

Historically Speaking

The Newsletter of the Cobourg and District

Historical Society

October 2025 — Issue 358

Beyond Renaming: Reclaiming Canada's History

Historian Christopher Dummitt will guide us through the complexities and controversies surrounding recent high-profile cases of historical renaming. Why do partial truths so often replace a more nuanced understanding of the past? Why is it so difficult to resist the growing calls for de-commemoration? Most importantly, how can those of us who want to honour Canada's history be both responsible citizens today and faithful stewards of the heroes and stories that have shaped our shared past.

Dr. Christopher Dummitt is a Professor of Canadian Studies at Trent University and the author of a number of books including *Unbuttoned: A History of Mackenzie King's Secret Life*. Dummitt frequently contributes thought provoking editorials to the *National Post*.

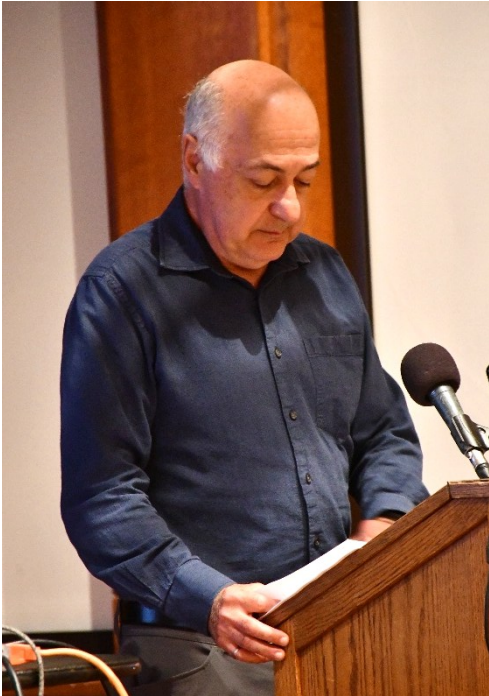


Join us on **Tuesday, October 28, 2025**, for an informative presentation in Cobourg's Victoria Hall. Doors open at 7:00 pm. All are welcome. There will be coffee/tea and the usual cookies so bring a friend or two! Members free and guests are \$5.00.

Our Previous Meeting

AVRO ARROW: The Right Decision?

On Friday, February 20, 1959, 14,000 employees were immediately fired and sent home, after a project they had been working on since 1953, was abruptly cancelled. That project was the military, supersonic, advanced interceptor, the Avro Arrow. Those fired had to quickly find other jobs including work with other aircraft companies, critical technical positions with NASA and many other fields. A HR worker, Elwy Yost, became the beloved TV host of *Saturday Night at the Movies*! Thousands of workers at Canada's third largest



corporation had a shared dream of creating the world's most advanced fighter jet. With the stroke of a bureaucrat's pen, that dream was changed from reality to piles of scrap titanium to be sold to the highest bidder by Crown Assets Disposal Corporation.

Our speaker, Palmiro Campagna, is a retired professional engineer and author of four books. Palmiro has spent decades studying why the Arrow project was cancelled. The truth is complicated: the project was expensive and somewhat over initial cost estimates; there was a since discredited assumption that missiles would replace bombers so high performance aircraft were no longer required; there were largely successful efforts to degrade Canada's capability as a creator of complex weapons

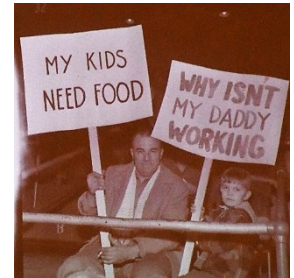
systems to a developer of minor components. Was cancelling the Avro Arrow a good decision? **NO!**

The situation is perfectly captured in an extract from a once Top Secret document: the important consideration was how to deceive the voters rather than making the best decisions for Canada's future prosperity. Little has changed since 1959.

