

Historically Speaking

The Newsletter of the Cobourg and District

Historical Society

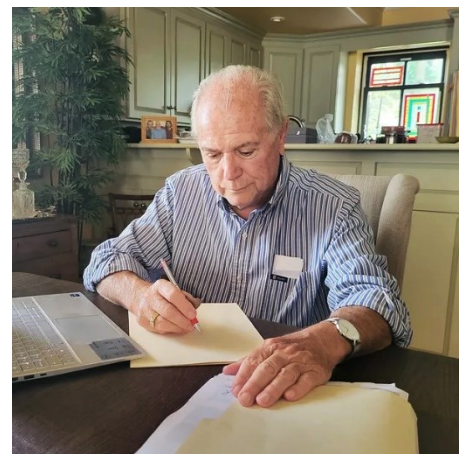
February 2024 — Issue 345

Father Frances Patrick Duffy

Father Frances Patrick Duffy, born in Cobourg on May 2, 1871, was a Canadian/American soldier, Catholic Priest and military Chaplain. Duffy served as Chaplain for the US 69th Infantry Regiment in WWI. His exploits were of such renown that a very large statue of him was erected in Father Duffy Square in New York City.

Father Duffy's story will be told by Randy Barber and will include a video produced by local reporter Pete Fisher.

Randy resided in Markham with his wife Solveig for over 40 years. Between 1994 and 2000 he served as Ward Councillor for the Town of Markham and is a recently elected Cobourg Councillor. He has held federal government appointments on the National Parole Board, CPP Disability and EI appeals. He consults to the legal cannabis industry relative to compliance and regulation. Randy is a collector of rare books, antiques, military artifacts, Winston Churchill memorabilia, and hand carved decorative decoys. He speaks on Trench Art, Sir Winston Churchill and the History of Barbering at every opportunity.



Join us on Tuesday, February 27 for an informative presentation. Doors open at 7:00 pm. All are welcome. Our new coffee maker is ready so bring a friend or two! Members free - Guests \$5.00.

Future Meetings of our 2023/2024 Programme

Tuesday, March 26, 2024

D'arcy Jennish is a journalist, historian and playwright. He has written ten books and will present the history of the National Hockey League -- born in a Montreal hotel room on November 26, 1917. Mr. Jennish wrote the book *The NHL: 100 Years of On-ice Action and Boardroom Battles*. It's certain to be an interesting story that both hockey and non-hockey fans will enjoy.

Tuesday, April 23, 2024

Annual General Meeting followed by a Member Show & Tell
Members are invited to bring something of historical interest like special objects, jewelry, letters, family diaries, medals of family members, old tools and documents or any treasures to display for fellow members to see and admire. Tables will be set up around the room to display items brought.

Tuesday, May 28, 2024

Social Event & Outing in Brighton, Ontario

Join us as we drive/carpool our way to Brighton, Ontario's community centre to hear Brighton resident and historian Dan Buchanan, *The History Guy*, present *The History of the Murray Canal*, which is now part of the Trent-Severn waterway. It is a story that is both complex and compelling. Presentation from 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Following the presentation, we will meet for lunch at a local Brighton establishment before returning to Cobourg

Our Previous Meeting

Streets of Cobourg

At our January meeting former Mayor Peter Delanty presented the history of Cobourg through our street names. We learned that there were many sources for the names of Cobourg's streets. Some were named after businesses: Mill Street got its name by dint of being the location of one of the earliest mills in our area. Furnace Street was named because William McLennan once ran a foundry there which the townspeople usually called "the furnace". Some were named after early residents: a fisherman, James Nunn, once lived on Nunn Street. Matthew Street commemorates Matthew Williams, an early Cobourg carpenter D'Arcy Street commemorates Colonel D'Arcy Boulton, Mayor of Cobourg and prominent in military and railway affairs. King Street was obviously named after King George IV who was King of England from 1820 to 1830.



The streets in New Amherst are named after WWI veterans.

In summary an informative insight into the history of Cobourg!

Dirty Little Secret

John L. Hill

People living in large urban areas, I sense, have an idealized impression of rural living in communities such as Colborne, Ontario. Colborne is about 100 miles east of Toronto, on the shores of Lake Ontario and is the place in which I grew up. I suspect the reason is that people feel that life in a small town is insulation from racial discord that pervades urban areas. Residents of such communities perceive perfection and racial harmony exist and have always existed in their picturesque and tranquil communities. They have fostered much of that myth. It's a form of "presentism," a belief that present-day norms and attitudes have always been and will always be. A present-day belief is that slavery is wrong and must have always been considered immoral. Nonetheless, I have come to believe that slavery has deep roots in Canada; it was not always seen as a dehumanizing factor, and it has its modern equivalent in how we see prisoners.

