

Historically Speaking

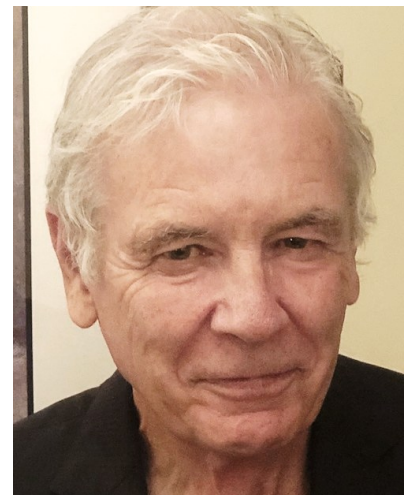
The Newsletter of the Cobourg and District

Historical Society

November 2025 — Issue 359

Denis Feely: Cobourg's Irish Revolutionary

Denis Carroll Feely was one of the most notorious Irish revolutionaries in the United States. A leading member of the Clan na Gael, an Irish secret society he helped to organize a bombing campaign in Britain during the 1880s. Feely lived in Cobourg during the 1860s where he took his law degree at Victoria College, established a successful career as a lawyer and was a leading figure in the town's St Patrick's Society while secretly sympathizing with the aims of the Fenian Brotherhood to initiate a revolution in Ireland. In 1866, "Hounded out of Canada by the bigotry of a cowardly herd," he took the ferry to Rochester, resumed his law practice, and resurfaced as an open supporter of the Fenian Brotherhood.



Dr. David A. Wilson will trace the Cobourg career of a man who would be described as "one of the most prominent and bloodthirsty of rebels in the States," and suggest ways in which his experiences in Cobourg may have influenced his later radicalism.

Wilson is a Professor in the Celtic Studies Program and History Department at the University of Toronto, and the General Editor of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. A Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and a winner of the University of Toronto's Outstanding Teaching Award, he specializes in transatlantic history and has published and edited a dozen books.

Join us on **Tuesday, November 18, 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.

Note: This meeting will be on the third Tuesday rather than the usual fourth Tuesday!

Our Previous Meeting

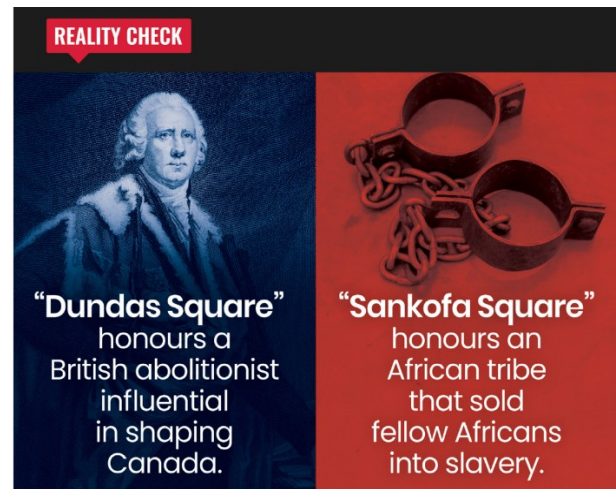
Beyond Renaming: Reclaiming Canada's History

Dr. Christopher Dummitt, Professor of Canadian Studies at Trent University, led the



audience through the complexities and controversies surrounding recent high-profile cases of historical renaming. Why do partial truths so often replace a 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 committed to honoring our history respond to advocates of renaming? Dummitt used the recent renaming of Dundas Square to exemplify the impacts of poorly informed politicians ignoring facts and producing results that many would consider the

opposite of those intended. Activists advanced the narrative that Henry Dundas, an eminent British politician who served as Home Secretary and later as First Lord of the Admiralty, was responsible for the continuation of the slave trade in the British Empire. This is likely to be the opposite of reality. Immediate abolition of the slave trade had little likelihood of approval by the British Parliament of the time. Dundas favoured a phased abolition of the trade which was approved by Parliament. Perhaps most amazingly, the eventual renaming of Dundas Square resulted in using the name of an African tribe that was an active participant in the slave trade!



