

# Historically Speaking

The Newsletter of the Cobourg and District

Historical Society

May 2026— Issue 364

## CDHS May Social

Join us on May 26, 2026, for a guided tour of the Canadian Canoe Museum!

Set against the stunning backdrop of Little Lake in Peterborough, Ontario, this fully accessible, \$45-million, 65,000-square-foot facility is home to the world's largest collection of canoes, kayaks, and other paddled watercraft. The museum cares for more than 650 vessels, with over 100 on display, showcasing rich cultural and historical traditions from across Canada and around the world.

Following the guided tour, you're invited to explore the museum's 5-acre waterfront property. With 1,200 feet of shoreline, docks, boardwalks, and beautifully restored natural spaces, the site offers ample opportunities to relax or enjoy outdoor activities on both land and water.

Charges for our May Social, including the guided tour, are: \$37 for seniors (65+) or \$41 for adults under 65. Lunch is additional. Tickets may be purchased by eTransfer to [cdhscobourg@gmail.com](mailto:cdhscobourg@gmail.com). Payment deadline is May 14, 2026.

We will meet at the museum on May 26, 2026 at 10:00 am. For travel directions, visit <https://www.google.com/maps/place/2077+Ashburnham+Dr,+Peterborough,+ON>



## ***Our Previous Meeting***

# **Nine Ships: The Peter Robinson Immigration**

Our April meeting began with the CDHS Annual General Meeting (AGM) and was followed by Dennis Carter-Edwards' presentation on the Peter Robinson Immigration to a near capacity audience in the Victoria Hall ballroom. See the Member Matters section of this newsletter for additional AGM information.

Dennis presented the story of the British-sponsored migration of Irish settlers to the Peterborough area. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland was plagued by civil unrest due to food shortages, severe rural poverty, poor housing, land insecurity, religious inequality and population growth without economic expansion. In an innovative effort to alleviate these



problems, the British government approved spending £30,000—roughly \$6 million in today's Canadian dollars—to fund what became known as the Peter Robinson Emigration Scheme. The aim was twofold: to ease pressure in Ireland while strengthening settlement in British North America. To carry out the plan, nine ships transported more than 2,000 Irish emigrants to British North America. Enticed by promises of free land these families made the arduous journey from Ireland to Quebec City on crowded ships, spent a month in sweltering heat in Kingston and then, after a brief stay in Cobourg, the settlers moved inland to establish new

communities in what are now Peterborough County and the City of Kawartha Lakes. Their arrival profoundly reshaped the region. These settlers laid the foundations for



enduring communities, introducing social traditions and cultural practices that continue to shape the area's identity today. The legacy of the Peter Robinson emigrants remains deeply woven into the cultural and historical fabric of the region.

## Future Events of Our 2025/2026 Programme

Date	Presenters	Description
<b>May Social,</b> <b>May 26,</b> <b>2026 at</b> <b>10:00 am</b>	Trip to Peterborough	The May social is at the Canadian Canoe Museum in Peterborough. Tickets for the tour are \$37 for seniors (65+) and \$41 for younger adults. Contact Carla Jones at <a href="mailto:cgrucelajones@gmail.com">cgrucelajones@gmail.com</a> for questions.

## Recent CDHS Meetings

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

<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>Link to Meeting Video</b>
September 2025	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWtzdrTzBTo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWtzdrTzBTo</a>
October 2025	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTETi9z8wRI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTETi9z8wRI</a>
November 2025	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYDM-HND6Uo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYDM-HND6Uo</a>
February 2026	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KL7sgzF76o0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KL7sgzF76o0</a>
March 2026	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDnzXhkWuPo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDnzXhkWuPo</a>
2026 AGM	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DAWKc0qVb88">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DAWKc0qVb88</a>
April 2026	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5JncrF_hsQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5JncrF_hsQ</a>

## Member Matters

### ***New Members***

Please join me in welcoming our newest CDHS members: JoAnne Hefford, Laurie Dubrovac, JoAnne, Lavern and Marie Finney.

### ***2026 AGM Results***

CDHS President Randy Barber deftly led the AGM considerations of all agenda items including several member questions in a record 12 minutes!

Recently the Ontario Government passed the Ontario Not for Profit Corporations Act (ONCA). At our AGM extensive changes to our constitution were approved to ensure ONCA compliance. The changes that were approved included new titles for some officers such as our President who is now the Society's "chair". We extend our thanks to Diane Chin for her careful work in adapting our original constitution to comply with the new legal requirements.

An updated list of those selected by our members to serve on the CDHS Executive is on the last page of this newsletter.

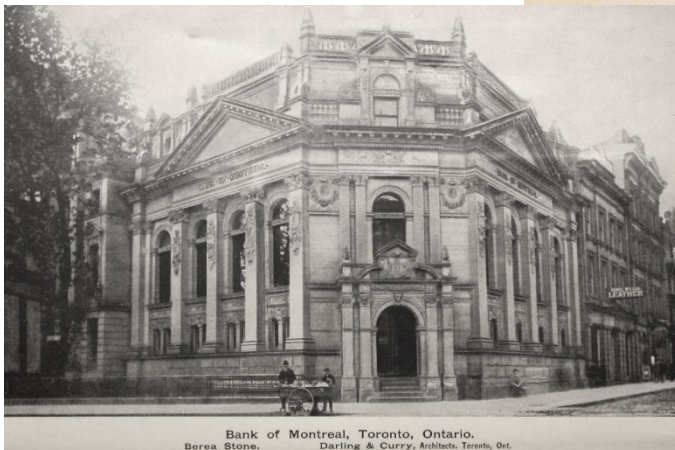


# Cleveland in Victoria Hall

*Dick Kauling*

Victoria Hall, constructed between 1856 and 1860, is faced with buff-coloured Cleveland Sandstone imported from northern Ohio. Starting in the mid-19<sup>h</sup> century, this fine-grained stone was widely valued for its durability, uniform appearance and suitability for detailed carving without crumbling. Transported to Cobourg by ship through the Great Lakes, the stone reflects the town's economic confidence at the time and its participation in regional and international trade networks. Selected by architect Kivas Tully, Cleveland sandstone enhanced the building's monumental classical design and refined architectural detailing. The stone façade remains a defining element of Victoria Hall and contributes significantly to its national historic significance as one of Canada's finest municipal buildings of the period.

