

OHS BULLETIN

ISSUE 226

Fall 2025

THE NEWSLETTER *of the* ONTARIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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On the cover: From the Heritage Village at the Canadian Transportation Museum and Heritage Village (OHS Institutional Member) in Kingsville, Ontario. Photograph from Curator Karolina Brozy.

OHS BULLETIN

The *OHS Bulletin* is the newsletter of the Ontario Historical Society (OHS).

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ONTARIO
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY Since 1888

CHAIR'S REPORT

DAVE MOWAT

Chair, OHS Board of Directors
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Greetings from Alderville. It's a pleasure to be addressing all of our members and informing you of some exciting new projects and developments.

The OHS is excited to debut the new layout and design of the *Bulletin*, which will now reach members twice annually, once in the spring and once in the fall. We look forward to receiving updates from all of our members, so please make sure to get in touch with OHS staff to submit your stories and photos for future publication. Special thanks go out to our summer student employee, Maggie King, who worked tirelessly on the redevelopment of our newsletter this summer, adding new columns and inviting new contributors to make it an even more engaging publication for our many readers.

Since my last report, the OHS has conducted surveys and held public consultations with members and stakeholders as part of our strategic planning process. It has been such a positive experience hearing from you. As we look to the future, our top priority is to support our members and the incredible work that you do on behalf of your communities. The Board of Directors met in late August to approve a preliminary report from the Strategic Planning Committee, and the final Strategic Plan will be completed later this fall. We will be reaching out to the membership in the coming weeks with a date for this year's Annual General Meeting, where that Strategic Plan will be shared with all OHS members for adoption. I want to acknowledge the efforts of OHS staff and Directors in coordinating these consultation meetings and preparing all of the necessary surveys and reports. Special thanks are due to our summer student employees Abby Conquer, Maggie King, and Faith Peter (2024), whose support made so much of this work possible. We wish all three of them the best as they continue with their studies and their emerging careers.

I want to report on a recent meeting between the OHS and the Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism. On June 16, OHS Executive Director Daniel Dishaw and I met with the Hon. Graham McGregor (and members of his staff) to discuss the important work of the OHS and its membership. I'd like to thank the Minister and his staff for what was an engaging and productive discussion. The OHS continues to advocate for increased support for volunteers and not-for-profit heritage organizations in Ontario.



Pictured above, from left to right are Dave Mowat, OHS Chair; the Hon. Graham McGregor, Minister, Citizenship and Multiculturalism; and Daniel Dishaw, OHS Executive Director.

HERITAGE PASSPORT

Explore Ontario



Explore Ontario's heritage sites with a visit to the Essex region!

1 Canadian Transportation Museum and Heritage Village

Learn more about Ontario's transportation history with a visit to the Canadian Transportation Museum and Heritage Village in Kingsville, ON. For more information and hours of operation, please visit ctmhv.com.



2 John R. Park Homestead and Conservation Area

Travel back to the 1850s at the homestead of John and Amelia Park. Be sure to visit in March to attend their annual maple syrup festival! For more information, visit essexregionconservation.ca/conservation-areas.



3 Essex Railway Station

Visit the historic Essex Railway Station, home to unique railway artifacts, equipment, and memorabilia. For more information, visit the Heritage Essex website: essexrailwaystation.com/index.html.



4 Tecumseh Heritage Centre

Immerse yourself in the local and communal history of Tecumseh, Ontario, with a visit to the Tecumseh Heritage Centre! Visit their *Facebook* page for more information: facebook.com/TecumsehHeritageCentre/.





Undated photo (c. 1910–20) of Bishop William White (pictured far left) alongside Anglican missionaries in China. Photograph from the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.

How Toronto Got Its Dragon Bones

A Tale of Two Missionaries in China

By Giordano Ravalico

Postgraduate Student, Carleton University

In his 1961 classic, *What Is History?*, E.H. Carr asks the question: what makes a fact a “historical” fact? Similarly, how does an object become an “artifact”? Surely entering a museum elevates the ordinary into the historical. If so, few Canadians have had a greater impact on Canada’s understanding of Chinese history than William Charles White, the Anglican Bishop of Honan, missionary-turned-professor, and curator of the Far Eastern Collection at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto.

In the 19th century, “Toronto the Good” was a hub for the Church Missionary Society and China Inland Mission, resulting in Canada sending out more missionaries per capita than any other country. White left for China in 1897—a dangerous time for missionaries as the Stewart family, White’s sponsors, had just been murdered in Fujian. Had he accepted their offer to come in 1895, his biography would be very short indeed.

White arrived in Honan to convert others, but was himself converted: he became fluent in Chinese, adopted local dress, and—unusually for his time—promoted the ordination of Chinese clergy. He took a special interest in the local Jewish community, which dated back to the 12th century, and wrote histories about it. By 1909, he was the first Canadian-born Anglican bishop in China and a budding scholar of Chinese antiquities.

James Mellon Menzies, a Presbyterian missionary from Clinton, Ontario, was similarly affected upon his arrival in 1910. There, in the Honan market stalls, he encountered “dragon bones,” sold as medicine. In fact, these were “oracle bones”: inscribed ox scapulae and turtle shells used for divination during the ancient Shang dynasty. Menzies amassed the largest oracle bone collection in the world—over 35,000 pieces—and produced *Oracle Records from the Waste of Yin* in

1917, a monumental corpus of inscriptions. Each entry included findspots, helping Chinese archaeologists survey the ancient Shang capital. *The Globe* hailed Menzies as the “discoverer of the Waste of Yin,” but he consistently gave credit to Chinese scholars, to whom he donated the vast majority of his collection.

The ROM was then beginning its Far Eastern collection under founder Charles Trick Currelly. Chinese political instability created a “now or never” opportunity for collectors. Currelly sought a purchasing agent, soliciting the expertise of Canada’s missionaries. Menzies declined, being unwilling to export cultural heritage; White, with no such qualms, accepted. Currelly urged White to “make hay while the sun shines.” Beginning in 1924, White shipped more than 7,000 artifacts to Toronto: Shang bronzes, Han ceramics, Buddhist frescoes, Tang sculptures. After China’s first cultural relics law was passed in 1930, White resorted to smuggling items past customs in personal luggage and bribing officials. In 1934, with hay made, White left China to take up a position at the ROM.

White also became the first professor of Chinese studies at the University of Toronto, but was more an enthusiast than a true academic. In China, he conducted no archeological fieldwork; his acquisitions were almost entirely dealer-bought, of uncertain provenance, and authenticated by others—especially by Menzies, on whom White relied heavily. Yet Menzies received no credit, and privately grumbled that White took “an unholy delight in forcing me to tell him what he would then pass off as his own research.”