4. During the brief discussion it was said that, even though a logical, reasoned case might be made for obtaining the F-101B's, such a decision could not be explained to the public. The repercussions of telling CINCNORAD that Canada was not prepared to re-equip the CF-100 squadrons would not be too great.

For
the

complete details of the Arrow project read Palmiro's *The Avro Arrow: For the Record*
<https://www.amazon.ca/Avro-Arrow-Record-Palmiro-Campagna/dp/145975316X/>



Events of Our 2025/2026 Programme

Date	Presenter	Description
Meeting October 28, 2025	Dr. Christopher Dummitt	Beyond Renaming: Reclaiming Canada's History Dr. Dummitt, Professor of Canadian Studies at Trent University, will speak about the current controversial practice of de-commemorating significant figures in Canadian history by removing statues and signage, changing street names, and rewriting texts. He will also introduce his new YouTube channel designed to make Canadian History come alive.
Meeting November 18, 2025*	Dr. David Wilson	A Revolutionary in Cobourg: The Fenian World of Denis C. Feely Dr. Wilson, Professor of History at University of Toronto, will share the fascinating but forgotten story of a young law student who wound up co-directing a 19th-century bomb campaign against Britain.
Meeting January 27, 2026	George Parker	John Rae's Search for the Franklin Expedition In 1845, the Franklin expedition vanished in the Canadian High Arctic while searching for the Northwest Passage. After years of failed rescue attempts, the Hudson's Bay Company turned to their most skilled explorer, John Rae. This presentation follows Rae's journey – what he uncovered in the Arctic, and how his shocking account of the expedition's fate was received in Victorian England.
Meeting February 24, 2026	CDHS members	Homes with a Story to Tell The stories of area homes – Dumble House, The Breakers, St. Anne's Spa, Barnum House and Lakehurst – that have impacted Cobourg's and even Canada's history.
March 24, 2026	Gordon Pitts	Scary Harry, The Northumberland County Cheesemaker Who Blew Up the Old West Albert Edward Horsley, a Northumberland County cheesemaker, became infamous for his role in one of the most explosive political crimes of the early 20th century.

Meeting April 28, 2026	Dennis Carter- Edwards	Nine Ships: The Peter Robinson Immigration In 1825, nine ships carried over 2,000 Irish emigrants to what is now Ontario, as part of the Peter Robinson Emigration Scheme—a government scheme to aid families facing hardship in Ireland. Traveling via Kingston and Cobourg, the settlers established new communities in present-day Peterborough County and the City of Kawartha Lakes. Their arrival helped shape the region’s cultural and historical landscape for generations.
May Social	Trip	Complete details of our planned trip will be provided closer to the actual event.

***Due to a conflict with another user of Victoria Hall, this meeting will be on the third Tuesday rather than the usual fourth Tuesday.**

Recent CDHS Meetings

For those who were unable to attend, videos of our recent meetings are available online:

<i>Meeting Date</i>	<i>Link to Meeting Video</i>
January 2025	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7baHeZTTHtw
February 2025	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIgXDHab9io
March 2025	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YitEaDWpO0U
2025 AGM	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PrJsD0nLS4
April 2025	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIgp4xTHuXg
September 2025	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWtzdrTzBTo



Victoria Hall Circa 1880

This photo of Victoria Hall is undated, but several clues help to narrow the timeframe:

- The Dominion Bank is visible on the east corner of the building. It operated at that location from 1874 until relocating in 1902.
- On the left side of the photo is Pauwel's House. Pauwel moved into this building after the Globe Hotel burned down in 1864. He had vacated the premises by 1882.

Together, these details suggest the photo was likely taken between 1874 and 1882.

<https://digitalcollections.vicu.utoronto.ca/RS/pages/view.php?ref=3038&k=#>

From our Patron

His Worship Lucas Cleveland

Thank you for having me here tonight. It is my profound honour to be the Cobourg and District Historical Society's first Patron, a role I will most assuredly wear as a badge of distinction... In both art and culture, the role of a Patron has often been pivotal in allowing those with incredible talents to have the resources to bring their creative vision to life. So this new title means a great deal to me.

