

# HERITAGE GAZETTE

OF  
THE

TRENT



VALLEY



REMEMBERING THE WHISTLE WING AND HENRY CALCUTT *(See page 8)*



As we watch the snow fall *a lot* this winter, the Trent Valley Archives invites you to imagine summer on the water instead. Imagine being on Chemong Lake, where, in this issue, Mike Parnell guides us through the upper floor of the cottage formerly housing the Peterborough Rowing Club on Kelly's Island, Mike Dolbey dives into the construction of the steamboat *Sturgeon* and its relationship to the Collemore family, and Elwood Jones plunges into a history of the steamboat *Whistle Wing* and brewer and steamboat operator, Henry Calcutt.

This issue also delves into the lives of Peterburians. Mike Dolbey delivers a beautiful biography of Iva Virginia Wells, a singer and pianist, and her husband, James Edgar, who was a Postmaster in Peterborough. Elwood Jones and Alicia Bertrand transcribe two fascinating memos from former General Electric Vice-President, Walter Ward, while he served as a radar specialist and Lieutenant-Colonel in the Royal Canadian Navy and Royal Navy (British). Those of you with British friends could discuss his letter on the dichotomy of British culture vs. Canadian culture during World War 2. It's quite the conversation starter (or ender)!

This issue also examines the relationships between Peterborough residents and our spaces and places. Highlights include a 1948 letter from Frederick De la Fosse to *Peterborough Examiner* editor Robertson Davies about the Victoria Park fountain, and a book review of *Peterborough: Spirit of Place*, which describes the stunning photography of John McQuarrie.

Another book review, by Mary and Greg Conchelos, discusses *The Kid from Simcoe Street*; a Memoir and Poems, by James Clarke. This enduring tale of a young boy's struggles, mentorship found in firefighters, and his eventual position as an Ontario Superior Court justice is also being adapted for the stage by Trent Valley Archives Theatre.

The TVA welcomes stories and records from citizens across the Trent Valley area. If you'd like to donate, we'd love to hear from you! Over the last year, we obtained numerous fascinating donations. TVA librarian Carol Sucee lists the new books, pamphlets, and other materials available to aid you in your research. Additionally, Elwood Jones describes the incredible new items added to our archival holdings, including photographs, stevengraphs, tabloids, maps, and much more.

As we plan the Spring edition of the Heritage Gazette, we welcome stories in the community regarding Black history, St. Patrick's Day, Easter celebrations, and any other stories about the Trent Valley you may have. Until the warm weather returns, the Trent Valley Archives board and volunteers wish you a cozy and comfortable winter.



Alicia Bertrand, M.A.  
Editor-in-Chief, Trent Valley Archives *Heritage Gazette*

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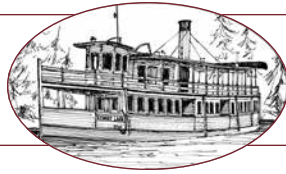
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# HERITAGE GAZETTE

## OF THE TRENT VALLEY



### *In this issue...*

**Editor's Corner**  
 By Alicia Bertrand ..... 2

**The Steamboat Sturgeon Stem to Stern**  
 By Michael P. Dolbey ..... 4

**Remembering the Whistle Wing and Henry Calcutt**  
 By Elwood Jones and Don Willcock ..... 8

**De la Fosse to Davies on Victoria Park**  
 By Elwood Jones ..... 12

**Iva Virginia (Wells) Edgar**  
 By Michael P. Dolbey ..... 14

**The Memos of WWII Radar Specialist and President of General Electric, Walter G. Ward**  
 By Elwood Jones and Alicia Bertrand ..... 18

**Kelly's Island Revisited**  
 By Michael Parnell ..... 22

**An Overview of Peterborough: Spirit of Place**  
 By Elwood Jones ..... 26

**Book Review: The Kid from Simcoe Street; a Memoir and Poems, by James Clarke.**  
 Reviewed by Mary and Greg Conchelos with Contributions from Elwood Jones ..... 28

**New Acquisitions in the Trent Valley Archives Library**  
 By Carol Sucee, Librarian, Trent Valley Archives ..... 29

**Around the Archives**  
 By Elwood Jones, Archivist, Trent Valley Archives ..... 30



**ON THE COVER:**  
 The passenger steamer Whistle Wing. To learn more about the steamer, turn to page 8.

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This issue of the *Heritage Gazette* was brought to you by the *Heritage Gazette* committee: Alicia Bertrand, Elwood Jones and Madison More.

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# The Steamboat Sturgeon

## STEM TO STERN

BY MICHAEL P. DOLBEY

While researching James Edgar, Peterborough's Postmaster between 1912 and 1919, I discovered the following article in the *Peterborough Daily Review*.<sup>1</sup> A letter had been sent to the Postmaster by 82-year-old Jacob V. Collamore, requesting help in locating step-siblings that he had left in Smith Township sixty years earlier. Accompanying the request was an incredible story about a "boat one mile long" that must have been told to him by his father when he was very young. Unravelling the true story has revealed a little-known facet of local history. It is also an excellent example of how early childhood memories become distorted over time. The article from the *Peterborough Daily Review* is transcribed below.

### ***BOAT ONE MILE LONG It Was Built at Mud Lake, Nearly 100 Years Ago***

**BUILDERS SON WRITES**

*Is there a resident of Peterboro, city or county, who remembers the steamer Cobourg? Not likely, because this boat was built about one hundred years ago. Some of the older residents may have heard the story of the steamer that was one mile from stem to stern and it is possible that they may be acquainted with certain facts, which Jacob V. Collamore of West Unity, Ohio, would like very much to know. Mr. Collamore's father built the steamer*

*Cobourg on the shore of Mud Lake. When his father married a second time, young Jacob left his home and since that day, he has not heard of his stepmother, or her son and daughter. Now he is seeking information and has sent the following letter to Postmaster Edgar; West Unity, Ohio, September 21st, 1914 Postmaster, Peterboro, Canada.*

*Nearly one hundred years have passed since my father built the Cobourg, the first steamer on Canadian waters, on the shore of Mud Lake opposite the Indian Village, on the Pearson farm of two hundred acres.*

*My father before this, lived in Rochester, New York, where I was born and where my mother died. Then my father moved to Canada and married the widow Pearson, on whose farm, the first steamer was built. This widow Pearson had two children, the older being a boy named Silas and the other, a girl named Harriet, who would now be about my age of 82 years.*

*My father was drowned in the Otonabee River, eight miles above Peterboro and his body was found two weeks later in the river near Peterboro, where he was buried.*

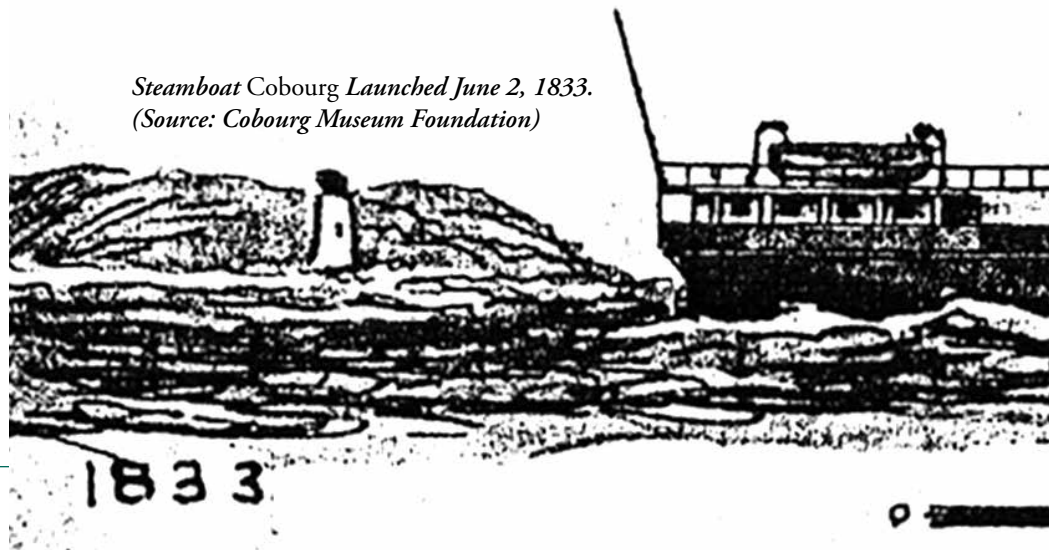
*I was young and soon left my step mother and since that time, have never heard of them. The object of writing this letter is to find out something about the Pearsons. Our neighbors in those days were the Nicholls, Mucelmiles, Galivans, Dunbars and Pearsons there being several families of each.*

*This steamer was cut in two parts and one half was drawn to Peterboro on a big sled during the winter when there was plenty of snow. Before the second half could be hauled the snow disappeared and that ended the steamer Cobourg, one half in Peterboro and the other at Mud Lake. From this came the story of a boat that was one mile from stem to stern.*

*Yours truly,  
JACOB V. COLLAMORE.  
West Unity, Ohio, U.S.*

The author of the letter, Jacob V. Collamore, was born in Hanford's Landing, in the town of Greece, Monroe County, New York, near the city of Rochester on July 5, 1832. Hanford's landing began as a schooner shipyard

*Steamboat Cobourg Launched June 2, 1833.  
(Source: Cobourg Museum Foundation)*



1. *Peterborough Daily Review*, 26 September 1914, Page 5.

in 1790 and by 1825 was repairing and building steamboats. Jacob's father, Elisha Collamore and his uncle, Thomas Collamore, were shipbuilders.<sup>2</sup>

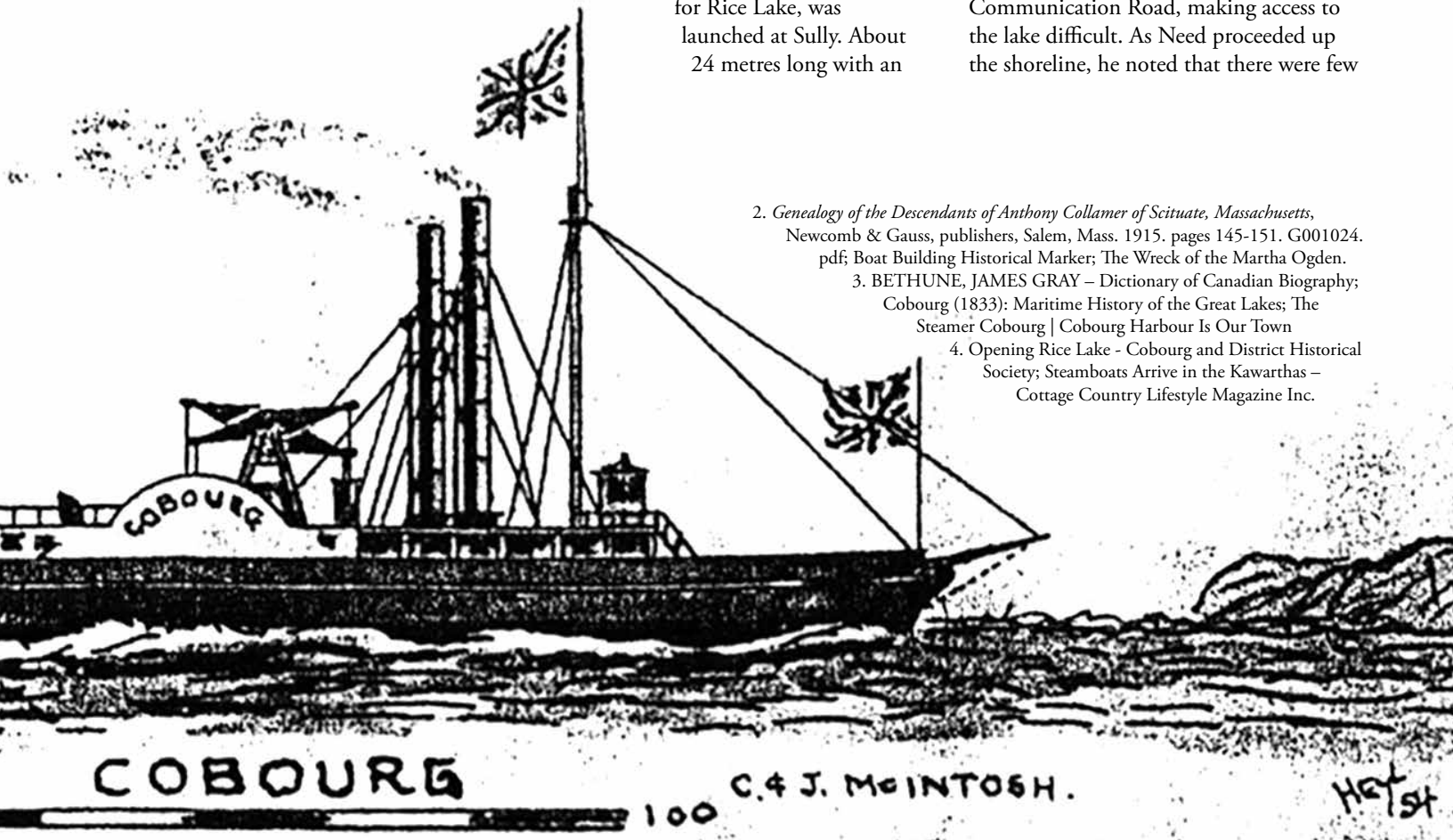
Across the lake, in about 1830, at the town of Cobourg, Upper Canada, entrepreneurial businessman James Gray Bethune was planning a transportation and merchandizing business to connect centres like York and Kingston to the new town of Peterborough and the rapidly developing townships in the back lakes of the Newcastle District. His plan conceived of a steamboat on Lake Ontario to link Cobourg to York and Kingston, an improved wagon road between Cobourg and Sully (now Harwood) on Rice Lake, a steamboat across Rice Lake and up the Otonabee River to Peterborough, an improved Communication Road between Peterborough and Mud Lake (now Chemong), and a steamboat operating through the back lakes with a lock at Bobcaygeon to provide access as far as Lindsay. He was a leading force in the establishment of the Cobourg Harbour Company in 1829, which implemented

major harbour improvements. He also led a group of investors which built the steamship *Cobourg* in 1833 for service on Lake Ontario. The *Cobourg* was launched on June 3, 1833 and made her maiden voyage to Toronto and Niagara on November 7, 1833. After a few early problems, she was quite a successful vessel. Her builders were said to be Wm. Hathaway & C. McIntosh, Cobourg Ont., but nothing more is known about them. Whether or not the Collamore brothers from Rochester were involved in her construction is not known, but the above letter of Jacob Collamore suggests that they may have been.<sup>3</sup>

In the early 1830s it is believed that Bethune hired the Collamore brothers from Rochester to come to Sully on Rice Lake to build steamboats for his inland enterprise. Before dams and locks were built, water levels on inland rivers and lakes varied greatly between spring runoff highs and late autumn lows. Consequently, inland steamboats needed shallow draft and a broad beam for stability and capacity. On June 11, 1832, the steamboat *Pemedash*, named after a shortened form of the native word for Rice Lake, was launched at Sully. About 24 metres long with an

18-horsepower engine, she typically took eight hours to travel between Sully and Peterborough. Some early passengers were not impressed. Catherine Parr Traill called the *Pemedash* "this apology for a steamboat", and Anne Langton said it was "the most uncouth steam packet we had ever seen". However, for most travellers, it was better than other alternatives.<sup>4</sup>

Building a steamboat on the back lakes was problematic. In 1818, the Communication Road had been surveyed along a former Indian trail between the bottom of the rapids on the Otonabee River at Peterborough and Chemong Lake. Thomas Ward, a member of the Northumberland Land Board, had acquired much of the land at the Chemong Lake end of the road, but by 1832, none of it had been developed and the road was in bad condition. Thomas Need, who in 1832 had acquired land on the shore of Sturgeon Lake in Verulam Township, described the road as "strewn with large stones and decaying stumps, lined with farms the first four miles and two miles through the woods." The Chemong Lake shoreline was very high and steep at the end of the Communication Road, making access to the lake difficult. As Need proceeded up the shoreline, he noted that there were few



2. *Genealogy of the Descendants of Anthony Collamer of Scituate, Massachusetts*, Newcomb & Gauss, publishers, Salem, Mass. 1915. pages 145-151. G001024.pdf; Boat Building Historical Marker; The Wreck of the Martha Ogden.