Led by Tully, Cobourg, was an early adopter of Cleveland sandstone but by the end of the century numerous other grand buildings had been constructed using the premium sandstone. The



Toronto's early Bank of Montreal building that now houses the

Canadian Hockey Hall of Fame was completed in 1886 using Cleveland stone. The above list, from the 1887 brochure of the Cleveland Stone Company, highlights Toronto buildings using their products. Even Canada's Parliament buildings used Cleveland sandstone.

Dave Dunn, the Director of Sales at Cleveland Quarries, describes why their sandstone has remained desirable for so long. "It has a very tight matrix binding the minerals. It is very predictable. At the same time, it's workable enough to make it easy to carve, yet hold fine details. And then, you combine that with the inherent strength and properties of the stone itself. It's very desirable. Carvers like working with it."

48 The Cleveland Stone Company.

TORONTO, ONT.—	Dominion Post Office.....	Berea
	Dominion Custom House.....	Buff Amherst
	York County Court House.....	Buff Amherst
	Dominion Bank Building.....	Buff Amherst
	Standard Bank Building.....	Buff Amherst
	Imperial Bank of Canada.....	Buff Amherst
	Ontario Bank Building.....	Buff Amherst
	Union Loan and Savings Building.....	Buff Amherst
	Building and Loan Association Building.....	Buff Amherst
	Trust and Loan Company of Canada Building.....	Buff Amherst
	Federal Bank of Canada.....	Buff Amherst
	Bank of Montreal Building.....	Berea
	Bank of Toronto Building.....	Berea
	Merchants Bank of Canada.....	Berea
	Quebec Bank Building.....	Trimming's, Berea
	Knox College.....	Buff Amherst
	St. Andrews Cathedral.....	Buff Amherst
	Scottish Assurance Building.....	Buff Amherst
	Manning Arcade Building.....	Buff Amherst
	Toronto Arcade Building.....	Berea
	British-America Assurance Company.....	Buff Amherst
	Consumers Gas Company.....	Buff Amherst
	Canada Pacific R. R. Offices.....	Buff Amherst
	Victoria Chambers.....	Buff Amherst
	Osgoode Hall.....	Buff Amherst
	Toronto Insane Asylum.....	Berea
	McMaster's Building.....	Buff Amherst
	Hon. W. T. McMaster's Residence.....	Buff Amherst
	Lieutenant Governors' Residence.....	Buff Amherst
	Lake Side Building.....	Berea
	McDonald Building.....	Berea
	Central Prison.....	Berea
	Veterinary College.....	Berea
	Toronto University Laboratory Building.....	Berea
	Odd Fellows' Temple.....	Trimming's, Berea
UTICA, N. Y.—	U. S. Post Office and Court House.....	Trimming's, Buff Amherst

**Berea Sandstone**  
Vermilion, Ohio

**Quarried by:**  
Cleveland Quarries

**Products:**  
Hand-carved specialty stone, architectural elements, cladding, paving, slabs, raw blocks

**Applications:**  
High-end residential exteriors, commercial buildings, landscaping, stone walls, fountains, pools, patios

**Colors:**

- Amherst Gray
- Birmingham Buff
- Both have an even pattern and subtle layering

**An American Legacy:**

- Continuously quarried since the mid-1800s.
- Used on statehouses throughout the U.S., as well as Canadian Parliament buildings.

American stones series

Graphic by Karin Kirk

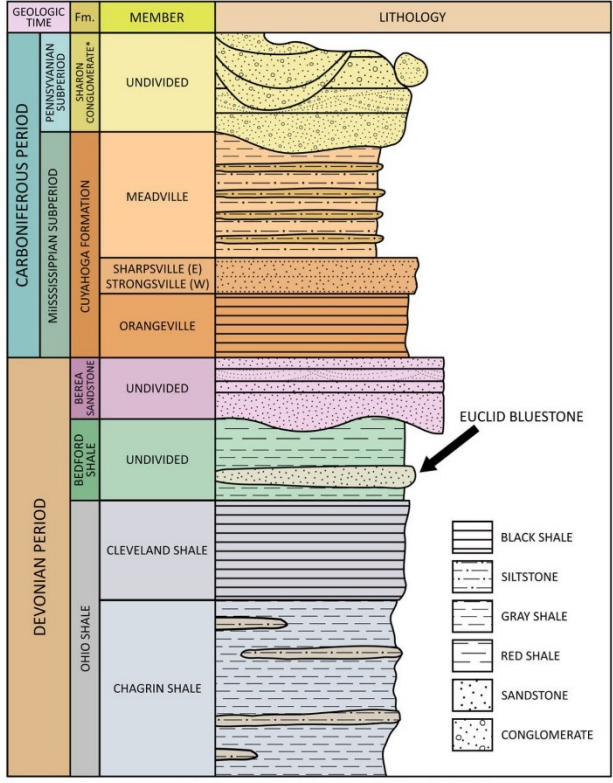
The vicinity near the southern edge of Lake Erie around Berea, Ohio, is known as “the Sandstone Center of the World,” In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the quarrying of sandstone was one of the largest industries in Ohio

Berea sandstone is famous because it is a durable stone with few irregularities. It can yield large blocks with an even grain and consistent coloring,

