

Historically Speaking

The Newsletter of the Cobourg and District
Historical Society
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Searching for the Franklin Expedition

The presenter at our January meeting will be CDHS member George Parker. One of our favourite presenters, George is a graduate of Ryerson Polytechnical Institute. He spent his

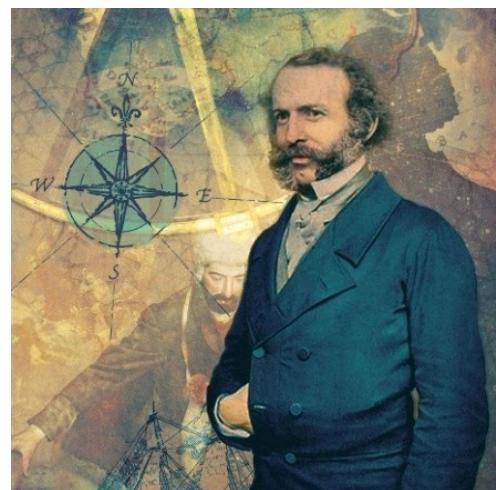


career working as a planning consultant in Toronto and overseas. Over the years, George has delivered several memorable presentations at CDHS meetings including an insightful analysis of the causes of the Rice Lake railroad failure and the far-reaching impacts of early land surveying in Ontario.

In 1845, Sir John Franklin assumed command of a major expedition to chart the remaining uncharted sections of the Northwest Passage in

the Canadian Arctic. Leading the British Royal Navy aboard HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*, Franklin and his ships vanished under mysterious circumstances. It fell to the Hudson's Bay Company explorer John Rae, a Scottish surgeon who was a native of Orkney, to uncover their fate. George will explore Rae's discoveries and the explosive reaction they provoked in Victorian London.

Join us on **Tuesday, January 27, 2026**, 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

Denis Feely: Cobourg's Irish Revolutionary

The Fenian Brotherhood was an Irish republican organization founded in the United States in



1858. Its sister group, the Irish Republican Brotherhood operated secretly in Ireland. Both groups aimed to end British rule of Ireland and to establish an independent Irish Republic. Various factions pursued a multi-pronged approach that included an armed uprising in Ireland, support from the Irish Diaspora in America and sabotage of British interests in Canada. Fenians attempted to invade Canada in the 1860s hoping to hold territory as leverage to force Britain to negotiate Irish independence.

Dr. Wilson told the convoluted tale of Denis Feely and his involvement in Irish independence. Denis was born in Ireland, moved to Cobourg, graduated from Victoria College and started a successful law practice here. He was considered a pillar of the community and was acquainted with Thomas D'Arcy McGee and James Cockburn who were both Fathers of Confederation. During his association with the fight for Irish independence Feely was radicalized by the riots in Peterborough and became an active bomber in London later in his life.. All the details of the many fascinating twists of public and private allegiances involving Feely are in Dr. Wilson's latest book: *Canadian Spy Story* which is available from Amazon at <https://www.amazon.ca/Canadian-Spy-Story-Revolutionaries-Secret/dp/0228011175/>



Future Events of Our 2025/2026 Programme

Date	Presenter	Description
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.

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=UWtzdrTzBT0
October 2025	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTETi9z8wRI
November 2025	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYDM-HND6Uo

Member Matters

New Members

Please join me in welcoming our newest CDHS members:

John Hill, Miles Lothian, Jim O'Shea and Courtney Saunders

Thank you for your Service

George Kamphorst served as CDHS Treasurer from the end of 2017 until this Summer. At our November meeting, CDHS President Randy Barber presented George with a token of our appreciation for his years of work managing the finances of our society.



Exploring Cobourg

Surreptitiously exploring abandoned buildings is the hobby of a few intrepid adventurers.

For a fascinating tour of Strathmore House visit

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tV_s8J45EVI



You might also enjoy the several videos of the abandoned Sidbrook on King St. E.:

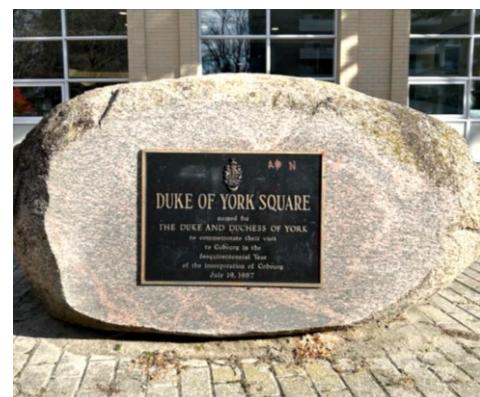
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pi91XdnRzfU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHlctlInp54>

<https://www.tiktok.com/@jmturbex/video/7440513296060468536>

Cobourg Revises History

Cobourg Councillor Adam Bureau has proposed removing the plaque referencing the Duke of York from the small courtyard beside the Cobourg Public Library. The plaque was installed following Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor's visit to Cobourg in 1987; he is the second son of Queen Elizabeth II. The title "Duke of York," first created in 1385 for Edmund of Langley, son of King Edward III, has been held by eight men over the centuries. The plaque does not refer to any specific Duke of York. Town staff have been directed to remove the plaque and to report on potential renaming options for the courtyard.