Estrangement came after White, as Menzies’s doctoral supervisor at the University of Toronto, insisted that the ROM—which funded Menzies’s studies—retain copyright to his research as a condition of publication. With little choice, Menzies signed over the rights, but the work remained unpublished. Meanwhile, White plundered Menzies’s dissertation to produce two books for himself. It was not until 1965, long after both men had died, that Menzies thesis was finally published: the result of a *quid pro quo* after his private collection was donated to the ROM by his family. By then, the story was already written. White kept diaries, but edited them extensively. In 1974, Lewis Walmsley, White’s friend

and successor at the University of Toronto, published *Bishop in Honan*, a hagiography drawn from the diaries. Menzies is simply noted for being “helpful,” while White emerges as a heroic figure who “rescued” Chinese heritage from destruction. Lovat Dickson, in the official history of the ROM, mentions Menzies merely once: as White’s “helper.”

Only Linfu Dong’s 2005 biography of Menzies, *Cross Culture and Faith*, finally challenged the official narrative. Four years later, the ROM established the James Menzies Chinese Research Fellowship, belatedly offering due recognition to a giant of Canada’s China scholarship.

Today, as museums confront their colonial legacies, the careers of White and Menzies are instructive. White’s role in building the ROM was enabled by imperial networks, and his version of events was long celebrated. Menzies—of the same historical moment—operated by a different ethic and was relegated to the margins of history. As Carr observed, history is not the past, it is a story about the past. Often, this story needs retelling.



An example of Menzies’ “oracle bones,” displaying the earliest known form of Chinese writing. A portion of the Menzies collection was donated to the ROM posthumously; the vast majority was left in China, where Menzies felt the artifacts should remain. Photo courtesy of ROM (Royal Ontario Museum), Toronto, Canada. ©ROM

Attention Graduate Students!

The OHS wants to spotlight graduate student research on Ontario’s history in the *Bulletin*. These articles may include local historical research, oral histories, biographies, etc. If your research sounds like a fit for this opportunity, please submit an 800–1,000-word article to ohs@ontariohistoricalsociety.ca. Submissions that include visual content are strongly preferred.



Ron Forbes, Chairperson of the Beachville District Historical Society, takes to the plate for the Zorra Zorras during a re-enactment game on the grounds of the Beachville Museum. Photo by Doris Weir Photography.

Baseball Anniversary Celebrated by the Beachville District Historical Society

By Stephanie Radu

Curator & Manager, Beachville District Museum

The 187th anniversary of the first recorded game of baseball in North America called for commemoration, and The Beachville District Historical Society and Zorra Heritage Committee stepped up to the plate. That early game was played on June 4th, 1838, to celebrate an annual holiday in Upper Canada that marked King George III's birthday. The monarch's birthday coincided with Militia Day, when able-bodied men of the Beachville District were expected to convene and participate in military drills. Earlier this year, the Society was looking to raise awareness of the area's rich baseball history, and brought together exhibitors that included the London Majors Alumni Association, Embro Minor Baseball Association, Beachville Legion, Society for American Baseball Research, Van Boekel Field of Dreams, and Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame. Authors, academics, sport historians, notable baseball players, and commentators were also in attendance.

This group of partners did not just convene for the anniversary celebration, the Society has been developing these connections since 2018. Initially, the Society participated in outreach events at Labatt Memorial Park, which helped to connect the organization with baseball historians and players affiliated with the London Majors and other Intercounty Baseball League teams.

Through this network, more research was compiled about Oxford County's involvement in the sports of baseball and softball. The results were shared at the annual conference for the Canadian Centre for Baseball Research in 2018, an event that solidified the Society's connections with researchers at the Centre, presenters from surrounding universities, and members of the Society for American Baseball Research. Starting in the same year, Beachville Museum began contributing to Doors Open London at the ballpark by installing educational booths and displays in the Roy McKay Clubhouse. In 2021, this partnership evolved to produce the regional baseball pass, which granted passholders access to the Society's baseball collections, the ballpark in London, and the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame in St. Mary's. In 2023, these three sites were added to The Official Pass-Port Program of the MLB & MiLB within the Baseball Attractions Pass-port, developed by Tim Parks. These passports have drawn a number of tourists (known as "STAMPeders") from across the United States to Beachville, ready to explore the museum's baseball exhibits and learn more about that first-recorded game in 1838.

Looking to capitalize on this growth, the museum conceived of a "Hands-On Heritage" program that would enliven the Society's exhibits by teaching participants



Participants explore artifacts from the history of the Intercounty Baseball League, as installed in the museum's agricultural complex by the London Majors Alumni Association. Photo by Doris Weir Photography.

how to make baseballs, like those crafted in the 1800s. This program inspired our organization to think about how the history of baseball is most effectively communicated to today's audiences. So, when our members started planning for the 187th anniversary event, we knew that we wanted visitors to be able to actively participate in the sport, in the production of sports equipment, and in the recollection of the first-recorded game. We also knew we would be able to call on the partners we had been collaborating and crossing paths with for years to help coordinate this fantastic event.

On May 31, 2025, just ahead of the official date of the 187th anniversary, historic displays and local history publications were set up across the grounds and in the agricultural complex at Beachville District Museum. Exhibitors from the London Majors Alumni Association put together an exhibit over 60 feet in length with memorabilia from the league and team's past. Attendees were able to not only view these pieces, but also delve into their significance with the help of local historians and former players. For Helen Johnson, a former catcher for the Embro Queens, the event was an opportunity to relive her days in the Oxford County Ladies' Softball League, recall her teammates, and share her experiences from the field. For landscape architect, Arthur Lierman, it was an opportunity to revisit his development plans for the "Baseball Gardens" in Beachville, alongside the model that illustrated his design. Trevor Oakes of HRD Bat Co., an official bat-maker for the MLB, demonstrated how early bats were made using lathes. Though many visitors were long-time followers of baseball, most had never seen

a bat made first-hand. Staff from the Beachville District Museum also helped visitors make baseballs according to the methods used in the 1800s—sewing together calf-skin with sinew, according to a lemon-peel design. Everyone who completed their baseball was invited to take it home. Lunch was served by the Beachville Legion and then participants either took to the limestone amphitheatre or to the field to enjoy a re-enactment baseball game. Players and audience members were explained the rules from the early 1800s and the game was on! A team from Beachville faced off against a team from Zorra, just as outlined in the account of the 1838 game. Players were assigned nicknames by their teammates and used rudimentary clubs to hit the ball. They were also "plugged" (hit by balls thrown in their direction) as they sought to make it to the next "bye" (base). Spectators of the re-enactment game enjoyed lively commentary provided by Joe Todd, a resident announcer and valued member of the International Softball Congress.