For a boy growing up in the Village of Colborne, Ontario, Canada, a community and part of Cramahe Township in Northumberland County, my introduction to local history was, to say the least, whitewashed. In the classroom, I and my fellow students were taught that one of the early settlers was the town's founder. His name was Joseph Keeler. We were told that the white frame house directly across the road from the southern tip of Colborne's Victoria Park was the oldest in town and possibly built by a Keeler. The Keelers were also United Empire Loyalists. To us, the UEL label was synonymous with sainthood. After all, we have named a college and a parkway after the group: Loyalist College and The Loyalist Parkway.

United Empire Loyalists were generally wealthy inhabitants from the eastern part of the United States who lived comfortably and resented the disruption brought about by the American Revolutionary War. They fled to the British colony to the north of the United States to maintain their allegiance to the British Crown.

It wasn't until half a century later that I became aware of the truth about the Keeler family and got a better perspective on its contribution to the local history of the community where I grew up.

The Keeler family was indeed Loyalist. Like other families who found themselves on the losing side of the American Revolution, it was necessary to pack their belongings and relocate to the British territory to the north. Some of the belongings were their slaves. Many of the loyal settlers had their slaves confiscated after the war, while others lost them to grants of freedom for those enslaved people who fought alongside the rebels. It was time for many of those arriving in the Canadian backwoods to replenish their human stock. It was

convenient to do so since drovers brought enslaved people and horses north of the border for resale.

I later discovered that one of my forefathers, Nazareth Hill, was considered a hero for standing up against a group of American rebels fighting for independence. He withstood a siege of canon fire and ultimately took rebel prisoners, saving local cattle from being butchered to feed the rebel forces. Nonetheless, the rebels eventually succeeded in their independence movement, and British sympathizers such as Grandpa Naz had to escape.

He was seen in Canada as UEL and was granted 40 to 100 acres of land near Picton, another Lake Ontario community to the east. It would require considerable human labour to clear and farm that land. Although no documentation has been uncovered, it is likely Grandpa Naz was also an enslaver. The section of southern Ontario from Kingston at the eastern end of Lake Ontario and westward to Northumberland had to be cleared, cabins erected, and fields tended. Unsurprisingly, much of the work was done with slave labour. Then, what is now a large part of the Province of Ontario was known as Upper Canada.

It may be helpful to understand that the practice of slavery was a burning question as the eighteenth century was drawing to a close. Upper Canada's first Lieutenant Governor, John Graves Simcoe, was a fierce opponent of slavery. Simcoe reported to Henry Dundas, the Home Secretary in Prime Minister William Pitt's government in England. Dundas was a Scottish lawyer and politician and one of the most potent and trusted Ministers in the Pitt cabinet. He was supportive of Simcoe's anti-slavery position. Yet he was also a politician. He understood that the immediate effect of a total abolition of slavery would cause economic havoc for plantations and their wealthy owners who supported the Pitt government. Dundas bowed to their pressure and amended a 1792 resolution that would have abolished the practice. The practice of owning slaves was so widespread that the bill proposing its abolition in 1793 was watered down to ban further importation of slaves and directing that all slaves be freed upon attaining the age of 25 when their usefulness for hard labour or child rearing was declining. Dundas was ridiculed for his position and called "the Great Tyrant." The delay in slavery's abolition caused 630,000 people to wait more than a decade for their relative freedom.

One of Simcoe's opponents was Hazelton Spencer, who represented Lennox, Hastings, and Northumberland Counties and was a slave owner in his own right.

Nonetheless, attitudes in Upper Canada changed rapidly, even in Northumberland. Five years later, in 1798, a bill to restore slave importation was defeated. This time, one of the most vocal opponents was David McGregor Rogers of Haldimand Township, who now

represented Northumberland. Rogers strove to end the practice of slave ownership. Slave ownership, though contentious, was still flourishing.

Against this backdrop, the Keeler family made their way and livelihood in Upper Canada. Joseph Keeler was wealthy and made several trips to Upper Canada with families who settled in Haldimand and Cramahe Townships, where Colborne is located. Joseph Keeler was a slave owner in Vermont but lost his slaves before heading north, probably acquiring replacement slaves in New York.

