



# Historically Speaking

The Newsletter of the Cobourg and  
District Historical Society

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Don't miss our Fourth Annual Trivia Night on Friday Nov 27 at Legion Village Pub from 7pm to 10pm. There will be the usual cash bar, 50/50 draw **plus** during the break we will be featuring personal stories from "War Brides" living in Cobourg.

Everyone is welcome! Tickets are \$5/person or \$2 for CDHS members. Nibbles included.

## Our Previous Meeting

### *In a Box of Letters*

Linda Nicol presented the moving tale of *The Story Told in a Box of Letters from a Navigator in WWII to His Young Love* at our October meeting. Her tale was skillfully built from a box of letters and an inexpensive compact. This is a story of romance, hardship, courage, and grief in WWII as told through the letters of an Australian



Airman to a young women in Edmonton, Alberta. We learned how they met and why he was so far from home, what it was like to be a navigator in 1944 awaiting deployment in Britain and many other aspects of life during the war. Linda researched an aviator's life and, based on a box of letters she wove a fascinating tale. Assisted by John Draper she read excerpts from the letters and combined their story with historical

details of the time. If you missed our meeting Linda has promised to make her presentation available on the CDHS website.

## Future Meetings

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| <p><b>Tuesday January 26, 2016</b>, George Parker<br/> <i>From Forest to Farmland: Surveying<br/> Hamilton Township</i></p> | <p><b>Tuesday February 23, 2016</b>, Allan Kirby<br/> <i>Historical Folk Songs from Eastern Ontario</i></p>                                 |
| <p><b>Tuesday March 22, 2016</b>, Ted Rafuse<br/> <i>The Ontario Car Ferry Company: Cobourg to<br/> Rochester</i></p>       | <p><b>Tuesday April 26, 2016</b>, Tom Holden<br/> <i>The 1878 Northumberland Atlas in Google<br/> Earth</i><br/> Annual General Meeting</p> |
| <p>Tuesday May 24, 2016, Bus Trip, <i>Museum Secrets: Trenton and Belleville</i><br/> Details to be announced</p>           |   |

## Membership Matters

### **Speaker Introductions**

The Programme Committee requires volunteers to introduce and thank our speakers at our regular meetings. We provide the biographical information from the speakers as well as tips on crafting a great introduction and thank you! If you are willing to take on this important task at an upcoming meeting, please contact any member of the Programme Committee.

### **Very Rewarding Work**

Our Programme Committee has been hard at work brainstorming ideas for an exciting season of speakers and events! If you have suggestions for future guests or wish to join the Programme Committee, please feel free to approach any of the members.

## The Last Spike

The installation of the replica ore car on the Cobourg waterfront is progressing. On November 8 several volunteers drove the last spike to secure the rails that will eventually support the ore car.



From the mid-1800s to the early 1900s the Crossen Car Company was a major manufacturer in Cobourg. Among their lesser known products were the ore cars used to transport iron ore from the mine near Marmora to Cobourg. In an 1881 accident several of these cars were sunk in the Trent Narrows just west of the present bridge on Highway 30. The remains of the sunken cars were retrieved and form the basis of the restored ore car.

The tracks were donated by Bill Neil who lives beside the Iron Ore Mine at Blairton about 4 miles west of Marmora on Crowe Lake. At his own expense he hired a backhoe which had to dig about 10 feet into a hole of loose iron ore. He then delivered the rails to Cobourg. As given to us, the rails were 17 feet long. We had to cut them to 12 feet for our display. Looking at the rails it is interesting to see that the top portion of the rail appears to have been rolled around the bottom portion – maybe when red hot. Quite

possibly the top cover was then quenched to increase the metal hardness as it tightened on cooling around the bottom portion.

These rails did not have bolt holes for joiner plates. However George Parker has located two more rails at Harwood dated ca1875 which do have holes. We think that since our rails were pounded into the ground they were quite possibly used to hold guy wires supporting the main lifting derrick for the iron mine. History says that all other rails were shipped to the Canadian sector



in France in WWI to be used to carry ammunition to the Front Line and casualties on return.