This event highlighted how the sport of baseball built community spirit in Upper Canada via intercommunity play and competition. It brought the old style of baseball to life in tangible and engaging ways and emphasized just how dramatically the game has changed in 187 years. Importantly, it also brought those who are passionate about modern baseball together with those fascinated by its history. The Society gathered partners, players, and other attendees to converse, learn, and reminisce in a community so passionate about celebrating its historic ties to the game.



Summer Solstice Festival near Thunder Bay, June 1979. Photograph from Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, 993.91.23.

The Life of Richard Lyons

By Michael deJong

Curator & Archivist, Thunder Bay Museum

Remembering Richard Lyons, a new documentary film from the Thunder Bay Museum, highlights the life and impact of Dr. Richard Lyons, who played a significant role through his Lyons Dance Troupe in bringing the Pow-Wow back to Northwestern Ontario.

Lyons was born in Fort Frances in 1925 to parents Edward and Mary Jane, and lived in that area for much of his early life. In his daily life growing up, Lyons was not exposed to many elements of Indigenous culture. For some time, he was employed as a fishing guide for some of the many tourist lodges in the area. He joined the Canadian Army during the Second World War; however, because of a diagnosed heart condition, he was not sent overseas for combat, but served in various roles in Canada throughout the war.

After the war, he married Marjorie Speaker, and began to learn about Anishinaabe language and culture from her and her family. This exposure influenced him considerably and became a driving inspiration and passion for the remainder of his life.

In the early 1950s, he and his young family moved for a period to Sapawe, Ontario (near Atikoken), when he worked for the lumber mill there. Soon after, he moved to Thunder Bay, where he worked for a time as a lumber grader for Northern Wood Preservers. During this period, he would continue his journey of cultural discovery, including travels to South Dakota, where he spent time learning

about Indigenous culture with the Lakota Sioux Nation, who would eventually honour him with the presentation of an Eagle Staff. Back in Thunder Bay, he would also become an Elder for the newly established Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre.

This journey would culminate in 1969 with the formation of the Lyons Dance Troupe. Richard's vision was to resurrect the Pow-Wow, along with Anishinaabe culture as a whole throughout Northwestern Ontario, by training and supporting young people who, like him, grew up without knowing their culture. The Troupe performed at many events and travelled to schools across the region to demonstrate the importance of this culture to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth alike. The renown of the Lyons Dance Troupe also grew outside of Northwestern Ontario—they travelled to Europe for a tour in the mid-1970s and performed for Queen Elizabeth II in London.

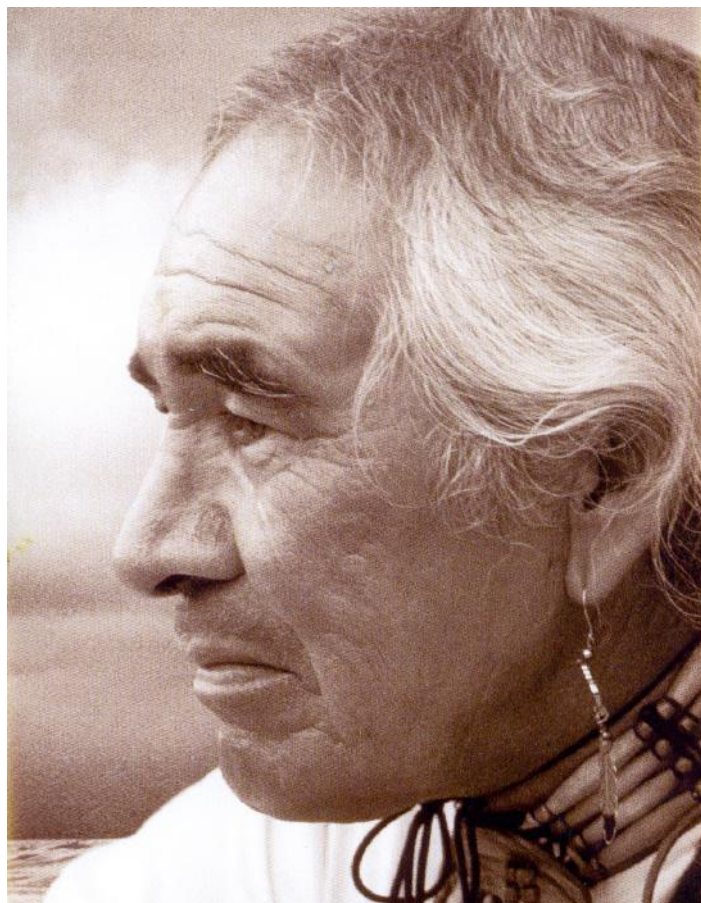
This important work resulted in further awards and recognition for Lyons, including an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from Lakehead University in 1992, and the Governor General's Award in 2002. In 2005, at the age of 80, Richard Lyons passed away. Today, Pow-Wows are a regular occurrence in and around the Thunder Bay region, in large part a testament to the Lyons Dance Troupe and their formative work many decades ago.

Richard's legacy is recognized in the newly released documentary film *Remembering Richard Lyons*. The

film opens by juxtaposing a narration of the 1921 circular from Duncan Campbell Scott of the Department of Indian Affairs, which called for the suppression of dancing among Indigenous peoples in Canada in service of assimilation, with contemporary footage of a Pow-Wow near Thunder Bay from 2024, demonstrating that, despite the government's efforts, the expression of Indigenous culture in Canada would ultimately prevail.

The film was a joint project between filmmakers Jim Hyder and Sterling Finlayson of Boozhoo Productions. Its development was guided by a committee of Elders and family members of Richard Lyons, and features testimonials from a variety of participants in the Lyons Dance Troupe about how it impacted and shaped their lives. The [film](#) is freely available on the Museum's *Vimeo* channel. The Thunder Bay Museum encourages interested institutions to host their own screenings of the film.

Special thanks to Jim Hyder and Verna Legarde for their assistance with writing this article.



Richard Lyons, Self Portrait (n.d.). Photograph by Jim Hyder.

MUSEUM MILESTONES

By Dr. John Carter

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Karen Bachmann's article (p. 14) explores the history and development of the Timmins National Exhibition Centre, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. Congratulations to all involved on reaching this milestone!

The Fashion History Museum in Cambridge has recently closed and placed its collection into storage while the board of management searches for a new site and additional funding. In Toronto, the Textile Museum of Canada has temporarily shut its doors to the public, with plans to reopen later this fall. Until then, its collection remains accessible on the museum's website. I hope both sites will open again to continue to provide their invaluable services.