Professor Dummitt's latest project reimagines how history should be told. Using fast-paced videos enhanced with AI-generated animation, he brings to life wild stories, rebellious victories, and the leaders who arguably should never have been in charge. To enjoy all of his creations visit <https://www.youtube.com/@Wellthatdidntuck/videos>



Events of Our 2025/2026 Programme

Date	Presenter	Description
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.
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***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:

Meeting Date	Link to Meeting Video
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
October 2025	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTETi9z8wRI

Member Matters

New Members

Please join me in welcoming our newest CDHS members:

- Individual membership—Donna Carter, Gail Tapscott, Caroline Tapp-McDougall, Pauline Green, Heather Hebert, Roslynn Cooke and Edwina Mears
- Family membership—Shirley and Ronald Lacey, Joan and Stephen Bale, Richard and Sarah Holland, Bryan, Linda and Dan Hallatt

Canada's Loss

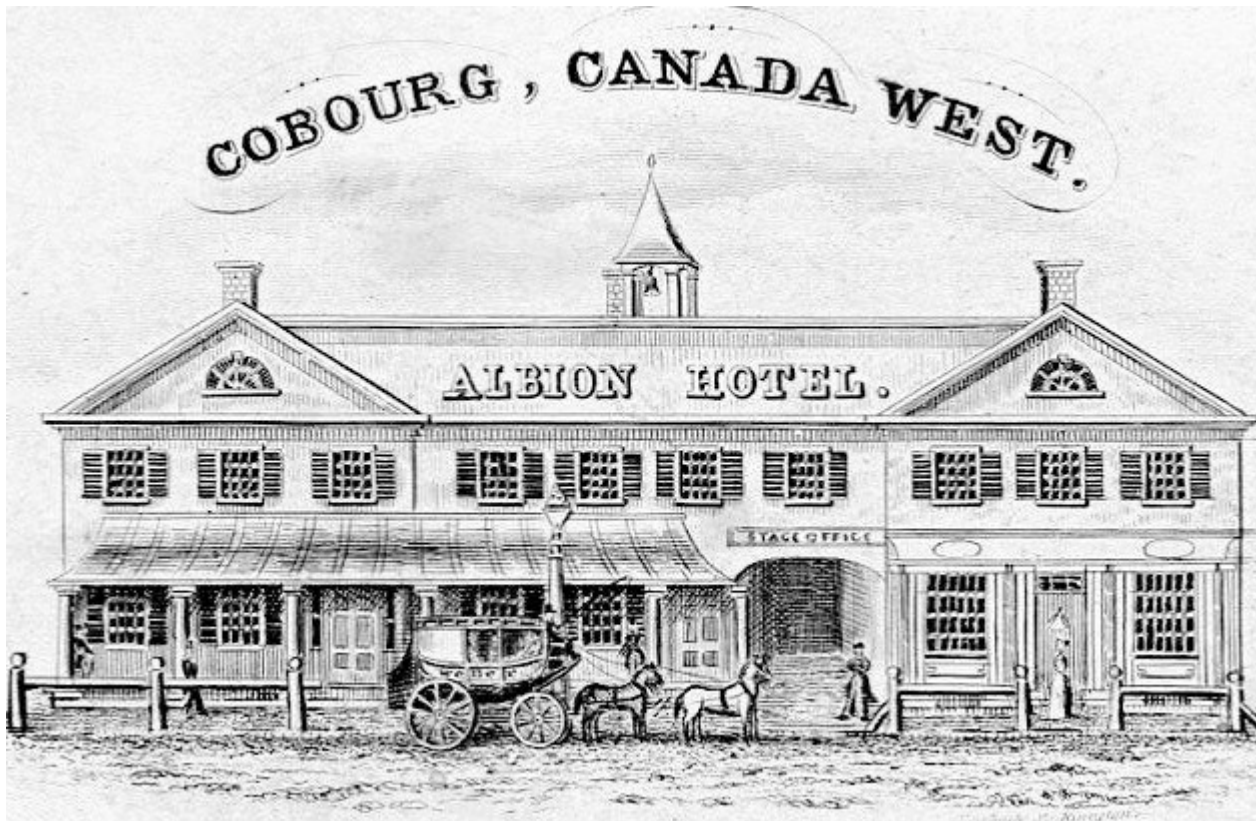
Tim Cook, the chief historian at the Canadian War Museum and Canada's pre-eminent military historian, has died. Cook was "a passionate ambassador" for both the museum and Canadian military history and his contributions to the Ottawa museum over the past two-plus decades have been "enormous," said the museum's president Caroline Dromaguet. Cook published 19 books and won numerous awards including the Ottawa Book Award for literary non-fiction on four separate occasions. He was a member of the Royal Society of Canada and the Order of Canada.