3. BETHUNE, JAMES GRAY – Dictionary of Canadian Biography; Cobourg (1833): Maritime History of the Great Lakes; The Steamer Cobourg | Cobourg Harbour Is Our Town

4. Opening Rice Lake - Cobourg and District Historical Society; Steamboats Arrive in the Kawarthas – Cottage Country Lifestyle Magazine Inc.

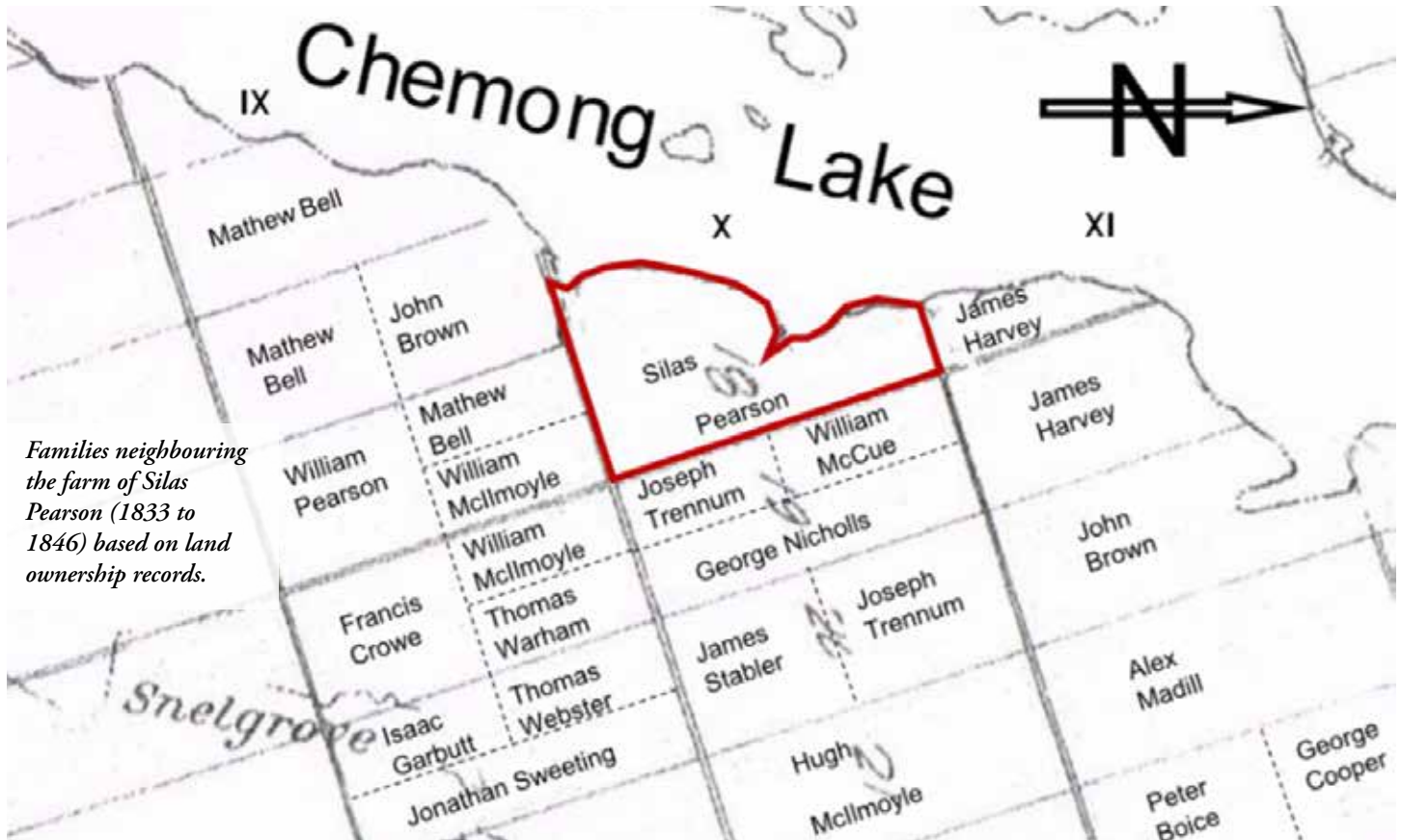
signs of habitation until he reached the farm of Silas Pearson about 7 km north of Communication Road. Pearson provided Need with “a mosquito-infested loft for sleeping and bread and milk for dinner”. Silas Pearson was born in Lower Canada (Quebec) in 1794 and moved east to Smith Township in 1821, settling on the North ½ of Lot 18 in Concession 10. He received the patent to this land in 1823 and by 1825 had purchased the South ½ of Lot 18 and all of broken Lot 17 in Concession 10. Only three months after Need’s visit, on October 17, 1832, Silas Pearson died of cholera, leaving his widow, Catherine Pearson and two children, Silas Jr., born September 3, 1827, and Harriet, born May 30, 1833.<sup>5</sup>

The steamboat for the back lakes was named the *Sturgeon*. Its hull was constructed at Sully on Rice Lake and then towed up the river to Peterborough in the autumn of 1832. Her design was probably similar

to the *Pemedash*. At Peterborough, she was cut in half, and during the winter of 1832-33, the two halves were sledded across to Chemong Lake, presumably on the Communication Road. Whether there were difficulties with the weather resulting in delays, as suggested in Jacob Collamore’s letter is not known, but the *Cobourg Star* reported that the steamboat *Sturgeon* was launched on June 8, 1833, and that “a new village was being laid out at the launching point”. On August 3, 1833, it was reported that “Steamboat *Sturgeon*, Capt. Nichols, now receiving engine at village of Bridgenorth, Lake Chemong.” Her maiden voyage took place on September 3, 1833, and John Langton was a passenger on board. He described the experience in a letter:

*“Having got my papers prepared, I sent them off to York and started for the Mud Lake which we reached just in time for our new steamer’s first trip. Of course, on a lake on which nothing but Indian canoes had*

*been heretofore seen, we could not expect a magnificent steamboat, but I must confess I was considerably disappointed with her working. She is built like a scow, that is, to be more intelligible to you, very much after the shape of a wash tub, a small draught being the principal object. Her accommodations for passengers are by no means bad; she carries sixty tons of goods and can go at six or seven knots an hour. All this sounds very well, but unfortunately her steam is exhausted directly, and I am afraid she will never do much good till she gets new boilers. However this was the first trip and we laboured under many disadvantages. The water is just at the lowest point and the Captain hardly knows the best channels; owing to which circumstances we stuck in the mud for an hour, during which we broke our pump and had therefore to stop every now and then, for near an hour, to pump the boilers full again by hand; add to which that our wood was quite green, and, until we stopped to cut down a few cedars the second day, we never had a decent fire,*



*Families neighbouring the farm of Silas Pearson (1833 to 1846) based on land ownership records.*

5. Theberge, Clifford B. & Elaine, *At The Edge Of The Shield – A History of Smith Township 1818-1980*. The Alger Press 1982, page 54; Logan, Dawn Bell, *Thomas Need – A Settler in the Backwoods of Upper Canada*, Goose Lane Editions, 2022, pages 41, 58, 59; *Cobourg Star*, October 1832.

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and consequently had to stop an hour or so sometimes to wait for more steam.”

Thomas Need, aboard the *Sturgeon's* second trip on September 11, 1833, merely commented “the steamboat disappoints us”. In his diary, Need noted three occasions when the *Sturgeon* visited Bobcaygeon during 1834, but without further comment. Unfortunately, the *Sturgeon's* owner, James Gray Bethune, had financially overextended himself and was declared bankrupt late in 1834. In May 1835, the *Sturgeon* was offered for auction, but no further information about its fate has been discovered. It was not until the 1850s that steamboats returned to the back lakes.<sup>6</sup>

While there are facets of Jacob Collamore's story about boat building that correspond to what seems to have happened, his recollections were clouded and muddled by time. His memories of family matters appear to be more credible. The family of Silas Peason visited by Thomas Need in 1832 corresponds well with Collamore's story. Jacob V. Collamore was born near Rochester N.Y. on July 5, 1832, the youngest of six children. His mother died about a month later in August 1832, possibly of cholera that swept through Rochester between July and October of that year. Her husband, Elisha Collamore, was believed to be at that time in Sully on Rice Lake building the steamboats *Pemedash* and *Sturgeon*. Presumably, other family members in Rochester looked after Jacob and his siblings until his father was able to establish a new home. In 1833, Elisha Collamore was believed to be involved in the construction of the steamboat *Sturgeon* on the shore of Chemong Lake, where very little accommodation was available. It is possible that he found accommodation at the farm of the recently widowed Catherine Pearson with her two children, Silas and Harriet. No record of their marriage has been found, but after Elisha Collamore's

death, the Canadian census lists widow Catherine Colamore, aged 75, living with her daughter Harriet in 1861, and Catherine Colinmore, aged 88, living with her son Silas in 1871. No other records of Catherine (Pearson) Collamore have been found. It seems clear that after Elisha Collamore married widow Catherine Pearson, he brought his children from Rochester to live at the Pearson farm with Catherine's two children. Two of Jacob's siblings later married in Canada.<sup>7</sup>

In his letter, Jacob recalled that families neighbouring the Pearson farm were the Nicholls, Mucelmiles (McIlmoyles), Galivans, Dunbars and Pearsons. The map, pictured, shows a number of these families nearby. John Galvin was further east on Lot 23 in Concession 10. Asa Dunbar was an innkeeper in Bridgenorth.<sup>8</sup>

It seems that Elisha continued to build boats as indicated by the story of his death in about 1846 related in the Collamore history; “... he (Jacob) was taken to Canada by his father, where he lived until he was fourteen years of age. At this time they went from their home to Young's Mills, on the Atonahee River, to build a boat. When the boat was completed, they started down the stream in it to deliver it to the purchaser, who resided in Petersburg, twelve miles away. Elisha, the father, was steersman, and his son Jacob was the pilot. It was at a time when the water in the river was very high and the river bottom was full of rocks, which made navigation very dangerous. While attempting to make a landing, the boat was overturned by swift currents, and they were thrown into the water. Jacob swam for the shore, but the strong tide drove him back, until at last he succeeded in catching the branches of an overhanging tree two miles below the point of the wreck. The body of his father was found two weeks later at a place eight miles below where the boat capsized. After this

experience, Jacob was taken by his sister to Cleveland, Ohio, ...”. The record also says that Elisha Collamore was buried in ‘Petersburg’, but no records of his death or burial have been found.<sup>9</sup>

Jacob Collamore requested information about Harriet and Silas Pearson. Silas was born on September 3, 1826, at the family farm on Lot 18 in Concession 10 in Smith Township. In the early 1850s, he married Silena Davis, daughter of John and Lucinda Davis of Cavan and they continued to live on the Smith farm. They had four children, William (1856), Jane (1858), Lucinda (1860) and Richard (1864). Silena died age 30 on July 24, 1867 and was buried in Lakefield Cemetery. By 1881, the older children had married, and Silas was living with his daughter, Lucinda, who had married Arron Nicholls. After about the age of 60, he lived with his son William, a blacksmith, and his family in Bobcaygeon. He died there on August 15, 1910 and was buried with his wife in the Lakefield Cemetery.<sup>10</sup>

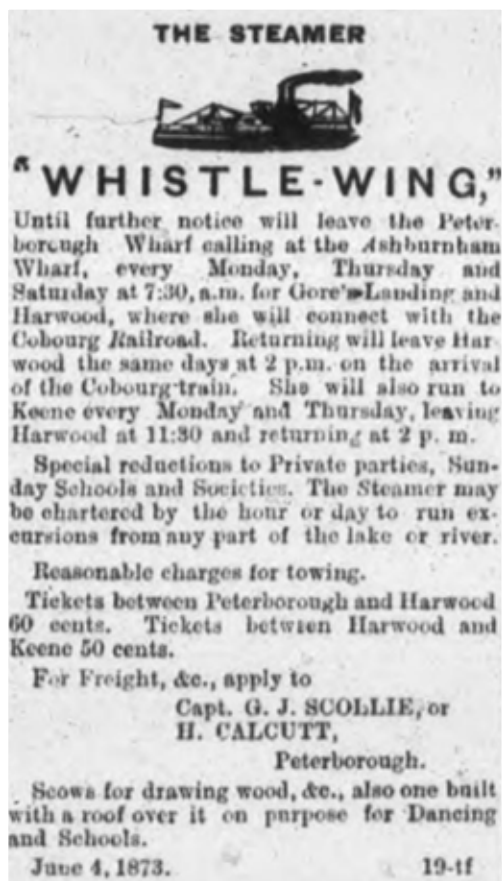
Harriet Pearson was born May 30, 1833, seven months after her father's death of cholera. By 1851, she had married Richard McConkey, born October 2, 1821 in Belfast, Ireland, the son of John & Margaret McConkey. They lived on the Pearson family farm, Lot 18 in Concession 10 in Smith Township, with Harriet's mother, Catherine, and her brother, Silas, and his family. Over the next 20 years, the McConkey's had at least eight children. By 1857, the farm must have been too crowded, and Silas Pearson sold his share of the farm to Richard McConkey for £150, providing a Quitclaim deed relinquishing any legal claim to the farm where he had been raised. The land has stayed in the McConkey family up to recent times. Richard McConkey died February 26, 1906, and Harriet died April 2, 1908. Both were buried in the Lakefield Cemetery.<sup>11</sup>

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6. *Sturgeon* (1833): Maritime History of the Great Lakes; Opening Rice Lake - Cobourg and District Historical Society; [earlydaysinuppercanada.pdf](#); Trent University Archives, Collection 23-005 - Dawn Bell Logan collection on Thomas Need; Dolbey, M.P. *Early Steamboats on the “Back Lakes”*, TVA Heritage Gazette Vol. 25, No. 1, May 2020, page 16. 7. Canadian Census, 1851 to 1881. 8. Peterborough LRO, Land Records for Smith Township. 9. *Genealogy of the Descendants of Anthony Collamer*, page 148-49; The Cholera epidemic of 1832 in Rochester. 10. Canadian census, 1851 to 1901; “Find a Grave Index”, FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:6ZRM-JPLY:Tue Apr 01 18:29:38 UTC 2025>), Entry for Silas Pearson; “Canada, Ontario, Deaths, 1869-1937 and Overseas Deaths, 1939-1947”, FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:JK7T-FMZ;Wed Jan 22 04:02:11 UTC 2025>), Entry for Silas Pearson and Silas Pearson, 15 Aug 1910. 11. Canadian census, 1851 to 1901; Peterborough LRO abstract book Smith L18-C10.