Several staff changes are happening at museums across Ontario. Stephanie Derman is the new curator at the Red Lake Regional Heritage Centre. Katheryn Schryburt is the new curator at the Park House. Kaitlyn Dubeau has been appointed as curator/director at the Timmins National Exhibition Centre. Karen Bachmann has become the Director of Cultural Services for the City of Timmins. Fiona Doherty, curator at the Moore Museum, is now also Heritage Director for St. Clair Township. Matt Weickert has been appointed as Exhibition and Collections Curator at the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre. Tracy Loch has departed from Castle Kilbride, and Sherri Gropp is now curator there. Mary Baruth is now the Director of Culture for Chatham-Kent.

I am sad to report that Eva Marie Ardiel has passed away. An arts educator for the Hamilton and Peel Boards of Education, Eva was appointed as the first curator at the old Britannia Schoolhouse in Mississauga, and is one of the founders of the schoolhouse museum educators' group, So Let's All Talk Education (SLATE). Eva contributed greatly to the fields of education and museums. She will be missed. Condolences to her family.

Lead article starts on p. 12...



The Timmins Museum: National Exhibition Centre in downtown Timmins. Photograph accessed from a Timmins Museum article.

Timmins Museum: National Exhibition Centre

By Karen Bachmann

Director of Cultural Services, City of Timmins
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The Timmins Museum: National Exhibition Centre is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary in 2025! While the original national exhibition centre was opened in 1975 in South Porcupine, the idea for a museum had already been in the works for many years. Newspaper articles from 1952 lamented the fact that Cobalt and Kapuskasing had museums, but Timmins had none—something had to be done about that, and the local Chamber of Commerce took up the challenge.

By 1962, the Chamber presented a project to the community that saw the incorporation of a museum in their new facility. They needed the support of the Township of Tisdale, but the proposition was voted down by the councillors and the project was put on

hold. Undaunted, Chamber members trotted out the museum idea again two years later. This time, they partnered with CKGB Radio, who was willing to support a proposal that would see a museum housed in two Ontario Northland Railway (ONR) cars. Many letters frantically flew between the Chamber, local MPP and Minister of Municipal Affairs Wilf Spooner, and the radio station, but the ONR decided to sell the railway stock to a museum in Toronto. The museum project was beginning to look like a bit of a joke.

In 1969, local businessman Joe Plante revived the aptly named Chamber Museum Action Committee. The group worked with the McIntyre Arena Committee and hoped to use the old bowling alley as the new

museum. But, just as before, the project died on the books because of a lack of funding and support. An attempt to use the old Schumacher Railway Station, on condition that it be moved, was also doomed to failure because of a lack of cash.

Unbelievably, the museum idea did not die there! In 1972, the Jubilee year for the town of Timmins, the Royal Bank helped fund a number of historical research projects across Canada; two students were hired to research the history of Timmins and the Porcupine Camp. This renewed interest in the town's history sparked the creation of yet another museum committee. These volunteers worked with both the federal and provincial governments to start a collection that was stored in various buildings around town.

While everyone was enthusiastic in 1972 when the museum committee got together, by the end of the year, they still did not have a site, money, or widespread public support. They took a chance and applied for a federal grant for the creation of a National Exhibition Centre (NEC) in the Porcupine. NECs were initially created by the federal government to provide rural communities with travelling exhibitions from across Canada. While the idea of the NEC was a start, the museum committee did not feel that it was the answer to their dream of a local historical museum.

A rival museum project was also in the works. The project, led by Canadian architect Raymond Moriyama, proposed the creation of a Natural Resources Science Centre for the North in Timmins, featuring mining, lumbering, transportation, wildlife and northern development exhibits. It was to be housed on the Hollinger Mine site, one of Canada's largest gold mines. The local museum committee felt threatened by this large project, which they were sure would overshadow their more modest efforts. The Moriyama project was eventually rejected by the Timmins Town Council because of the astronomical costs involved; the more modest and affordable museum and NEC project was put into action instead.

By late 1973, funding was secured for the NEC; \$100,000 was contributed by National Museums of Canada to erect a building that would house exhibition

and programming space. The Timmins National Exhibition Centre opened its doors in 1975, under the directorship of Edwina Taborsky. The first travelling exhibition came from the Art Gallery of Ontario and featured works by Emily Carr and Lawren Harris. The site was off to an auspicious start and work progressed on the addition of a local museum. Ms. Taborsky left after one year, replaced by Lydia Ross Alexander, who was successful in securing the funding necessary for the community museum addition. Construction finally began in 1978. Ken Doherty was hired as the curator. On November 1, 1979, part of the new museum was officially opened to the public. Timmins finally had its museum.

So, there you have it—a very short history of the start of the Timmins Museum: NEC. When Lydia Alexander Ross left in 1984, the director and curator positions were merged and Ken Doherty assumed the new role. I assumed the role in 1988 and left the museum last November for another position in the city; Kaitlyn Dubeau is the new Director/Curator for the facility. The TM: NEC is set to continue to provide programmes and exhibits for the community for another 50 years!

The TM: NEC is located at 325 2nd Avenue in Timmins, Ontario. Admission is free! For more information about programs and events, visit www.timminsmuseum.ca/.



Director/Curator Ken Doherty with school group, 1985, in the Timmins Museum. Photograph from Dr. John Carter.

OHS INCORPORATIONS

Friends of Oliver Paipoonge Heritage Park and Museum

Rebecca Eras, Chair



Photograph of Russ' Garage at Oliver Paipoonge Heritage Park and Museum. Photograph from Rebecca Eras.

On March 25, 2025, Friends of Oliver Paipoonge Heritage Park and Museum became incorporated through affiliation with the Ontario Historical Society. The 18-acre Park, owned by the Municipality of Oliver Paipoonge, invites visitors to take a walk in the past and visit numerous historic buildings and museums, browsing everything from classic cars to local turn-of-the-century antiques and artifacts. Open weekends from mid-May until the end of September, events and attractions include Russ's Garage, a classic car museum; The Duke Hunt Museum, and authentically restored buildings including the Pioneer Home, Cobbler's Shop, Blacksmith Shop, and the Heritage Village. Also on site are a historic church still used for small weddings today, a schoolhouse and teacherage, and numerous rail and agricultural assets. The Park was built by the late Fred Goodfellow to preserve antiques and artifacts from the past 100 years and offer a glimpse into the history and heritage of generations past.

Overall, the Park provides an immersive experience back in time to see how people once lived and get some amazing photos along the way. It features timeless backdrops for special events, outdoor markets, and music that the Friends group will support growth opportunities for.

With goals to increase awareness and visitation of the Park, to promote its programming, and to support the protection of key assets, the Friends group is guided by its strategic plan to help identify and pursue focused fundraising and other economic and educational opportunities for the long-term viability of the Park.