Long-time CDHS members will remember Dr. Cook's excellent November 2022 presentation on the almost 2,000 soldiers and two nurses who formed C-Force. They were sent to defend the British colony of Hong Kong, arriving in early November 1941, a month before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. You can enjoy the meeting recording at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ceUhZbssXR8>

The Rising Globe and the Falling Albion

Dianne Brock



This is the story of two inns, one lawsuit and a town caught between ambition and memory

In the heart of 1840s Cobourg, two hotels stood at the center of a legal and architectural drama that reshaped the town's main street. The Albion Hotel, long a fixture of hospitality, was shuttered by covenant—its closure promised in exchange for the rise of a new rival: the towering Globe Hotel.

What began as a formal agreement soon unraveled into courtroom conflict. The case of *Boulton v. Weller* tested the boundaries of contract law, equity, and procedural fairness. The Albion reopened prematurely, the Globe ascended in grandeur, and the courts weighed in with lasting consequences.

Yet Cobourg's triumph was short-lived. In 1864, fire consumed the Globe Hotel in a dramatic overnight blaze. Though lives were spared, the town's pride was reduced to ash. The Albion, meanwhile, found new life under E.E. Tennery—refurbished, reopened, and quietly enduring.

In the summer of 1845, a quiet agreement was struck in Cobourg that would soon ripple through the town's legal and commercial life. Mr. Weller, a local figure with ties to the

Albion Hotel, entered into a formal covenant with D.E. Boulton and others. In exchange for twelve pounds and ten shillings—roughly \$2,500–\$3,000 CAD today—Weller agreed to shut down the Albion Hotel, then operated by James Lambert. The closure was to begin once a new hotel, the Globe, was completed near Weller’s residence. More importantly, Weller promised to keep the Albion closed for two full years from the date of the agreement, July 11, 1845.

The Globe Hotel opened on August 1st, 1845, and Weller did close the Albion as promised. But on May 1st, 1846—just nine months later—he reopened the establishment, well before the two-year term had expired. The plaintiffs, believing this to be a breach of covenant, sued for damages totaling three hundred pounds (approximately \$60,000–\$75,000 CAD today).

The case, *Boulton vs. Weller*, was heard during the Michaelmas Term of 1846 in the Queen’s Bench of Upper Canada, under Queen Victoria’s tenth year on the throne. The court faced two key questions: whether Weller had breached the covenant, and whether a procedural error in describing the deed—the written agreement—invalidated the claim. Weller challenged the case by requesting a formal copy of the deed and filing a demurrer, arguing the case should be dismissed due to the misdescription.

But the court disagreed. Justices Macaulay, McLean, and Jones ruled that the proper response to a disputed deed was to plead *non est factum*—a formal denial of its validity—not to file a demurrer. This principle had already been affirmed in earlier cases including *Ross vs. Parker* and *Snell vs. Snell*. The court also clarified that the two-year closure period, whether counted from July 11 or August 1, had not elapsed when Weller reopened the Albion. He had clearly violated the agreement.

The Queen’s Bench ruled in favor of the plaintiffs. Judgment was granted on the demurrer, and both parties were permitted to amend their pleadings upon payment of costs. The ruling reflected a maturing legal system—one increasingly attuned to the demands of commercial life and procedural fairness.

Meanwhile, in the final weeks of 1845, the equity side of the dispute reached its own conclusion. The High Court of Chancery at Toronto, with the approbation of Master John Godfrey Spragge, issued a decree authorizing the sale of property to satisfy the judgment. The sale was to take place at the newly completed Globe Hotel in Cobourg, sometime in January 1846.

The property in question was Lot No. 9, Block No. 1 in Cobourg—a valuable parcel comprising dwelling-houses, a shop, storehouses, and premises adjoining the Albion Hotel.

With 66 feet of frontage on both the main street and the rear-facing street, the lot was prominently situated. Notices were distributed across Toronto and Cobourg, including Boulton's own office, inviting interested parties to obtain particulars free of charge. The decree was formally signed by J.G. Spragge on December 18, 1845.

The closure of the Albion was publicly announced in local advertisements, which described a rare opportunity for householders and innkeepers to acquire furniture and carriage goods from the inn's auction. Mr. Lambert, the Albion's operator, retired to his establishment at the Court House, where his reputation as a hospitable and capable landlord continued to flourish.