# REMEMBERING THE *WHISTLE WING* and HENRY CALCUTT

BY ELWOOD JONES



THE STEAMER  
*"WHISTLE-WING,"*

Until further notice will leave the Peterborough Wharf calling at the Ashburnham Wharf, every Monday, Thursday and Saturday at 7:30, a.m. for Gore's Landing and Harwood, where she will connect with the Cobourg Railroad. Returning will leave Harwood the same days at 2 p.m. on the arrival of the Cobourg train. She will also run to Keene every Monday and Thursday, leaving Harwood at 11:30 and returning at 2 p.m.

Special reductions to Private parties, Sunday Schools and Societies. The Steamer may be chartered by the hour or day to run excursions from any part of the lake or river.

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H. CALCUTT,  
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Scows for drawing wood, &c., also one built with a roof over it on purpose for Dancing and Schools.

June 4, 1873. 19-1f

Advertisement for the passenger steamer *Whistle Wing* published in the *Peterborough Daily Review*, June 14, 1873.

The following article contains a reproduction of a newspaper article from the *Peterborough Times* about a trip on a steamer called the *Whistle Wing* on June 14, 1873.

The *Peterborough Times* was founded in early 1872 by W. H. Robertson and Walter Walsh and was a daily source of news from 1895 to 1910. It was the third of Peterborough's three dailies, which all operated during those years. The printing office was located at 346 George, now part of the Peterborough Square site. Robertson lived on Stewart Street, but later at the large house on Water and McDonnell Streets, on the north-east corner. He is likely the author of this story on the *Whistle Wing*.

The story is well written and is a trip on a stretch of water that has been travelled by many early travellers. The description by Catharine Parr Traill in *Backwoods Canada* remains my favourite narrative of the trip on the river and Rice Lake. It was a challenge, too, for the Robinson immigrants of 1825, who travelled in a scow imagined by Peter Robinson, and was built by local people and some Robinson immigrants.

The *Whistle Wing* was one of the best-known steamers of the steamboat era. (Mike Dolbey tells that story elsewhere in this issue of the *Heritage Gazette*). Our writer suggests that Dan Herald built the *Whistle Wing*. The second part of this article is a reproduction of an article by Don Willcock on Henry C. Calcutt, already known as the "Commodore", who was a brewer in Ashburnham, mainly at what is now the site of the Lions' Ashburnham Hall.

Interestingly, Gore's Landing is the place where the *Whistle Wing's* excursion stopped. The newspaper article mentions a "Mr. Harris" the proprietor of a hotel. This was likely John Alfred Harris (1869-1937), an accomplished painter. It also mentions Dan Herald, who founded the Rice Lake company circa 1862. He patented a style of canoe we now call the Herald Patent canoe.

*The passenger steamer Whistle Wing.  
(Source: Cottage Country, July 15, 2021).*



*The Peterborough Times* 14 June 1873

## **TRIP IN THE STEAMER “WHISTLEWING”**

Monday, the 9th of June, was just such a day as any person would choose for a sail—just wind enough to counteract the great heat of the sun, without a cloud on the beautiful blue sky. As the clock pointed to eight, we started for the Peterborough wharf. Arriving at the top of the bank, we saw the beautiful little steamer lying at the shore with steam up, ready for a start. I looked around to see how I was to get to her and found the only way to reach where she was lying, was over a drain that was left open, as I suppose, for a trap to break passenger's necks or legs— Our city fathers, I am sure, are not particular which. I could not help contrasting the difference as to who is interested in things. If Mayor Cox owned that boat we should not have long to travel over an open corporation drain. If one foot of clay against a window of his costs the town so much money, what would filling up the drain cost? They might really have the heart to consider an

enterprise like this sufficiently, to have the road repaired to the river, so that people who desire to travel on the boat won't run the risk of their lives to get on it. I believe an appropriation has been made for a wharf; could it not be made before the winter sets in? It would be a great accommodation to the public.

After scrambling over the drain we went on board, where we found everything as clean as a new pin, and the boat hands smiling. After repeated whistles, and hauling in and out of the gang way planks, we steamed over to Ashburnham, where there was another gathering, all ready to pile on. By this time we had made up a good crowd, forty-one all told. “All aboard,” says the Captain. But a shout from the top of the hill, “Hold on a moment”— and somebody remarked, “We can't go without the Belle of Bobcaygeon.” “Another Peterborough man late,” says an Ashburnhamite. “Blow the whistle, boys—we are off,” says the Captain, with a long sigh, as if he had got something off his mind, “Just one hour and a half late.” As we neared the locks we all held our breath; it looks quite wild since

the fence was carried off by the ice last spring, but the boat glided in beautifully, and came to a stop within two feet of the lower gates. We started, and after a beautiful hour's run on a river that can't be surpassed for beauty on this continent, we arrived at Halo's bridge, which was opened by a woman. We passed through all right, and wended our way down stream to Rosa's bridge, where we delayed a few minutes to put on wood. Passing Rosa's (time 11 o'clock) we went straight along, and the river continued to get more beautiful all the way, until it emptied into Rice Lake. The view as you first enter the lake is beyond imagination; a person must see it to realize it. Here we found a good smart breeze moving dead ahead, but the “Whistle-Wing” took no notice of it as she glided over the waves, and threw them over her bow in perfect disdain.

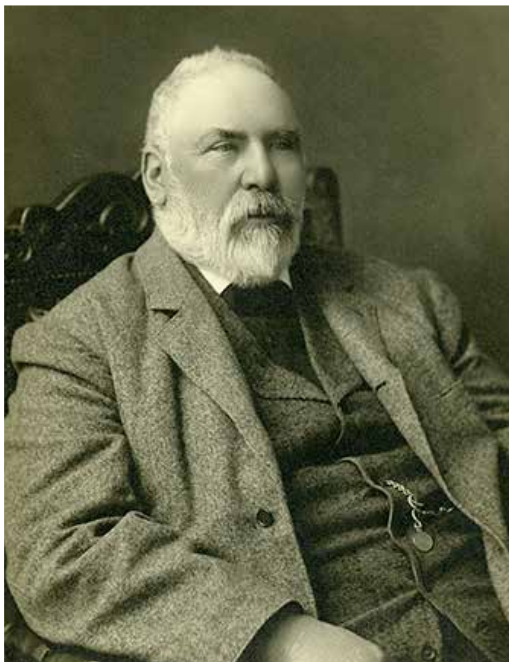
Passing several islands we arrived at Gore's Landing. There we were met by Mr. Harris, the obliging proprietor of the Hotel. By this time everybody began to feel the sting of hunger— time, 12 o'clock — having made the last ten miles in just one hour. There was a general

stampede for the hotel, where we waited but a few minutes when the welcome bell was jingled. I was not more than four feet from the dining-room door, but, alas! when I reached the room every place was full— but, thanks to good appetites, I had not long to wait, for I know, at the rate the beef, veal and fish were disappearing, that it would not take long to fill them up. I was about right; they soon began to show signs of weakness, and when the first one got up, you can easily guess who took his place. Talk about eating — if you had seen that hoof descending towards the floor, it would have struck terror into the heart of a dyspeptic. That disease, however, doesn't live around Rice Lake. It was never known to stay there over night—always vamoosed before bed-time, no matter how late in the day it gets there, if you want a

good dinner go to Harris', Rice Lake. You will never be deceived; and if you want an appetite to eat it with, they sow them on the "Whistle Wing," price fifty cents. The inner man being replenished, we divided up, one party going out yachting, and the other strolling around hills, some calling on our old friend Barron, who keeps a school for training young men up in the way they should go, and with him a boy will receive due attention, not only in studies, but manners as well. The latter is, unfortunately, not paid sufficient attention to in our public schools. We inspected the school grounds and then strolled up to the new boarding house, which is also kept by Mr. Harris. This house is only used for families as private apartments, and the meals are served at the hotel, which makes it very retired, as you are not subject to the intrusion of travellers. We enjoyed the beautiful scenery of the lake from the verandah and returned to the hotel, where we met the rest of our party returning from the Lake. They had crossed to Fothergill's Point in the splendid

yacht owned by Mr. Dan Herald, who kindly placed it at their disposal, and also accompanied them himself. Dan may well take a pride in the building of that yacht; for comfort and steadiness it cannot be beaten. There were twenty-two on board, and room enough for as many more. Dan is also a dab at canoe building. He showed us some very handsome canoes he had on hand, and he had the honor of building one this year for His Excellency Lord Dufferin. The yachting party had the advantage of us in fishing, for they caught two fish one of them weighing ten pounds, whilst Mr. Strickland hooked one before dinner opposite the hotel door. We packed up our traps, paid our bills and started for the wharf, which we reached just as the boat touched it. That boat runs, now you bet she had been all the way to Keene since leaving us. We hastened on board and took a good long look at Gore's Landing, and there, was one unanimous sentiment—"I wish I could return tomorrow."

If you never were there, take my advice and go. The expense is very trifling, and



*The sidewheeler Golden Eye. (Source: Cottage Country, July 15, 2021). Inset: The "Commodore," Henry Calcutt. (Source: Cottage Country, July 15, 2021)*



the facilities afforded you by the “Whistle-Wing” of staying there three hours, is a splendid arrangement, everybody should avail themselves of it: and those who can stay a week, by all means do so. We had no sooner crossed the lake than the old sting began to trouble us again; so the captain ordered the boys to boil us a kettle of water, and we had a good, stiff cup of tea, backed up with ham sandwiches. Before we reached Campbelltown it would have taken a search warrant to find a crumb of provision on that boat the size of a pin's head, everything eatable having been eaten clean up. We called on Mr. Freeman to tune up his fiddle, and at it we went in, dance after dance, till we passed the bridge. Here we were joined by the postmaster, who had paddled down to meet us, accompanied by two other young gentlemen.

As they were fresh at the fun they went at it in earnest, and dancing never ceased till we found we were in the locks. We were under the impression that another hour's enjoyment was before us before we could reach the locks, but Freeman's quadrille

band made the time pass quickly. After locking through we sailed for Ashburnham and let off our friends there. Making a delay of only five minutes, we proceeded to the Peterborough landing to go through another series of circus performances over the drain. Arriving at the landing we gave three cheers for our hostess and a tiger for the commodore, both of whom had accompanied us over; and, wishing every success to an enterprise that had afforded such a day's pleasure, we wended our way home, delighted with ourselves and the world in general.

Rice Lake.

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**"Whistle-Wing"**  
**Will leave the Peterborough Wharf,**  
**King Street, every**  
**Monday, Wednesday and Saturday,**  
**MORNING AT 8 O'CLOCK,**  
**For Harwood and Keene. Returning**  
**will leave Keene at 1 o'clock, and**  
**Harwood at 2 o'clock.**  
**Fare to Harwood 60 cents.**  
**Return tickets \$1.**  
**Harwood to Keene 50 cents.**  
**The Steamer will be prepared on**  
**the intervening days to take Pic-nic**  
**parties or Schools on liberal terms**  
**from or to any part of the river or**  
**Rice Lake, by applying to**  
**G. SCOLLIE, captain or H. CALCUTT.**  
**Ashburnham, June 24th, 1872. 22-tf**  
**[running ad in the Peterborough Times]**

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*The following is Don Willcock's story on Henry Calcutt. The original story appeared in Cottage Country, published July 15, 2021, Rice Lake.*

When Henry Calcutt's name is mentioned, it is usually associated with ale and beer. Brewing was the basis of his fortune but his real love was steamboats, and resulted in his nickname of “Commodore” – a naval rank above Captain and below Admiral for an officer commanding a squadron.

Henry Calcutt was born in May 1836 in Cobourg, Ontario. His father, James, was a successful Irish brewer who emigrated to

Cobourg in 1832 and established a brewery and malting house there. Henry joined the family business at an early age; then in 1855 he and his wife Isabella moved to Peterborough where he quickly set up the Little Lake Brewing Company. This brewery did well, producing good ales and porters until the building burned in May 1864. Calcutt promptly built a new, larger brewery (presently where the Lions' Centre and Riverside Park are located), hired a Munich brewmeister, switched to making lager, and re-named the company the Calcutt Brewing and Malting Company. It operated until 1922.

With his brewery flourishing, in 1871 Henry Calcutt bought the steamer *Enterprise*, which ran from the Cobourg-Peterborough Railway terminus at Harwood on Rice Lake. The spring of 1872 saw him replace this vessel with a newly-built passenger steamer, the *Whistle-Wing*, which was soon joined by the new sidewheeler *Golden-Eye*. These boats formed the basis of the Calcutt Navigation Company which would, at its peak, comprise six modern steamboats and would pioneer the concept of passenger cruises. For over thirty years, Calcutt's boats made daily passenger runs and regular excursions. Such groups as the Peterborough Fire Brigade, the 57th Regiment, churches, clubs, and businesses booked his vessels for outings on the Otonabee River and Rice Lake. To further facilitate this business, Calcutt bought two Rice Lake resorts: Idylwyld (east of Harwood), then Juniper Point (north shore).

