

Historically Speaking

The Newsletter of the Cobourg and District

Historical Society

October 2021 — Issue 326

Cobourg Ingenuity Over 50 patents were filed by ingenious Cobourg residents between 1870 and 1918. Our presenter, Ken Strauss, will explain patents and why they matter. You will hear the stories of some of Cobourg's successful inventors, our dabblers and our weird!

Ken worked at one of Canada's first computer service firms, was principal in a software development company serving the printing trade and later filled a variety of information technology positions at Ontario Hydro. Ken has had a lifelong fascination with mechanical devices and delights in converting ideas to metal in his home workshop. Since retiring in 2003 he has mentored high school students participating in the F.I.R.S.T. robotics competition, worked with the Tetra Society, an international group that builds solutions for people with physical disabilities and with the University of Toronto to build experimental prosthetics. Since moving to Cobourg he has been active in the CDHS and has served in various positions including editing our *Historically Speaking* newsletter since 2010. Ken is passionate about responsible government. He is a founding member and currently a director of the Cobourg Taxpayers Association.



Join us on-line via **Zoom, Tuesday evening, October 26, 2021 at 7:30 p.m.**

Please register in advance for this webinar:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_iNk_sjIyS5i_G628SCU71A

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

Cobourg and District Historical Society Programme 2021–2022

All meetings start at 7:30 p.m. on the 4th Tuesday of each month except as noted below.

November 23, 2021 by Zoom

Saving the Past for the Future—Brookside, an Invaluable Community Resource: Learn about the history of this Cobourg landmark. Rob Mikel, local historian and author, will present.

December 7, 2021 by Zoom

Canadians Under Attack December 7, 1941: An additional meeting in memory of the 80th Anniversary of the Pearl Harbour attack. Tim Cook an historian at the Canadian War Museum and member of the Order of Canada, will present.

January 25, 2022 (Expected to be an “in person” event)

Trivia Night, Social, Membership Drive: To be held at the Legion Village Pub, 111 Hibernia Street, Cobourg. Details to follow.

February 22, 2022 (Expected to be an “in-person” event)

Trent Severn Waterway: Saluting the human ingenuity and history of The Trent Severn Waterway.

March 22, 2022 (Expected to be an “in person” event)

Maureen Jennings - The Murdoch Mysteries Award Winning Author: Ms. Jennings will speak about her inspiration for the Murdoch mystery stories, her attention to historic detail and accuracy, and her role as creative consultant on the series. She would like to share her love of history and her ‘treasures’ which she hopes will enthrall others as well.

April 26, 2022 (Expected to be an “in person” event)

Rum Runners - The story of Ben Kerr and Prohibition: An exciting story of the roaring twenties in Ontario where rum runners challenged the storms of Lake Ontario to smuggle booze to the American side. Hear the story of Ben Kerr, the most notorious of the bunch, who ran his last load of booze out of Presqu’île and ended up crushed by February ice near Colborne.

May 24, 2022 (TBA)

An “in-person” social accompanied with an outing or special presentation is planned. Details will be published in a future issue of *Historically Speaking*.

Member Matters

If you missed it

If you missed our September meeting you can enjoy the recorded version on YouTube. No special sign-in is required and you can view the video on computers, tablets, smartPhones and smartTVs. Go to: <https://youtu.be/rDXKEHer3nM>

New Members

Please join me in welcoming our newest CDHS members:

Patricia Beeson

Mark Kean

Marilyn Wood

Membership Renewal

It is membership renewal time. Even through the pandemic we incur costs that include: hosting of the Zoom webinars, our website, honorariums to our speakers, production of promotional materials and contributions to permanent historical features that are part of our town. We have kept the membership fee the same as last season: Individual Membership: \$30 and Family Membership: \$50

- If you wish to pay by e-transfer, please send to the Membership Chair, Brian Murphy: brianincobourg@gmail.com
- If you wish to pay by cheque, please make your cheque payable to the Cobourg and District Historical Society and mail it to:

CDHS Membership Chair

P.O. Box 911, Stn Main

Cobourg, ON K9A 4W4

Thank you for your continued support of the Cobourg and District Historical Society!