Yet the Albion Hotel would not remain dormant for long. On July 24, 1847, a new advertisement appeared in Cobourg's papers. E.E. Tennery announced that he had taken over the Albion Hotel, formerly occupied by Mr. Lambert. The building had been significantly enlarged, thoroughly repaired, cleaned, and refurnished for the comfort of travelers. Tennery assured the public that his table would be supplied with the best seasonal and market foods, and that the sleeping apartments were spacious, well-ventilated, and remarkably agreeable. The yard and stable facilities were described as safe and convenient, with attention given to the wants and comforts of patrons. Centrally located and long favored by citizens and travelers, the Albion was once again open for business—under new stewardship and with renewed ambition.

The local paper reported the Albion fire of July 22 1857:

Destructive Fire!

It is our painful duty to report another extensive conflagration, resulting in the destruction of buildings and property valued at no less than £3500. The fire was first discovered around 2 o'clock yesterday morning, issuing from a shed or outhouse on Swayne Street behind the building occupied by Mr. A Halliday.

An alarm was raised and firemen, along with a large number of citizens, were quickly on the scene. Despite their utmost exertions, the fire spread rapidly to the Albion Hotel and adjoining buildings on King Street, which were soon engulfed in flames and consumed.

For a time, the safety of the buildings on the south side of King Street was in serious doubt. Thanks to the determined efforts of the fire brigade, they escaped with only minor damage.

The buildings destroyed include Mr. Cuthbert's dwelling house and shop, insured for £65 on the shop, £45 on stock, and £12 10s on furniture, most of which was saved. Mr. Regan's dwelling house, stables, and sheds were uninsured, though the

furniture was preserved. The store occupied by T F Nicholl, Auctioneer, and owned by Mr. Regan was also uninsured, but its contents were removed. The Albion Hotel stables, sheds, and outhouses, occupied by W Y Church, were insured for £450 with the N D Mutual Fire Insurance Company and £400 in the Provincial on the furniture, nearly all of which was saved. The dwelling house and shops owned by H Terry and occupied by A Halliday and A Paton had no insurance on either buildings or goods.

The buildings, all constructed of wood and closely connected, proved impossible to save. The firemen worked with exceptional energy and perseverance, and only the highly combustible nature of the structures prevented the success their efforts deserved.

The origin of the fire remains unknown, though it is feared to have been the work of an incendiary.

The Globe Hotel, meanwhile, became a towering symbol of Cobourg's growth. Erected around 1846 at the northeast corner of King and McGill Streets, it stood five storeys tall—the highest building in town. Locals regarded it with pride, a testament to Cobourg's rising stature.

But tragedy struck on April 9th, 1864. Around 2 a.m., strong winds off Lake Ontario fanned flames that erupted within the hotel. Within three hours, the grand structure was reduced to smoldering ruins. Several guests were injured, and three lives hung in the balance. Two men and a twelve-year-old boy were trapped on the top floor, clinging to window sills as fire licked at their hands. A long ladder was rushed forward, and in a heart-stopping moment, all three were rescued. Miraculously, no lives were lost.

The financial loss was estimated between \$15,000 and \$20,000—a staggering sum in 1864. Yet the site lived on. In 1877, D. Hooey's residence was built there, later demolished in 1947. The Park Theatre rose in its place in 1948. During excavations in the 1940s, workers uncovered the original foundation timbers of the old Globe Hotel—a haunting reminder of Cobourg's grandest building and the night it was lost.

A version of this article was posted to the Cobourg Yesteryears Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/395744833503>) and is included here by permission of the author.

The Avro Arrow Lives On!

A CDHS member, Brian Murphy, recently visited the Edenvale Aerodrome in Stayner, Ontario. As part of the Canadian Air and Space Conservancy (CASC) collection, the display includes a full-size replica of the Avro Arrow. For more information on their collection and to arrange a tour visit <https://www.avroarrow203.com/>

At a recent Pickering antique sale (<https://ontarioantiquetools.com/>) a vendor was offering precision machinist tools—Starrett depth micrometers—engraved with “AVRO” and accompanied with inspection certificates from 1959.



The Disappearance of Big Tony: A Colborne Mystery

John L. Hill

Colborne, Ontario — On a warm July evening in 1955, 62-year-old Anton “Big Tony” Gikoff disappeared without a trace from his neat home near the centre of this quiet Northumberland County town. Now, seventy years later, the mystery persists — the false teeth and wristwatch left behind on his kitchen table still symbolize the case’s eerie stillness.