In 1906, Henry Calcutt ceased operating his steamboat line and sold its remaining vessels; both resorts had been sold previously. The “Commodore” died in June 1913, after a lengthy illness brought on by a stroke. He is buried in Little Lake Cemetery – fittingly with a good view of the Otonabee.

*By: Don Willcock*  
*The Peterborough Museum & Archives, 300*  
*Hunter St E, Peterborough,*  
*705-743-5180*  
[www.peterboroughmuseumandarchives.ca](http://www.peterboroughmuseumandarchives.ca)

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# DE LA FOSSE *to* DAVIES *on Victoria Park*

BY ELWOOD JONES

*The following is a letter from Frederick De la Fosse to Robertson Davies, editor of the Peterborough Examiner, dated 22 July 1948 on the subject of Victoria Park. The original letter is in TVA, F340, D, box 24, Peterborough Examiner fonds. Some years ago I wrote about the search for a fountain and it might be worthwhile to reference that article. What is interesting is the way in which Council made decisions and when people offered their services for free it was accepted readily. The water company referred to in this letter was a private company taken over by the town in 1903 when the Peterborough Utilities Commission was established. — Elwood Jones*

[Q = direct quote; QQ = direct quote within direct quote; seems to end at “but no light”.]

Q: 457 Water Street, Peterborough, July 22 1948

Dear Mr. Davies

I have just received the enclosed item from Mr. Ireson which will be of interest, perhaps, while the subject of the Fountain is in the public mind. I have copied the whole thing from the Examiner of Mar. 9th 1944, the clipping having made by Mr. Ireson at that time.

Victoria Park Fountain Given  
To Peterborough by two Citizens

QQ: The fountain in Victoria Park has been in the news lately prompted by investigation as to its origin. This is to be found in the record of the proceedings at the town Council meeting of March 15, 1885.

Incidentally, the opening of that meeting produced a humorous example of municipal repartee. The Council Chamber at that time was lit by gas and on the evening the gas lighting system failed to function and at first there was only available an oil lamp on the clerk's table. One member of the Council suggested that when Mr. X took his seat there would be plenty

of gas. “Yes, retorted another,” there will be lots of gas but no light.” However, another lamp was procured and the reporters did their work by the light of a candle.

The question of the condition of the Court House Park, as Victoria Park was then known, was brought before the meeting by a deputation from the Horticultural Society, headed by J. H. Roper. He said the matter of improving and beautifying the Court House Park had been under consideration by the Society. At the last session the County Council had made a grant of \$75 for five years and were prepared to grant them a lease for 25 years. The ground would be laid out at once, shrubs and flowers planted, and paths and walks constructed. Toward the initial capital expenditure the society were asking for a grant of \$300 from the Council. The Society would support the scheme financially to the limit of its ability. The only object in view was to foster a love of the beautiful and provide a pleasing place of resort for the townsmen. It was stated that there would be bi-weekly band concerts as in the previous summer.



Mayor James Stevenson said he had been active in trying to get something done as Peterborough was very much behind the times in the matter of parks. Further, Mr. George A. Cox and himself would agree at their own expense provide a fountain. The Water Company would provide, free of charge, water for the fountain and for watering the grounds, shrubs, flowers, etc.

Members of the Council at that time were: Mayor James Stevenson, members

T. Cahill, W. S. Davidson, T. Kelly, J. McNaughton, W. H. Moore, J. McClelland, William Yelland, T. Douglas, A. Rutherford, T. Menzies, James Kendry, J. J. Hartley — a list which contains many well-known Peterborough names.

Mr. Ireson has a great deal of miscellaneous matter relating to Peterboro stored away in a private receptacle and has been engaged for years in beautifying the Public Library and examining the old

newspapers. He has a wonderful storehouse of memories of facts culled from Library sources and might be of great use to you as a systematic delver for historical facts regarding the city.

I hope this copy will be of some service to you.

Sincerely yours

Fred—k De la Fosse

VICTORIA PARK, PETERBOROUGH, ONTARIO—6



*Colourized Postcard of Victoria Park (TVA, Hugh Jones F546, Series 7).*

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# IVA VIRGINIA (Wells) EDGAR

BY MICHAEL P. DOLBEY

An article published in the *Peterborough Examiner* in 1987 by Clare Francis Galvin tells of a delightful boyhood recollection about Mrs. Martha Edgar who lived at 451 Weller Street. Mrs. Edgar was the widow of James Edgar, Postmaster of Peterborough from 1912 until he died in 1919. The story describes Mrs. Edgar as a very elderly Victorian lady whose house was “a mausoleum filled to over capacity with heavy dark furnishings of that period”. She was also reputed to be “an accomplished pianist, and an equally renowned chanteuse”. Galvin even describes a private performance that Mrs. Edgar gave at the Galvin residence shortly before she died. This article inspired the search for more information about this intriguing lady.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, Galvin incorrectly remembered the lady’s name as Martha; it was actually Iva Virginia Edgar (née Wells).

Iva Virginia Wells was the youngest daughter of William Wells and Mary Ann (née Machell) Wells. They were a farming family in King Township near Aurora. In 1871, there were eight children living at home, ranging in age between 6 and 28 years old. By 1881, Mary Ann Wells, living with four of her younger children, Matilda, William Jr., Alice and Iva, is listed in the census as the head of the family but not a

widow. No other records have been found for her husband, William, until his death on January 1, 1902 of cystitis in the ‘Home for Incurables’ in Toronto. Clearly, he had suffered a debilitating accident or illness in the mid-1870s. He is buried in the Aurora Cemetery, sharing a tombstone with his wife, Mary Ann Machell, who predeceased him on October 24, 1888 of Bright’s (kidney) disease.<sup>2</sup> Their family farm, the 100-acre East ½ Lot 9 in Concession 6 in King Township, was transferred from William Wells to his son, William Wells Jr. in 1879. It was then sold out of the family in 1885. It is believed that the proceeds of the sale supported the wife and family in future years. According to his death registration, William Wells Jr. remained a bachelor farmer throughout his working life. Whether he acquired another farm or worked for others is not known. He died at the age of 80, in 1933, at the home of a married sister in Toronto, and was buried in the family plot in Aurora Cemetery.<sup>3</sup>

In 1889, after the death of their mother, the three sisters, Matilda (Tillie), 41 years of age, Alice (Allie), 31 and Iva, 22, lived briefly on Wellington Street in Aurora. By 1891, they were all living together at 102 Fern Avenue in the Parkdale area of Toronto. No information has been found about what they did for a living or for amusement.<sup>4</sup>

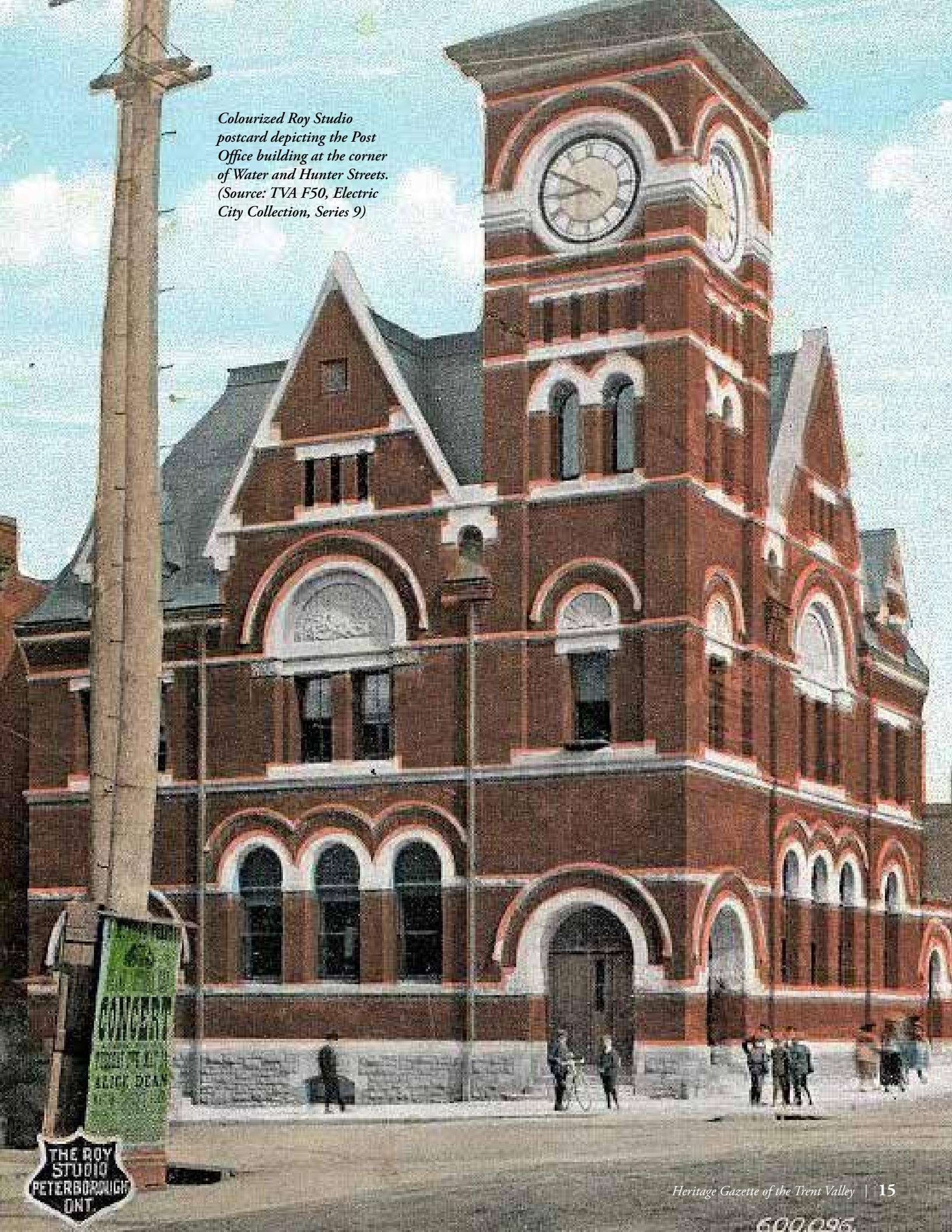
By 1894, Iva Wells had met James Edgar. They married on June 20, 1894 at Iva’s home, 102 Fern Ave, Toronto. James Edgar was born in County Down, Ireland, on August 16, 1869. He came to Canada in 1885 and worked for his brothers, Alexander and Joseph Edgar who were merchants in Lefroy, Ontario (on Lake Simcoe south of Barrie). He moved to Sundridge and shortly after to Toronto, where by 1883 he was running a small grocery business at 218 Sorauran Avenue, in Parkdale, close to Fern Avenue. After marrying Iva, the 1884 Toronto Directory indicates he was living at 102 Fern Avenue, the home of Miss Tillie Wells. His grocery business, James Edgar & Co., was partnered with Harry G. MacDonald. In the 1885 Toronto Directory, 102 Fern Avenue was no longer the home of Tillie Wells and the grocery store at 218 Sorauran Avenue was operated only by Harry G. MacDonald, indicating the Edgar and Wells families had left Toronto.<sup>5</sup>

It is possible that James and Iva Edgar moved to Peterborough around 1900. In 1901, James Edgar was operating a “wholesale paper & woodenware” business at 182 Simcoe Street (in 1899, 182 Simcoe was vacant), and he and Iva were living at 340 Rubidge Street. Alice Wells was also living at 340 Rubidge Street and possibly

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1. Galvin, Clare Francis, “Our modest home was turned into a turn-of-the-Century concert hall”, *Peterborough Examiner*, December 15, 1987, page 6. 2. 1871 & 1881 Canada Census; “Canada, Ontario, Deaths, 1869-1937 and Overseas Deaths, 1939-1947”, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:JDY7-5XQ> : Sat Jan 18 11:09:06 UTC 2025), Entry for William Mills (Wills), 01 Jan 1902.; “Canada, Ontario, Deaths, 1869-1937 and Overseas Deaths, 1939-1947”, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:JFH8-RZR> : Mon Jan 20 15:34:34 UTC 2025), Entry for Mary Anne Wells, 24 Oct 1888.; “Find a Grave Index”, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:63YS-ZCN2> : Thu Apr 03 07:21:58 UTC 2025), Entry for William Wells. 3. LRO 65 (York Region), abstracts for King Twp, E½ L6-C9; “Canada, Ontario, Deaths, 1869-1937 and Overseas Deaths, 1939-1947”, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:JKKZ-P8C> : Fri Jul 26 14:34:14 UTC 2024), Entry for William Wells and William Wells, 1933. 4. 1889 Aurora Tax Assessment Roll; Toronto City Directories 1890 to 1894. 5. Ontario marriage record # 014579, 20 June 1894; Obituary for James Edgar, *Peterborough Examiner* 18 Nov 1919, page 16; Toronto City Directories 1883,84,85.

*Colourized Roy Studio  
postcard depicting the Post  
Office building at the corner  
of Water and Hunter Streets.  
(Source: TVA F50, Electric  
City Collection, Series 9)*



Matilda Wells, although she was not listed. By 1903, James Edgar's "wholesale paper & woodenware" business had moved to 343½ George Street but he and Iva were still living at 340 Rubidge Street along with Alice and Matilda Wells. In March 1906, James Edgar had telephones installed in both his business at 343½ George Street, and his home at 340 Rubidge Street. By 1907, James Edgar's business was described as "wholesale paper, paper bags, woodenware and confectionary" operating at 343½ George Street. He and Iva had moved to their new house at 1 Weller Street (by the next year it was renumbered 451 Weller St.). Alice and Matilda Wells are also living at 1 (451) Weller Street.<sup>6</sup>

Early in 1909, it was announced that James Edgar's brother, Mr. John Edgar of Burk's Falls, was moving to Peterborough.

