

Historically Speaking

The Newsletter of the Cobourg and District

Historical Society

February 2026— Issue 361

Homes with a Story to Tell

For 233 years, Cobourg's landscape has been shaped by homes—some grand and others modest—that influenced the lives of our residents. The stories behind these houses and their



builders are key to understanding Cobourg's development. At our February meeting, Cobourg and District Historical Society members Randy Barber, Diane Chin, and Leona Woods will share the fascinating stories of several landmark properties—



Barnum House,
The Breakers,
Dromore House
and Lakehurst—

and the remarkable people who called them home.

Join us on **Tuesday, February 24, 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

Searching for the Franklin Expedition

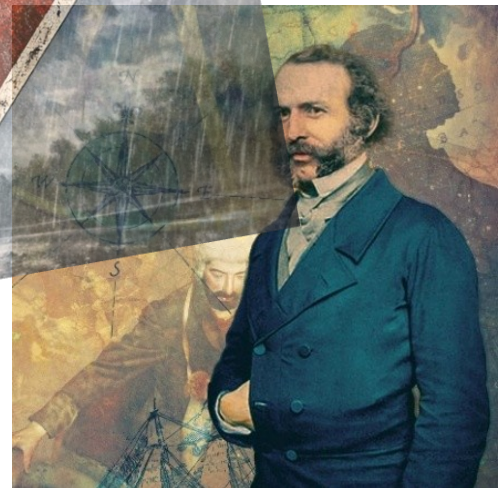
The presenter at our January meeting will be CDHS member George Parker. One of our



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.



Future Events of Our 2025/2026 Programme

Date	Presenter	Description
Meeting February 24, 2026	CDHS members	Homes with a Story to Tell The stories of area homes — Dromore 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=UWtzdrTzBTo
October 2025	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTETi9z8wRI

STOLEN FROM A GRAVE.

THE BODY OF RICHARD MAY RUDELY TAKEN BY BODY-SNATCHERS.

THE GHOULS WERE AT THE FUNERAL.

"A dead, damp, moist, unpleasant body!
—Nicholas Nicholby, ch. xxxiv.

Body-snatchers! Ough!

The very mention of it makes the cold shivers run down one's back, and the palms of the hands grow moist at the repulsive thought! The dead of night! Ghoulish thieves! The clank of the spade! The coffin reached and splintered as it's opened! The dead ruthlessly torn from its last resting place, and borne in villains' arms, one knows not where! Ah! what fate awaits these blood-smeared culprits when the great day of reckoning comes!

On Saturday night, Sept. 23rd, a crime was committed at the Union cemetery which loudly calls for justice. Sometime during that night, a newly made grave was visited by despoilers of the dead, and the corpse of a young man was carried off. No clue has since come to light as to the identity of the grave robbers, or where the body is secreted.

On Tuesday, Sept. 19th, Richard May, aged 16 years and nine months, and son of Mr. John May of Hamilton Township, died after a short illness. He had been in ill-health for some time previously, but his death was sudden and unexpected. The physicians differed as to the cause of his death, we are informed, one claiming that it was due to consumption, while the other thought hemorrhage of the stomach was the cause. However, the funeral took place on the Thursday following. The grave was undisturbed on the following Saturday, the 23rd, but on Sunday morning the father of the deceased visited the grave and observed that it had been disarranged. The cemetery authorities noticed that everything was not as it should be, and an investigation was ordered. The grave was dug up, when it was found that the body had been stripped of its clothing and had been removed from the casket, the burial clothes being scattered amongst the earth above.

MR. TOMS INTERVIEWED.

A representative of *The Sentinel-Star* waited upon the secretary of the Union Cemetery, Mr. Wm. Toms Jr., to secure the facts of the case.

"Yes," said Mr. Toms, "there seems to be a gang of body-snatchers in this neighborhood, and the depredations committed at the Union cemetery are likely done by the same individuals who tried to rob the grave at Baltimore a fortnight ago."