When I think of Cobourg's own history, it is the microcosm of our own great nation itself... hard work... hardships... persistence and perseverance, a belief in both self-reliance and determination... The story of Cobourg, I would argue, is the story of Canada itself...

I have always loved history, from the grand to the eccentric, from the profound to the intriguing footnotes... the incredible tapestry that is the very panorama of the human experience...

What intrigues me most is that history should not only inform... but it should impact us every day, both now and in the future...as our greatest teacher...not as some fleeting apparition...but as a sage... telegraphing out a clarion call across the ages...a guideline that is the basis for the very edification that is the blueprint for how our very humanity contextualizes the road ahead...the very path before us.

History should never be the vague spectral images in a misty rearview mirror... no, history is literally civilization's canvas painted in both the broad strokes and the smallest tangential whispers that are made up of our greatest achievements...to our darkest shames...

Our world history is a collection of the profound...the profane...the banal...the vainglorious to the literal glorious...it reads like a novel of the highest highs and the lowest lows...but it is a novel whose pages are added to, unabated...that as one chapter climaxes, there is always another with new twists and turns.

When we think of tonight's topic, the Avro Arrow's history comes to life with a tale of intrigue...political and military machinations, but above all, it is a story of heart...a Canadian story that shows us once again punching above our weight...using our never-say-die attitude that we brought to two great World Wars...every Olympics and certainly every major hockey game...we have ever been in, for examples.

Why organizations like the Cobourg and District Historical Society matter so much is they are not only the guardians of our community's shared past...but they keep it alive for where it really matters... in the future...

In closing, I would like to personally thank the Cobourg and District Historical Society, its Executive and Membership, and my fellow Councillor, Randy Barber, for thinking of me for this special honour...and in Randy's honour I would like to quote... probably my favourite quote about history, or at least one's own personal history, from a giant in world history who is close to Randy's own heart. In the words of Sir Winston Churchill...

"History will be kind to me...for I intend to write it"

Thank You

The preceding was delivered by His Worship Lucas Cleveland in Victoria Hall as part of the September 23 meeting of the Cobourg and District Historical Society.

Member Matters

New Members

Please join me in welcoming our newest CDHS members:

- John Sled and Lori-Anne Simpson—Individual membership
- Neil Hamilton and Ann Moring—Family membership

Land Acknowledgement—

The CDHS Executive has decided to adopt the same land acknowledgement as that used by the Cobourg and Area Museum. Written in consultation with Rick Beaver of Alderville, it is specific to Northumberland and is much shorter than that used by the Town of Cobourg.

We respectfully acknowledge that we are on the treaty and traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig Anishnaabeg. We offer our gratitude to the First Nations for their care of and teachings about our Earth and our relations. May we honour those teachings.

The residents of Alderville maintain the Black Oak Savannah nature preserve and an ecology garden. They are regenerating 81 hectares. They also conduct controlled burns of the property. In addition, they provide tours, school trips and run camps focusing on the importance of caring for the environment.

Canada Invaded!

David Beasley

U.S. President Donald Trump announced his intention for the United States to make Canada the 51st U.S. state. Although he said the take-over would be only through economic pressure, his reputation for using force and dissimulation alerted Canadians to the possibility of another armed invasion. Canada has faced several invasions from the United States as described in brief accounts below.

The French and Indian War (1754—1763)

This was fought between France and Great Britain to determine control of the vast colonial territory of North America. (The more-complex European phase was the Seven Years' War [1756–63] fought in Europe.) The French and Indian War began over the specific issue of whether the upper Ohio River valley was a part of the British Empire, and therefore open for trade and settlement by Virginians and Pennsylvanians, or part of the French Empire. Settlers of English extraction were in a preponderance in the coveted area, but French exploration, trade, and alliances with Native Americans predominated.