Announcements

Hastings County Historical Society

The Hastings County Historical Society is hosting another fascinating presentation “Indigenous History: Reading Between and Beyond the Lines”. It is free but you must register in advance. For further details, visit <https://hastingshistory.ca/photos/custom/Fox-Zoom-Social-Media.3.pdf>

Road Trips

If you are tired of staying at home but not yet ready to venture into crowds, a road trip might be what you need. For a selection of road trips to visit various local historic sites visit <https://hastingshistoricalplaques.ca/road-trips-map>

Reminiscences of Mrs. White of White's Mills

The following is the story of a settler who came to the Cobourg area almost 250 years ago. Life was certainly not as comfortable as today but those who moved here appear to have been contented and with very hard work they prospered. White's Mills was named after Mrs. White's husband, Josiah Charles White, who built a grist mill on the upper reaches of the Factory Creek, west of Hull's Corners.

My father and mother came from England, settled in the United States, in St Lawrence Co., upon a farm which they purchased there, planted some trees, and were beginning to prosper when the Revolutionary War broke out in 1774.

Hearing that sugar was made from trees in Canada, and being thorough Loyalists, and not wishing to be mixed up with the contest about to be carried on, they packed up their effects and came over to Canada. Arrived at Sorel, they stayed some time, but a fire happening at the house they occupied, in which the deed of our land in the United States was destroyed. Guy Carleton, Lord Dorchester, granted them eight hundred acres of land, with some implements to clear away the trees and settle on lands called Sidney, near Belleville.

The country at that time was a complete wilderness, but by energy and perseverance, for a long time, we got on very happily. Many years afterwards my father tried to regain our farm (Chrysler's) in St. Lawrence Co., but the deeds being burned at Sorel he could not do anything, although the American Government would have put him in possession if the deeds had been forthcoming.

In those secluded wilds their trust was in Providence, who blessed their endeavors. They had two sons and five daughters; one of the boys was drowned.

Mother used to help to chop down the trees, attended the household duties, and, as the children grew up, they were trained to industrious habits. We were very useful to her, attended the cattle, churned the butter, making cheese, dressing the flax, spinning and made our own cloth and stockings. I have a gown now in my possession that I made of homespun sixty years ago.

Before our crops came around, having brought seed with us, supplied by Government, we had rations from the military posts; also, when these were nearly exhausted, father collected our butter, cheese and spinning, taking them in a batteau to Kingston, which he traded off for salt, tea, and flour.

The Bay of Quinte was covered with ducks, of which we could obtain any quantity from the Indians. As to fish, they could be had by fishing with a scoop. I have often speared large salmon with a pitchfork. Now and then provisions ran very scant, but there being plenty of bull-frogs, we fared sumptuously. This was the time of the famine. I think in 1788 we were obliged to dig up our potatoes, after planting them, to eat.

We never thought of these privations, but we were always happy and cheerful; no unsettled minds, no political strife about church, government, or squabbling municipal councils. We left everything to our faithful Governor. I have often heard my father and mother say that they had no cause of

complaint in any shape and were always thankful to the Government for their kind assistance in hour of need.

We had no doctors, no lawyers, no stated clergy; we had prayers at home, and put our trust in Providence.

An old woman in the next clearing was the chief physician to the surrounding country, as it gradually settled. A tree fell one day and hurt mother's back very much. We sent for the old woman, who came, steeped some wheat, made lye, applied it very hot, in a flannel, and in a very short time she was well as ever.

As the girls grew up, and settlers came round, a wedding occasionally took place. There was but one minister, a Presbyterian, named Robert McDowall, a kind, warm-hearted man, who came on horseback through the woods from Kingston, and where he saw smoke from a house he always made up to the residence, where he was always welcome. He had a most powerful voice; when he became excited he could be heard a mile off. All who were inclined to marry he spliced, with many a kind word to the young folks to be sure to be prosperous by industry and perseverance. He married Mr. White and myself. I have the certificate yet. When the other girls would smirk and look pleasant at him, think he was a great benefactor to the race, he would chuck them under the chin and say, " It will soon be your turn. I am going to Clarke, a long way off, through the woods, with very few settlements on the way, and when I come back, mind and be ready." There was not much trouble in that, for the girls had no dresses but what they spun and made for themselves.

