

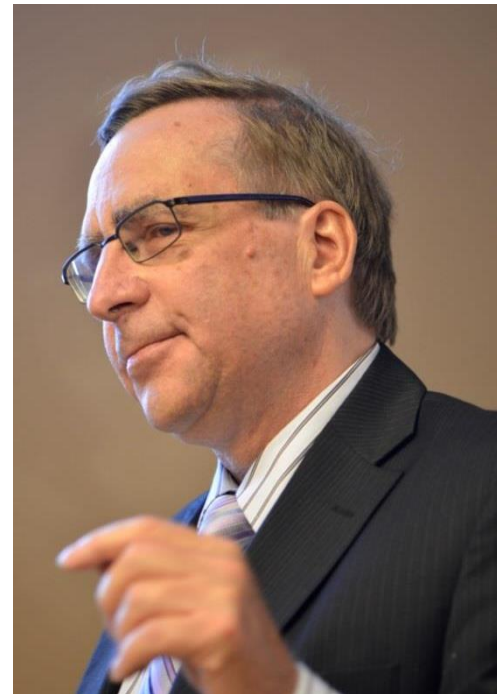
# Historically Speaking

The Newsletter of the Cobourg and District  
Historical Society

November 2018 — Issue 300

## 38 Hours to Montréal

We are pleased to welcome back to the Cobourg Historical Society meetings author and speaker Dan Buchanan. Dan's newest book is entitled, *38 Hours to Montréal*. This book chronicles the adventure of William Weller, the Stagecoach King of Cobourg who was challenged to get the Governor General from Toronto to Montreal in less than 38 hours. Dan will be entertaining us with the story chronicled in his book, outlining the adventure as it starts at Beverley House in downtown Toronto and ends at the Exchange Coffee House in Montréal. Considering the state of roads in the 1840s and the stagecoach experience, the attempt to traverse this distance in just over a day is an amazing challenge. So come to the meeting and see how Cobourg's own William Weller accomplished this feat. Dan Buchanan will also have copies of his book for sale for those of you who want to know every detail.



Join us for Dan's presentation on Tuesday, November 27, at Victoria Hall. Doors open at 7:00 PM for coffee and cookies. 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*** **The Secret Life of William Lyon Mackenzie King**

Dr. Christopher Dummitt, Professor of History at Trent University's School for the Study of Canada and co-founder of the Canada 150 project was the featured speaker at our October meeting. Dummitt talked about the secret life of William Lyon Mackenzie King. King served as Prime Minister for 22 years and died as a respected although not particularly charismatic



leader. After his death, Mackenzie King's private diaries were made public and the world learned that he was a man who led a double life. He was an eccentric bachelor who communed with the spirit world, his deceased mother and his beloved dog Pat. He also connected with prostitutes believing that he could "save" them. Dummitt's recently

published book, *Unbuttoned: The Secret Life of William Lyon Mackenzie King*, is about both the story of the man and the story of the diaries themselves.

This presentation raised questions about public *vs.* private persona, the role of executors in destroying documents, the role of historians in exposing secrets and, of course, who William Lyon Mackenzie King really was. You can read more about Professor Dummitt and his work at <https://www.christopherdummitt.com/>.

## Future Meetings

<p><b>Tuesday, January 22, 2018</b> Citizens' Forum, Victoria Hall, 7:30pm</p>	<p><b>Dave Mowat</b> <i>A Social History of Alderville</i></p>
<p><b>Tuesday, February 26, 2019</b> Citizens' Forum, Victoria Hall, 7:30pm</p>	<p><b>Gerry Brown</b> <i>Armistice 18 Historical Fiction Novel</i></p>
<p><b>Tuesday, March 26, 2019</b> Citizens' Forum, Victoria Hall, 7:30pm</p>	<p><b>Judith Goulin</b> <i>Jackson and Jex: Renowned Cobourg Builders</i></p>
<p><b>Tuesday, April 23, 2019</b> Citizens' Forum, Victoria Hall, 7:30pm</p>	<p>Annual General Meeting <b>TBA</b> Cobourg Sports History</p>
<p><b>Wednesday, May 15, 2019</b> Citizens' Forum, Victoria Hall, 7:30pm</p>	<p><b>Hugh Brewster, Moderator</b> A Panel to Debate: <i>The Secret Diaries of Susanna Moodie</i> End of season social event</p>

## Member Matters

### ***New Members***

Please join me in welcoming our newest members: Randy Barber, Barbara Solveig, Jennifer O'Rourke and Thomas Warnke.