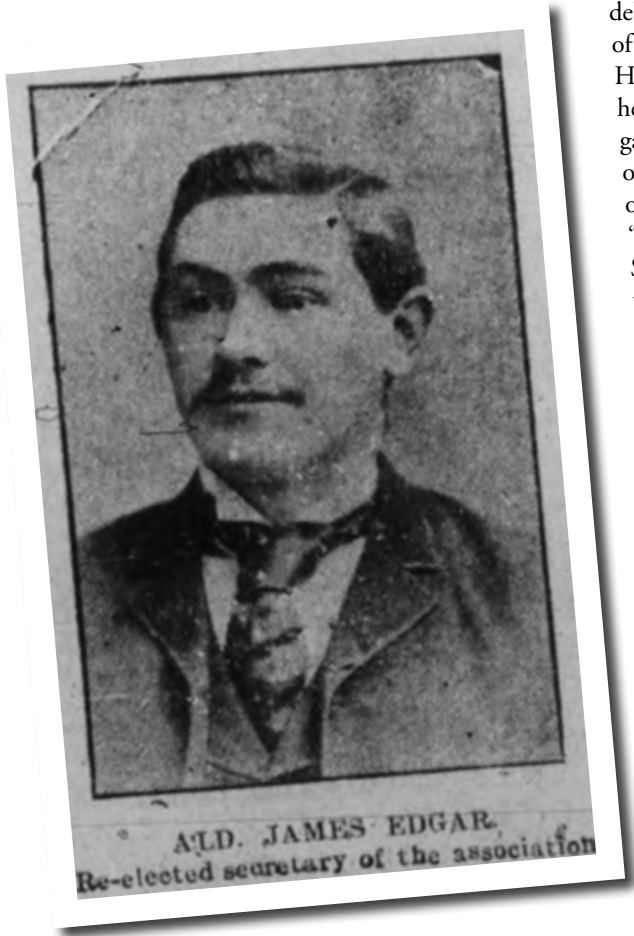
John Edgar was two years younger than James and came with his wife and three children, moving to 577 Sherbrooke Street. He worked for James Edgar in the Paper and Sundries business at 343½ George Street. This might have allowed James to spend more time getting involved in politics. On October 24, 1910, it was reported that a robbery had occurred at their store. John Edgar had locked up the store the night before and discovered the robbery when he opened it the next morning, which indicates that John was a trusted employee.<sup>7</sup>

By 1909, James Edgar was a successful businessman and an active citizen of the community. When Wesley Brothers, Grocers and Butchers, declared insolvency, they assigned their assets to James Edgar, Paper Merchant, who arranged a meeting of their creditors to settle their debts. He was an active member of the Peterborough Board of Health. Over the next few years he was active in promoting garbage collection, the building of sewers and the improvement of milk safety. He was elected "The People's Warden" at All Saints' Anglican Church, where he was also Chairman of the Building Committee. The cornerstone of their new church was laid in 1909, with visiting dignitaries being entertained at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Edgar at the corner of Weller and Park Streets (451 Weller St.). The following year, he was chairman of an inter-church committee that organized a "Sunday school convention and summer school" that was highly applauded in the newspapers. In November 1909, James

Edgar was active in the Municipal elections, nominating candidates and acting as the District Returning Officer for Ward 8.<sup>8</sup>

Over the next two years, James Edgar became more involved in politics. In November 1910, he was nominated for Counsellor of West Ward in the Peterborough municipal election. He won the seat by a large margin and was assigned to the 'Fire, Water & Light', the 'Manufacturer's' and the 'Legal and Reception' committees. During the following year, he was frequently mentioned in the newspapers in connection with his work on Council. However, he may have lost favour among some due to his proposal that the City of Peterborough should be governed by a commission rather than the present Council system. He was defeated by J. J. Duffus at the election in January 1912 by a small margin. Another reason offered for his defeat was that it was rumoured that he "was to get the Post Office and that his time would be fully taken up there".<sup>9</sup>

During this period, James Edgar was also active in the West Peterborough Conservative Association, being re-elected as their secretary in July 1911. He figured prominently in Conservative events such as the selection of J.H. Burnham as Federal candidate and E. A. Peck for Provincial candidate of the Conservative Party, and a rally on August 24, 1911 attended by R. L. Borden, leader of the Conservative Party of Canada. He also publicly opposed 'Reciprocity', the U.S. free trade initiative being promoted by the federal Liberal government. The federal election on September 21, 1911 returned a Conservative government, including West Peterborough's J. H. Burnham, unseating the ruling Liberals who ran on a platform favouring reciprocity. Peterborough's Postmaster at this time



*James Edgar (Source: Peterborough Daily Review July 19, 1911; Page 1)*

6. Peterborough City Directories 1899, 1900, 1901, 1903, 1907, 1909; *The Peterborough Daily Evening Review*, 17 March 1906, page 6. 7. *Peterborough Daily Review*, 19 Feb 1909, Pg 8; 14 Oct 1910, Pg 6; 26 Oct 1910, Pg 4; 1 Nov 1910, Pg 4. 8. *Peterborough Daily Review*, 26 Jan 1919, Pg 5; 9 Feb 1919, Pg 2; 19 Feb 1919, Pg 8; 27 Dec 1919, Pg 8; 31 Dec 1919, Pg 11; et.al. 9. *Peterborough Daily Review*, 28 Dec 1910, Pg 4; 3 Jan 1911, Pg 1; 26 Dec 1911, Pg 8; 2 Jan 1912, Pg 1, 5, 8.

was A. H. Stratton, brother of the Hon. J. R. Stratton, the former Liberal M.P. for West Peterborough. On February 12, 1912 it was announced that an Order in Council had been passed removing A. H. Stratton, stating “offensive partisanship” as the reason for dismissal. The same Order in Council appointed James Edgar as the new Postmaster. The liberal leaning *Peterborough Examiner* newspaper pointed out the irony of the situation.<sup>10</sup>

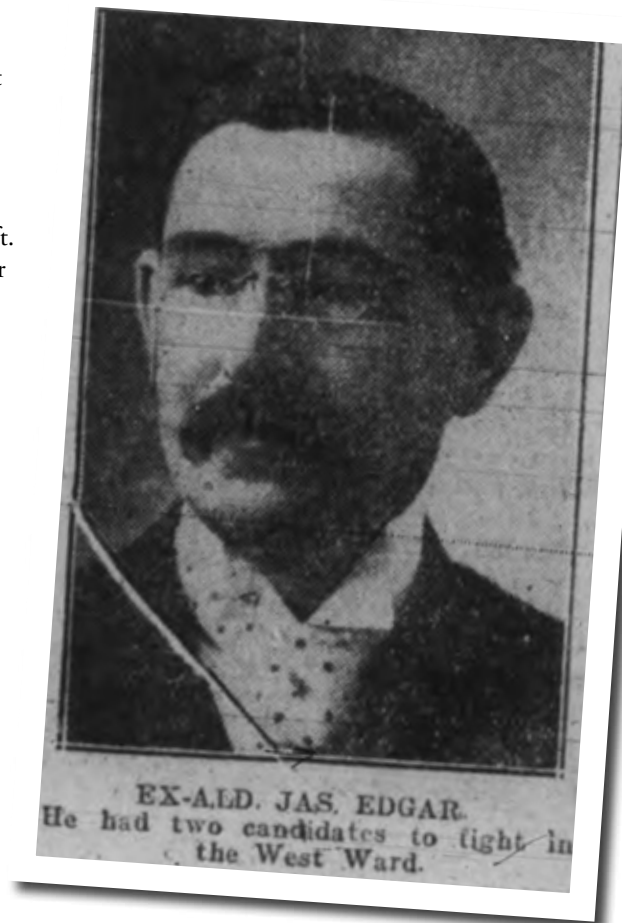
After his appointment as Postmaster, the only notices about James Edgar in newspapers were related to post office matters and occasionally activities related to the All Saints’ Church. In late 1914, a military company of civil service employees was formed. James Edgar was elected to be their Captain. At about the same time, “Mr. Jas. Edgar handed in the nice fund from the post office employees of \$150” to The Patriotic Fund. On November 1, 1919, a short notice announced that James Edgar was taken seriously ill and removed to Nicholls Hospital. He died at his home on November 19, 1919 of heart failure and was buried at Little Lake Cemetery. His obituary indicated that he had been unwell for two years and seriously ill for a few months before he died.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout the above period, there were frequent social notes about nieces and nephews of Mr. and Mrs. James Edgar visiting them. Also, notices about when Mrs. Jas. Edgar would or would not be ‘receiving’ at her home, 451 Weller. Other than one notice that Alice Wells was visiting family in Toronto, no other mention of the Wells sisters living with the Edgars was found. Nor was any reference to Iva Edgar’s prowess at piano or song discovered that would suggest anything more than a Victorian woman’s social upbringing.<sup>12</sup>

In 1921, Iva Edgar was living with her two sisters, Matilda and Alice, and a lodger, Francis Igre, at 451 Weller Street. Although not enumerated in the 1931 census, Peterborough directories indicate that Iva, Matilda and Alice lived together until 1929 when Alice left. She may have gone to live with her bachelor brother, William, who would have been about 76 years old in 1929. He died in 1933 and is buried in the family plot in Aurora. He shares a tombstone with Alice, who died in 1943.<sup>13</sup>

According to her death registration certificate, Matilda (Tillie) Wells, aged 84, died in St. Joseph’s Hospital, Peterborough, on May 25, 1933 of arteriosclerosis & senility with a contribution from a broken pelvis about 1 year, 7 months. She had lived at 451 Weller Street for 30 years, and her position is listed as ‘Housekeeper’. She was buried in Little Lake Cemetery in the Edgar family plot. In his 1987 article, Clare Galvin told the apocryphal story of Tillie’s death thus: “It was sometimes the custom of ‘the girls’ to retire after dinner to the third floor billiard room for a game of snooker ... History has it, she was six points up on Martha (Iva) and sank a pink ball in the side pocket, emitted a slight moan, and fell across the table — solid dead”. Perhaps the broken pelvis occurred at the billiards table, and she died in hospital nineteen months later.<sup>14</sup>

Iva Edgar continued to live at 451 Weller Street at least until 1938. However, when she died at the age of 74 on November



*James Edgar (Source: Peterborough Daily Review January 2, 1912; Page 5)*

19, 1939, her obituary noted that her residence was 220 Brock Street. It also said that she died in Nicholls Hospital after an illness that lasted some time. In the article, Galvin talks about Mrs. Edgar being invited to the Galvin home, where she played the piano and sang. The Galvin residence was at 461 Murray Street, just two blocks north of Iva Edgar’s home. Mr. Galvin would have been between 10 and 13 years of age at the time.<sup>15</sup>

10. *Peterborough Daily Review* 1 March 1911, Pg 1; 19 July 1911, Pg 1; 18 Aug 1911, Pg 4; 26 May 1912, Pg 7; *Peterborough Examiner*, 21 Feb 1912, Pg 1 & 8.

11. *Peterborough Daily Review* 2 Dec 1914, Pg 1; 12 Dec 1914, Pg 8; 1 Nov 1919, Pg 16; 18 Nov 1919, Pg 16; 19 Nov 1919, Pg 10; 20 Nov 1919, Pg 1. 12. *Peterborough Daily Review* 31 Jan 1910, Pg 6; 25 May 1910, Pg 5; 15 Sept 1910, Pg 5; 22 July 1911, Pg 5; 28 Oct 1911, Pg 8; 10 Apr 1912, Pg 5; 23 May 1912, Pg 4; 10 June 1912, Pg 4; 23 July 1912, Pg 5; 30 Nov 1912, Pg 5; 31 Dec 1912, Pg 5; 6 Jan 1913, Pg 8; 3 Jan 1913, Pg 8; 7 Aug 1913, Pg 6; 11 Feb 1914, Pg 8; 1 April 1914, Pg 8; 3 Sept 1914, Pg 8; 23 Oct 1914, Pg 8. 13. Canadian Census 1921 & 1931; Peterborough Directories 1929, 30, 31; "Canada, Ontario, Deaths, 1869-1937 and Overseas Deaths, 1939-1947", *FamilySearch* <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:JKKZ-P8C>; Fri Jul 26 14:34:14 UTC 2024), Entry for William Wells and William Wells, 1933; "Find a Grave Index". 14. "Canada, Ontario, Deaths, 1869-1937 and Overseas Deaths, 1939-1947", *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:JKXF-SLY>; Fri Jul 26 14:46:57 UTC 2024), Entry for Matilda Wells and William Wells, 1933. 15. *Peterborough Examiner*, 20 Nov. 1939; 1931 Canadian census for Galvin family.

# *The Memos of* WWII RADAR SPECIALIST *and* PRESIDENT *of* GENERAL ELECTRIC, WALTER G. WARD

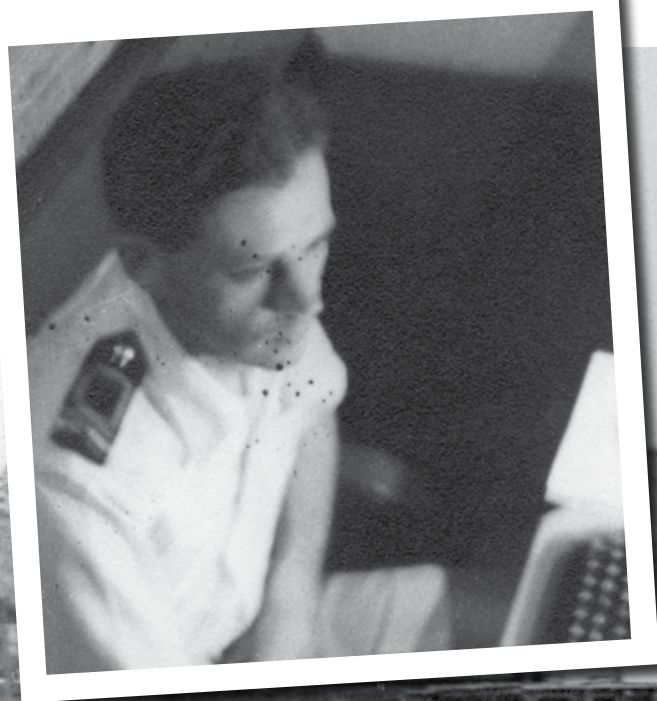
BY ELWOOD JONES AND  
ALICIA BERTRAND

Walter George Ward (b. 1914 – d. September 1994) was known in the Peterborough community as a former Vice-President and General Manager of the Canadian General Electric Company (GE).<sup>1</sup> Ward began working at GE when he was 17 years old. His earliest task was to tighten nuts on radio transformers. He left for a few years to earn a degree in electrical engineering at McGill University in Montreal.