"What do you know about the stealing of the body of Richard May?" we queried.

"Well, the burial took place on Thursday Sept. 21st. It is customary in our cemetery for the caretaker to sod the grave immediately after it has been filled in. This was done in the present instance. The grave was seen on Saturday afternoon, and at that time showed no signs of having been disturbed. On Sunday morning, Mr. John May, father of deceased, visited the grave with fresh flowers, and noticed that the earth was scattered about the grass, and was in a disordered condition generally. On his return home he mentioned the fact to the family, who were surprised to hear of it, as they had seen the grave nicely sodded after the burial took place. On Sunday afternoon, I was at the cemetery myself, and saw that the grave looked untidy. I sent for the caretaker, never thinking that anything was wrong, for the purpose of having him put it in proper condition. I did not see him until Tuesday, when, after investigation, he reported that the grave had been tampered with. The cemetery committee met, and ordered myself and the caretaker to open the grave and investigate. We did so.

The earth had not been packed in on one side, and there was a large hole in consequence. As the earth was thrown up, we came across portions of the burial clothes, here a stocking, there a pair of pants, and later on the shroud—and so on. The top of the shell was on crooked, and was not screwed down. On taking off the top, we found the glass of the coffin smashed and the pieces lying in the bottom of the coffin, which would indicate that the glass had been broken after the body had been removed—possibly by the falling in of the cover of the shell. The body had been stripped of all clothing and taken away.

The grave was covered in again, and my report submitted to the cemetery authorities, when the matter was placed in the hands of the police with instructions to spare no pains or expense in bringing the villains to justice."

This material was originally posted on the Cobourg Yesteryears Facebook group by Dianne Brock,

New Exhibit at the Museum

There's a new exhibit coming and they think you may be able to help create it!

It's a story 150 years in the making, but you may have a part of that story! It was one hundred and fifty years ago this year that the world's very first telephone call was made. To celebrate this momentous event, the Museum will be presenting this summer an exhibit tentatively titled *"Hello. Can You Hear Me? 150 Years of the Telephone"*.

When Alexander Graham Bell made that first call, he knew he was on to something special, but he could hardly have imagined the millions of telephone calls which now circle the globe daily. There are stamps and coins celebrating his invention, an International Telephone Day, telephone museums and a shelf-full of books. There's even a little industrial intrigue. And this summer we'll be telling some of the story here in Cobourg.

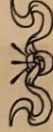
The Museum's Exhibit Team has begun putting the story together, but they believe that parts of it are now sitting in the homes and the memories of people living not too far away. They expect that there are telephones and telephone stories just waiting to be shared and become part of this summer's exhibit. Perhaps you have a beautiful orange Alexander Graham Plane Phone, or a very old Cobourg phone directory, or an antique Bell sign. Perhaps you worked as a Bell lineman back in the old days. The Exhibit Team would love to hear from you to discuss the possibilities.

To start, everyone is invited to contact the museum by email to: info@cobourgmuseum.ca. Or use the old-fashioned way – telephone and leave a message at (905) 373-7222. They would love to hear from you!



Dining at Cobourg's Hoo-Lee Gardens: 1960s

HOO-LEE GARDENS Special Chinese Food Menu



PORK AND BEEF

1. Barbecued Pork	\$1.15
2. Barbecued Spare Ribs	1.25
3. Fried Pork or Beef with Green Pepper	1.25
4. Fried Pork or Beef with Mushroom	1.45
5. Fried Pork or Beef with Bean Sprouts	1.10
6. Fried Pork or Beef with Vegetables and Almond	1.25
Above Order with Bread and Butter. Tea, Coffee, Milk 10c extra.	
7. Fried Pork or Beef with Tomatoes	1.15
8. Fried Pork Liver with Vegetable Oyster Sauce	1.10