### ***Old Members***

Many of our long time members enjoyed talking with Dr. Granville Nickerson. Dr. Nickerson now lives in Toronto and, at almost 100 years of age, seldom makes it to our meetings. However, he is always an enthusiastic supporter of our group and history in general. While still a medical student he successfully employed an innovative treatment for juvenile tubercular meningitis. Nickerson achieved national repute in 2015 when he donated his grade school book autographed by Babe Ruth to the Queens County Museum. A few years ago *The South Shore Breaker*, a Nova Scotia newspaper, reported the event as follows:



One day in 1933, a shy young man was walking down Main Street in Liverpool with his friends and saw Babe Ruth in front of the post office.

That young man was Granville Nickerson. He was 11 years old at the time and at age 93 he returned to Liverpool to give the Queens County Museum a gift – an autograph from Babe Ruth.

Nickerson was a part of a group of friends known then as the Bristol Boys – named for the street they lived on. They were walking home from school when they spied Babe Ruth in front of the post office talking to Dr. John C. Wickwire.



“He’s wearing

high lace boots, britches and a jacket and we wondered what he was doing here,” he says.

In his hand Nickerson had a copy of *The Mill on the Floss*, a book he was reading for his Grade 7 class. He said to a friend that he wished he could ask Babe Ruth to sign his book and without hesitating, his plucky friend grabbed Nickerson's book, walked right up to the baseball legend and asked for an autograph.

"I remember he said 'Hey Babe, will you write your signature in my friend's book?'" recounts Nickerson.

Babe Ruth took the book and signed it much to the delight of the boys watching, who all got to meet Babe Ruth in turn.

The book also received another signature from a friend of Granville – Leroy Surette – who did it as a joke directly after Babe signed the book.

"Leroy Surette signed it too... I was going to erase it but they said it might spoil Babe's signature," Granville remembers.

Nickerson has had the book ever since.

### ***Microphones***

Much of Christopher Dummitt's interesting talk was missed by some who were unable to hear him because of the way the headset microphone was used since the headset did not fit Christopher. Leona will be renting a lapel microphone for the next meeting as some speakers find that much more comfortable to use. If you are having trouble hearing the speaker, please do not hesitate to raise your hand and ask that he/she please speak more loudly. Leona will sit towards the back of the room in future and you can signal her if you would prefer.

## **In Memoriam**

### **Ronald Gordon Oberholtzer**

*March 26, 1929 - November 4, 2018*

Long-time active member of the Cobourg and District Historical Society and dear friend of mine, Ronald Gordon Oberholtzer, PEng, passed away in the NHH in his 89<sup>th</sup> year, Ron was born in Kitchener, Ontario but spent his youth in Port Rowan and the town of Simcoe.

His university graduation photo shows a very handsome young man with a lovely smile and glint of mischief in his eyes. Daughters Beth and Candace confirm that he had a devilish side and enjoyed a good joke. I concur with this especially when he played a very good hand of bridge! This side of Ron remained intact until his later years. When visiting him at Palisade Gardens I hunted him down to find him enjoying a game of darts. He would always make light of his skills. Another thing about Ron, which I learned from his wife Cath, was that he could be painstakingly perfect about any "engineering" task about the house. The finished product was always admirable!



Both Ron and his beloved partner of 54 years, Cath, devoted hours to the establishing and supporting the Archives which were housed in the C. Gordon King Centre in 1995. Their involvement lasted sixteen years when the responsibility of maintaining the Archives was turned over to the town. In addition, Ron and Cath as a team were responsible for newsletter distribution for four years. Ron also was a CDHS liaison with the Library Foundation for a number of years.

Quoting daughter Beth: "Ron was Mum's academic research assistant, documenting the artifacts Cath was researching, building archeological sifting screens, and accompanying her on her teaching/speaking circuit". Their teamwork was well established!

What is less well known is that Ron had a pilot's licence and was a keen Motor Sports fan. In fact, he and Cath met through the Oakville Car Club both enjoying many car rallies while courting.

A fine gentleman, Ron is survived by his children Bath, Todd, Candace and David as well as five grandchildren.

*Dorothy De Lisle*

## **Cobourg Goes to Ottawa**

*George Parker*

The recently re-opened Science and Technology Museum in Ottawa now has a "Cobourg" item on permanent display: one of our Iron Ore Cars, constructed here in Cobourg in 1867 by James Crossen and A. E. Munson, for the Cobourg, Peterborough & Marmora Railway and Mining Company. The car on display is in its "original" condition. That is the car has been kept in more or less the same condition as when it was retrieved from the Trent River by Parks Canada in 1980 (after being submerged in the river for 99 years). When Ken Willcocks and George Parker visited the Parks Canada Service Centre in Cornwall in 2014, this Ore Car was being stored off in a corner, its future unknown. Now, 38 years after it was retrieved from the river, it has finally found a home! And since there do not appear to be any other railway cars remaining from this early era (1867), this Ore Car on display in Ottawa is now the **oldest surviving railway car in Canada!**

Visit <http://www.marmorahistory.ca/new-page/> for additional details of the Blairton mine and the ore cars that transported its product.