The government of Virginia argued that the lands of the upper Ohio were included in the colony's 1609 charter and that this grant gave Virginia a claim to the western lands that was more valid than New France's claim. When it became clear that raw Virginia militia could not make headway against seasoned French regulars, the war spread like wildfire across the continent. Both British regulars and the American colonial forces became seasoned wilderness fighters. Perhaps the most-notable Anglo-American unit to adopt that style of combat was Rogers's Rangers, a corps of some 600 frontiersmen under commander Robert Rogers. Description of the War is best found in Kenneth Roberts' powerful novel, *Northwest Passage* about the exploits of Major Robert Rogers whose Rangers raided Indian and French settlements. Roberts' narrator wrote about Rogers: "To me, at times, he seemed almost a god: at other times possessed by demons." Rogers led the Rangers' attacks on Indian and French settlements by way of Lake Champlain beginning with St. Francis, along the Great Lakes conquering the French forts to Fort Detroit. He is regarded as an American hero by Americans interested in history but when he returned from adventures in Europe at the start of the American War for Independence, Rogers joined his brother James' regiment of Loyalist militia, a true British patriot.

The American Revolution (1775—1783)

Although the American colonies were not yet the United States, they formed militias to fight the British troops within each colony. Many colonial government officials and perhaps half the population refused to rebel.

Early in the fighting, two expeditions of Americans were sent to capture Quebec which had refused to join the Americans in the rebellion against their British rulers. One prong of the attack, led by General Montgomery, went by way of Lake Champlain to attack Montréal while the other led by Benedict Arnold took a more arduous route through the Maine wilderness to attack Québec City. Kenneth Roberts describes the harrowing passage of Arnold's troops through Maine to besiege Québec. Arnold is wounded and cannot join in the battle for the Lower Town which the Canadians win. Meanwhile Montgomery's troops have taken Montréal. Continuing to Québec to help Arnold's force besiege it, they fail to conquer it and retreat with Arnold's troops in a snowstorm. Kenneth Roberts' novel *Arundel; a Chronicle of The Province of Maine and The Secret Expedition Against Québec* gives the reader a sense of the Maine wilderness the expedition must overcome.

The fighting between Indian nations, Loyalist militias and Rebel forces was often random as this passage from *From Bloody Beginnings; Richard Beasley's Upper Canada* illustrates: "The rebel militia caught up to Brant's party two days later as it forded the river with its plunder. Well-disciplined and eager to avenge themselves, some militiamen veered to get in front of Brant's smaller force, but Brant, hearing gunfire, led forty of his men through the underbrush to get in front of these militia to ambush the ambushers. Surprised, cut off from their main body, the rebels refused Brant's offer to surrender. Fighting Indian style behind rocks and trees, each man for himself, Brant's white Volunteers and Indians took all day to subdue the militia in what was later called one of the bloodiest contests of the revolution."

The War of 1812 (1812—1814)

This was the first American invasion of Canada in which American armies tried to conquer Canada from the farthest extent of the Great Lakes to Quebec. Canadian militia, British regulars and Indian nations from the West and East repulsed the American invaders after suffering destruction of towns, mills and ships. While the British fought the French over the West Indies and Napoleon in Europe, American President Madison saw an opportunity to capture Upper Canada to cut off the timber sent from it to England which used it to build its ships. Without timber the British navy would be weakened, giving American ships greater command of the seas.

Major John Richardson, Canada's first novelist, wrote the first narrative of the war. His *A Canadian Campaign* was serialized in a British periodical in 1826-27. It describes the fighting on the Right Division of the Army of Upper Canada about Detroit and south through Ohio and Pennsylvania. Richardson joined the 41st British Regiment at age 15 as a Gentleman Volunteer, was promoted to Lieutenant after proving himself in battles, and was taken prisoner to Kentucky after his regiment and Tecumseh's Indians were overwhelmed in the Battle of the Thames (1814).

