

# Historically Speaking

The Newsletter of the Cobourg and District

Historical Society

January 2024 — Issue 344

## Streets of Cobourg

Cobourg was first called Amherst and then Hard Scrabble. By the 1820s the name was changed to Cobourg. Some streets were named after prominent early citizens, some for ancestral heritage and some by business people. Commencing in the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century new streets were often named after former Cobourg Mayors

Peter Delanty will present the history of Cobourg as told by our street names. Peter, Mayor of Cobourg 2000 – 2010, is a former school principal

and recipient of the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award. His past and continuing commitment to many organizations and causes, include his position as Treasurer in 1980 at the then newly minted Cobourg and District Historical Society.

Join us on Tuesday, January 23 for an informative presentation. Doors open at 7:00 pm. All are welcome. Bring a friend or two! Members free - Guests \$5.00.



# Future Meetings of our 2023/2024 Programme

**Tuesday, February 27, 2024**

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 69<sup>th</sup> 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.

**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*

## **Camp 30: The Bowmanville PoW Camp**

Our November meeting presented the history and possible future of Camp 30 near Bowmanville. The camp's first buildings were completed in 1927 to establish the Bowmanville Boy's Training School for errant youth. With the advent of WWII it was realized that the facility could be easily converted to house German prisoners of war. Soon the camp was expanded with barracks to house almost 800 prisoners, an indoor swimming pool, gymnasium, mess hall and even a small hospital.

The site was designated a National Historic Site of Canada in September 2013.



Two speakers, both heavily involved in the preservation of Camp 30, shared the podium.

Marilyn Morawetz, is Chairperson for the Jury Lands Foundation whose mission is to rejuvenate this Canadian historic and architecturally significant site. The other presenter was Faye Langmaid who is a planner with the Town of Bowmanville and lives in Port Hope.

We learned many details of not just of the operation of Camp 30 as a home for German PoW but also how the youth who lived there in training school times were educated and integrated into local society.

Perhaps most importantly for our own preservation projects we gained insights into how government grants are applied for and granted. From the presenter's comments it appears that much of the effort (and expenditures) must go towards voluminous studies and reports rather than the actual work of preservation. A pity!

## Edgar Benson, Left of Centre



Karin Wells, noted journalist and author, presented the story of Mina Benson in a CDHS Zoom meeting in October of 2020. For the details of Ms. Wells' presentation see <https://www.cdhs.ca/images/newsletters/NewsletterOct20.pdf>

If you enjoyed learning about Mina Benson whose dogged determination earned her international acclaim as an explorer of Labrador, you will likely also enjoy the story of her equally determined descendent: Edgar Benson. Edgar is another son of Cobourg. His life is explored in an article by Tom Cruickshank published recently in *Watershed Magazine*. For the full details see <https://watershedmagazine.com/departments/edgar-benson-left-of-centre/>

### Show and Tell

A Historical Show & Tell is planned for our April meeting immediately after the Annual General Meeting segment. To get some ideas you might enjoy notes and photos of some of our previous Show & Tell events:

*Historical Review* #23- 2005-2006, pages 34-36, <https://cdhs.ca/images/reviews/Historical-Review23-2005-2006.pdf>

*Historical Review* #29 – 2011-2012, page 43 <https://cdhs.ca/images/reviews/Historical-Review29-2011-2012.pdf>

*Historically Speaking*, October 2020, <https://www.cdhs.ca/images/newsletters/NewsletterOct20.pdf>  
(see page 3)

# Susan Ann Roberts, Cobourg's Photographer

*Brock V. Silversides*

The role of women in the history of Canadian photography continues to be an over-looked area of study. Very few entered the field at a professional level (as opposed to as a hobby) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and of those who did, few actually managed their own establishments. Of those few who worked professionally many conducted the business under their husband's or father's name.

One of the earliest female photographers to operate a studio in Cobourg was Susan Ann Roberts. While much can be reconstructed about her personal life .the details of her career are very sketchy. No studio records remain and she does not appear to have placed any advertisements in the local newspaper. It is a very faint trail!

Susan Ann Roberts was born September 21, 1850 in Cobourg. She was the eldest daughter of John Dab Roberts and Jane Dawe. Susan's father was originally from Mevagissey, Cornwall, England but emigrated to Canada in 1847. A man of many talents, he started his working life in his new home as a shoe salesman.