Hamilton House

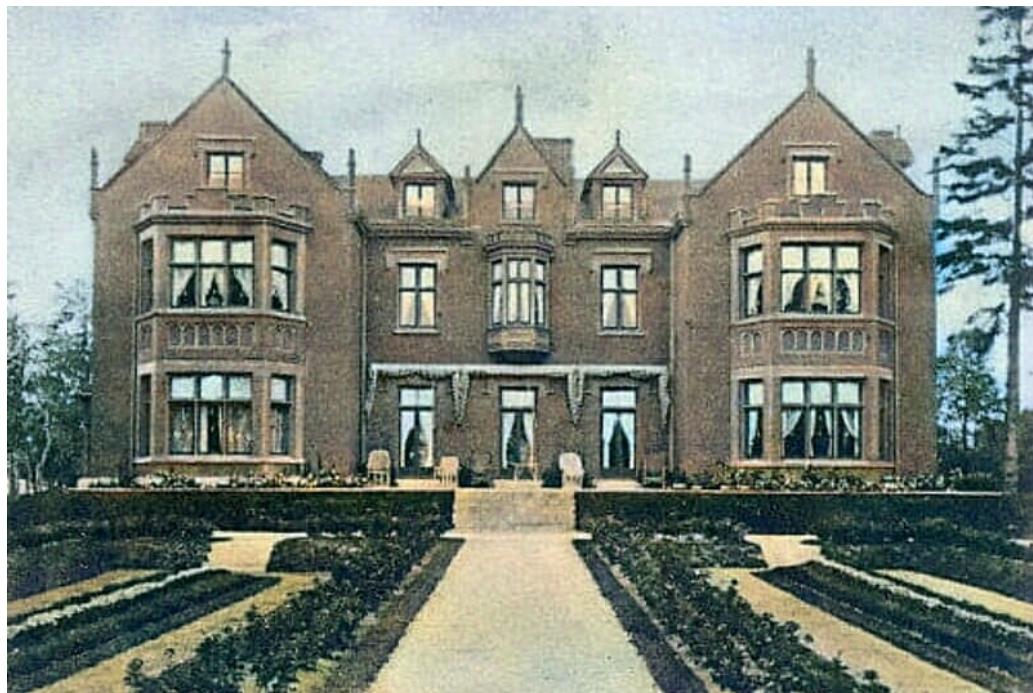
On the western edge of Cobourg, a short walk into the woods from the end of Ravensdale Street, lies the ruins of Hamilton House. Two houses once stood on this site at various times. The first, built in the late 1850s, was owned by the Hon. Sidney Smith, Postmaster General of Canada. In 1860, Albert Edward, the 18-year-old Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, visited Cobourg for the grand opening of Victoria Hall. Local lore claims that after a night of revelry in town, the prince rested for a few hours at Hamilton House before continuing his journey to Rice Lake and on to Peterborough.

After the death of her husband, American politician and railway magnate Erastus Bowman Wells, Mrs. Wells purchased the original Hamilton House in 1895 to use as a summer retreat. Tragically, the house burned to the ground in January 1899. Later that same year, she built a far grander Hamilton House on the same site that was more appropriate for her financial status. Mrs. Wells owned the estate until her death in 1905, after which it

passed to her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Eleanor Tracy. The Tracy family owned the property

HAMILTON HOUSE BURNED

On Friday morning last about one o'clock, the alarm of fire rang out, and startled our citizens from their sleep. It was soon learned that the beautiful residence of Mrs. Wells, west of the town was on fire. The fire brigade, although the property was outside the town, went out to the scene of the fire, and with the aid of a number of citizens succeeded in saving the furniture from the down stairs, which was very valuable, and included three pianos, but the furniture upstairs was nearly all consumed by the fiery element. The house was formerly the residence of the late Hon. Sydney Smith, late Postmaster-General, and was handsomely finished and the grounds beautifully laid out. It was there the Prince of Wales, on his visit to Cobourg, was entertained, and the place was one of the most beautiful residences in the country. Mrs. Wells, of St. Louis, Mo., purchased the property, and has expended a large amount on the buildings and grounds as well as lavishly furnished it for her summer residence. The fire took place in the conservatory and from thence to the house which was totally destroyed. The insurance was \$10,000 on the house and \$10,000 on the furniture, and Mrs. Wells will no doubt receive the full amount, as her loss was great. The companies interested are adjusting the matter. We are pleased to learn that Mrs. Wells has stated that it is her intention to rebuild, which will be good news to our citizens as well as a pleasure to our summer visitors.



until it was destroyed by fire in the 1940s.