The war comprised three battle regions: The Right Division in the West, the Centre Division in the Niagara area, and the Left Division in eastern Canada. Richardson, after spending 23 years in Europe and returning to Canada, gathered documentation on the battles in the other regions but when the Reform government withdrew its grant to him to pay for their publication, he added documentation on the Right Division to his *A Canadian Campaign* and published it as *The War of 1812* in 1842. *The Canadian Campaign* was reprinted by Davus Publishing in 2011 with an introduction by David Beasley and reprinted with other writings in *Operations of the Army Under General Wolfe: The Battle for Quebec* in 2023.

Richardson claimed that Canada would have been lost to the Americans in the first year of the war if it were not for the Indigenous nations in the west that Tecumseh persuaded to join the British in Amherstburg and fight the American armies beginning with Fort Detroit, which the American General Hull surrendered without a fight from fear of the fierce tribes and potential massacre of the fort's inhabitants.

Pierre Berton dramatized the war covering the battles in all the regions chronologically in two volumes: *The Invasion of Canada. 1812—1813* (1980) and *Flames Across the Border, 1813—1814* (1981).

“At the planning level, the war was marked by incredible bungling. As in so many wars, but especially in this one, the day was often won not by the most brilliant commander, for there were few brilliant commanders, but by the least incompetent. On the American side, where civilian leaders were mixed in with regular army officers, the commands were marked by petty jealousies, vicious infighting, bitter rivalries. On certain memorable occasions, high-ranking officers supposedly fighting the British preferred to fight each other with pistols at dawn. Old soldiers were chosen for command simply because they were old soldiers; they acted like sports heroes long past their prime, weary of the contest, sustained only by the glamour of the past, struggling as much against the ambitions of younger aspirants as against the enemy. Some were chosen capriciously. One general was given an important command solely for political reasons— to get him out of the way.

“On the Canadian side, where "democracy" was a wicked word and the army was run autocratically by British professionals, there was little of this. Many of these men, however, were cast-offs from Europe. The officers gained their commissions through purchase, not competence. With certain exceptions, the cream of the British Army was with Wellington fighting Napoleon's forces on the Iberian Peninsula. Aging veterans made up part of the garrison forces in Canada. Boys of fourteen and fifteen fought with the militia. Lacklustre leadership, incompetent planning, timidity and vacillation were too often the concomitants of command on both sides of the border.”

The Canadian militia had been training for war since the American loyalists fled the United States after the Revolution and fought bravely against the invaders, although without the British regulars, they could not have prevailed. *From Bloody Beginnings; Richard Beasley's Upper Canada* (Davus Publishing: 2008), by David Richard Beasley describes the fighting in the Niagara Region where Richard Beasley was Colonel of the 2nd York Regiment. The War is seen in the context of the founding and development of Upper Canada from the American Revolution to the end of Upper Canada in 1841. An excerpt from the book captures the horror of the battle of Queenston Heights when the Americans crossed the Niagara River from Lewiston: “The boats returning to the American side carried the wounded and dead, presenting the ghastly sight of men without arms and legs to those waiting to cross. The militia, which by law did not have to serve on foreign soil, stood back in horror. No one coordinated the boat traffic. There was general confusion and too few boats. . . The Americans, terrified by the sight of painted savages with their tomahawks, swarming up the hill and whooping, fled before the musket balls tearing their bodies in shreds. Stumbling over long grasses, they were scalped by the pursuing Indians or shot by Canadian militiamen, who, if they were not wearing cast-off British uniforms, had to be careful that the Indians did not mistake them for the fleeing enemy. Americans, panic-stricken young boys in their first battle, leaped from the cliff into the river and were shot trying to swim. Others hid in the rocks and thick vegetation on the cliff side but were flushed out by the Mohawks, who, infuriated by the loss of some warriors, refused to give quarter.”

The Dickson Filibuster (1836)

The first minor American invasion of Canada left Buffalo with 60 men and attempted to seize the fur outposts of Manitoba but most of his followers deserted and he vanished to the west.