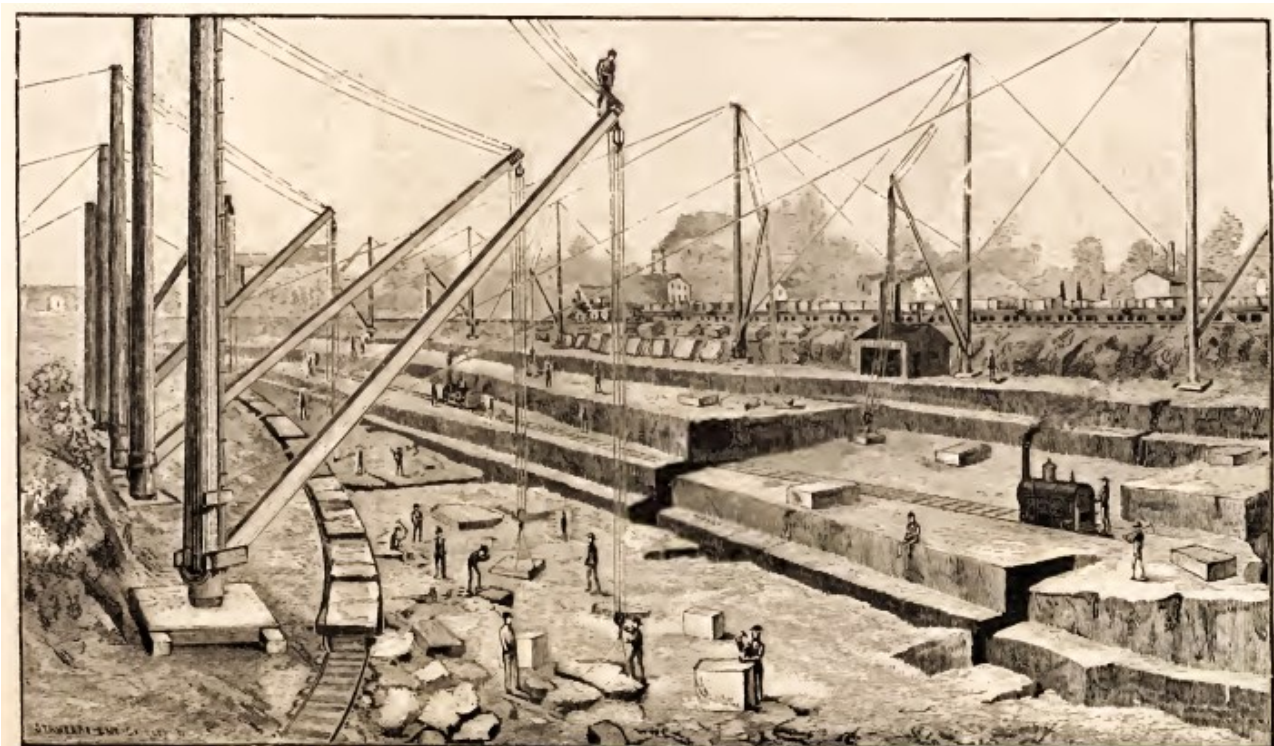
and it can be carved, sawn, or chiseled to suit nearly any taste. It is hard enough to withstand the elements, yet soft enough to be workable.

Berea sandstone is a familiar building material but it’s geology is unclear. Berea Sandstone is from either the late Devonian Period or the early Mississippian Period. That is, about 359 million years ago. Fossils are commonly used to establish the age of sedimentary rocks but this sandstone has relatively few fossils. To estimate the dates of deposition geologists must rely on information such as how the rock relates to the layers above and below it. Three hundred and sixty million years ago rivers were cutting deep channels down into the shale layers that sit below the Berea. Over time, the channels were filled with fresh sand that was carried in by the rivers. Sediments from river deltas piled more sand on top of the channels, creating a more or less level plain. Then sea levels began to rise, washing in marine sand. Each of these three phases laid down slightly different layers of sand, and by studying the patterns and ripples in the sediment, geologists can tell if the sand was left by a river, a delta or by an ocean.