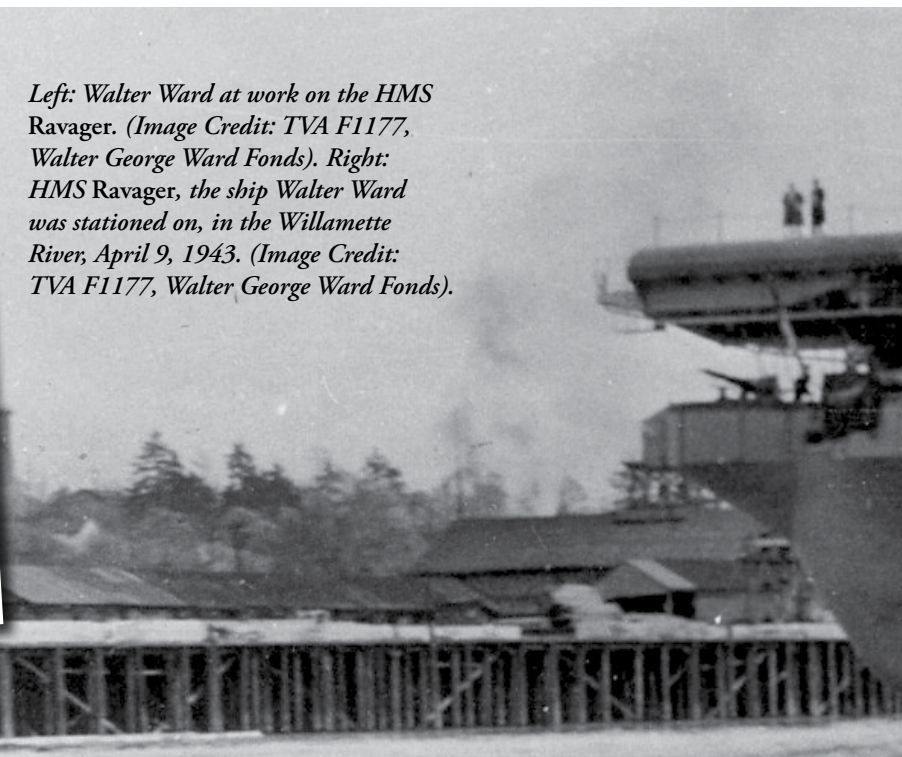
As a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Royal Canadian Navy and Royal Navy (British), he used his practical and educational training as a radar specialist while stationed on the HMS *Ravager* (aircraft carrier) and on HMS *Scylla* (cruiser) in the Battle of Normandy on June 6, 1944. At the Trent Valley Archives, you can review memos and letters from Ward that contain his opinions of people and processes in the Royal Canadian Navy and Royal Navy,

photos taken on the HMS *Ravager*, his letter of advice to Canadians on loan to the Royal Navy, his reminiscences of D-Day, and more. Ask for the Walter George Ward Fonds #1177.

Ward returned to Peterborough and GE when the war ended in 1945. In his tenure at GE, he went from tightening nuts to managing the electronic equipment section, and then President and Chairman before his retirement in 1977.



*Left: Walter Ward at work on the HMS Ravager. (Image Credit: TVA F1177, Walter George Ward Fonds). Right: HMS Ravager, the ship Walter Ward was stationed on, in the Willamette River, April 9, 1943. (Image Credit: TVA F1177, Walter George Ward Fonds).*



1. Find a Grave, "Walter George Ward", Find A Grave.com, accessed on November 30, 2025, online at: <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/180572289/walter-george-ward>; *The Toronto Star* (Toronto, Ontario, Canada) Wednesday, September 07, 1994, pg. 12.

Ward wrote about the trials and tribulations of being a radar specialist while also training his fellow officers. Below we've transcribed two of the memos from the TVA Fond. First, a full transcript of his letter of February 2, 1944 from the HMS Ravager on the difficulties of training, inspecting, cleaning, maintaining the radar equipment, and performing his duties of Officer of the Watch while some other ranks only kept watch half as often. Second, we've transcribed part of his letter of advice to Canadians about to join the Royal Navy, in which he had quite a strong opinion of the British people he met while overseas during the war.

[sic] = word is quoted exactly as spelled in the document. Grammar has not been edited from the original in the transcription.

S.M.S. "Ravenger"  
2nd February 1944

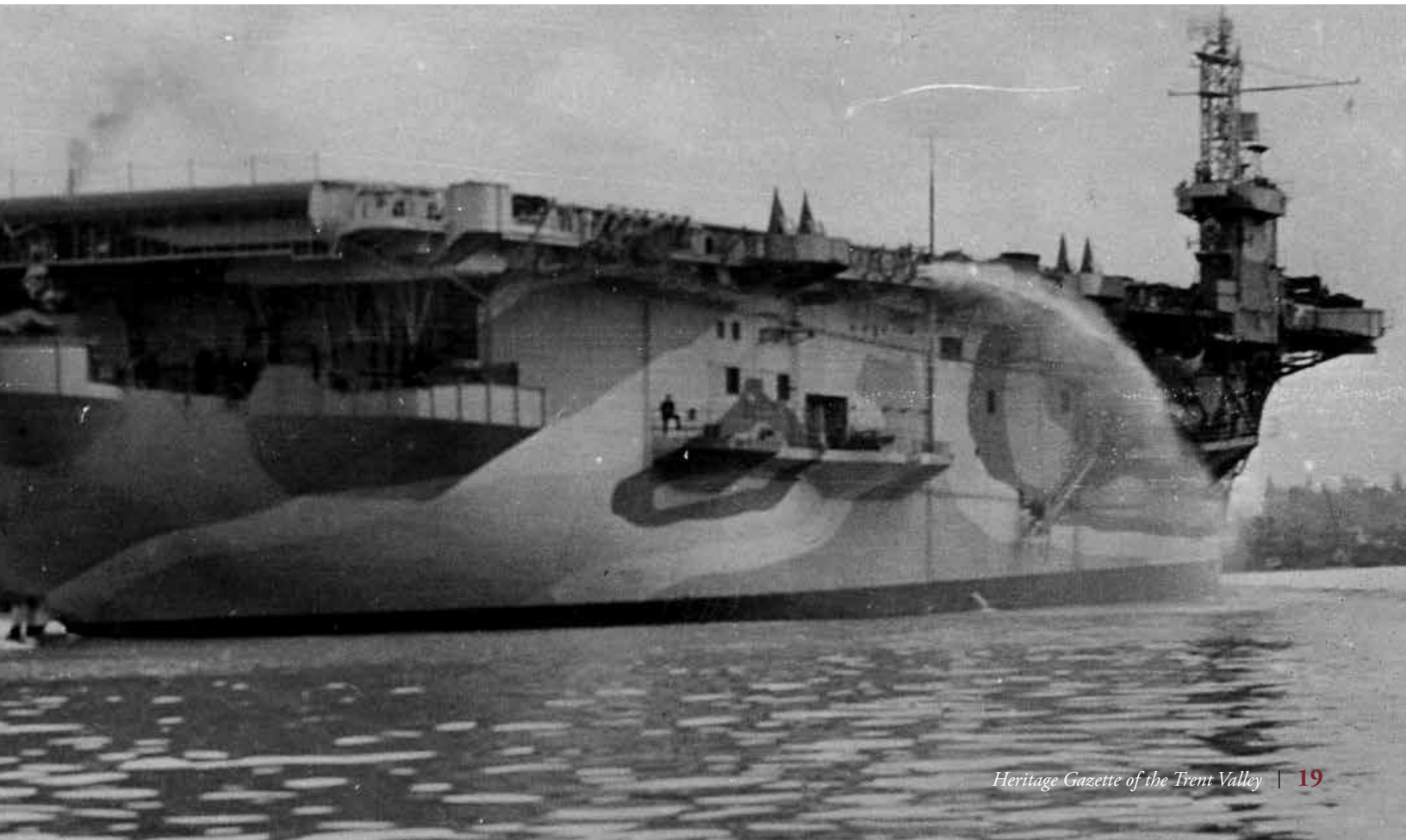
Sir, I feel it my duty in the interests of my department, the ship and the Service, to submit the following.

You will recall, Sir, that it was on a voluntary basis that I originally started doing the duty of Officer of the Watch on this ship. At that time the Radar equipment had practiced the radar operators diligently. The ship was in home waters and the number of officers available for watchkeeping duties was limited. In order to ease the situation, and since the state of the radar was good, was quite willing to undertake the extra duty which I considered I could carry out in addition to my other work. At that time, all junior officers in the ship were on the O.O.W. roster and the duty usually came about every alternate day.

About this time, the ship having commenced Deck Landing Training, I worked out an organization for my department which included a daily two hour lecture from me and a daily operational exercise directed by me. I did this for four main reasons. Firstly, radar operators cannot maintain their efficiency with continual instructional operation. Secondly, in order for them to become more expert at their sets and to learn new

ones, which is in the present Signal School policy, they need courses of instructions on board. Thirdly, the morale of the department varies almost directly with the interest in radar which in these instructions can only be created and maintained by the Radar Officer, and fourthly, the work the ship is at present engaged in performing offers a very excellent opportunity for bringing the radar organization to a high degree of efficiency.

This arrangement was carried on quite successfully for about a month and interest was increasing greatly, especially in the lectures. About this time I took over the responsibilities of C.B. Officer for the ship, which, as you are aware, Sir, involved an immense amount of work for about two months and still involves a great deal of attention from me since the situation, while in hand, is still not cleared up. I also took over the communications Division a short time later and this in itself requires a good deal of attention at the present time since we are in an ideal position for training and passing out operators and consequently we have a regular turnover



and replacement of communication ratings going on all the time. I found I was not able to devote the necessary time to the radar department to maintain the programme it having the two leading operators give daily periods of instruction.

They, however, are Operators solely and their knowledge and ability is strictly limited. On the maintenance side we have two radio mechanics who are see [sic] their first ships and require close supervision and training. There are, in addition certain checks and inspections which it is imperative that I do personally.

About a month ago the watchkeeping organization underwent a change and the result in practise is that the four junior watchkeeping officers do an O.O.D. routine (when we are on the normal D.L.T. programme) and the remaining junior officers on board who are qualified, keep the Dogs (or part of them) first, middle, morning and the forenoon until the ship weighs anchor. The officers doing these latter watches vary in number continually, since they include (A) officers of 768 Squadron who may be off the ship for a few days, but the number averages about five officers. I have for the past week been in charge of producing the list of O.O.W.'s in harbour. I have found that various officers (e.g. the A.E.O. and the D.L.C.O.) have been taken off the roster. The remaining officers including myself have been doing an average of one watch a night. This while the five junior watchkeeping officers are doing two watches between them per day. They, however, it is realized may be called on to keep an anchor watch at any time but even so this does not relieve the gangway O.O.W. who must still carry on his watch. Yesterday, February, the first, I produced a list of watchkeepers for to-day. One officer informed me Commander "F" had stated he was not to keep a watch. I approached Commander "F" and he said this was so on flying days. This meant my moving all watchkeepers forward one watch. While the instance itself is rather trivial it is submitted as indicating a state of affairs which I believe is unsatisfactory and which has in the past led to a great deal of discontent and I think will continue to do so.

I have found during the past two weeks that I have been unable to carry on my own primary responsibility, namely, radar, satisfactorily. I have found that the sixteen radar ratings have not the morale or the interest which they should have. I have found that the radar sets are in need of a general overhaul that I must supervise personally. I do not in fact believe the radar department at the present time to be operationally efficient, nor can I make it so while carrying out the other duties I have enumerated.



*Lieutenant Walter G. Ward. (Image Credit: Peterborough Examiner)*

You will see, Sir, that my primary concern is the efficient fulfillment of my first duties. I have indulged in an outline of the watchkeeping situation because, as the officer responsible for producing harbour watchkeepers, I was aware of the difficulties and circumstances existing and felt it my duty to submit them.

I feel that I can bring the radar, C.B. and divisional work to a satisfactory degree of efficiency if I am relieved of the uncertainty and drain of time and energy involved in watchkeeping.

I submit that in certain instances, boiler-cleaning, etc., where it would be helpful to "pitch in" and assist I would be only too willing to do harbour watchkeeping.

I am, as I mentioned in a conversation, Sir, interested in combining the air and ship radar work because this extra work would be in line with ships radar and would all tend to be increased [sic] Operational efficiency.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

Lt. (Sp) R.C.N.V.R. Radar Officer

### **TO CANADIANS ABOUT TO TAKE UP R.N. APPOINTMENTS**

As one Canadian to others, I want to make a few remarks to you while you are still here all together. Some of the things I am going to say may already have come to your notice. These things are not the kind of things you will hear from Official Canadian sources – and the particular things I will mention are just a few that has been my lot to notice.

Any Canadian Officer when he is lent to the Royal Navy is soon up against a good many problems. He not only has his new job to learn but almost a new language and a complete new set of customs. This language and set of customs will affect the efficiency of the officer concerned at his job, and it will also affect the social life of the officer both afloat and ashore. This will be so until such time as he has mastered the new vocabulary (not necessarily the pronunciation [sic]) and learnt the meaning of the customs.

The British types you meet, both officers and ratings, are likely to treat you with an amount of respect which is due to you only partly for what you are. To most types it is not only a question of what you are but what your friends are and what your family has been. As you all know at home it is only what you are yourself that counts.

In past generations Britain has been a great leader in democratic reform – and in the

days when the modern world was Europe, Britain was a good way ahead of any other country in such reform. Her colonists took away with them these ideals; and the Dominions and colonies which finally evolved prompted Tennyson to call Britain “The Mother of the Free”. Some of the children colonies have come of age and as Dominions are living a life even more free in ideas than the Mother Country. To a very great extent this advance in democracy [sic] which the Dominions have made is due to a better and far more universal educational reason for the continued existence [sic] of well-divided and distinct “classes” and also a great many labor problems.

Some British officers therefore, coming from the “upper classes” of comparatively well-informed families, and speaking the “upper class” language rather naturally do not wish to be associated in any way with ratings who are mostly (especially in peace time) fellows who have had very little education indeed. Whatever happens there are not enough Canadians here to change this situation ourselves.

Consequently if something happens which seems undemocratic to you I do not think it is a good idea to say what you think or to ‘to fly off the handle – though’ [sic] it may require considerable restraint to prevent this. I think the situation can be helped for yourselves by doing what the psychologists call “developing a defence mechanism”. At first this may involve thinking to yourself something like this – “Oh --- he is only a poor miserable uneducated Englishman and can’t be expected to know any better”. However after a time you may become more accustomed to these things and in a good many cases you will find there is a good reason for those undemocratic acts.

In this connection it is well to consider the man who is the normal every day victim of the undemocratic act. If it is a Naval rating, remember that even in war time about three out of four of them and 99 out of 100 of the trouble makers will practise every conceivable bluff and deceit and will resort to sheer fabrication to get something they want. (such as leave out of watch,



*Walter Ward (pictured top left) with friends on the HMS Ravager. (Image Credit: TVA F1177, Walter George Ward Fonds; Cropped from Original)*

or to get out of doing work). To be too democratic to chaps like that is to make it easier for them to practise all their tricks to get around you. I do not wish to justify all undemocratic acts in the light of the above but I believe this reveals at least another point of view; for these are the men that British officers have had to deal with; and you must also learn to deal with them efficiently yourselves in your own way. You may find that a good many war time British officers themselves are apt to try such tricks in more subtle ways as well.