However, by the 1820s, slave ownership was largely phased out. It was cheaper to use indentured help from Europe hired for the short planting and harvesting season than to maintain a landowner's workforce year to year.

Joseph Keeler's extended family included a brother or cousin, Eli Keeler. It was Eli who, in 1824, sold a young mulatto boy named Tom, about fifteen years old, to William Bell of Belleville. Like so many other Loyalists, Bell had taken up occupancy in New York State before heading north. He settled in Kingston but moved to Belleville, where he opened a store in Quinte, taught school, and held municipal office. When Bell was sixty-six, advancing age necessitated help around the home. Bell's daughter, Amelia, who ran the Grafton Inn a few miles west of Colborne, likely alerted her father that Eli Keeler was willing to sell Tom. Eli had trained Tom with several marketable skills and could be counted on to help bring extra income to the Bell household. A deal was struck. It was likely the last slave sale in Upper Canada. It took place in Cramahe Township. Bell purchased Tom for seventy-five dollars. In today's dollars, the price seems low, but in 1824, a small log house could be built for forty dollars. Tom was seen simply as an item of property.

Tom would have been emancipated on turning twenty-five in 1834, but in 1833, slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire. History does not tell us what became of Tom. The Keeler family had conducted, if not the last, at least one of the last slave sales in Canada.

Tom's sale may have been a "last" for Cramahe, but the Village of Colborne, now due to reorganization part of Cramahe Township, can also claim a "first"

In the 1950s, Colborne had a baseball team participating in the Lakeshore League with other towns. The league consisted of players representing several other towns in the vicinity. Because of the village's small size and limited talent pool, Colborne enhanced its league standings by hiring young athletes from the American South, usually two per summer season, to join the team. It was a summer job for these young black men who were paid and housed at the Brunswick Hotel on Colborne's main street.

My father, Lorne, joined the executive of the baseball club, importing talented young athletes. It was seasonal employment, allowing the recruits to profit from playing a sport they loved. Those young ballplayers must have felt very alone being the only black men in a white rural community. My dad invited the imported talent to our home for breakfast on Sunday morning. I recall sitting across the table from these impressive athletes, listening to their tales of growing up in the Jim Crow South and being fascinated by their accents. At the end of an extended meal that was mostly conversation, I would request the men to autograph my baseball. I recall the impressive penmanship of “Carl Higginbottom” and “Leo Myles.”

The last of these “imports” was an exceptional athlete named Bob Turner. Turner was born in South Bound Brook, New Jersey in 1926. Before coming to Colborne in 1950, he earned a Bachelor of Physical Education degree from New York University. Most Colborne residents had probably not finished high school. He had also racked up an impressive resume of athletic achievements – playing with the Harlem Globe Trotters in 1946 and signed by the Chicago White Sox in 1948-49. During a four-year stint in the US. Army, he became a recreation director. It was expected he would play only one season with Colborne. But Bob Turner decided to stay on after his summer contract and was hired to become the municipality’s first Recreation Director. Indeed, he became the first black Recreation Director in Ontario and Canada.

Bob Turner organized athletic events for the village youth and was instrumental in forming the Colborne Band and Baton Corp., dressed in blue and gold marching uniforms. The Corp developed a glowing reputation in southern Ontario. It marched onto the field on the opening day of a Toronto Maple Leaf ball game, the precursor to today’s Blue Jays. The Band and Baton Corp even received an invitation to march in the Rose Parade in Pasadena, California.

But as the 1950s drew to a close, old racial resentment surfaced. Some residents were critical of the fact that Bob Turner, a black man, had a wife who was white. The sentiment against miscegenation was not widespread, but it was clear that the racist sentiments we identified with the United States South had local adherents. We were not so far removed from the slave-holding days as we gave ourselves credit for. Turner packed his bags and moved to Cornwall, Ontario, where he became Recreation Director in a much larger centre. Bob Turner died suddenly while undergoing a minor operation at a Cornwall hospital in 1960. His heart stopped beating during surgery. When he left for Cornwall, people in Colborne and Cramahe forgot his significant contribution to town sports.

Years later, Colborne built a new skating, hockey, and sports arena. The town needed a name for its new sports facility. One would have thought that the name would honour a local sports figure. Not so. It settled on “The Keeler Centre”. Portraits of the Keelers are proudly displayed on the walls of the Keeler Centre complex.

Some will consider the Keeler family, the founders of the village where I grew up, to be slave owners and slave traders and consider them racists. Is racism systemic? Was it part of the culture commonly accepted in their day? Racism is another type of dehumanization. It may be so commonplace in society that no one sees it as wrong.