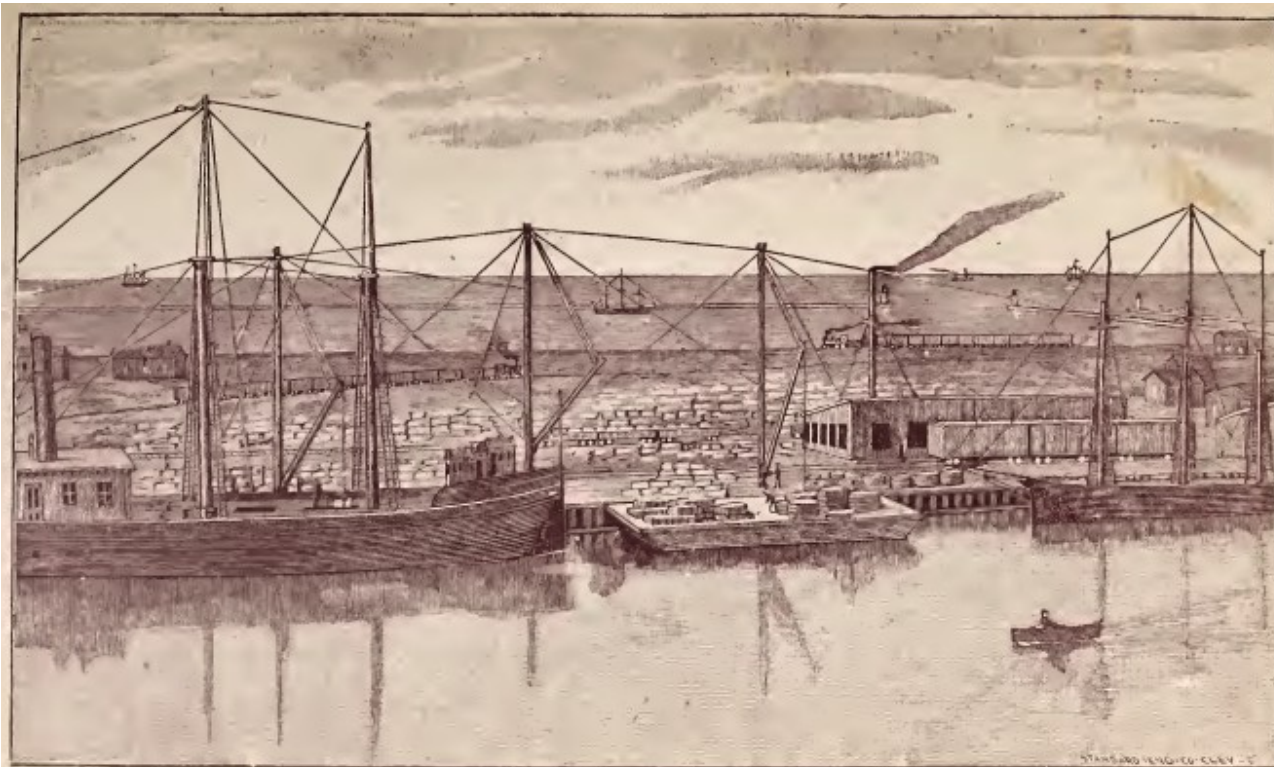
**THE ROCKS OF CLEVELAND**



Quarrying Cleveland Berea sandstone required thousands of workers and extensive facilities, from large-scale extraction operations to where stone was loaded onto trains, ships and barges bound for building sites across North America..



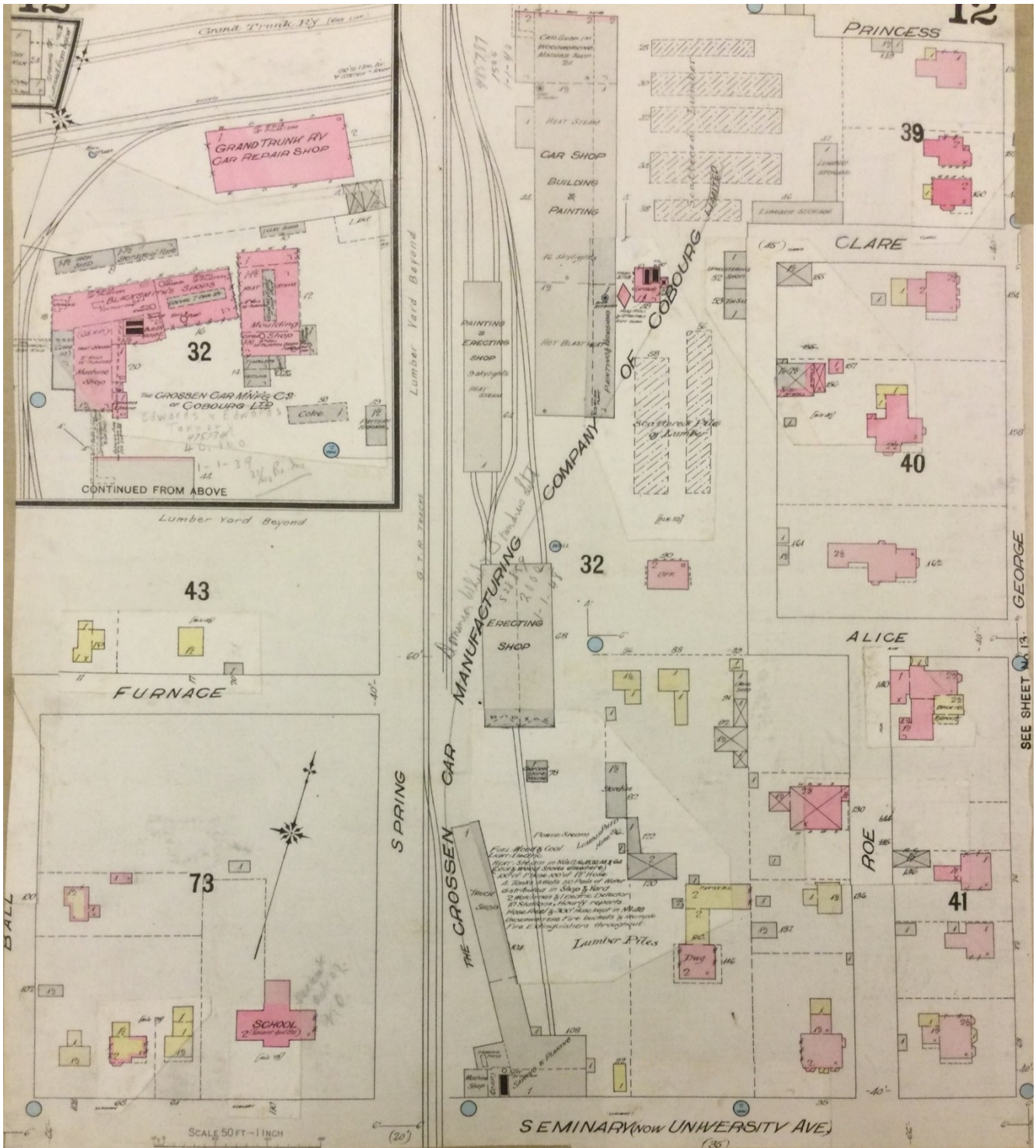
VIEW OF OUR QUARRY, No. 1 A, AT BERE A, O.



VIEW OF OUR YARD AND SHIPPING DOCK AT CLEVELAND, OHIO.

# Cobourg's "Tannery Lands"

There has been considerable recent discussion about potential future uses of Cobourg's "Tannery Lands". The map below illustrates how this area was used in 1911 when Crossen Car Works was the major occupant of the site. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Cobourg had fewer than 1000 families yet Crossen employed over 500 men who built 150 freight cars and seven passenger cars each month.



The *Cobourg Sentinel* published the following article in their March 25<sup>th</sup> 1880 edition:

## **COBOURG CAR WORKS**

The largest Car Works in the Dominion at the present time, are situated in the Town of Cobourg, and belong to James Crossen Esq. They were begun in a comparatively small way some seven years ago, but through the untiring energy and perseverance of the proprietor, have increased as the years advanced, until the works now cover a space of between eight and ten acres of ground, employ over a hundred and thirty men, and consume vast quantities of material of various kinds, used in the construction of railroad cars.