In January of 1869 he switched occupations and established a retail and wholesale seed business for the pre-dominantly agricultural community of Northumberland County. As an afterthought he offered another service: photography. It was an old combination –seeds and photographs– but he appears to have been quite successful. A mercantile reference book from this time gives his firm a value of between \$2,000-\$5,000 with a good credit rating. Much of that success was due to the personality and talents of his photographer, Susan ,who for all intents and purposes ran the studio part of the business from 1870 on as her father was usually too busy. Roberts was one of earliest photographers in Cobourg while her father was busy with the seed trade. She grew up in a heavily photographic-oriented circle. Charles Lawes, Cobourg's best-known photographer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. was a neighbor of the Roberts. The children of each family were close friends and Lawes's eldest daughter, Charlotte, was also listed as a photographic artist in 1871.

The Dominion Census for that year gives a simple financial breakdown of "Miss S.A. Roberts' Photographic Establishment." In total her fixed capital was evaluated at \$500 while her floating capital was \$20. One female employee was engaged at a yearly wage of \$150. Her raw materials (paper, glass and chemicals) totalled \$50 while her product output was set at '\$250. Thus, her net profit for that year was a grand total of \$50. Susan ran the studio for a only five years. but developed an admirable local reputation. Throughout the early 1870s her financial ratings were consistently higher than Charles Lawes'. By January of 1872 the establishment's value had risen to between \$2000 and \$5000.

Few examples of her work are known to exist and almost all are self-portraits that have survived in her family. In accordance with Victorian customs, she produced mainly *cartes-de-visite* and cabinet card photographs on albumen paper. Susan closed the studio upon her



marriage to Matthew Henderson, a Cobourg store clerk, on September 16, 1874. She then switched her emphasis to running her home and raising her seven children. With the advent of the 1880s came the opening of the Northwest Territories for settlement. The Henderson family eagerly digested

the Federal Government and Canadian Pacific Railway advertising brochures. The idea of a free homestead and the lure of the pioneering experience were both powerful incentives.

In May of 1882 Matthew led an exploratory group of six other Cobourg and Grafton area men to the Assiniboia District now in the province of Saskatchewan. He applied for a quarter-section farm at the Wascana settlement, 12 miles northwest of Pile-of-Bones which was the new capital of the Territories.

He returned to Cobourg in September of 1882, stayed the winter and returned with Susan (again pregnant) and two children the following spring. After a long tiring rail journey they arrived in the "muddy desolate looking port called Regina" (as Pile-of-Bones had been re-christened). Consisting chiefly of shacks and tents, the town did not bring out Susan's natural enthusiasm: "Small wonder that a great wave of homesickness came over those who saw it for the first time and that Mrs. Henderson, used to the comforts and beauty of the old Ontario town, did not go near it again for over two years."

They then moved out to their homestead and started building their new life. In July of 1883 they built a house 18 by 24 feet and throughout the summer broke five acres of land. In September Susan gave birth to their fourth child who had the distinction of being the first white child born in that part of the Territories. The winter of 1883-84 seems to have been a cruel introduction for Susan to the prairie seasons. She remembered it as:

*"...a very hard winter: intense cold, no coal, an unfinished house and for fuel only the small wood that could be procured in the ravines. At night the nails cracking with the*

*frost was like musketry fire, and doors, windows and walls were often thickly covered with white frost. There were as yet no storm doors, nor windows...*"

In a psychological sense. the new environment was also rough on Susan:

*"To a woman used to the cultured advantages of a college town, possibly the utter lack of anything of the sort was as much the cause of loneliness of those early days as was the absence of the loved ones in the East. No music, no lectures, no parties, just the steady grind of hard work and the care of little children. "*

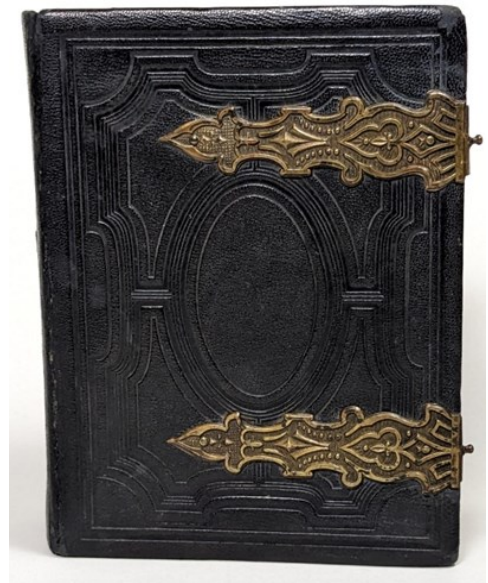
Adding to her uneasiness were the frequent absences of Matthew. such as his spell on transport duty for the Canadian army for six weeks in the early spring of 1885 during the Northwest Rebellion. Or his three-month stay in Regina when he was hired as a carpenter for the new Northwest Mounted Police barracks.