Today’s “cancel culture” would have us judge those who came before us by the social norms and mores accepted in modern society. We forget that those we regard as heroes may have a checkered past. Even the “great emancipator” Abraham Lincoln would not likely pass muster. In 1858, he said, “I will say then that I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the black and white races.”

A century and a half ago, it was not considered deplorable to be a slave owner. The crime was allocated to those enslaved people who ran away from their servitude. Times change, and so do our attitudes. Owning another human as a piece of property would today be considered intolerable. Escaping enslavement would be regarded as noble. An ongoing problem is that many expect present-day conditions and attitudes to be the same in the past as they are now and ever shall be.

There is no demand to change the name of the sports complex in Colborne because the Keeler family were slave traders, nor should we try to erase history. Dehumanization continued in the past and will continue if we are bold enough to see it.

The Keeler family will be regarded as instrumental in turning a heavily forested settlement into a rural community. Bob Turner, the first black recreation director who invigorated sporting life in the community, is all but forgotten. The fact that UEL families were heavily involved with slavery and that a Keeler was involved in the last slave sale is just a dirty little secret.

Cobourg resident John Hill is a retired criminal lawyer, actor and author of numerous articles on Canada’s criminal justice system. His latest book, *Pine Box Parole*, is available from local bookshops and from Amazon (<https://www.amazon.ca/Pine-Box-Parole-Fitzsimmons-Confinement/dp/1988824850>)

Early Railways in Northumberland

David Savage

There were an amazing number of railways established in Northumberland County in the later half of the 19th and early 20th century. None still exist by their original names – all either failed and disappeared or were merged into other, more successful, ventures.

The first railway in the area was the **Cobourg and Peterborough**. This railway was chartered in 1850 and construction began from a point on the harbourfront at present day Cobourg north to Harwood, crossed Rice Lake by way of a causeway and a bridge, then headed northwest to Peterborough. A spur line was built from the main line to the village of Baltimore and an extension line was built from Peterborough to Chemong Lake (Bridgenorth) .

The next railway to arrive in the area was the **Grand Trunk**, which began construction in the area in 1856 and spanned basically east to west following the north side of the lake. The biggest obstacle was spanning the Ganaraska River valley in downtown Port Hope. Stonework for the bridge came from quarries in the Bowmanville area and the line was open for traffic in 1857/58.

Speaking of Port Hope, the **Port Hope and Peterborough Railway** was chartered in 1858. After a number of surveys, a route was chosen for the railway headed north from the harbour in Port Hope to Millbrook and then northeast to Peterborough. In 1860, the railway entertained more extensive plans and, therefore, changed its name to the **Port Hope, Lindsay and Beaverton Railway**, with the extension of a line northwest from Millbrook to Lindsay, Beaverton and, later on, continued around Lake Simcoe to Orillia and Midland.

At the north end of the county the **Ontario and Quebec Railway** was chartered in 1884. The railway began construction of its line from Montreal to Toronto by way of Smith Falls, Havelock, and Peterborough.

A new railway in eastern Canada that originated in the west was the **Canadian Northern**, which chartered its Ontario division in 1912. The line arrived from the west and continued south to Toronto, then extended farther east to Montreal by way of following the shoreline of Lake Ontario east to Deseronto, then northeast to Ottawa. After crossing the Ottawa River into Quebec, it continued to Montreal.

Also in 1912, another railway company, the **Campbellford, Lake Ontario and Western Railway**, began construction of its line from a point on the Ontario and Quebec Railway at Glen Tay (a point just west of Smith Falls). The line continued southwest, dropping down to meet Lake Ontario at Belleville. The line then continued, following the shoreline, to Division Street in Cobourg.

The first casualty was the **Cobourg and Peterborough Railway**. Due to poor construction practices on the bridge over Rice Lake, the winter of 1874, and vandals from the **Port Hope Railway**, the bridge collapsed, taking the fortunes of the railway with it. The railway came back to life briefly in 1876 as it constructed a line from Trent River to Blairton. For several years, it shipped ore by rail from Blairton to Trent River, by lake boat from Trent River to Harwood, by rail again from Harwood to Cobourg, then by lake boat from Cobourg to Cleveland. Two stations of the railway remain. The one formerly located on Cobourg's harbour front has now been moved to Stuart Street, where it serves as a residence. The station from Harwood has been moved to Roseneath, where it serves as a community hall. The railway was purchased by the **Grand Trunk** in the late 1800s and the remaining section (Cobourg to Harwood) was abandoned in 1912 and the rails sold for the war effort.