We got along first-rate, so that when any of the girls married afterwards, they each had a portion of one hundred acres, one colt, four cows, a yoke of steers, twenty sheep, and linen which they had spun and wove, some furniture which they made. Carpets were not known then, nor were they wanted, as the floor of a farmhouse were always scoured by their own industry.

My mother died in 1834. She was blind for several years previous to her death. She was in the 104th year of her age. My father was killed by the raising of a barn.

I was married to Mr. White in 1812 and came to Cobourg in 1815. It was quite a wilderness, but a few small clearings, and only three houses in the place, a rough corduroy road that led to the lake.

We took a clearing made by Mark Burnham, brother to Zacheus Burnham. We did very well, and as my husband used to go to Montreal in a batteau, which took him three weeks, to buy goods for Burham's store, which he had opened near the Courthouse, he had many ways, independent of the farm, which he left me to manage.

Mr. Mark Burnham soon became rich, for, as settlers came in, they had plenty of money, which they had earned of the Government, they never cared what they gave for anything so long as they got what they wanted.

After a time, my husband got up a small distillery which proved, at last, to be a curse to the neighborhood. It drew a vast number of Indians, who became very troublesome, who would throw logs of wood at our door to obtain more firewater. It was very profitable, so we managed to put up with this Indian annoyance. Mr. Mark Burnham used to help at the distillery in those days, when my husband went to Montreal. He would be gone some five or six weeks. It was a hard, fatiguing journey. My husband being a thorough Government man, one of the old school, he was well protected and cared for, and was much respected by the Indians, whom he managed very well. The country was full of Indians.

My husband used to bring seeds from Montreal. Here the soil was very rich, and soon we had a very fine garden, which in those days was quite a curiosity. In May we had fine lettuce, and as to onions, they were as big as turnips.

After staying at Burnham's clearing for four or five years, by that time Mr. White had saved enough to buy a farm we have lived upon ever since. I do not know who made the first clearing, but some of the fruit trees were planted when we came to it.

Here we succeeded well, had to work early and late, cared not how the work went. We continued to thrive and brought up our children industriously.

Land at that time about Cobourg was of very little value. A good-sized block, leading from Smith's building to the English church, could have been bought for a saddle. By degrees others came in, so as to make a snug little community.

My husband, in hopes to benefit himself and family, bought land at Rice Lake, some twenty miles in the back country. Here he built a mill, so that all we gained by farming was lost in this speculation. I did not approve of this speculation and would not go there to live. The old minister used to say, "Attend diligently to what you once under- take, and do not run from post to pillar."

About fifteen or twenty years ago the country began to be better known; a great many settlers came with money, which greatly improved the state of things. I never expected to see steamboats to run to and fro to the States, nor railroads to run through our farm. A great many improvements have taken place, both in roads and implements. Yet, I do not think all these tend to make people contented and happy, for the rising generation are not so much so as their forefathers; they have ideas that can never be realized. Give me the social spinning wheel days, when girls were proud to wear a homespun dress of their own spinning and weaving, not thinking of high-heeled boots and thin shoes, nor rigged out in hoops and crinoline; salt-cellar bonnets, which have occasioned a great demand for doctors, which were almost unknown in my young days.

Witness:

J. COVENTRY,.

J. C. WHITE.

(Signed) CATHERINE WHITE, Aged 79 years.

As the Town debates how and when to re-open Victoria Hall's Concert Hall, Citizens Forum and other meeting rooms, we thought it appropriate to go back in time and discover the story of the visionaries who built this magnificent building.

The following originally appeared in the October 2018 issue of *Historically Speaking*:

A Grand Gamble

In the late 'forties and early 'fifties the citizens of Cobourg were certain that their town was destined to be a city and the belief was shared by many men of prominence in Ontario. A harbour good for the times had been constructed, the railway to Peterborough was expected to result in great prosperity and the population of Cobourg was increasing. It was natural, consequently, that noted Toronto architect Kivas Tully, should be employed to design a town hall commensurate with future greatness.