# 1883 Cobourg Memorabilia

The Cobourg Fire Department was recently contacted about some elaborate tableware presented 135 years ago. The Grand Trunk Railroad provided elaborate mementos!



## A Ripe Old 300

Leona Woods

This newsletter is the 300<sup>th</sup> since the founding of the Cobourg and District Historical Society. In March of 1980 Ken Brown, President of the Heritage Association, met with 25 people in the foyer of the not yet reopened Victoria Hall to see if there would be interest in forming a group that would explore local history. A steering committee of Marion Hagen, Rob Mikel, Lois Ann Verney, Louise Connolly, and Peter Greathead decided that there was sufficient interest and the first public meeting was held in May of that year. Since then the newsletter, *Historically Speaking* (issues 1-300) and the *Historical Review* (1981–2014) have recorded the presentations, activities and items of interest to the organization. Names such as Percy Climo, Rob Mikel, Gordon King, Marion Hagen, Dorothy Sifton, Peter Delanty, Dorothy De Lisle, Elizabeth Parken, Jane Greathead, Diana Cunnington, Richard Randall, John and Alma Draper, Charlotte and Alan Cockerill, Cath Oberholtzer and Judith Goulin among others appear on these pages as contributors to the knowledge of the members.

Copies of *Historically Speaking* from 2010 to present are now on our website and can also be downloaded each month. Visit <https://cdhs.ca/news-notice/newsletters>. Ken Strauss is the current editor. Some members still receive hard copies delivered by Carla Jones. However, before computers were part of most households the newsletter editor, John Jolie, published “snippets” at the back of each *Historical Review* from 1980 to 2011.

In March 1999 (#147) Jolie wrote about people fighting progress. He reported that “*The Cobourg World* of June 17, 1921 reported the opposition to the paving of King Street. Indifferent to the horse manure, the dust, the mud and the ruts that were the nature of the road, opponents to a cement surface presented three points: 1. Cobourg could not afford the \$110,000 to pave King Street from William to the east limits of the town, 2. If the council waited a few years the construction costs would surely drop, 3. There were complaints that the disruption would drive visitors away”. The town went ahead and the next year a petition was presented to pave Division as far north as the CNR tracks.

In April 1999, Jolie reported that the Arlington Hotel, at the north end of Victoria Park, was a meeting place of high society during WWI and one summer evening when the Salvation Army Band was playing outside the hotel, “to their surprise and delight, a guest stepped outside and joined their hymns. The guest was the great tenor Enrico Caruso.” If you walk along Walton Street and note the houses at 309, 311, 313 and 315 you will see that they have a similar appearance. The bricks are said to be from the Arlington Hotel.

In May of 2003, the newsletter recorded the impact of the opening of Highway 401 in 1961 had on the farms and roads and people in Northumberland County.

In 2006 the newsletter noted that King Street as it is now is very different from what it once was with mud and animal droppings, ice and wood stored behind stores, livery stables off the main street, six water closets behind Victoria Hall and root cellars as well. The harbour had wooden slippery docks, coal, railway and ferries. All was not as sanitized as it is now.

Copies of the *Cobourg and District Historical Review* are available in the Local History Room on the second floor of the Cobourg Public Library and contain fascinating accounts of life in this area, and of historical events of significant importance in the development of this country.

## **Announcements**

### ***Free Research Tool***

Genealogists have long recognized the importance of the many county atlases produced in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some of these atlases were reprinted during the 1970s but many of these reprints are becoming as rare as the originals. McGill's Rare Books and Special Collections Division is fortunate in owning copies of many of the original atlases.

Begun in July 1998, the County Atlas pilot project initially encompassed ten atlases. Two subsequent Phases allowed the completion of the Ontario map, ultimately totalling forty-three atlases.

The County Atlas Digital Project is a searchable database of the property owners' names which appear on the township maps in the county atlases. Township maps, portraits and properties have been scanned, with links from the property owners' names in the database.

Visit <http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/countyatlas/search.htm> for free access to a wealth of information. If this type of material is of interest you may also want to investigate *The County of Northumberland Directory for 1870-71* which is available for download from the CDHS website at <https://cdhs.ca/images/downloads/1870NorthumberlandDirectory.pdf>

### ***Interesting Blog***

A Belleville resident, Lindi Pierce, maintains a blog with numerous articles of interest to those who enjoy local history with an emphasis on architecture. For dozens of fascinating articles and photographs visit <http://ancestralroofs.blogspot.com>.

## CDHS Executive for 2018 – 2019

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