An hour spent in going through these works will amply repay the visitor, and any sceptic who wants evidences of the "hum" other than those he reads of in the press of the country, will have all his doubts removed, by devoting a little of his spare time one of these fine afternoons to a saunter through the Cobourg Car Works.

The first attraction to the visitor is the large building in which the wooden material for freight cars is got in readiness for construction. Here huge planing machines with their incessant buzz, smooth the long heavy beams which compose the sides of the cars, while circular saws are constantly cutting other material into proper widths and lengths, and boring and morticing machines doing their labour with the nicety of clock work. Large piles of material, all ready for the erecting hands are seen on every side awaiting removal. Like the stones that composed Solomon's temple of old, which were got in readiness in the quarries, a long distance away from the structure itself, so the material that composes these cars is all prepared in this shop, the various pieces morticed to fit, so that when removed to the erecting house, where it is taken on trucks, the workmen there have only to fix the prepared pieces into their proper places, and bolt and nail them together. In a shop adjoining this, the iron wheels, the only material used which is not made in the works here, are

bored the proper size, and fitted on the axles by hydraulic pressure, then run on trucks to the **ERECTING SHOP.**

In this place immense piles of prepared material are seen on every side, through which the visitor has to thread their way. On the tracks were several freight cars in course of construction, the hands busily engaged putting the prepared pieces together. Four or five freight cars can be turned out in a day, as necessity demands, all ready for painting, lettering and finishing.

In the **FREIGHT PAINT SHOP** to which the cars are removed from the erecting house, as they are put together, the wood and iron work is painted, lettered, and the cars run out into the yard, from whence, after a sufficient number are ready, they are removed to their destination, these tracks being connected with the Grand Trunk Railway by a switch. On the track for removal were one second class passenger car, a baggage and express car, and a mail and smoking car, the cost of which amounts to nearly eight thousand dollars. These cars reflect great credit on the works here. The second-class passenger has very comfortable seats, on which one could ride for a long distance without any inconvenience, and is fitted up and painted inside in a manner such as one experiences in first-class cars on many roads. The mail and smoking car is a paragon of perfection, the conveniences for assorting and caring for the mail matter being of the highest order. These cars are for the Canada Central railway. The next attraction is the building shop for **FIRST-CLASS CARS.**

In this shop the men were, when we paid our visit, working upon the last first-class passenger car, of a contract for six, for the railway mentioned above, and the foundation for the first car of a new contract, was getting ready. In this building all the material for first-class cars, with

the exception of the trucks, and heavy foundation beams, is got in readiness for the hands of the erectors.

The machinery is necessarily finer and capable of neater work, than the shop first visited, as jobs turned out of here are of a superior order. One little machine is peculiarly attractive. This is the one that makes the blinds for the windows of first-class cars. The machine is small, and quite complicated, but it does its work in a most wonderful manner, and makes one think that the ingenuity of man is capable for almost anything. In the construction of first-class cars quite a number of fancy woods are used. Large piles of these may be seen in every direction, composed of white wood, oak, ash, cherry, walnut, birds-eye maple, and mahogany. This shop has the capacity for turning out first-class car every two weeks. Adjoining it are the upholstery and paint shops, the one for the upholstering of the seats, and the other for painting and finishing the cars.

Mr. Crossen is preparing large additions to these buildings, for even with their present capacity, he finds himself crowded for room, and material which should be kept under roof, has often to be piled in the yard. This yard, of which there are several acres, is a study of itself, and makes one think he is in the near vicinity of a large sawmill. Great piles of lumber, plank, scantling, and timber, meet the eye in every direction. These are constantly replenished by additions, brought principally by the cars of the Grand Trunk Railway, but also by teams from lumber mills in this vicinity.

The next points of interest are the works where the iron stuff is prepared. The first of these is the **CASTING SHOP**. As before stated, all the material used in the construction of the cars, wooden and iron, except iron of the wheels, is prepared at the works here.

A large number of iron castings are required, consisting of axle boxes, brake fixtures, fancy ends for seats, etc. These castings are in both brass and iron. Casting is done every other day.

We were fortunate in seeing the whole process of casting a number of axle boxes and ends for seats. We first watched the iron going into the furnace, although the heat from the open door, and the gas, were not the most pleasant things in the world.

Heaps of iron, composed of parts of old stoves, pots, frying pans, and almost every conceivable culinary utensil together with broken or imperfect castings, were shovelled pellmell into the maws of this insatiable fiery monster, to come out below as a creamy white molten mass. This is carried in a ladle between two men, to the moulds, into which it is poured, and allowed to stand for about ten minutes, to set, when the mould is opened, and the casting, still at a red heat tumbled out, when it soon cools. It is then taken to a large iron box, into which it is put with a number of others, and a quantity of small scraps and pebbles, and revolved by machinery, the friction taking off all the rough edges and uneven surfaces. Next to the casting shop is the **BLACKSMITH SHOP**, where bolts, nuts, etc, are made, and the iron rods so freely used in the construction of cars, turned and twisted into their requisite forms. We question if this blacksmith shop, for cleanness, comfort, and every requisite facility for turning out perfect work, has a superior in the province.

Great heaps of bolts and plates, in their various stages toward completion, were lying about, impressing one very forcibly with the magnitude of the works which would require such vast quantities of material of this kind. Off from the blacksmith shop is the **FINISHING AND TURNING SHOP**, where the bolts are threaded and fitted to the nuts, the castings bored, polished where required, etc., in readiness to be removed to the erecting house. These latter shops are all of brick, and have been recently put up. The whole of the machinery in the blacksmith, turning and passenger car shop is run by a very large and powerful engine, the machinery of the first shop visited being worked by a separate engine.

# The Cobourg Riot of 1839: The Rest of the Story

**Dianne Brock**

In early August 1839, the province was unsettled by alarming reports about John Lett, the murderer of Captain Usher. Sir George Arthur issued a £500 reward for his capture, and rumours placed him near Cobourg, though some newspapers falsely claimed he had already been arrested and jailed there.