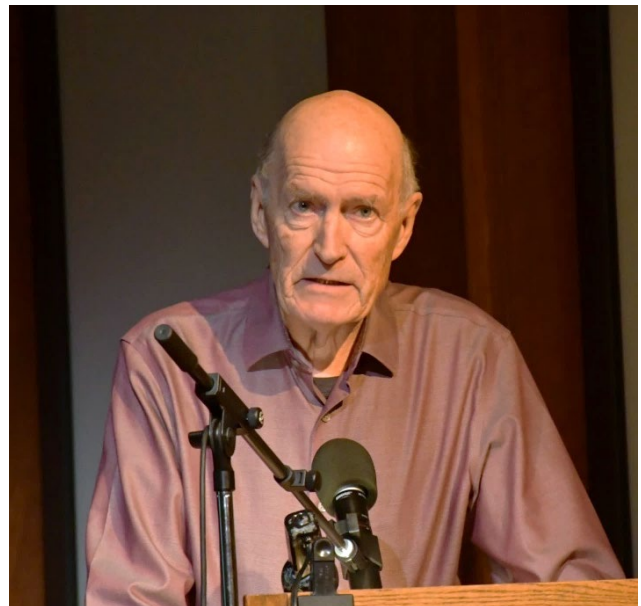
Excavation and construction were under way in 1856 and on the 1st of December Mayor D.E. Boulton and Clerk Davied Brodie issued a proclamation announcing the laying of the cornerstone "in a Public Manner with Grand Masonic Ceremony" and fixing the 18th of the month as a holiday for that purpose. *The Cobourg Star* commented that "great as our progress has been our past is but a trifle to the great future which lies yet unopened before us".

From *Cobourg 1793-1948* by Edwin C. Guillet.

So began the story of "Victoria Hall, that most magnificent of mid-Victorian civic buildings graces the small town of Cobourg in Southern Ontario, symbolic of its ambition at the time, of its aspiration to be a major centre in Canada West, and signifying its prowess in tapping the resources of the interior with a railway to the timber lands and developing area to the north" as described by Peter John Stokes in *Victorian Cobourg*.

On September 18 John P. Taylor, formerly Executive Director of the the Society for the Restoration of Victoria Hall, kept the rapt attention of a full house in the Concert Hall as he described the construction, narrowly averted destruction and the painstaking restoration of Victoria Hall.

After his presentation Hall screened Taylor's short docudrama, *The Grand Gamble*, that recreates the decision to build a grand city hall and the story of its restoration. Watch the video at <https://cdhs.ca/stories/65-the-grand-gamble>



Honouring Belleville's Co-Discoverer of Insulin
DR. JAMES BERTRAM COLLIP

Please join us on October 16, 2021



The City of Belleville and the Dr. James Bertram Collip Memorial Committee are pleased to invite you to a special monument unveiling ceremony to pay tribute to former Belleville resident, Dr. Collip. As one of the four co-discoverers of insulin, he has helped to save the lives of millions of diabetics around the world.

MONUMENT UNVEILING CEREMONY

WHEN: 11 a.m., October 16, 2021

WHERE: behind Belleville General Hospital, directly east of the Rotary Fitness Park,
along the Kiwanis Bayshore Trail

EVERYONE WELCOME

guests are asked to respect COVID-19 mask and distancing protocol

CDHS Executive for 2021 – 2022

President	Carla Jones	cgrucelajones@gmail.com (289) 252-1684
Past President	Leona Woods	leonawoods@sympatico.ca (905) 372-7624
Vice-President	Randy Barber	randy.barber1947@gmail.com (905) 377-9421
Secretary	Open	
Treasurer	George Kamphorst	gfkamphorst@gmail.com (905) 375-8563
Membership	Brian Murphy	brianincobourg@gmail.com (289) 634 2727
Programme Co-Chairs	Carla Jones Randy Barber	cgrucelajones@gmail.com randy.barber1947@gmail.com
Programme Committee Members	Gerry Brown Diane Chin George Kamphorst Leona Woods	blackcat111343@gmail.com dianemchin@gmail.com gfkamphorst@gmail.com leonawoods@sympatico.ca
Members-at-Large	Gerry Brown Hannah LeBlanc Diane Chin	blackcat111343@gmail.com (905) 372-3984 h18leblanc@gmail.com (905) 376-4937 dianemchin@gmail.com (289) 435-2015
Newsletter Editor	Ken Strauss	ken.strauss@pebblebeach.ca (905) 377-9854