The Patriot War (1837—1838)

In 1837, the large colonies of Upper and Lower Canada (basically modern Ontario and Quebec) were controlled by conservative cliques. Reformers hoped to topple the Family

Compact of conservative elites which governed both provinces with little regard for the farmers and city workers. American sympathizers formed armed groups waiting on the American border for the success of the rebels when they would invade the Canadas. Poorly organized invasions from Detroit on Windsor, from Buffalo on the Short Hills in the Niagara region, and from Navy Island in the Niagara River on Chippewa on the Canadian shore were the main events, easily repulsed. In August 1837, a militia called the Sons of Liberty formed with the intent of expelling Britain from Quebec and declaring independence, under the leadership of Louis-Joseph Papineau. Papineau's men first fought the British on November 6; when they were forced to disband in mid-December, the fighting had taken 300 Canadian and British lives. Another rebellion in Upper Canada under William Lyon Mackenzie was also suppressed in Toronto.

Duncombe's Rebellion (1837):

In western Upper Canada Dr. Charles Duncombe raised an army of rebels and made Scotland town their rallying point. They planned to march on Brantford, Hamilton and join up with a victorious Mackenzie but Mackenzie's failure left them faced with a strong militia under Allan MacNab and Six Nations Indians. They fled and many were captured and imprisoned. The rebel headquarters was in Cleveland, Ohio, from which Hunters hoped to invade Canada across Lake Erie if the rebels seemed to be successful.

The Battle of the Windmill. An American force crossed the St Lawrence River on November 16, 1838, captured the windmill in Prescott, Ontario and fought British regiments until it realized the Canadians were not going to support them.

The Fenian Raids (1866—1871)

The Fenians' object in capturing Canada West and Canada East was to hold the country hostage to force Great Britain to surrender Ireland. They intended to take Ottawa and imprison Canadian political leaders to exchange them for Irishmen imprisoned in Britain. They planned for multiple invasions at points in Canada West (now southern Ontario) and Canada East (now southern Quebec) intending to cut Canada West off from Canada East. Most of their plans petered out and just an invasion across the Niagara River from Buffalo to Fort Erie by hardened Civil War veterans encountered Canadian students who had muskets which they had never fired. The Battle of Ridgeway was won by the Fenians but the students had stopped the Fenian advance; fearing the approach British regulars the Fenians fled back to Buffalo.

Cobourg, 1901

At the time of the original article, Toronto residents considered Cobourg to be an expensive place – far from the current perception of Cobourg as a lower cost retirement town. The image below is from *The Toronto Star* for Saturday August 24, 1901. Note the price of the sixteen-page weekend edition of the *Star*!



Announcements

Discover Victoria Hall

The Victoria Hall Volunteers are sponsoring an open house from 3pm to 8pm on Friday, October 17, 2025. There will be free guided tours with interactive experiences, a scavenger hunt of Victoria Hall features and special activities for the children. Visit their website for more information: <https://vhvcobourg.ca/>

Stroll Through St. James Cemetery

The next Hastings Historical Society meeting features a stroll through history with four reenactors who will regale with stories of innkeeping, the feed and grain business, the exploits of the Hastings Prince Edward Regiment during WWII and the grandest theatre that Belleville had ever know. Tuesday, October 21 at 7pm at Maranatha Church Auditorium, 100 College Street West, Belleville. Admission is free.

Cobourg Museum Foundation Needs Volunteers!

We are seeking enthusiastic volunteers to welcome visitors and guide them through our exciting new exhibits. Your commitment of just three hours a week would be greatly appreciated. No prior experience is necessary – just bring your passion for history and community! If you are interested, please email us at info@cobourgmuseum.ca