The **Grand Trunk** fared better with its Canadian division being merged into **Canadian National Railways** (now **CN North America**). The original line still continues to serve an important rail link between Ontario and Quebec. The **Port Hope, Lindsay and Beaverton Railway** became part of the **Grand Trunk Railway** family, which then became part of CN. The first casualty was the abandonment of the line from Millbrook to Lindsay in 1937, with the line from Port Hope to Peterborough being abandoned in 1959. The **PH, L & B** station in Port Hope still remains on Walton Street and now houses Lent's Travel.

The **Ontario and Quebec Railway** was merged into **Canadian Pacific** and remains basically intact today, with the exception of the section from Havelock to Glen Tay, which has been abandoned in the last few years. Original stations still standing on the line include Tweed, Havelock, and Peterborough.

The **Canadian Northern** was doomed from the beginning, basically due to competition with the Grand Trunk. The section of the line from Port Hope to Belleville was abandoned in 1937. Other sections of the line were abandoned over time, thus resulting in the line falling into history.

The **Canadian Northern** was merged with CN in 1927. Canadian Northern stations still remain at Whitby, Oshawa, Starkeville, Port Hope, and Smith Falls. The **Campbellford, Lake Ontario and Western Railway** merged with **Canadian Pacific** (which continued construction of the line from Division Street in Cobourg west) and still exists.

This material was first published in *Historical Review* #13 in 1994. David Savage, now deceased, was a member of the Cobourg and District Historical Society with a passion for anything railroad related.

Member Matters

New Members

Please join me in welcoming our newest CDHS members:

- Patricia Calder
- Lynda Kay
- Laurie Vandewater

Announcements

Lakeshore Genealogical Society

The LGS has monthly presentations for those with an interest in genealogy. For more information visit <https://www.lakeshoregenealogicalsociety.ca/calendar>.

Wednesday, March 13, 2024: Canadian Resources Review This is a Zoom only event. All are welcome but please pre-register: LGSregister@gmail.com Our speaker is Sher Leetooze.

Saturday, April 6, 2024: The Rice Lake Trading Post This is a hybrid Meeting – Rotary Room Cobourg Library – Presentation at 1:30 p.m. Our speaker is Dr. Robert Pearce. Bob will tell us about the history of the Rice Lake Trading Post, which was established in 1793 at the mouth of the Otonabee River. This very informative presentation documents both the historical and genealogical aspects of the surrounding region in the 1800s while touching on many topics, including the American Revolution, War of 1812, Mackenzie Rebellion, North West Company... and more.

Kingston Historical Society

Wednesday, March 20th: Kingston railway historian Eric Gagnon will talk on his extensive railway research under the title “Two Miles, Two Tracks, Two Railways, To Obscurity.” Eric’s most recent books – *Smoke on the Waterfront* and *Stories on the Waterfront* – have focused on the railway’s impact on Kingston’s economy, especially the Hanley Spur which connected our waterfront to the Grand Trunk/CN main line.

Wednesday, April 17th: Queen’s doctoral student Margaret Ross will talk about her research into the problem of “vice” in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Kingston and the City’s attempt to control its sex trade. She will draw on her article *Your Town is Rotten: Prostitution, Profit and the Governing of Vice in Kingston, Ontario, 1860–1920s*.

For details of these and other events visit <https://www.kingstonhistoricalsociety.ca/>

Tuesday, February 27, 2024

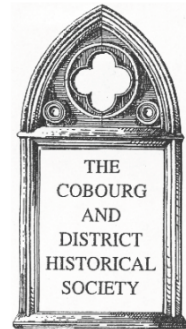
Cobourg's Father Francis Patrick Duffy
The most celebrated U.S. Army Chaplain in the
Great War



Presenter
Randy Barber, V.P. CDHS



Showing His Video
Pete Fisher, Today's Northumberland



Father Duffy, a Roman Catholic priest, was born in Cobourg in 1871 on King Street and ordained at St. Michael's Church on September 6th, 1896.

Join us to learn how, as chaplain of the famous Fighting Sixty-Ninth, he came to be memorialized in Times Square, New York City.

It's an important story.

Concert Hall in Victoria Hall

Members free, Guests \$5, ALL ARE WELCOME

🕒 Doors open at 7 PM 🕒 Meeting starts at 7:30 PM

For Member information, Brianincobourg@gmail.com

Father Francis P. Duffy



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