A survey was undertaken in summer 2024 asking the public to provide insights and ideas on their interests and experiences at the Park. This provided an opportunity to engage with the public while also serving as a strategic communications vehicle in the media, by integrating the information about the Park and its programs into the survey to raise awareness of the Park's offerings. The results showed that many people wanted to learn more about the past through the museum and historical buildings; they also wanted to attend more events and concerts at the Park and to take photos in the unique setting.

This year's plan includes pursuing fundraising opportunities to work toward becoming a registered charity to enable the group to issue donation receipts and position the Friends group for future lottery licensing and grant opportunities. For more information, visit www.ophp.ca.

Shooting Sports Museum

Peter Barbier, Secretary, with input from Garth Wetherall



Photograph of the Boer War Display, resourced and arranged by Museum members. Photograph from Ross McBean.

Throughout the history of this country, firearms have played a crucial part in the lives of Canadians, not only for sustenance and national defense, but also for both

amateur and professional sport all the way to major competitions such as the Olympics.

There have been many well-known Canadian gunsmiths and companies, such as Ross & Cooley, who have played a major part in our everyday lives, and of course in times of war.

The Shooting Sports Museum was established to promote the history of not only these firearms, but all target sports through organized presentations along with interactive exhibits and static displays. Our background comes from one of Canada's largest shooting sports clubs, the Burlington Rifle and Revolver Club, better known today as Range Burlington. The Museum is an integral part of their renovation plans that include new display and secure storage space. The Range Burlington Historical Society, which has become part of the Sports Shooting Museum umbrella, typically presents six History Talks per year. Some of our previous presentations include: The Brown Bess, The Snider Enfield: Canada's primary rifle of the late Victorian period, Small arms of WW1 of both sides, and Guns of the Old West. The most recent talk, Arms of the American Civil War, was delivered on March 8th by Peter Barbier, one of the Directors of the Museum. We have many exciting talks planned for the next few years, including Automatic Firearms of WWII, The Story of a Boer War Rifle and a Canadian Soldier, Black Powder Military Firearms, Black Powder Shooting, Arms of the East India Company, and Winchester Repeating Arms.

Museum Volunteers were very active in the early June National Range Day events, bringing a historical perspective to the day. The last two events were the History of the Canada and the British Empire Service Arm & Weapons, and Equipment of the American Civil War. We will again be participating in this year's event and it will be The Wild West—Guns of the American Frontier.

Finally, we are in the planning stages of this year's field trips for interested members. We are blessed to be surrounded by many interesting historical sights in our area and in the past, we have visited the battlefields at Lundy's Lane, Ridgeway, and Brock's Monument,

where our Museum President, Garth Wetherall, shared his detailed knowledge and insights into the important historical events that unfolded there.

Middle Grey Arts and Heritage Group

Tim Reilly, Executive Director



Photograph of the Annesley Sanctuary in Markdale, Ontario, where the OHS met with members to celebrate their incorporation on May 27, 2025. Photograph from Daniel Dishaw.

Middle Grey reaches into many segments of our geographically large, smaller populated community in the south of the County of Grey. We remain focused on historic Annesley in Markdale and in keeping it filled year-round with a lot of activity at many different levels.

Diversity, frequency, and value are our steering principles in consistently bringing wonderful art into our countryside. So far, we have spent four years experimenting and practicing in holding a large number of all sorts of events, tackling heritage issues, broadening understanding of both growth and decline in our community's traditional institutions, and planning to provide a full-service venue for performances.

Our affiliation with the Ontario Historical Society allows us to achieve a better perspective and a wider circle of friends and communities on this journey. We are dedicated to providing performance venues of historical, architectural, and acoustical delight for musical, spoken word, and other cultural performances, events, exhibitions, and presentations by artists of all kinds, deep in the heart of beautiful rural Ontario and the absolute Middle of Grey.

BARRY PENHALE'S ONTARIO

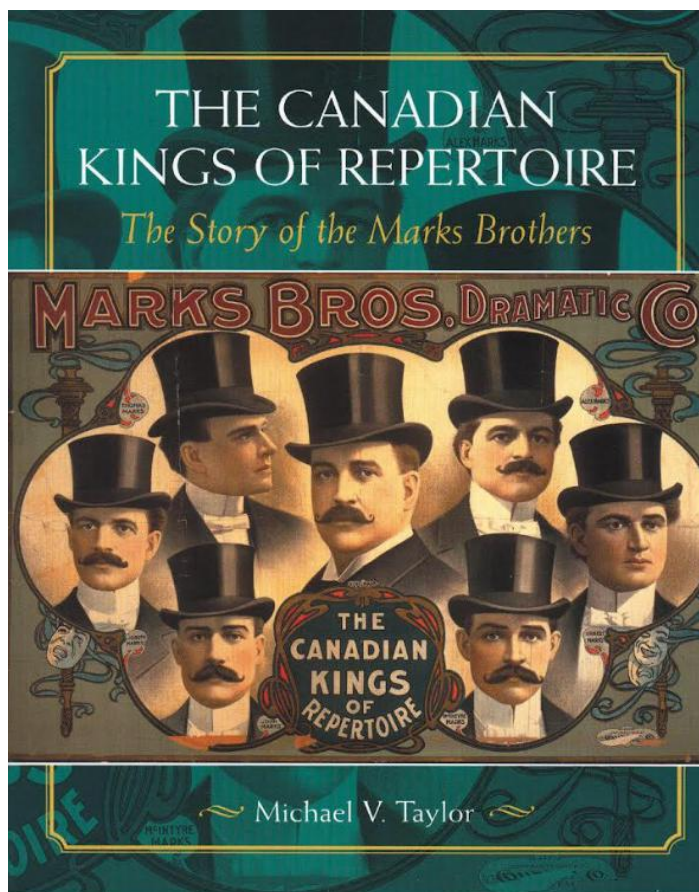
Architecture and Vaudeville: Exploring Perth's Past

By Barry Penhale

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Few Ontario communities can lay claim to such a diverse and colourful history as the charming and long-settled Eastern Ontario community of Perth. Thanks to my parents and their wanderings across the trillium province, I was introduced to Lanark County and Perth while yet a youngster. Fortunately, numerous projects much later found me returning to Perth and, on each occasion, I discovered further layers of its history. It has frequently been said that Perth has it all, including a delightful main street that benefited some years back when it was the object of a Mainstreet Canada Revitalization Project administered by the Heritage Canada Foundation, in conjunction with the Town of Perth. Ontario day-trippers in their explorations will also find enjoyment in viewing other similar revitalization projects in such communities as Prescott, Port Hope, Seaforth, and Jackson's Point. But I digress, and return now to Perth, whose visual attractiveness coupled with its more than ample heritage has often attracted media attention. During the 80s, it was the subject of a half-hour episode of the television series *Sketches of Our Town*, which at the time found me enjoying a triple role as researcher, host, and narrator. My colleagues and I were faced with the challenge of trying to fit into one program the many stories begging to be recorded and filmed. If budgets had permitted, we easily could have produced a mini-TV series on Perth alone, but modest production dollars ruled out that inviting prospect.