It is the foundation of this second Hamilton House that is today mostly hidden in the woods just past the end of Ravensdale.

Nurses' Duties: 1887

*In addition to caring for your 50 patients,
each nurse will follow these regulations:*

1. *Maintain an even temperature in your ward by bringing in a scuttle of coal for the day's business.*
2. *Light is important to observe the patient's condition. Each day fill the kerosene lamps, clean the chimneys and trim the wicks. Wash the windows once a week.*
3. *Nurse's notes are important to the physician, so make your pens carefully. You can whittle the nibs to your liking, but the doctor must be able to read the notes.*
4. *Each nurse on day duty will report every day at 7 a.m. and leave at 8 p.m., except on the Sabbath on which day you will be off from 12 noon to 2 p.m.*
5. *Nurses in good standing will be given off an evening each week for courting purposes, or 2 evenings if you go to church.*
6. *Each nurse should lay aside from each pay a goodly sum of her earnings for her benefits during her declining years.*
7. *The nurse who performs her labours and serves her doctors and patients without fault for 5 years will be given an increase of 5 cents a day.*
8. *Any nurse who smokes, uses liquor, frequents dance halls, gets her hair done in a beauty shop will give the director of nurses good reason to suspect her worth and integrity.*
9. *Daily sweep and mop the floors of your ward, dust the patient's furniture and window sills.*

Shelley McCutie '98

Victoria Hall As It Might Have Been



The AI generated image above was posted on FaceBook by Warren Hoselton

Halcyon Days at the Pav

Judith Goulin

What is a “Pav”, you may wonder?

Pav, short for pavilion, was the endearing name for Cobourg’s dance place near Victoria Park. The Pav was built in 1923 with money donated by a few wealthy American Summer Colony people and gifted to the young people of our community.

Dance pavilions were popular in Ontario in an era beginning in the Twenties through the Sixties. Every community worth its salt had one: Oshawa, Bala, Toronto, and Sauble Beach, to name just a few. Dance pavilions were social hubs mostly for dancing and sometimes even for romance!

The Pav reached its zenith at the end of WW Two when Stan Williams, a local musician of note, operated the place. His own band, the Blue Marines, most often provided the dance music, but sometimes even big bands of the day performed there.

It is said that during the summer The Pav jumped with music six nights a week. There was no dancing on Sunday, of course, but on holiday weekends in the summer, the Pav began holding dances that began at midnight on Sunday. What fun for the young folks!

Unfortunately, it wasn't long before neighbours rained on their parade and convinced Cobourg Town Council to put a stop to the noisy midnight dances.

Alcohol was forbidden inside the Pav but some young folks hid their liquor and beer outside and snuck out for a nip when they got thirsty from all that dancing. Some things never change from generation to generation. The French express this so eloquently: "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose." ... the more things change the more they stay the same.

Deb Haynes, recalling her teenage years in Cobourg, said: "The Pav dances were the highlight of my summer. Forbidden by my parents to go there, I never missed a dance all summer!"

Close to the Pav there was a snack bar where people enjoyed ice cream cones and other



treats, and a roller-skating rink, but the star attraction was a giant water slide. Anyone who had a nickel could climb up the steep stairs to the top of the slide and enjoy

a quick journey down to the cold water of Lake Ontario.

The late Bud Barr who was born and raised in Cobourg, was a friend of this author, and a long-time member of our historical society, remembered "the screams of kids careening down the very tall wooden slide." The kids were seated in what is best described as a toboggan on wheels, that landed in the cold water of Lake Ontario.

Liz McCaughey, who was also born in Cobourg, quipped "I remember a slide in the park. It was high and steep. It would never be allowed now!"



Over time, the beloved Pav became derelict and was demolished in 1976. Perhaps some of you who are reading this wish you had been there on Cobourg's beach during those halcyon days.

Cooey Changes Sex: 1930 to 1943



In 1930 Cooey Machine and Arms had two dozen employees, all male, shown in the group photo above. By 1943, due to their quality products and the war effort, their staff numbered



over 100. And perhaps half of the employees were now female.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/395744833503/permalink/10171081738498504/>

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The Cobourg and District Historical Society has been a registered charity since 1981

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