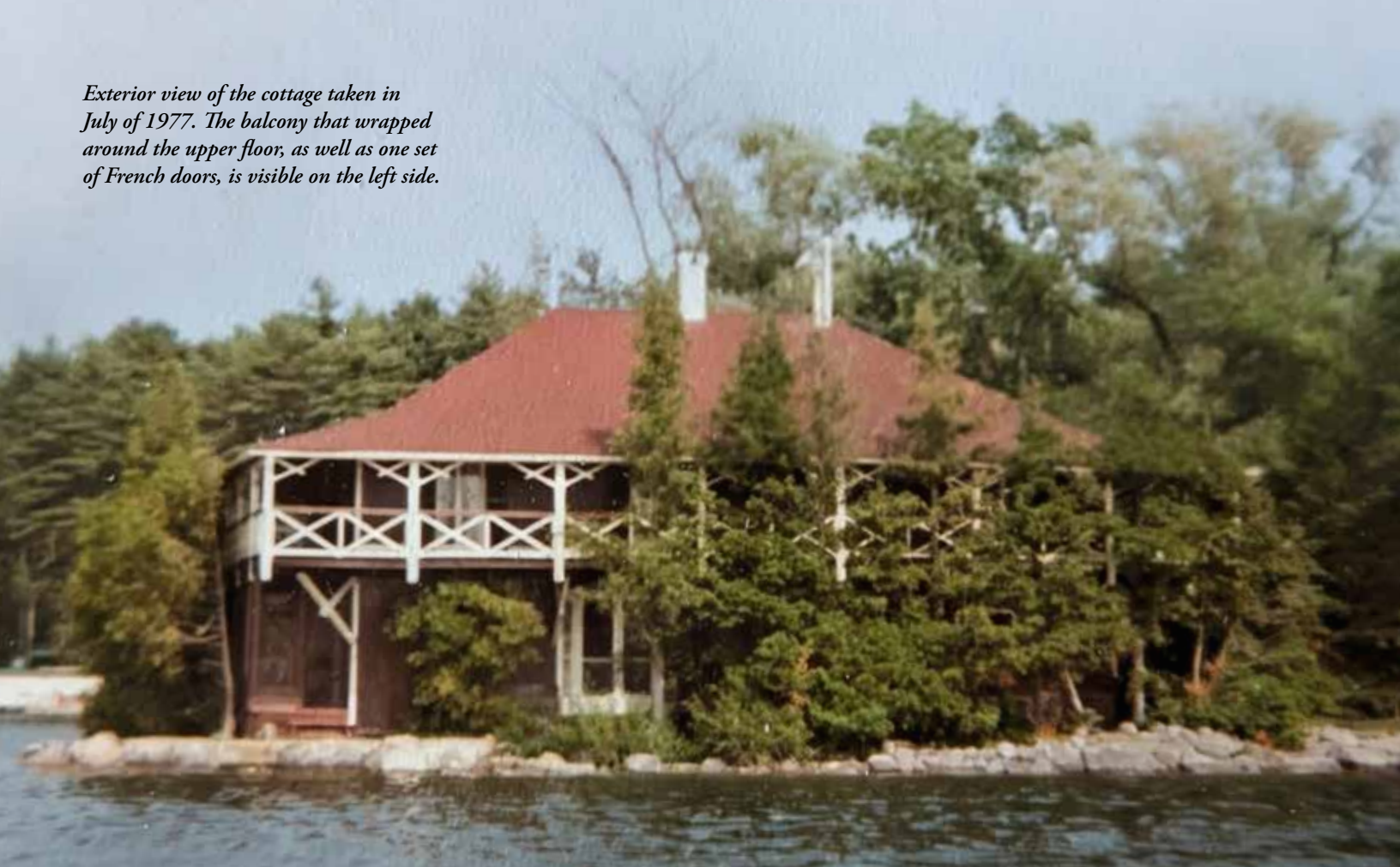
In countries outside it is common to ridicule “British reserve” and this you may find has been considerably overdone. You will find friends in the wardroom soon enough and although you may meet a certain amount of this “reserve” you will probably find that when they do become friendly they will stick by you in trouble.

In Britain it is common to refer to us and other Dominion personnel as “rough colonists”. It infers we are boorish and

ill-mannered. I believe this has come about partly because when we first come over we are not familiar with the language or customs and also because at first we may in many cases rebel against undemocratic acts and against reserve. This may cause some chaps to react in a rude and somewhat disrespectful manner. We must prove that this reference to us is unjustified. To do this will rarely be an easy task but I think you will see that it is a necessary one if we are to take our proper places along with our workmates. I believe it is a fact that there are more Canadians “on loan” than any of the other Dominions – and that seems to indicate that we can profitably mix.

There are a great many things I have expressed poorly and other things I have left out entirely. My concern is that we shall give the Royal Navy cause to consider us a very valuable asset – and this they [c]annot fail to do if Canadian officers continue to be rated as high as Commander Price has said they now are.

*Exterior view of the cottage taken in July of 1977. The balcony that wrapped around the upper floor, as well as one set of French doors, is visible on the left side.*



# KELLY'S ISLAND *Revisited*

BY MICHAEL PARNELL

*Editor's Note: This article is the second part to Mike Parnell's "Kelly's Island – The Flagship of Chemong Park" published in the Trent Valley Archives Heritage Gazette, April 2025, Volume 30, #1.*

In the previous article, we were left standing at the bottom of the stairs, about to climb to the second floor of the old structure that was originally built for the Peterborough Rowing Club. Immediately you were aware of the unique hand railings. On both sides were long rowing oars bolted through the wall in two places, with the paddles positioned at the bottom. As you climbed the steps, it would get brighter and brighter as a large square window would greet you at the top. A string supported by eye hooks ran parallel

above the left oar. Anywhere along the way you could pull the string to turn on the wall light at the top, and it was an ingenious substitute for the modern three-way switching we have in homes today.

The second floor of the old cottage on Kelly's Island was a different atmosphere than what one experienced on the main level. Whereas the dark rustic rooms with open ceilings that exposed all the heavy ceiling joists would remind you that this building was initially used to store boats, the upper storey was quite a different world with a tinge of royalty. It had a softer touch, with antique wood panelling covering every ceiling and outer wall. The wood used was birds eye maple, native to the northern United States, and it was lighter than the panelling downstairs. It also had a decorative trim around all the

French doors and windows, giving it a pleasant, finished look. Every room was done the same way. Given the American influence in the early days, I'm not surprised by this.

I believe that when the building was constructed in 1889, the entire second floor was one big open space with the roofed wraparound balcony providing access to a spectacular view from all sides. The reason I say this is that all ten French doors and four windows were placed symmetrically around the space, and across from each other, except that each window would face another French door. It was an interesting layout with each exposure different from the others. Strolling on the balcony, you would pass four French doors on the east side, two windows and one door on the south, then three doors and

one window on the west, and finally two doors and one window on the north side.

One of the Kelly members had done research on the building many years ago and found evidence that they used to hold dances on this floor before it was converted to a private residence. While I was up there, I could picture the scene: men in top hats escorting ladies in long formal attire through one of the French doors, catching a view of a starlit night while leaning on the railing of the balcony with the drone of live music playing inside. To this day, I have vivid recollections of walking the entire circumference of the balcony. I wish I could remember how many steps it took. I can only imagine what it was like for couples to stroll the same path back in the days when oil lanterns lit the way.

At some point during the early 1900s, the second floor was divided into seven rooms. Before that, the antique panelling that I described earlier was installed. For no apparent reason that I can find, one of the windows was covered over. To me, this really upset the symmetry, especially on the balcony side. It didn't look right, and the board and batten had been altered to hide its existence. It really was a profound mystery why such a unique window was removed. Then, the partitions were added to create six bedrooms and a very large hall.

Arriving at the top of the staircase, one would find about 3 or 4ft of walkway before meeting the exterior wall containing one of the three large remaining square windows. It was the only one that opened bringing in that strong west breeze directly from the lake. I was told that it used to contain yellow and green stained glass until the 1970s when it was used as an entry point during a devastating break-in. I'm sure the replacement clear glass doesn't do the window justice, but it sure provided ample light down the steps.

Turning to the right you realize that you are in a large hall. In fact, it was probably

the largest room on the floor. Not much furniture as there were two doors to the north, two to the east, and two to the south for the six bedrooms, then a French door to the west to access the balcony. It was also the brightest room on this floor. The ceiling on the second floor was much higher than on the first. It was around 12ft high and it made this room very spacious. A suspended stove pipe ran through the northeast corner of the room, but it was high enough to walk under. Nearby was the hatch to the attic above, and accessible only with a very tall stepladder. The staircase had no railing, just a low partition surrounding it. At the end of it

All six doors to the bedrooms had transom windows. Instead of glass, there were screens with breathable curtain material covering them. Since the bedrooms had no particular names I used colours to identify each one, considering the curtains or the painted furniture. I needed that when I removed furniture from each room for the first two years while spring cleaning, drawing pictures to help me remember where everything belonged!

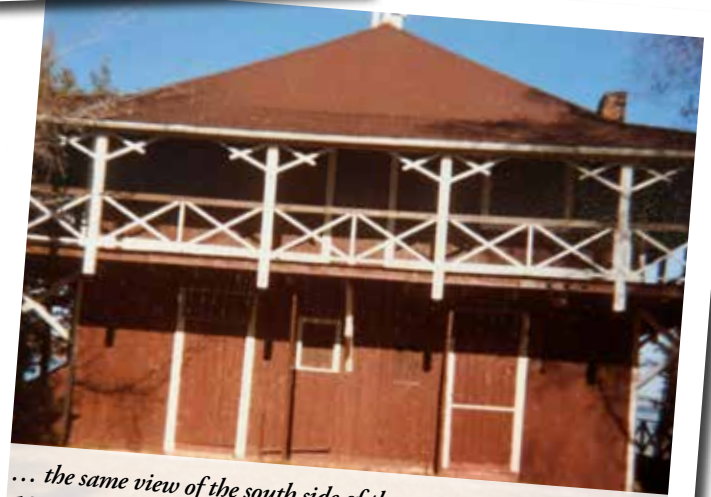
Immediately to the left at the top of the stairs was what would have been the master bedroom. I referred to it as the "rose

room". It had a large, high antique bed with rounded corners and spindles. Across the room sat a dressing table with three-sided mirrors. Where it sat was the location of the stained glass window that was removed. Without it, the room was rather dark with just one French door for natural light. Numerous cedar trees in this area by the balcony also didn't help. A rocking chair by the balcony door and dressers completed this medium-sized room, along with a small corner closet that only half the



*Exterior view of the south side of the cottage taken on July 16, 1977 when the cottage was open for the summer. This view is contrasted with ...*

was a bench seat with storage below. Some chairs for conversation were scattered around, but hardly used. A large dresser on the north wall served as the linen closet. Just it and the old stand at the bottom of the stairs were the only two unpainted pieces of furniture (along with the two harvest tables fastened to the walls in the kitchen).



*... the same view of the south side of the cottage in November of 1980, when the doors and windows were boarded up for the winter.*

bedrooms had. This was the only bedroom that didn't have a hanging light in the middle of the room that you had to find in the dark. Conveniently, there was a string by the door you could pull to switch the light on the wall. It also had the only telephone on this floor, and it was a heavy thing, sitting on a bedside table. The last time it would have worked was around 1974 but it was hardwired to the system. Despite the intense heat of the fire, the only thing remaining from this room was the bed springs, and the metal base of this phone, sitting inside what was left of the wheel barrow in the room below.

were against an interior wall, allowing you to face either a French door or a stained glass window. An exception to this was the rose room with the missing window!

From the hall and heading to the northeast corner, one would reach the "red room". This was by far my most favourite room to stay in. It was one of the two largest bedrooms, approximately 16' X 16'. It contained two French doors and a blue stained-glass window. The door to the east provided the second-best view of the lake, namely towards the causeway and the bay, where my family cottage was located.

Though the furniture was all painted beige, there was a lot of red fabric in this room. In

front of the window was a padded bench seat with faded fabric. The window, though beautiful, was impossible to see from the lake due to the dense growth of cedar trees at the north end. A large rocking chair and footstool sat in front of the other French door. Many a time I felt like I was in a castle by the ocean when I slept there. The height of the tray ceiling made you very small, and with the French doors open, the dashing of the waves against the rocks below was extremely loud. The antique dresser facing the bed completed the castle effect with its turret-like design atop the built-in mirror, along with shelves on either side for candle sticks. In the middle of the ceiling, a low-hanging light with a red lampshade swaying in the wind brought one back to days gone by.

To the south from there were two small bedrooms on the east side. They were pretty much identical in size and each had just one French door to the balcony. They each contained a metal antique bed, something in size between a single and a double. The one closest to the red room I called the "pink room", namely because of the vivid colour the furniture was painted. This room, perhaps, would have been a little warmer on a cold day with the stove pipe serving the dining room running the length of the room over the bed. The room next to it I called the "gold room", again due to the furniture. The Kellys referred to these as "the little east rooms", and somewhat airless despite the transoms. They were very seldom used, and generally the first to get boarded up near the end of the season. As for me, I only stayed in each just once, but found them reassuringly comfortable



*The sunny west side of the balcony, looking north, taken in March of 1981 when the cottage was boarded for the winter.*

*The north balcony, taken on June 27, 1980 as the cottage was being readied for the summer season.*

Crossing the hall to the north was the other medium-sized room I called the "yellow room". It had the best view of any bedroom from one of the two French doors. You could look right down the lake toward Fife's Bay without any trees obstructing the view. This indeed was the windiest room (and the coldest), but the sunsets from here were unlike any other. I should mention here that I really liked the furniture layout of the entire second floor. The heads of all eight beds



and cozy, especially in a creaky and rambling old structure such as this place.

A few steps south of the gold room, and beside the bench seat at the end of the staircase, was the door to the room called the “bat room” by the Kelly family. Occasionally, bats could be seen flying here, but I preferred to call it the “blue room” instead. This was the other large bedroom with similar dimensions, and it was the room I stayed in the most until the Kelly kids took it over once they outgrew their cribs. It was one of two rooms containing twin beds. A small rocking chair was positioned in the southeast corner in front of a corner closet. Typical of some of the other bedrooms was a painted wooden washstand near the door you entered. On top was a large bowl with a water pitcher inside. Hidden down below in the cupboard was the chamber pot. These were used way back in the day, before the cottage had any plumbing. Nearby was a rack fastened to the wall to hang a towel and a facecloth for washing. An unusual dresser sat against a far wall. It was low, ideal for kids, with only 2 drawers. But it had a tall, narrow mirror attached on the left side, making it hard to move during spring cleaning. Overall, this bedroom was a great morning room with 2 sets of French doors catching the sun on the east and southern exposures. But the highlight of this space was the most beautiful stained-glass window. It was square in size, but it had triangular-shaped patterned glass at the corners. In the middle were square pieces of red and blue stained-glass. It was the only upstairs window not hindered by trees, making the colours much more brilliant. How it survived the break-ins over the years is amazing to me. I assume that the window that was removed many, many years ago was of the same design as this one, since it was located on the same exterior wall.