Perth has been well served by its delightful museum, which boasts a plethora of displays that capture the history of the town. The museum is worth a visit if only to discover the fascinating story of the Marks Brothers, local entertainers of renown whose home base was nearby Christie Lake, close to Maberly, Ontario. Initially, the seven brothers only performed in the eastern Ontario region. In time, train travel allowed them to fulfill the many requests they were receiving to perform much further away. It had to have been quite a sight to see the dashing brothers and their



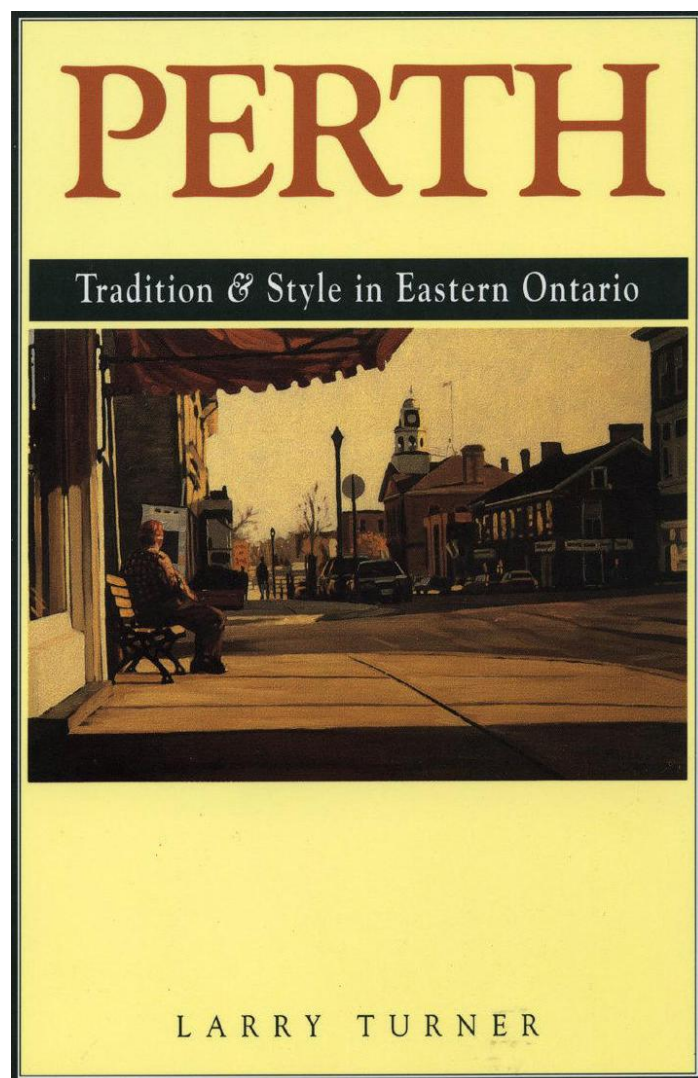
The cover of Michael V. Taylor's book, *The Canadian Kings of Repertoire: The Story of the Marks Brothers*.

glamorous wives on the train station platform, about to head off to a theatre somewhere. Such trips not only involved the theatrical troupe, but also all their costumes, stage scenery, and props needed for a show. The story of the Marks brothers was well captured in the illustrated book *The Canadian Kings of Repertoire*, authored by Michael V. Taylor, a journalist who came to Canada from the U.K. seeking work in his field. He discovered the Marks family while a reporter for the *Perth Courier*, where he rose to become editor before returning to Britain. Kudos to the man who recognized a good story and left us a document of an important but little-known chapter in our entertainment history.

If you are a historic plaque watcher, be advised that Perth has plaques galore, some of which mark heritage buildings just begging to be photographed. The plaques for historic homes include the rare American Federal style, which can be seen when visiting the McMartin House, built around 1830 and now an Ontario Heritage Trust property. The Trust is also the custodian of a most attractive property known as Inge-Va, a Late Georgian Neoclassical home built in 1824. When Perth celebrated the 150th anniversary of its founding on July 3, 1967, plaque unveilings included one for the imposing Music Hall. Dedication honours were handled jointly by the Lord Provost of Perth, Scotland, and the then-Mayor of Perth, Ontario, E. Scott Birchell. Other plaques include one in Stewart Park commemorating the 1816 Perth Military Settlement. For those interested in significant figures in Perth's history, a plaque on the grounds of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church reminds us of Reverend William Bell, an important clergyman whose writings and journals have been used by many historical researchers.

I recall the years when both local and visiting book buyers needing a literary fix were well served by an excellent independent bookstore. Doug McNichol, then curator of the Perth Museum, frequently directed visitors with heritage interests there. It was McNichol who also mentioned to me on my occasional museum visits that a book on early Perth history was no longer available. He urged me to consider bringing out an updated community history book. The result was an attractive volume thoroughly researched and well-written by historian Larry Turner, at the time the principal historian with the nationally respected firm known as Commonwealth Historic Resource Management Limited. Larry and I built a fine working relationship that abruptly ended when Turner passed while at his favourite place, the family cottage on the Rideau. Both McNichol and Turner were still with us when a well-attended book party at the museum saw *Perth: Tradition & Style in Eastern Ontario* launch in style. Following McNichol's death, his position was filled by his former wife, Susan, who also possessed a substantial background in the museum field.

I dedicate this column to Larry Turner and Doug McNichol. Without such dedicated individuals, the public today would be the poorer when it comes to accessing the heritage of Perth. This is also Ian Millar country, where the famous equestrian resides on a sprawling horse farm close to the town. While in Perth, one can see a statue of Millar's horse, Big Ben. I hope our readers will soon discover the delights and heritage of a town well worth visiting!



The cover of Larry Turner's book, *Perth: Tradition & Style in Eastern Ontario*.

FROM *the* BOOKSHELF

By Dr. Keith R. Fleming
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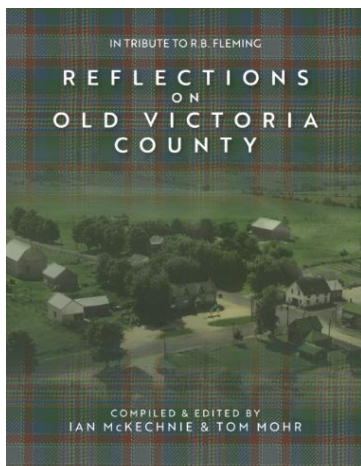
Note from the Editor: Please join the OHS in welcoming Dr. Keith R. Fleming as our new “From the Bookshelf” Editor for the OHS Bulletin. Dr. Fleming is an avid reader of Ontario history and Professor of History at Western University. Thank you, Dr. Fleming!