We Were the Bullfighters

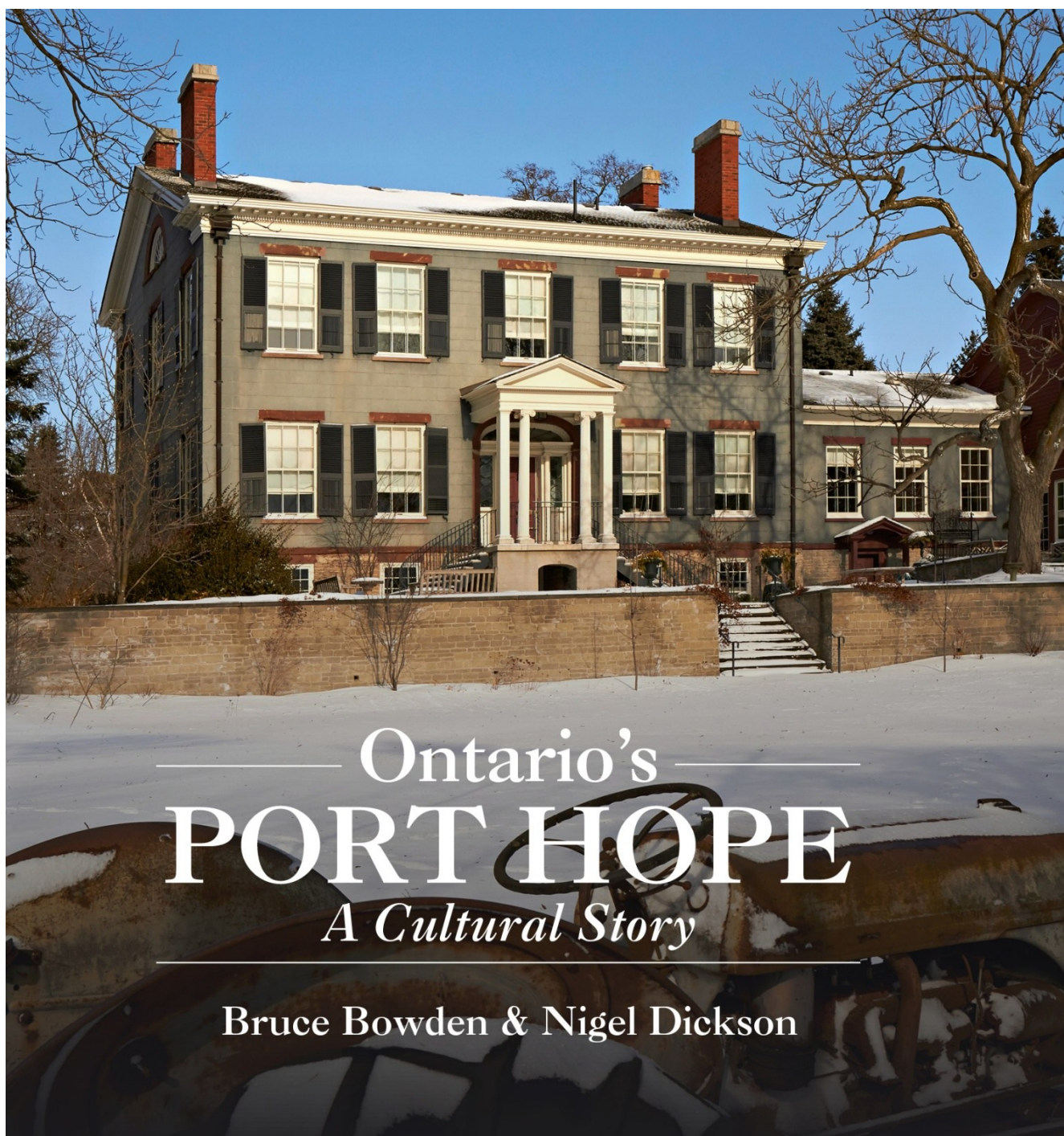
In 1923 Ernest Hemingway moved to Toronto and was hired as a staffer for the *Toronto Daily Star*. On his first day, he was sent to cover a prison break at Kingston Penitentiary. Toronto lawyer Marianne Miller uses Hemingway's fascination with the escape of Canada's most notorious bank robber, Norman 'Red' Ryan, as a backdrop for her historical fiction novel following Ryan's escape and exciting pursuit through southern Ontario and across the US.