There is no evidence that Susan did any photography after moving to the Prairies. She did however instruct her husband in the rudiments of the art. In the 1906 Regina Industrial Fair. Matthew's photographs received first prize in the category "Views of the Northwest-Amateur Photography." It is possible that these images were hers. but being a former professional she may have been prohibited from entering. In 1907. the Hendersons moved into Regina where Matthew operated a real estate venture called the Henderson Land Company. They relocated to Victoria, B.C. in 1913 for their retirement years. Matthew died in October 1926 and four years later Susan went to live with her youngest daughter, Agnes, in Winnipeg. Susan died November 17, 1931 at the age of 81.

The Northumberland County Archives and Museum (NCAM) graciously provided the illustrations for this article. NCAM has the *carte de visite* of an unknown gentleman (c1869-1874) produced by Ms. Roberts. This



photo album is from the Hagen Family Collection 1981.001, donated by CDHS member Marion Hagen in 1996.





Portions of this material was originally published in *The Cobourg Evening Post* for May 5, 1990. A special thanks to Abigail Miller of NCAM for providing the images of their holdings.

## Our Readers Ask

Last month a CDHS member mentioned that she has a Cobourg related medal and is looking for any information on its



history and significance. The medal's current owner noted: "The medal belonged to my grandfather Edward Thompson. My grandmother gave this to her brother and supposedly said that the medal was presented to acknowledge his contributions to helping Brits to settle in this area. It has the British coat of arms on the front and, from the inscription on the obverse, it appears that my grandfather was the past president."

In response to this reader's query, I received the following detailed response from CDHS member George Parker:

I found a similar medal for sale on the internet:

[Antique Sterling Canadian Masonic SOE Medal Badge Gloucester Lodge 103 Fidelity – Yesteryear Essentials](#)

It seems that the SOE group was independent of the Masons. I took this passage from a Mason's group in Hamilton:

*The Sons of England Benevolent (or Benefit) Society was a Canadian benevolent society formed to assist needy Protestants of English extraction (mainly working-class families) and to promote loyalty to the monarchy while providing cooperative insurance and burial plots to members in need because of family illness or other mishap. Mr. George Clatworthy in Toronto founded the Society in 1874 and it was organized into local lodges. The Canadian Sons of England Benevolent Society was governed by the Grand Lodge for Canada which held meetings in various cities across the country with its' own constitution and bylaws and consisted of the Supreme Council, the Executive Council, the Beneficiary Board, and the Finance Committee of the Beneficiary Department. This Grand Lodge was not related to the Masonic Grand Lodge of Canada in the province of Ontario that was instituted in 1855.*

So it may not be correct to call it a "Masonic SOE" medal as the internet description does. According to the last line in the article mentioned above, the two groups were not related. I would simply say that this is an "SOE medal" rather than referencing "Masonic".

George Parker

## **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>.

**Online Sources for Scottish Research – February 14 at 8:00 PM** – Have you exhausted the many online resources for finding your Scottish ancestors? This meeting is a Zoom only event. All Welcome. Please Pre-register: [LGSregister@gmail.com](mailto:LGSregister@gmail.com) Speaker is Christine Woodcock.

**NOTE: The time of this presentation will be 8:00 p.m.**

**Saturday, April 6, 2024 – Hybrid Meeting – Rotary Room Cobourg Library – Presentation at 1:30 p.m.**

***The Rice Lake Trading Post* – Speaker: 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 1800's while touching on many topics, including the American Revolution, War of 1812, Mackenzie Rebellion, North West Company... and more. Closely tied to this story and the people was the formation and growth of the Rice Lake Reserve (now Hiawatha First Nation) and the Otonabee Township in Upper Canada.

# Join Us Tuesday, January 23, 2024 The History of Cobourg as Told by Street Names

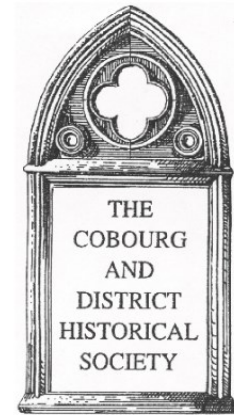
Presented by Peter Delanty, Mayor of Cobourg  
2000-2010

## Please join us ...

Cobourg was first called Amherst and then Hard Scrabble and in the 1820s the name was changed to Cobourg.

Several streets were named for the early prominent citizens, for ancestral heritage and significant business people. Commencing in the latter 20th century, new streets would be named after Mayors.

Peter's presentations are always delightful and entertaining, filled with interesting tidbits. Join us and bring a friend!



## 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](mailto:Brianincobourg@gmail.com)



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