CHOW MEIN

9. Vegetables Chow Mein	95c
10. Pork or Beef Chow Mein	1.15
11. Chicken Chow Mein	1.25
12. Shrimp Chow Mein	1.35
13. Chicken Liver Chow Mein	1.10
14. Barbecued Pork Chow Mein	1.20
15. Subgum Shrimp Chow Mein	1.50
16. Subgum Chicken Chow Mein	1.40
17. Hoo Lee Garden Special Dai Dep-W oey	2.50
(Sost Noodle Cantonese Style) Above any Order with Mushroom Include Bread and Butter. Tea, Coffee, Milk 10c extra	

CHOP SUEY

18. Vegetables Chop Suey	85c
19. Pork or Beef Chop Suey	1.00
20. Chicken Chop Suey	1.15
21. Chicken Liver Chop Suey	1.10
22. Shrimp Chop Suey	1.25
23. Barbecued Pork Chop Suey	1.10
Above any Order with Mushroom. Include Bread and Butter. Tea, Coffee, Milk Extra 10c	

SWEET AND SOUR

24. Sweet and Sour Spare Ribs	95c
25. Sweet and Sour Chicken Wings	1.10
26. Sweet and Sour Shrimp	1.45
27. Sweet and Sour Breaded Chicken	1.50
28. Sweet and Sour Breaded Pork	1.25
29. Sweet and Sour Chicken Ball and Pineapple	1.75
Above Order Include Bread and Butter. Tea, Coffee, Milk, Extra 10c	

RICE

30. Steamed Rice per Bowl	20c
31. Plain Vegetables, Fried Rice	75c
32. Pork or Beef, Fried Rice	95c
33. Chicken Fried Rice	1.10
34. Shrimp Fried Rice	1.25
35. Barbecued Pork Fried Rice	1.10

Above any Order with Mushroom.
Include Bread and Butter.
Tea, Coffee, Milk, 10c extra

CHICKEN

36. Chicken (ja Doo Guy half)	\$1.75
37. Fried Chicken Liver Green Pepper	1.10
38. Fried Dice Chicken and Vegetables and Almond	1.45
39. Sliced Chicken Fried and Vegetables	1.75
40. Chicken Wings Dry	1.15
41. Fried Chicken Wings, Chinese Oyster Sauce	1.45
42. Barbecued Chicken with Mushroom Sauce	1.55
43. Breaded Chicken with Almond and Gravy	1.50

Above Order includes Bread and Butter.
Tea, Milk, Coffee, Extra 10c

EGG FOO YOUNG

44. Hoo Lee Garden Egg Roll	20c
45. Vegetables and Mushroom Egg Foo Yong	80c
46. Pork or Beef and Mushroom Egg Foo Yong	95c
47. Chicken Mushroom Egg Foo Yong	1.10
48. Shrimp Mushroom Egg Foo Yong	1.20
49. Lobster Mushroom Egg Foo Yong	1.45

Above include Bread and Butter.
Tea, Coffee, Milk, Extra 10c

YET CA MEIN

50. Chicken Yet Ca Mein	85c
51. Pork or Beef Yet Ca Mein	75c
52. Vegetables and Mushroom Yet Ca Mein	65c
53. Shrimp Yet Ca Mein	95c

CHOICE "C"

For Four — \$9.00

Soup	Chicken and Vegetables
Egg Roll	Chicken Mushroom Chow Mein
Shrimp Diced with Almond	Sweet and Sour Chicken and Pineapple
Barbecued Pork Fried Rice	Chinese Tea
Almond Cookies	Same Dinner, each Additional Person \$2.25

CHOICE "D"

For Six — \$12.50

Soup	Egg Drop and Peas
Egg Roll	Soo Ja, Fresh Shrimp
Hoo Lee Garden Sweet	and Sour Spare Ribs
Special Chicken Mushroom	Chow Mein
Chicken Sliced Fried	and Vegetables
Beef Mushroom Fried Rice	Chinese Tea
Almond Cookies	Same Dinner, each Additional Person \$2.50

SOUP

Chicken and Rice	25c
Chicken Noodle	25c
Vegetables	25c
Chicken Mushroom	30c
Egg Drop and Peas	35c

Minimum Charge — 25c per Person

What a Difference!