Big Tony was no drifter. Standing six-foot-four and weighing 265 pounds, he was a man who made an impression — a large, good-natured immigrant with a booming laugh and a thick Bulgarian accent. Born in Varna, Bulgaria, he came to Canada in 1928, seeking the same

promise as countless others: hard work and better opportunities. Back in Bulgaria, he left behind a wife and three daughters — Slavhteo, Maria, and Slavka — to whom he sent money every month. “Twenty-five dollars, sometimes fifty,” his cousin Philip Petroff later said. “He never forgot his family.”

From Toronto to Port Hope: Building a New Life

After arriving in Toronto, Tony found work in labour jobs before heading east to the town of Port Hope, where he took a bold step — buying a small property for \$300. With an entrepreneurial spirit, he opened a modest restaurant. But when the Great Depression struck, business dried up. “He couldn’t make a go of it,” one former neighbour recalled decades later. Taxes piled up, and Big Tony was forced to sell the property — eventually to an oil company — and start anew.

A Fresh Start in Colborne

Tony moved to Colborne, Ontario, a farming community just off Highway 2. There, he started over again. He ran a peanut wagon downtown, a familiar sight on Saturday afternoons, or at a street dance opposite Victoria Park at the centre of the Village. “You could smell the roasted peanuts halfway down the street,” locals remembered. Later, he bought a house from a local doctor, renting out rooms to cover his expenses.

He became something of a fixture in the community. He was often seen at the Colborne baseball games, cheering loudly from the bleachers as the town team battled in the Lakeshore League. He would clap his hands and shout out “Hubba! Hubba! Nice goin’ kid!” when a Colborne run scored. As dusk fell, Tony would be the one to switch on the ballpark lights, a small civic duty he took great pride in.

One of his tenants — a young man skilled with tools — became his partner in a new venture: a chimney-cleaning business. Coal was the primary fuel source in the 1950s, and most homes required their chimneys to be cleaned at least once a year. It was dependable work, and Tony seemed content. He wasn’t wealthy, but he was respected — a man who had built his life through sheer determination.

A Quiet Life, a Sudden Absence

That made what happened in July 1955 all the more shocking.

Tony was last seen on July 9 at his home. When friends noticed days later that he hadn’t been out selling peanuts or seen at the ballpark, concern spread quickly. The lights in his house were still on, and the back door was unlocked.

Inside, police found signs that suggested Tony hadn't gone far — or hadn't gone willingly. His false teeth and watch were on the kitchen table beside a half-finished cup of coffee. His bank account was untouched. His wallet, still containing cash, was left behind.

There was no sign of a struggle. No footprints outside. Just a big man who had ceased to exist.

The Search and the Theories

Authorities combed through Colborne and the surrounding fields, scouring the railway tracks and the nearby lakefront. But there were no leads. Tony's cousin Philip Petroff, then sixty, feared the worst. So did Tony's grandson, William Tourtounza, a 19-year-old who had recently arrived from Europe. "If he were alive, he would have written," William told a local reporter.

Theories filled the vacuum left by evidence. Some said Tony had been murdered — perhaps robbed by someone who thought he kept money hidden in his home. Others whispered about a business deal gone wrong, or a debt left unpaid. A few insisted he'd walked away, tired of loneliness, and taken a train west to start over.

George Westrope, a local homeowner preparing to open a Texaco station at the corner of King and Durham Streets, speculated that the large holes he had dug for installing fuel tanks might have been an easy place to hide a body. Clearly, no one would take that suspicion seriously. People in rural Ontario would never even consider such evil acts.

But those who knew him best dismissed the idea that Tony would abandon the village. Tony was proud, they said. He wouldn't have left his teeth behind — not Big Tony.

The Case That Never Closed

In the following years, Tony's house stood empty. The tenants moved out. The garden grew wild; the windows clouded with dust. The town carried on, but the story lingered — a human-sized absence haunted Colborne's collective memory. In 1958, when a femur bone was discovered near the railway trestle south of town, many believed the mystery was finally solved — until the coroner confirmed it belonged to a cow.

The official file never yielded a suspect, a body, or a motive. "We just ran out of road," one retired OPP officer later said. "He was there one day and gone the next. People don't just vanish, but somehow, he did."