Attention soon shifted to Samuel P. Hart and the men who had landed with him from the schooner *Guernsey*. When the vessel returned to Oswego, American authorities seized it on suspicion of involvement in the Cobourg affair. Kennedy escaped, and several papers linked the group directly to Lett and the violence surrounding the Usher murder.

Canadian and American newspapers exchanged accusations about who was responsible for the expedition. Reports from Kingston insisted the plot was organized in the United States, while American papers denied any involvement. Meanwhile, panic grew in Cobourg. The magistrates warned Sir George Arthur that public feeling was so inflamed they feared they could not restrain the townspeople from taking justice into their own hands.

The *Oswego Herald* added to the alarm, reporting that the *Guernsey's* crew had returned drunk and unusually flush with money, prompting the Collector to seize the vessel and send a deputy marshal to Cobourg for evidence. Kennedy was said to have reached Lewiston, and some feared Lett had escaped with help from sympathizers in Durham.

Through all this, the £500 reward remained in force, and authorities urged the public to watch for strangers as the province braced for further disturbances.

## **The Court Case: September 13, 1839**

The men formally brought before the Assizes in the 1839 Cobourg conspiracy case were Samuel P. Hart, Wm. P. Wilkins, Henry Wilson, Wm. Ducker, Joseph Ash, Sr., Joseph Ash, Jr., and William Baker. These seven formed the core group placed at the bar to answer charges of conspiracy, arson, and attempted murder. Several others—including Henry J. Moon, James Kennedy, Letts, Clark, Mason, and Bilton—were arrested or examined during the investigation but were not ultimately included among the principal prisoners at trial. Their fate, and the dramatic courtroom proceedings that followed, would soon grip the entire district.

The trial itself had begun on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, before Mr. Justice Jones and his associates. Hart, Wilkins, Wilson, Ducker, and both Ashes stood charged with conspiring to murder Robert Henry, to burn his dwelling-house, and to persuade Henry J. Moon to join them in the criminal design. All pleaded not guilty. The jury was sworn, and the prisoners—especially Hart—appeared deeply shaken.

The Attorney General opened with a stark outline of the plot: a plan to murder a respected man who had never harmed them, to burn his home, and to draw Moon into their scheme. He promised the jury clear evidence, including testimony from Moon, two sailors, and Sheriff Ruttan. He described the law of conspiracy and the gravity of assembling arms for murder in the dead of night. When he finished, the witnesses were ordered out.

Sheriff Ruttan testified first. Acting on instructions, he had crossed the lake to deliver assurances of non-prosecution to Sprague. Sprague agreed to come but claimed he needed to go to Oswego for books. On the schooner *Express*, Ruttan learned from the captain that one of the men aboard had helped seize the schooner *Guernsey*, that carried Hart's party into Canada. An objection halted further details, and the Attorney General waived additional examination. A sailor from near Rochester followed. He had seen Hart, Wilson, Wilkins, and Baker aboard a schooner owned by Captain Terry. Hart boarded first, speaking quietly to someone below deck. The vessel crossed the lake, returned with arms, and then altered course. The captain refused to take them where Hart wished, so Hart secured another vessel. The men carried knives, pistols, swords, and spoke of rifles left behind. Their weapons were packed in trunks, and they handled them with a kind of formal ceremony.

Another sailor, serving on the schooner *Guernsey*, testified that the prisoners boarded at Oswego with only ordinary baggage. They left at midnight, and by morning only a few trunks remained. He saw belts—concealed at first—worn by the men who handled the trunks. He later saw the same belts on the wharf. His testimony became confused and repetitive, but the impression was unmistakable: the men were armed and organized.

Further testimony revealed darker intentions. Lett, one of the conspirators, claimed he would "do his part." He said that if the "Jail Birds" learned anyone had named them in evidence, they would kill the informant. He spoke of robbing Jaynes, of rallying neighbours, of stealing money, of calling out the militia one by one and forcing them to surrender their funds. He discussed lists of names, including the Boultons, whom he said should be "cut out," especially the younger one.

One witness described a night of frantic preparation. He returned to find Lett and Hart in the kitchen, running bullets by the stove. It was bright moonlight. Woolcoft arrived, saying his wagon was not ready, but Hart later told the witness that Woolcoft would help them if they delayed until the next night. Kennedy appeared, and Sprague brushed past the witness, saying he was going too. The plan shifted repeatedly—escape by schooner, splitting the party, or going together. The Ash men argued. All were armed except Wilson. The witness refused to go, insisting he would not join them.

Later, he confronted Sprague: “You see this is going to ruin us.” Sprague urged him to act. The witness went home, found Robert Williams there, and confessed he was finished with the reform cause. He felt sick at heart. He resolved to inform Mr. Boulton, who lived eight miles away. Before bed, he told Williams he intended to bring himself to justice, admitting he had been deceived by the others.

The next morning he went to Cobourg, then sought out Mr. Dyer Boulton. He warned Boulton not to speak to him in the street. He feared Boulton might alert Hart’s party. He met Boulton and Mr. Conger together, made excuses about land titles to conceal his purpose, and eventually reached Boulton’s office. There he revealed everything. Boulton and Captain Clark heard his full account. He later took tea at Foster Sprague’s, then returned to Boulton’s house. Kennedy confronted him in the garden, asking whether he had done wrong. The witness insisted he had done what he believed right.

The court noted that his testimony, given clearly and explicitly, carried conviction.

Mr. Duer testified next, though his statements were confused. He spoke of names on papers, suspicions around Jaynes, and conversations he barely understood. Moon’s relatives then testified. Moon had visited them in July, speaking strangely about money, imprisonment, and his inability to do anything. His story seemed untrue. Hines, another witness, repeated—almost mechanically—that Moon was a man of character, that money had been shut up, that Moon was unable to act, and that he did not use the bank.