<https://www.amazon.ca/We-Were-Bullfighters-Marianne-Miller/dp/1459753607/> or local bookshops.

Acts of Darkness

Local retired criminal lawyer and recent CDHS presenter John L. Hill's latest book, *Acts of Darkness*, exposes the many faces of crime, and the many faces of injustice. Some acts of darkness are brutal and unmistakable: murder, drug wars, and violence behind prison walls. Others are more calculated: fraud, betrayal, corruption, and abuse of power. And some unfold quietly, in courtrooms, in boardrooms, or deep inside Canada's justice system, where wrongful convictions, systemic neglect, and indifference can be just as devastating.

<https://www.amazon.ca/Acts-Darkness-Notorious-Criminals-Prosecutors/dp/1990735754/> or local bookshops.



Bruce Bowden and Nigel Dickson have authored an outstanding new book about Port Hope's architecture. For additional information about the book and purchase information, visit www.ontariosporthope.ca

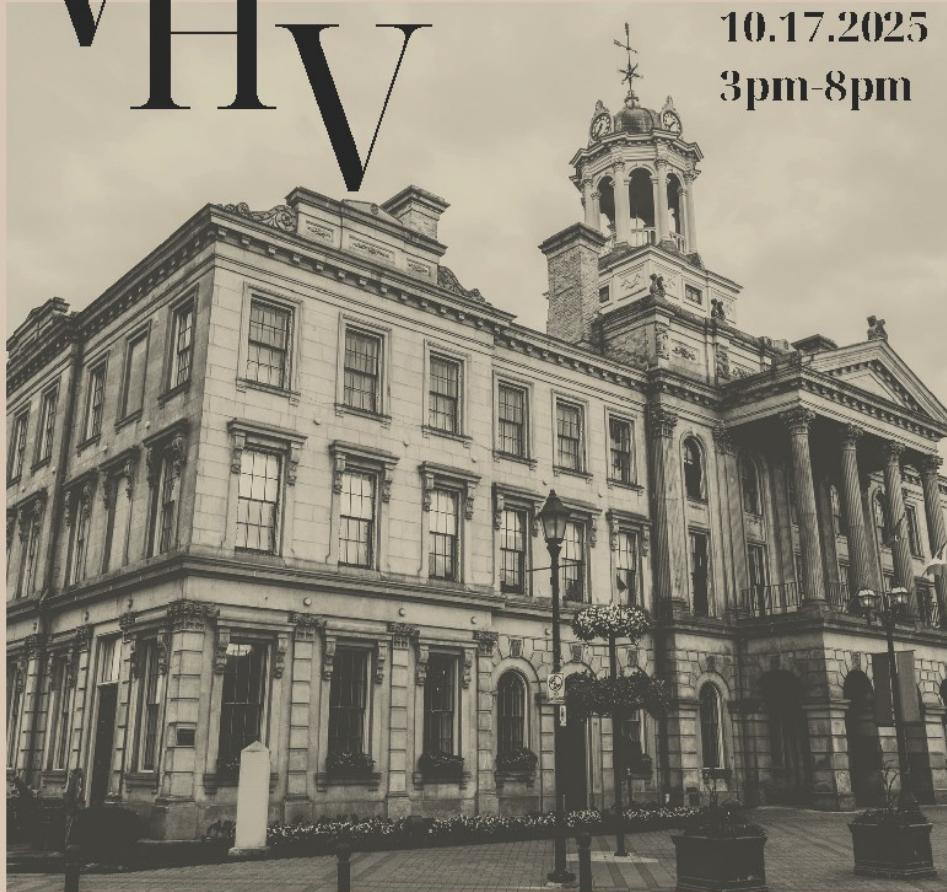


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FREE activities for the public including Guided Tours,
Scavenger Hunt & Children's Activities
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VHV

**10.17.2025
3pm-8pm**



Learn more at www.vhvcobourg.ca

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