Readers of the *OHS Bulletin* will recall that in the December 2024 edition Dr. Cynthia Comacchio announced she was taking over as editor of *Ontario History* and therefore would no longer be writing “From the Bookshelf.” Like all of you, I was an avid reader of Cynthia’s columns. Cynthia wrote in December of how heartening it had been for her as columnist to read and recommend so many books—she referred to them as “labours of love”—on Ontario’s local history. I am pleased to have the opportunity to pick up writing “From the Bookshelf” where Cynthia left off. By way of a brief introduction, I am a professor in the Department of History at Western University where I teach a wide range of Canadian history courses, but my principal focus is researching and writing about Ontario’s history. To begin my first column, I echo Cynthia’s encouragement to authors to continue sending their books to the OHS office so they can be showcased in “From the Bookshelf.” Here are my thoughts on some of the interesting books that were sent my way this summer...

Reflections on Old Victoria County: In Tribute to R.B. Fleming

By Ian McKechnie and Tom Mohr, eds.

As a longtime fan of Neil Young, I was pleasantly surprised to encounter a chapter in *Reflections on Old Victoria County: In Tribute to R.B. Fleming* recounting the legendary singer-songwriter’s childhood years in the community



of Omemee. It was just one of many delights in this wonderfully eclectic collection of thoroughly researched and well-crafted essays. The book is a sequel to two earlier volumes of local history, *Looking for Old Victoria County* (2017) and *More Surprising & Intriguing Things About Old Victoria County* (2021) written by Dr. Rae Fleming (no relation). Plans were well underway for this third volume when Fleming passed away in April 2022. A team of talented local historians pulled together to complete the book as a tribute to Fleming, a dedicated scholar of local and public history who for many years was an active volunteer with the Ontario Historical Society. After completing a doctorate in Canadian history from the University of Saskatchewan, Fleming lectured at several Canadian universities and became a prolific author. As Professor Elwood Jones reminds us in the book’s afterword, Fleming’s “appreciation for history,” especially that of Eldon Township and Victoria County, “was tinged with a real understanding of anecdote, illustration and character.”

Reflections on Old Victoria County introduces us to a sweeping cast of characters and events. After describing Indigenous peoples’ early influences in the region, we encounter Benjamin Holmes, an African American born into slavery who was among the area’s first Black residents, and Alfred Lafferty, the Black headmaster of Lindsay Grammar School in the 1870s. Other earlier notables included George Crandel, whose misspent youth as a gang member did not prevent him from becoming a respectable shipbuilder, steamboat captain, and municipal politician. The eclectic Beatrice Brown was a dog breeder, poet, and motel proprietor, while Fenelon Falls became home to Swedish immigrants employed in the local Swede-owned furniture factory. Also included are stories about constructing both the Port Whitby and Port Perry Railway and the short-lived Georgian Bay & Seaboard Railway, as well as resolute campaigns to spare the Pontypool grain elevator from demolition, and to build in 1940s Lindsay much-needed wartime housing referred to derogatively as “rabbit huts.” There are recollections of attending the one-room Bolsover School in the 1960s, and how the pipe organ in Lindsay’s St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church contributed to community life. We join renowned

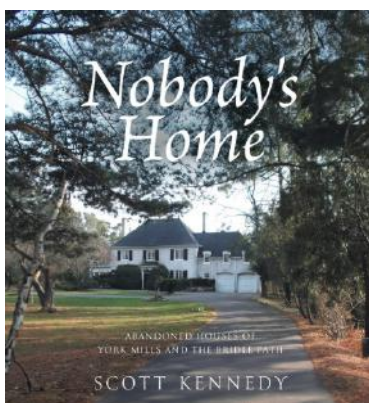
landscape painter Thoreau MacDonald on his rambles through the Coboconk countryside where the natural beauty inspired his art. Readers even engage in some sleuthing at the original Victoria County Gaol where it is still not known if bodies of former inmates remain buried under its courtyard. A fitting conclusion to the book, given Rae Fleming's reputation for gifting friends with loaves of his homemade sourdough bread, are several pages of "recipes drawn from almost every corner of old Victoria County."

Nobody's Home: Abandoned Houses of York Mills and The Bridle Path

By Scott Kennedy

Like them or loathe them, oversized and ostentatious 'monster homes' are increasingly commonplace in many urban neighbourhoods across Ontario. Scott Kennedy, who has written several books on Toronto's history, clearly is not a fan of these 'McMansions'. His most recent book, *Nobody's Home: Abandoned Houses of York Mills and The Bridle Path*, laments that "perfectly liveable houses" in those traditionally affluent Toronto neighbourhoods have been replaced by the "plague of the monster house."

Having grown up in what was then rural York Mills, Kennedy is emotionally attached to an area he has traversed repeatedly over the years, camera in hand, photographing the urban housing transformation taking place. The book includes over 300 of his photos, many taken in the early 2000s, recording changes to 54 properties in the York Mills and Bridle Path neighbourhoods. Especially instructive are several aerial shots Kennedy included from the 1940s and 1960s to highlight older houses that originally were surrounded by farmland before succumbing first to urban sprawl and eventually a



developer's wrecking ball. Other homes Kennedy documents were constructed more recently, in the 1950s and 1960s. Some photos captured them in their original impeccable condition, but Kennedy's focus more often is their dilapidated exteriors and partially gutted interiors.

I was surprised to learn that several houses in these otherwise tiny neighbourhoods sat abandoned, sometimes for years, falling prey to deterioration and vandalism before being demolished. Kennedy's most detailed example is the dismantling in 2004 of an immaculate stone home—complete with one-inch-thick honey-coloured oak panelling in the main-floor den—at 72 The Bridle Path. In 38 photos Kennedy describes "the brutality of the destruction. Stonework and carpentry that took master stonemasons and carpenters months to create—and would have stood for hundreds of years—was reduced to rubble in a matter of minutes." Yet 19 years later, the lot remained vacant.

The culprits in Kennedy's story of how these Toronto neighbourhoods represent a disturbing nation-wide trend are the "deep-pocketed developers, who profit by outbidding legitimate, would-be homeowners, and building monster houses to sell to wealthy customers." The resulting environmental and social costs, he warns, are excessive: demolition and construction debris clog landfills while desperately needed affordable housing stock is destroyed.

Kennedy also provides brief commentaries on many of the homes' architectural styles, builders, and original owners. We are introduced, for example, to Samuel Tick, an entrepreneur whose simple innovation of coating with plastic the sharp tips of bobby pins financed the design and construction of his house at 73 The Bridle Path in the 1950s. We are also shown the classical Georgian style 1940s vintage home of Tomas Bata, founder of the multinational Bata Shoe Corporation, which stood at 44 Park Lane Circle until it was demolished in 2017. Kennedy marvels "that we live in a world where even a mansion like this has become just another teardown."