Finally, the newspaper added its own warning. With the evidence of the Hart trial before them, and with strangers of no fixed occupation crowding the streets, the editors urged stronger surveillance and greater authority for magistrates to question suspicious persons. No honest man, they said, should object. They recommended extending to the province the 36th of George III, chapter 7 (Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act of 1795).

***Trial Continues: September 20, 1839***

The continuation of the Cobourg conspiracy proceedings opened with the testimony of D. E. Boulton, who stated that he resided in Cobourg and had received information of a conspiracy against both his uncle and himself, as well as an intended attack upon the bank. This intelligence reached him on the 28th of July. On that day, Henry J. Moon met him in the street and asked to see him at his office at two o’clock. Moon told him, “what I have to mention to you is worth thousands.” Boulton already regarded Moon as a mysterious man; Moon had previously warned him not to speak to him in the street, as it might provoke an attack. When Moon later insisted they meet on the Island, and did so with unusual precision, Boulton

became suspicious. He instead directed Moon to come to his office, and informed Mr. C. E. Clark of the matter, asking him to remain nearby.

Moon arrived between twelve and one o'clock, without his wig, wearing his natural hair. Several men were in the office at the time. When Moon left, Boulton asked whether he would object to repeating the information to Mr. Clark; Moon agreed, and the two went to Clark's residence, where Moon repeated his account.

Benjamin Walker, who had first informed Boulton of Moon's involvement, had just come from Captain Boulton's, where Boulton had arranged to meet Moon. Plans were made to seize Hart and his party that evening. Boulton waited nearly half an hour when Mr. Charles Clarke arrived in haste. Believing it imprudent to attack Ash's house with so few men, Boulton gathered additional assistance: Mr. Manners (known by several names), Mr. J. C. Boswell, Mr. Charles Ruttan, and several officers. Clark and Manners approached the back door, while Boswell, Ruttan, and Boulton went to the front. Young Ash opened the door, and they entered easily.

Inside, they found Wilkes sitting in the kitchen, with Mr. Ash present. A guard had been placed around the house. Boulton believed Ash did not know the men who had gathered there. Hart had been seeking to see Boulton that night, but refused unless Boulton came alone. Moon later told Boulton that fifty dollars had been offered to him to keep quiet, and that he was promised one hundred dollars for betraying Boulton. Wilson was found and searched. Clark reported that he and Manners had discovered black bullet-proof clothing and other suspicious articles in the house. Wilson was taken shortly after the officers' presence became known. The elder Ash was found downstairs; his wife was below. Clark and others found, upstairs and under beds, several men marked with "W. E." The house had clearly been used as a rendezvous. Bullets were found in papers. Hart was taken with arms and a uniform; he claimed he was going to the Queen's Bush and that they intended to "shoot the Whigs." This occurred around half-past nine o'clock.

Ash stated that Hart was to call for him. He attempted to disclaim the evidence, saying the items were not his, and that he did not know the men in the house. He denied knowing his son was there. His statements were contradicted by Clark and Boswell.

D. C. Chatterton (Owner and editor of the *Cobourg Star*) testified regarding Wilson's arms. He had not reached the lower floor as quickly as the others. He stated that the depositions taken before him were all signed except for some returned sheets. He had seen Hart's handwriting and believed a letter produced to be Hart's, though he would not swear to it. He noted that

cross-examined recollections were less reliable than written statements. He had not been inside old Ash's house.

Benjamin Walker testified that he was present at Ash's when the prisoners were taken, and that he was one of the committing magistrates. The prisoners gave their information freely. He did not know Hart's handwriting.

Constable J. C. Boswell stated that he went to Ash's, found the door shut, and demanded entry in the Queen's name. Young Ash said he knew the men in the house. Boswell corroborated the other witnesses. The prisoners gave their information freely. He did not know Hart's handwriting. He added that the Ashes bore a good character and were not likely to commit robbery.

John Boswell was also present at the capture and heard young Ash deny that the men were in the house.

Further handwriting testimony followed. W. S. Conger, acquainted with Hart's writing, believed one of the papers produced was Hart's, though much disguised. W. W. Boswell could not swear to it. G. S. Boulton believed one sheet to be Hart's writing, though another was too disguised to identify. Several letters, believed unquestionably to be Hart's, were then inserted.

These letters revealed Hart's dealings with Patriot leaders, his financial troubles, his resentment toward Arthur, his desire for political change "upon honorable principles," and his involvement in clandestine plans, including discussions of destroying Canadian steamboats, raising funds, and coordinating movements across the border. He spoke of needing money, of the Buffalo Fund, of secret lodges, and of the dangers of betrayal.

The elder Ash, in his examination, stated he had remained at Williams' house only a quarter of an hour, and that he told Almon that Hart wished to see him. He corroborated Mr. Sax's evidence and confirmed that Hart and Wilson had refused to sign their examinations, though they acknowledged them as accurate. Baker also corroborated the others, though his own account was so absurd it was recorded largely for its strangeness. He claimed to be a merchant from the United States visiting a cousin in Chatham, married to a man named Bismigh's widow, and that he had arrived by schooner, risen early, and been seized almost immediately. His story was confused and contradictory.

Captain Charles Clark testified that on Monday, July 22, a party under Hart had been drilling at Williams' house and were armed. Acting on information from Mr. Sax, he went with several captains to the house. He was refused entry and forced the door. Inside, he found the

men armed and drilling, and the house filled with weapons. His testimony, though repeated in the record with mechanical redundancy, established clearly that Hart's party had been training for armed action.

The defense then attempted to discredit Moon. Samuel Stevens, Jacob W. Myers, J. C. Blais, Nelson G. Reynolds, and Justice Z. Bowell all testified that Moon's character was notoriously bad, that he was not to be believed on oath, and that he had long been regarded as untruthful. Some had personal quarrels with him; others had merely heard of his reputation. Reynolds, who had himself been tried for high treason and acquitted, stated that Moon's character was "very indifferent."

The prosecution closed, and the judge addressed the prisoners. He rejected their claim of being victims of conspiracy or prejudice, insisting they had been given a just and impartial investigation and had been found guilty on the evidence.