For several years, Cobourg has struggled with persistent petty crime, including break-ins, assaults, and similar offenses. The individuals involved are rarely named publicly and are often released within hours, without bail, on a simple promise to appear in court. By contrast, in a case from March 1931, the accused 18-year olds were publicly identified and each required to post \$2,000 bail — a significant sum at the time, considering that a typical Cobourg home sold for only \$3,000 or less.

Quit Several Farm Jobs—Convicted of Vagrancy

Admitting that he had quit several farm jobs because he had got "fed up," **Kenneth Wedderburn** pleaded guilty, in Burlington police court to a vagrancy charge, before Magistrate W. J. Barr. Wedderburn, who was taken from a freight car there, came from the Old Country last April, being brought out by the Salvation Army, and after serving four months in jail on the present charge, he will be deported if the recommendation of the court is followed.

During the depression of the 1930s, thousands of Canadians were unable to find work in their hometowns. Many then traveled from town to town by freight train hoping to find any type of work that would provide a meal. For example, Cobourg had a "hobo" encampment on the east side of town.

Many now believe that food and housing are "human rights" regardless of a person's willingness to work. The crime of vagrancy was even removed from Canada's Criminal Code in 2019. The attitude today is rather different from that of the 1932 newspaper article above!

COBOURG

ALLEGED THEFTS SOLVED WITH ARREST OF FOUR

**Town and Provincial Police
Join Forces After Sixteen
Robberies**

FISHERMEN CHARGED

**Ten Complaints Are Laid Fol-
lowing Patrol of Two
Lakes**

Cobourg, March 13.—Town and provincial police are confident that an epidemic of petty thievery and shop-breaking which began in Cobourg and vicinity last fall is now at an end with the capture of four local youths between the ages of 18 and 19.

Thomas Brewster and Leslie Guy were arrested Wednesday by Provincial Constable William Carey as a sequel to months of detective work by Chief Constable J. C. Ruse, 73, who is prevented from taking an active part in police work by a broken shoulder received in Sunday's snow-storm. Provincial Constable A. Kidd was also instrumental in forging the chain of evidence by which the police believe they have solved at least sixteen separate instances of shop and housebreaking. Guy and Brewster are released on bail of \$2,000 each and will appear for trial on Monday, March 16.

Austin Brewster and Leslie Hedger were arrested by Provincial Constable Carey in Brewster's home at noon yesterday. Taking his cue from the hesitancy of a girl who answered the door, Constable Carey walked directly into a back bedroom and seized the second Brewster boy. As Austin Brewster was putting on his overcoat a knock came to the door.

"Duck, Les, duck," Austin Brewster shouted, according to Constable Carey. "I snatched the door open and grabbed Hedger before he could move off the steps," Constable Carey related.

The pair captured last appeared before Magistrate Floyd yesterday afternoon and were remanded for a week.

Cobourg's House of Refuge Destroyed by Fire!

**AGED FOLK SAVED
BY ATTENDANTS
AS REFUGE RAZED**

United Counties Institution at
Cobourg Destroyed With
\$100,000 Loss

PANIC AVOIDED

Staff and Volunteers Guide
and Carry Feeble Charges
Out at 2:30 a.m.

Special to The Star

Cobourg, Dec. 22.—Sixty-five aged men and women were saved early to-day when fire destroyed the united counties' House of Refuge here. None was injured. Loss is placed at \$100,000. Firemen helpless because of the lack of water pressure, had only one stream of water to fight the fire, which started inside a partition at the south-east side of the building, adjoining the sleeping quarters of ten inmates. Practically all the contents of the large building were burned. The fire was discovered at 2.30 a.m. by an attendant and the staff immediately commenced awakening all the inmates. With great presence of mind, Mrs. Bruce Thompson, the matron, and Clarence Mc-

(Continued on Page 2. Col. 1)

Toronto's front page news story for December 22, 1934 was the fire in Cobourg. The story continues on page 2 with many more horrifying details:

With the aid of four maids Mrs. Thompson carried out 15 women in their nightdresses, wrapped in blankets. Most of them were crippled with age and several were over 90 but they obeyed Mrs. Thompson's instructions to the letter, remaining in their rooms until she came for them. One was Agnes Perry, 98, who is deaf, dumb and blind. Two babies, aged 11 months and 17 months, were also rescued.