## **Announcements**

### ***Heritage Fair***

The Port Hope Historical Society will sponsor a Heritage fair on Sunday, May 1, 2016 from 10am to 4pm at Lion's Centre, Thomas St., Port Hope. For further information phone (905)885-2981 eMail [info@porthopehistorical.ca](mailto:info@porthopehistorical.ca).

## Interview with War Bride Olive LaSalle

*Leona Woods*

Olive LaSalle currently lives in Legion Village and is 89 years old. She will be 90 this June and while she admits that she and her husband had a hard life when they arrived in Canada after the war, they had a good life.

Olive lived in Risely, England, a small town in Berkshire near Redding. She could see the incendiary bombs hitting London from where she lived and later in the war, when the missiles were falling on London, she knew that they were taking out whole streets at a time. Her town was not bombed. When the Red Cross, “a penny a week fund”, was moved out of London to an old Jacobean home called Bramshill House ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bramshill\\_House](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bramshill_House)), Olive rode her bike to volunteer there each day. Many of the other girls lived in and the trucks from the military bases in the surrounding area would come over and pick the girls up for dances. Bramshill House was not far from the army signal corps stationed in Aldershot and so there were lots of dances to go to. When Olive learned of this, she decided that she wanted to live in as well, and so she did.

She met Jim, a Canadian from Chesterville near Ottawa. He was a truck driver and they struck up a friendship. When Jim was discharged he went back to Canada but returned to England to marry her in 1946. She was 18 and he was 23. They lived in England in Risely and Reading for three years before emigrating to Canada. Although Olive and Jim were married after the war ended, and so Olive may not technically have been a “war bride”, she is considered so for this interview.

Olive’s wedding after the war was organized using coupons because rationing was still very much a way of life. She made her wedding dress and there was not enough fabric to make the bridesmaids dresses out of one colour so they made do with a wide swatch of another colour between the bodice and skirt. They catered the wedding themselves and people would meet her at their gates with extra bread coupons that she could trade for other food for the wedding reception – a feast of salads and cans of tongue. There were no wedding gifts because people had nothing extra. They had spent years being creative with clothes and food, stretching everything they had to the limit. Rationing remained a way of life in England through the early 1950s.

Olive and Jim came to Canada in 1949 on the Aquitania which was still a troop ship at the time. The men and women were housed separately and there were sixteen women sleeping in a room. They would go down to the dining room for meals and were stunned at the huge spread before them. The food was overwhelming!

Olive and Jim arrived in Chesterville, a little town just south of Ottawa, where Jim was from. There was no employment there and so they had to go to Toronto in order to survive. They shipped their furniture by CP rail from Chesterville to Toronto for \$37. They found two rooms to stay in for \$17 a week and had to find jobs immediately as they had no money to pay the next week's rent. Both Jim and Olive found work almost immediately and Olive continued to work all her married life at Falconbridge Nickel. They had one daughter, Barbara, who became a figure skating champion and still teaches figure skating today. She lives in Cobourg with her husband and Olive's grandson, wife and two granddaughters live in the area as well.

When Olive arrived in Canada she was very homesick and said that she felt that at times "she could almost swim home." Olive came from a large family and she had left most of them behind. She did have a sister in Bowmanville but they did not have much contact with each other. Olive's sister was also a war bride but the Canadian that she married was a difficult man and her life was hard. She had ten children, and her husband discouraged any contact with Olive so the sisters saw each other very seldom.

There are few war brides left now. Their lives in Canada were very different from the lives they would have had, had they stayed in England. It took courage to emigrate, to come to a new country with a husband and, sometimes, children. It took courage to make a new life. Olive has no regrets except that she cannot live out her days with her husband Jim who passed away some years ago.

## CDHS Executive for 2015 – 2016

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