He then addressed the younger Ash, lamenting that a young man who professed religion had sheltered men intending murder and arson. Ash had seen the arms and could not have been ignorant of the plot. He had not warned authorities nor shown any horror at the crimes contemplated. Instead, he had become the associate of outlaws and rebels. The judge urged him to reflect on the disgrace he had brought upon himself.

Turning to Hart, the judge spoke at length. Hart, an older man, once a soldier in the British army, had influence and intelligence. He had become a leader in the rebel cause, actively engaged in the Patriot movement. He had not been deceived; he had chosen his course. He claimed to be a Patriot, but the judge declared that if he acted as a Patriot of the United States rather than a subject of the Provinces, he must suffer the consequences. The judge condemned the treacherous nature of the movement and the danger it posed to the peace of the country.

The sentences were then pronounced: confinement and fines, repeated solemnly and emphatically, marking the gravity of the offenses and the court's determination to uphold the law.

***The sentences, when they came, were severe.***

Hart received seven years' hard labour in the Penitentiary, and was required to give security—himself in four hundred pounds, and two sureties each in two hundred pounds—for three years' good behaviour upon release. Wilkins, Wilson, and Baker were each sentenced to five years in the Kingston Penitentiary, with the same securities as Hart. The elder Ash was ordered to six months' imprisonment in the District Gaol, fined £100, and

required to give security for three years' good behaviour. The younger Ash received twelve months' imprisonment and a fine of £50, with the same three-year security requirement.

The Assizes closed on Saturday morning, and Mr. Justice Jones and the Attorney General immediately departed by land for Port Hope, where a steamboat waited to convey them to Toronto.

“So closed the Cobourg Conspiracy, its leaders consigned to punishment, its schemes exposed, and its shadow lingering still upon the district. The law had spoken with severity, and the community, long unsettled by rumour and alarm, could at last draw breath.”

*Thanks to Dianne Brock for permission to re-publish her research.*

## **Announcements**

### ***CDHS Website Addition***

For over a decade our website has included 35 interviews with military veterans who served from WWII to recently (<https://cdhs.ca/veteran-interviews/>). These recordings are from a series of interviews conducted by students of Cobourg District Collegiate Institute West as part of a 2010 Cobourg and District Historical Society project entitled *Cobourg's Veterans: An Oral History*. This project was conceived to preserve the remembrances of local area veterans for the benefit of future generations while furthering the education and appreciation for our history. It was made possible through a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Google and other search engines do not index audio files which made it difficult for researchers to find the material. Ken Strauss recently used AI enabled computer software to convert each audio file to a text files and the website has been updated to include the more accessible material. There are likely errors in some of the computer generated transcriptions so the original recordings should be consulted if there is a question regarding critical words.

### ***NCAM News***

Northumberland County Archives and Museum has procured a new Phase One digital camera system designed for high-resolution digitization, marking a major advancement in their capacity to create preservation-grade images. This exciting development was made possible by Walter Borchenko and Kim Keyser of B3K Digital and the very generous and swift financial support of a local private donor.

The system will be installed in the Parker Westgate Studio, a dedicated digitization space within the new NCAM. The Studio's name is in memory of Peter Parker and Marion (nee Westgate) Parker who were active members of the Cobourg and District Historical Society

during the 1980s. The Parkers helped to organize a Cobourg & Peterborough "Railway Walk" which was a sesquicentennial project of the CDHS. This 1987 outing led to a CDHS publication, "Reflections on a Railway", written by Barbara Garrick and John McLaughlin, a copy of which is in the Local History Room of the Cobourg Public Library.

NCAM staff will be trained on the system over the summer and are developing a plan to prioritize digitization based on preservation risk, richness of informational value, and frequency of use. The Parker Westgate Studio is expected to be operational later this Fall, accelerating NCAM's ability to enhance long term preservation and open new possibilities for research and engagement with the collection.

The Northumberland County Archives has 135 bound volumes and hundreds of un-bound copies of Cobourg newspapers. Northumberland Archives also has thousands of Campbellford, Colborne, Port Hope and Warkworth newspapers from the 1870s to mid-1990s. These collections are currently available only for on-site use; they cannot be accessed remotely by computer. Their new equipment will allow NCAM to begin digitizing these historical newspapers.\*

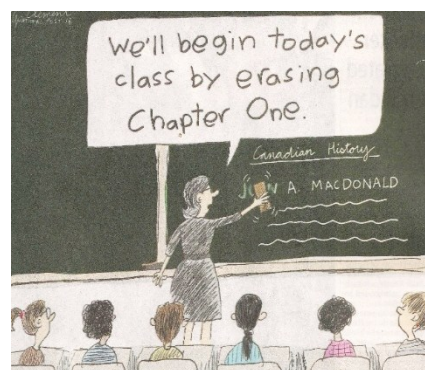
### ***Cobourg Museum Foundation***

The Annual General Meeting of the Cobourg Museum Foundation will be held on Wednesday, May 13, beginning at 7pm at the Sifton-Cook Exhibit Hall, 141 Orr Street. The meeting is open to the public but only members can participate in the election of officers.

Following the AGM there will be a presentation by the Museum's Exhibit Team on the new exhibit, "Can You Hear Me? 150 years of the Telephone".

### ***History Matters***

If you enjoyed Dr. Christopher Dummitt's insights into Canadian history at the October CDHS meeting, you will find much more of interest at the website (<https://cihe.ca/>) of the Canadian Institute for Historical Education (CIHE). They feature both in-person and online events presented by leading authors and historians including Dr. Dummitt, J.D.M. Stewart, Charlotte Gray, Dr. Alan Taylor and many more.



### ***Port Hope Walking Tours***

The Port Hope chapter of the ACO is organizing a series of walking tours this Summer and Fall. The tours all start at 11:00am on Saturdays and last for approximately 90 minutes. Visit <https://acoporthope.ca/2026/04/06/historic-walking-tours-2026-schedule-tickets> for details.

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

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