the top box office draws of the sound era. She was barely a teenager when she started in theatre, appearing on stage which included light opera. By 1892, she was on Broadway and she later became a star comedienne on the vaudeville circuit. In 1910, she had a hit with *Tillie's Nightmare* which Mack Sennett adapted to film in 1914 as *Tillie's Punctured Romance* with Charles Chaplin. Marie took top billing over a young Chaplin, but her film career never took off and by 1918, she was out of films and out of work.

Marie's role in the chorus girls' strike of 1917 had her blacklisted from the theatres. In 1927, MGM screenwriter Frances Marion got her a small part in *The Joy Girl* and then a co-starring lead with Polly Moran in *The Callahans and the Murphys* (1927). It was a slow return in films but her popularity continued to grow. But it would be sound that made her a star again. *Anna Christie* (1930) was the movie where Garbo talks, but everyone noticed Marie as Marthy Owens. In another film from the same year, *Min and Bill* (1930), she won an Academy Award for her dramatic performance. She would receive another Academy Award nomination for *Emma* (1932). In 1933, Marie was the top box office star of one poll as she could easily switch between drama and comedy. She had more success with *Dinner at Eight* and *Tugboat Annie*.



Dressler appeared in more than 40 films, and achieved her greatest successes in talking pictures made during the last years of her life. Always seeing herself as

physically unattractive, she wrote an autobiography titled, *The Life Story of an Ugly Duckling*.

In 1960 a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame was added in Marie's memory for her contribution to the motion picture industry. As part of its Canada in Hollywood series, Canada Post issued a Marie Dressler postage stamp on June 30, 2008.

Marie Dressler House was converted to a restaurant in 1937 and operated as a restaurant until 1989, when it was damaged by fire. It was restored but did not open again as a restaurant. Nineteen years ago, a group of film enthusiasts involved in the restoration of the Marie Dressler house had a wild idea: "Why not hold a festival showing the films in which Marie Dressler had starred?" This seemingly fantastic idea grew into the present event in which each year we show a variety of films generally made before 1950 and one film always features Ms. Dressler.

## **Bus Tour: "In Praise of Older Barns"**

*Martha Watson*

The Hamilton Township Heritage Committee annual bus tour took place on September 24, a glorious warm fall day. This year's theme was early barns of classic post-and-beam construction. The tour included nine barns within Hamilton Township including one still in use on a working beef farm, one that has been converted to a residence, one that was derelict and is in the process of restoration, and one that is no longer in use and, sadly, has developed some major structural problems that are not feasible for the retired farmer to repair. Some were smaller barns converted for use as workshops, garages, or spaces for gatherings, either in their original location or moved from other locations and re-assembled. Some of the barns date to the 1850s and 1860s.

At each barn participants disembarked from the bus and tour guides and barn owners pointed out the barn's features and background. Particularly interesting was the evolution of some barns' configuration when the need for more space caused the farmer to enlarge his barn by adding to its length at one or both ends, or by a perpendicular addition at each end creating a U-shaped structure that also provided a three-sided outdoor sheltered enclosure for farm animals. Accompanying the tour was Bill Beaton of Loyalist Timber Framing, a local company that is well known for both restoration and construction of these traditional structures. Bill was available to provide expert insight into technical questions. At mid-day a ploughman's lunch was served inside one of the restored barns, enhanced by a square dancing demonstration and a short talk by Bill Beaton pointing out various structural elements of the barn.

The tour group also learned the fate of many early barns: demolition for sale of its parts for use in other construction. Better, perhaps, than collapse in a heap of rubble, but for the nostalgic among us it seemed not the happiest end.

Throughout Northumberland County we are fortunate to have many fine early barns still standing to bear witness to the agricultural foundations and settlement history of the area. They are eminently worthy of preservation so that they can remain for still another century, silent reminders of times that went before.

## **In Memoriam**

### ***James William Low***

We mourn the passing of CDHS member James William Low. Among his many accomplishments Low was an ardent amateur astronomer, developer of astronomical software, writer and photographer. He will be remembered by many in our Society for his research into the life of Andrew Elvins, the founder of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada and a Cobourg resident in the mid-1850s.

## Notes and Notices

### ***Vintage Film Festival***

Marie Dressler is very much a part of Cobourg's history. The Vintage Film Festival is an off shoot of the Marie Dressler Foundation and is now in its 19th year. One or two Marie Dressler movies are shown at this annual event. The festival will occur over three days:

October 28th at Victoria Hall, Cobourg, starting at 5:20 p.m.

October 29th at Capitol Theatre, Port Hope, starting at 9 a.m.

October 30th at Capitol Theatre, Port Hope, starting at 10:30 a.m.

Advanced tickets can be purchased at the Victoria Hall or Capitol Theatre box offices. Weekend passes are \$60 each; Friday evening only (including reception) \$35; Saturday only \$35; Sunday only \$22.

Individual movie ticket \$8 available one hour before the movie on the day of showing. For a complete list of films to be shown see [www.vintagefilmfestival.ca](http://www.vintagefilmfestival.ca) or phone (905) 372-5839 for further information.

### ***Victoriana Show***

The Victoriana Show 2011 will be in Cobourg from November 11-13. Events include a Victorian Christmas Dinner, gift shopping, high tea and numerous lectures. For complete details of the Victoriana show visit [www.victorianashow.com](http://www.victorianashow.com) or phone (905) 372-2098.

## **Websites**

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

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

Cobourg Museum Foundation: [northumberlandheritage.ca](http://northumberlandheritage.ca)

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

Cobourg History: [www.cobourghistory.ca/](http://www.cobourghistory.ca/)

Ontario Veteran Archive: [www.ontarioveteranarchive.ca/](http://www.ontarioveteranarchive.ca/)

## **CDHS Executive for 2011 – 2012**

President	Ken Strauss	<a href="mailto:ken.strauss@sympatico.ca">ken.strauss@sympatico.ca</a>
Recording Secretary	Jackie Hick	<a href="mailto:mikeandjackie@sympatico.ca">mikeandjackie@sympatico.ca</a>
Archives Chair	Cath Oberholtzer	<a href="mailto:cober@eagle.ca">cober@eagle.ca</a>
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