Legacy of a Vanished Man

Today, few in Colborne remember Big Tony Gikoff's booming laugh. The peanut wagon is

gone, the ballpark still exists, but Colborne's team and the Lakeshore League have vanished. The poles holding the lights still stand but remain unlit. The house he once owned has been rebuilt. However, his story still circulates among local historians and old-timers — a ghostly reminder of a different era when newcomers carved out new lives with their hands and willpower.

Somewhere between the kitchen table and the back door, between the life he built and the past he left behind in Bulgaria, the trail of Big Tony went cold.

His cousin Philip once said, "He came to Canada with nothing. He made something for himself. But he never got to go home."

And no one ever found out where *home* really was for Big Tony Gikoff — Colborne, Varna, or somewhere in between.

Sidbrook Crumbles: Demolition by Neglect

Rob Mikel

The demolition of Sidbrook now appears inevitable. A landmark along King St. E. for over 150 years, it is one of the most architecturally and historically significant buildings left in Cobourg. Its history and the evolution of this magnificent house is unique to Cobourg. As one of the town's relatively few surviving iconic structures, the house has been key to defining the character and the soul of the town.

Henry Mason, a successful entrepreneur and merchant, commissioned Kivas Tully, the architect of Victoria Hall, to design Sidbrook. It was a fine Neo-classical residence with Italianate influences. The house has evolved over the years. Sidbrook was originally a square, almost cubed shaped two-storey building, with a flat roof topped by a balustrade running along the perimeter of the roof. It was similar to houses found on America's east coast. A monumental and elaborately decorated entrance porch dominated the façade. Its details are similar to those found on Victoria Hall.

Shortly after it was built, Major David Campbell, a wealthy half-pay officer, bought Sidbrook. Along with his brother Colonel Robert Campbell, he founded the town of Campbellford, Ontario. Both had distinguished military careers during the Napoleonic Wars.

About 1870, Campbell made extensive alterations to Sidbrook, adding a large west wing whose design was sympathetic to the original house. Though a few later Victorian

flourishes such as the oriole windows and gable peaks were included. A significant change was the replacement of the flat roof with a hipped roof. No doubt a flat roof was not conducive to Cobourg's weather.

The 1870 marriage of his ward Mary Jane Angell to John Vance Graveley, scion of two prominent Cobourg families, could have triggered the changes.

The Graveleys lived with Colonel Campbell until his death in 1888, at which time the Graveleys inherited the bulk of his estate. In 1896, being important in provincial military affairs, Graveley assumed the position of Chief Ordinance Officer at Stanley Barracks, Toronto. After their move to Toronto, the house was rented for the summer, most notably by the Guatemalan Ambassador to the United States, Antonio Laza-Arriaga and his family.

William L. Abbott of Pittsburgh, a onetime partner of Andrew Carnegie and Chair of Carnegie Steel, bought the house in 1900 as a summer home for his family. He bought it on spec while visiting Roland Hemmick in Port Hope. He figured if his family didn't like it, he could get a good return on the property. After the family approved of the house purchase, he added a third floor and the exterior's Beaux-arts classical features, including the front monumental classical portico, based on 'Porch of the Caryatids' located in Greece's Acropolis, and an east terrace. Instead of building a new roof, Abbott had the roof raised and the third floor inserted between the second floor and suspended roof. When completed the roof was lowered into place. The Abbott family summered in Cobourg until the death of Abbott's wife Annie Wainwright Abbott in 1948, after almost 48 consecutive summers.

The Abbott estate extended south from King St. to Lake Ontario, and from Brook Rd. to the east, to Cobourg Collegiate to the west. This was except for five acres that made up the Brook House estate at 9 Brook Road South. About 1952, the estate was bought along with the East View subdivision, which included Abbott Boulevard, Coronation Crescent and Lakeshore Drive. The old house became a private hospital.

The hospital closed in 2002 and has been unoccupied since. There were a few developers interested in converting the house to condos, but nothing has materialized. It is a testament to the building that it took over 20 years to deteriorate into this condition. The fate of Sidbrook could have been much different but for successive councils that did not support or encourage its retention, and who failed to use the provisions of the Property Standards Act to ensure the building remained structurally sound.

Any new development cannot compare to Sidbrook, nor create a development that captures Cobourg's charm and identity. Undoubtably, passersby will not look at the new development with the same interest and appreciation.



This material first appeared in the Fall 2025 edition of the ACO's Cobourg-East Northumberland chapter's newsletter and is reproduced here by permission.

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