FROM *the* ARCHIVES

At the meeting of the Ontario Historical Society, held at the Exhibition Grounds in Toronto on September 2, 1898, the following resolution was passed:

“That the Ontario Historical Society having among its objects that of forming a historical museum, and as there is now available for such purpose a considerable quantity of rare and valuable material, it is desirable that steps should at once be taken to place the various articles on exhibition; and that a committee, consisting of Lady Edgar, Miss Mickle, Miss FitzGibbon, Rev. Dr. Blackstock, Mr. C.C. James, and Mr. J.O. Brant-Sero, be appointed to take such steps as may be necessary to accomplish that object.”

As a result, in June of 1899, the Ontario Historical Society organized the first Canadian Historical Exhibition at Victoria College in Toronto. Running

from June 14 to 28, this landmark event was staged with the patronage of His Excellency the Governor General of Canada. It represented one of the earliest concerted efforts to assemble, preserve, and publicly celebrate the artifacts and stories of Canada’s past.

The 1899 exhibition gathered thousands of objects loaned from private collections, local historical societies, churches, libraries, and government archives. The displays featured a wide range of materials, including Indigenous art and relics, settler furniture and household items, military relics, maps, manuscripts, and rare printed works.

The striking promotional poster was designed and executed by renowned artist J.D. Kelly of the Toronto Lithographic Company, a versatile firm known for its in-house design, lithography, engraving, and electrotyping work. Based in Toronto at the corner of King and Bathurst, Toronto Litho. Co. produced everything from books and maps to postcards and original posters—like the one shown here, commissioned by the OHS in 1899. All told, 2,000 of these posters were printed and “distributed to all parts of the Dominion.”

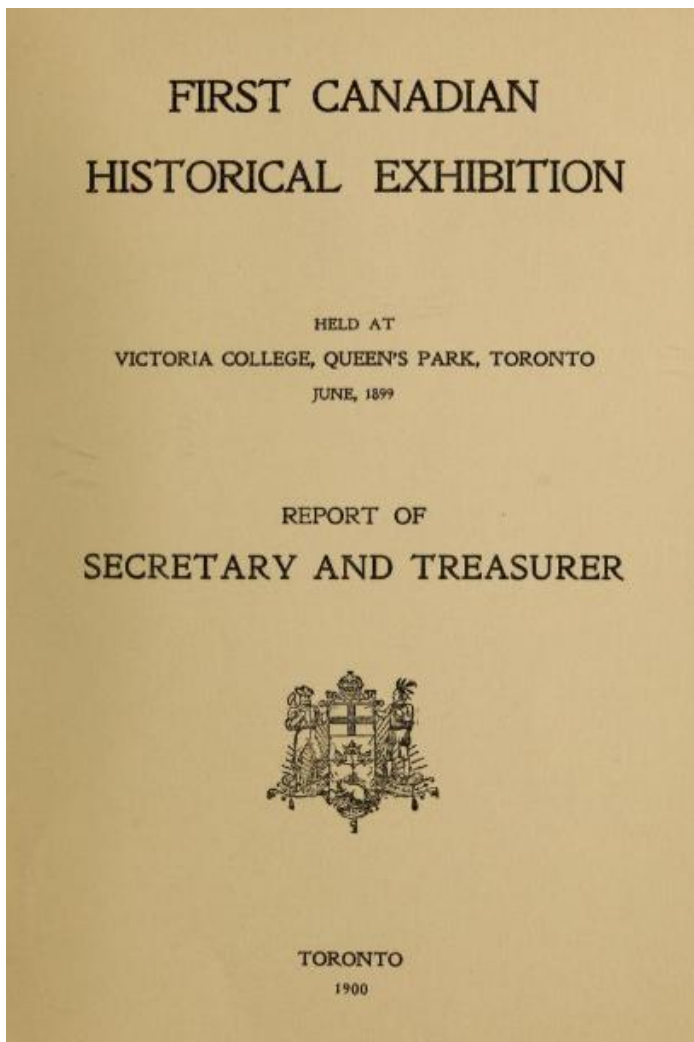
After the conclusion of the exhibition, about 200 posters remained. The OHS Secretary remarked in 1900 that there was now considerable demand among poster collectors to acquire the remaining copies. Surplus copies of the poster (and the exhibition catalogue) were made available for purchase at the Methodist Book Room in Toronto.

The total cost of the exhibition was reported to be \$2,698.50. Adjusted for inflation, that would be roughly \$100,000 today.

For those wishing to read about the exhibition in greater detail, a scanned copy of the OHS Secretary & Treasurer’s Report from 1900 is available [here](#).

Left: The cover of the OHS Secretary & Treasurer’s Report from 1900. Scanned image courtesy of Internet Archive.

Right: The 1899 poster, designed by J.D. Kelly of Toronto Litho. Co. Photo courtesy of Toronto Public Library.





OHS UPDATES

News from OHS Members and Affiliates Across Ontario



Friends of Wesleyville Village: Pop-up music event with performer Lloyd Johnson presenting stories and songs from Newfoundland and beyond. Accompaniment by Warren Tate. An evening filled with historic tidbits, songs and touching stories. Photograph from Robin Marsh.



Canadian Lighthouses of Lake Superior: Volunteers cleaning around the keepers dwelling, re-painting parts of the fog alarm building, and pouring concrete for a new pay station box. Over 100 volunteer hours were completed on this day! Photograph from Paul Morralee.



Leeds & 1000 Islands Historical Society: Leeds & 1000 Islands Historical Society 30th Anniversary River Cruise, June 21, 2025. A two-hour cruise on the St. Lawrence River to celebrate our February 1994 incorporation with OHS. The 95 participants included the township mayor and two councillors. Photo by Brian Phillips.



Pickering Museum Village: One of our many blacksmith workshops with a real blacksmith! Hosted in the Historical Greenwood Blacksmith Shop that we have on site. Photograph from Meghan Yardley.

CELEBRATING *our* COMMUNITY

Every member and donor strengthens the Ontario Historical Society's mission to preserve and share Ontario's rich history.

Thank you for being part of our growing community!

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- Middle Grey Arts and Heritage Group
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- Sharon Museum and Gardens
- Shooting Sports Museum
- St. Francis Xavier University: Angus L Macdonald Library
- Stone Church Cemetery Commission
- Swami Mohan Das Sewa Samiti of Canada
- The Canadian Transportation Museum and Heritage Village
- Town of Renfrew McDougall Mill Museum
- Trinity Theatre
- UELAC Calgary Branch



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