When the fire was first discovered some of the aged men in the building worked heroically under the supervision of Bruce Thompson with a hose and chemicals until the arrival of Cobourg Fire Brigade under Chief Turpin who got out of a sick bed to fight the flames.

Charles Maquire, one of the volunteer firemen, was struck by a falling brick but courageously although blood streamed down his face.

Distraught by the harassing events of the night, Mrs. Thompson related that she had lost everything in the fire, including valuable jewelry, the accounts of the home and wedding presents she received at her marriage three years ago. She sadly commented that all the presents, the Christmas tree and the plum pudding which were to have made Christmas Day brighter for the old people have been destroyed.

"I told the old people to stay where they were, otherwise, some of them would have been lost in the flames" she went on. "I was able to get fifteen old ladies crippled with age from the building. They did not have time to dress and we sent them all to Cobourg Hospital. Some were in an extreme nervous state."

Mrs. Mary Ann White and Mrs. Sharpton who are both over 90 were among them. 17-month-old John Johnson and Billy Lovelace aged 11 months were also carried to safety by Mrs. Thompson and her helpers.

Cobourg had developed a 'House of Refuge' near the corner of James and George streets in the early 1890s. The home took in the elderly, indigent and destitute of the community.

From the CDHS Archives:

Lenah Field Fisher's letter to her mother relating the Royal Tour

My Dearest Mother

Well the excitement is over. The Prince was here yesterday and it certainly was terrifically exciting. He arrived at twelve thirty just in time for lunch. The girls were all at the front windows and just as he was coming up the walk we sang "Jonnies in Town" which is his favorite song. There were about umpteen reporters, movie men and official photographers who took the Prince's picture as he entered. After having lunch with us in the big dining room we all assembled in the gym, which is on the second floor. The Prince came in and shook hands with all of us, I was the second one to be honoured. We were all simply thrilled to death as he was going down the steps at the front door the photographers and movie men again got busy. They ask the Prince to remain on the steps a minute and the girls all crowded round. And my dear "I" was standing beside his Royal highness. So where the movie of his tour through Canada is shown when it comes to his Guelph visit first look for this child and you can't miss the Prince of Wales.

On the way from our residence over to the boy's gym, we were singing Johnnies in Town. The movie men got in front and took a movie of us singing, I was in the front ranks. Half-way across the campus I found myself walking on the grass just opposite the Prince so he said to me "Do you like dancing?" I said, "yes I love it," he said, "Do you do very much of it here?" I said "we usually dance for a while after supper in the gym," he said "that's great." And then the crowd shoved me (the great big brutes). Later on one of the official photographers said to me "Have you any souvenirs," and I told him, "yes." He asked to see it so I produced the end of a cigarette which the Prince had just thrown away. The photographer asked me to hold it up and my dear he took my picture holding the cigarette.

When he was seated in the car some of the girls who were gathered 'round the car ask him for cigarettes for souvenirs. He produced his case and gave all the girls on that side of the car. I was standing in a mob on the other side he only had one cig. left so what do you suppose he did? Simply reached out over the heads of all the girls close up to the car and handed his last cigarette to me. Was I thrilled?! I simply looped.

This morning when I went in for my mail what should there be in my box but a package with just these words from the Royal Prince. On opening I discovered a huge box of cigarettes in a box, each cig. is marked with the Prince of Wales our private best. I feel as though I were in heaven. It's getting late so must close. So write soon, and tell the news.

Love of your own little daughter,

Lenah

P.S. For heavens sakes don't have this put in the paper!

CDHS Executive for 2025 – 2026

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