Of all the French doors on the second floor, nine of them made you feel like you were actually out on the water. When you looked out, that was all you saw besides the trees. No land was visible except for



*The interior of the yellow room, with a view of the French doors.*

the one door that overlooked the south lawn. All of these doors were identical in size and had the same ornate hardware and fancy hinges. The only difference was the colour of curtain fabric stapled to each set to match the decor of the various rooms. These curtains were for decoration only and were never used. That’s where the green shutters came in.

These amazing devices were installed on every door in the summertime with a hinge system that locked them in place when opened against the wall. Even the wind couldn’t dislodge them. But almost all the time they were kept closed over the doors as they also served as screens. They all had movable louvres on the inside and could be adjusted for privacy or for wind control. The only setback was the rooms were considerably darker when closed, along with all the surrounding trees and the sloped roof over the balcony. Unless it was really cold, the doors were always left open making the second floor a very breezy place. No matter where you were, the sound of the water against the rocks could

be heard nonstop, and it felt like it was just inches away.

I will close with one of my fondest memories of the second floor, as it provided the best view of approaching thunderstorms. Many times, Ian Kelly and I would dart up the stairs and through one of the doors facing west. It never occurred to us to use one of the doors on the lee side of the cottage. Seeing the lightning from that height was thrilling and the loud claps of thunder added to the excitement. You could witness the storm racing down the length of Chemong Lake, and when the winds rose furiously, it became downright scary. Unfortunately, in our rush, we would sometimes forget to pin the shutters back and BANG, they would slam shut against the French door, engaging the self-locking system at the threshold. With no other way to get back in, we had to lean over the balcony railing like drowned rats, and yell at the top of our lungs, hoping that Ian’s wife Marlene would hear and rescue us. It was a somber moment trudging all the way back downstairs, soaking the battleship grey floors and steps along the way!

# AN OVERVIEW OF *Peterborough: Spirit of Place*

BY ELWOOD JONES

*Peterborough: Spirit of Place* is a great looking book enlivened by the superb photography of John McQuarrie sprinkled with historic photos. John McQuarrie has picked stories for an anthology that also captures important aspects of the past and present of Peterborough and the surrounding area. There is a special interest in writers who have discussed the environment and geography of the area. Several stories have been taken from pertinent webpages.

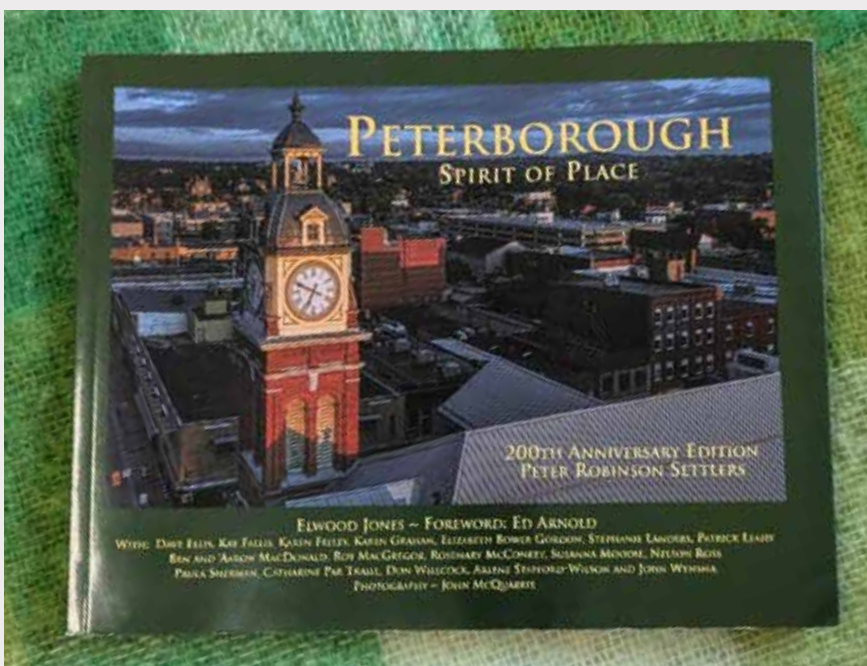
In the foreword, Ed Arnold pays tribute to the photojournalism of John McQuarrie, and comments on how the book makes us appreciate the diversity of our history and

how lucky we are to live in this special place. Arnold concludes with a discussion of the setting and of how Peterborough got its name in the autumn of 1825.

Then, the book begins with a discussion of canoeing and of the Indigenous history of parts of eastern Ontario. There are specific excerpts from the webpages of Curve Lake and Hiawatha First Nations. This is followed by a discussion of agriculture that is enriched by exceptional colour photos of area farms.

The discussion of the Robinson Irish emigrants begins with the 1823 arrivals, surrounding views of St. Peter-in-Chains

Cathedral and St. John's Anglican Church in Peterborough. Then comes the story of the early history of Peterborough, including pictures labelled "Scott's Plains" even though the town, never a village, was named by October 1825. These historic images are juxtaposed with a modern view of Peterborough from the river looking west. Short stories set in 1823 and in Cobourg in 1825 introduce the Peter Robinson emigration, but the scene for Peterborough is set in a short excerpt by Rosemary McConkey from her recent book, *Green Routes*. This includes an evocative view of the mixed feelings of the emigrants leaving the "green hills of my country," and also highlights the



*Peterborough: Spirit of Place* is a richly woven tapestry of images and text tracing the soul of a community from its founding days in 1825, when Peter Robinson's intrepid Irish settlers arrived, to the vibrant city it has become today. This compelling chronicle invites readers to walk its pages as they might the downtown streets — past heritage façades and familiar faces — unaware that among them are descendants of those early pioneers whose quiet resilience shaped this land. At once intimate and expansive, this book celebrates two centuries of spirit, struggle, and belonging in a place where history still lingers in the bricks, the bridges, and the hearts of its people. This colour, coffee-table book is 9" by 12", 176 pages and retails for \$40.00. It can be purchased both in-person and online at the Trent Valley Archives.

appreciation expressed by the emigrants, in this example by those who settled in Douro.

The key discussion of the Robinson emigration is a keenly researched essay by Patrick Leahy that originally appeared as a six-part feature in the *Peterborough Examiner*. Patrick comments on the legacy of English domination in Ireland, the rebellion of 1798 and the agricultural difficulties the country faced in the early 1820s. The proposal of Sir Robert Wilmot Horton was a response worth considering, and the emigrations of 1823 to the Rideau area and 1825 to Peterborough proved progressive. The British government believed Ireland had an excess population and Upper Canada had opportunities. Patrick considers the long trip the emigrants made in nine ships from Cork to Quebec, and then the many weeks spent getting from there to Peterborough. His description is perceptive and inclusive of the emigration experience.

The discussion of the Robinson emigration continues with observations by Elwood Jones on why the British never repeated the emigrations and Mary English-Cooper's description of the accomplishments of her Heffernan ancestors.

Next, the book explores the rich agricultural accomplishments of Robinson descendants, beginning on the Leahy farm. John McQuarrie's eye for the spirit of the landscape opens to exceptional photographs and his commentary on "the timeless rhythm of rural life." He visits farms and rural markets, and captures farmers in action in the fields, raising cattle and in dairy farming.

John McQuarrie's camera and narrative capture excellent views of Millbrook and Cavan. He then brings his camera to Peterborough, where he captures stunning views of the city looking north from City Hall, side-by-side views of City Hall and the County Court House and the War Memorial backed by views of the Armoury and the former Peterborough Collegiate Vocational School. Then, McQuarrie follows with views of Quaker Oats, Canadian General Electric, streetcars and downtown businesses.

A feature essay on the people who worked at the *Peterborough Examiner* sets the tone for a city where walking is a pleasure. There are great sections on the Millennium Park and downtown Peterborough, featuring some enhanced historic black and white photos, as well as sweeping full colour streetscapes. Abandoning Peterborough's roadways, McQuarrie turns to its waterways, with sections on the Otonabee River, the Trent Severn Waterway and the Lift Lock.

Moving beyond Peterborough, Lakefield is featured in a stunning streetscape of Queen Street, anchored by the former post office (taken when repairs were being made to the stone work!) Catharine Parr Traill and Susannah Moodie are featured in this section. Additionally, Young's Point and Stoney Lake are featured.

There are also discussions and vibrant photos around the Riverview Park & Zoo and Trent University. Samuel de Champlain's dream is discussed in the midst of the Trent University section, which features a gorgeous two-page aerial view of Trent University and its countryside setting.

The book features other local institutions as well, including the Peterborough Petes, the Peterborough Museum and Archives, and Hutchison House. The new Canadian Canoe Museum is featured among them, as well as canoeing and the wilderness. This section includes two paintings by Frances Anne Hopkins in Montreal canoes, spectacular paintings that are in the Library and Archives Canada lobby.

The nature theme is continued in the next section featuring an essay by Dave Ellis on "New Life", featuring loons and eagles feeding their young. The book concludes with astronaut Chris Hadfield's photo from outer space that includes our region.

John McQuarrie's splendid and beautiful *Peterborough: Spirit of Place* is one in a series of *Spirit of Place* books capturing communities and their environs, including Canada, Muskoka, Perth and Almonte, among others.



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- This membership category is suitable for educational partners with students that want to use TVA facilities and groups/businesses that wish TVA to provide archival services
- No tax receipt is given

# *The Kid from Simcoe Street; a Memoir and Poems,*

BY JAMES CLARKE. INTRODUCTION BY ROY MCMURTRY.

EXILE EDITIONS, 2012.

REVIEWED BY MARY AND GREG CONCHELOS WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM ELWOOD JONES

*The Kid from Simcoe Street*, a memoir by James Clarke, retired Ontario Superior Court justice, gives a moving account of his life growing up before and during World War II. His home was a tenement in a working-class neighbourhood on Simcoe Street in Peterborough, Ontario, bounded by the fire hall, the York Trading Warehouse, the railway tracks along Bethune, Albert's scrap yard, and the Chinese laundry on the North side of Simcoe Street.

The oldest child of a Catholic mother from Quebec and an Irish Protestant father, he was baptized in both faiths. This tension formed a thread throughout his upbringing, affecting the atmosphere of the household, the relationship between his parents, and his schooling (his mother won and he attended St. Peter's Catholic School). Both parents worked at the Empress Hotel, about two blocks east of their home, his father as a bell hop and his mother as a waitress.

When James' father enlisted in the Second World War, the Clarke family faced further hardships, as James' mother was forced to support a family of three with sparse resources. James idolized his father while he was away, but upon his return, soon realized he was not the man who left to fight for his country. His father's drinking

problem started early on, with James noticing it as early as four years old, but it became much worse after his return home (probably in connection with what we now call post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)). James' mother, who had counted on her husband's promises to change, had her dreams shattered.

The memoir has several strengths, and one of them is its close look at downtown Peterborough in the 1930s and 1940s, where James had many escapes. The fraught environment at home drove James out of the house, where he made friends with his schoolmates and neighbours. He and his pals played in the nearby junkyards and went to the movies. Sometimes they jumped on the CNR trains that ran along Bethune Street close to his home, and travelled a few blocks. Of particular importance were the firefighters next door,

who accepted him as one of their own. He spent many happy hours with them, and the fire hall became a haven.

*The Kid from Simcoe Street* documents how James came to terms with the heartbreak he experienced in his boyhood and the disadvantages that life put in his way. Somehow, he was able to overcome them, and find the strength to move on. In high school, he focused on athletics and his studies, becoming a top student. As a result, he was able to go to McGill University, and the day he got on the train for Montreal was the day his world changed, leaving Simcoe Street behind for the "unmet intimate faces of his future."

As part of a long and fulfilling life, he was able to draw upon a number of remarkable obstacles and opportunities that eventually led him to becoming a chief justice in the Ontario Superior Court. Over time, his view of his childhood softened, and the memoir suggests that he learned a great deal from his upbringing.

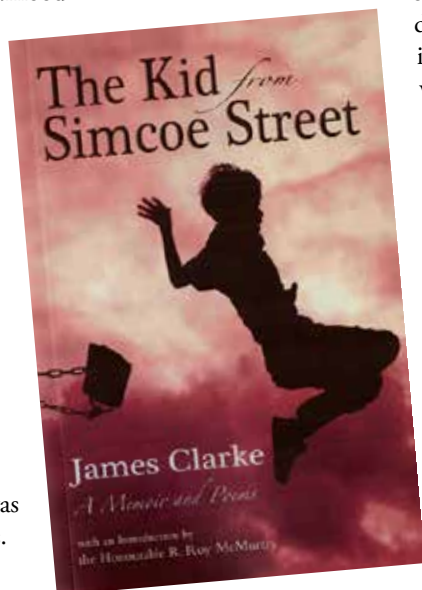
James is also the author of over twenty poetry books, many reflecting on important aspects of his life, both his struggles and satisfactions. A number of these poems are included in the memoir.

The memoirs' opening comments by Roy McMurtry, prominent Ontario lawyer and judge, stress that "as a result of his clear and honest narratives of tragedy and opportunity, the reader is left not with a patchwork of incidents but something woven out of a whole cloth. That through nine decades of struggle and joy is James Clarke's journey to a successful profession and an artistic achievement namely a full and poetic sense of what one long life can become."

The book will appeal to those interested in childhood experiences in wartime Peterborough and beyond.

*The Kid from Simcoe Street* is currently being adapted for the stage by Trent Valley Archives Theatre, and will be staged at the Market Hall Performing Arts Centre on June 4 and 5 at 7:30pm and June 6 and 7 at 2:00pm. Tickets cost \$30 for regular seating and \$40 for cabaret seating and can be purchased on the Market Hall website, here: <https://tickets.markethall.org/eventperformances.asp?evt=526> or by contacting the box office at 705-775-1503.

Copies of the book can be purchased both in-person and online at the Trent Valley Archives for \$25 each.



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# NEW ACQUISITIONS *in the* TRENT VALLEY ARCHIVES LIBRARY

BY CAROL SUCEE, LIBRARIAN,  
TRENT VALLEY ARCHIVES

During the past year, the TVA Library has added several new titles to the collection. As it is a research library, we are always pleased to add materials that we believe will aid in our members' investigations. Of course, several new titles about the Irish emigration to the Peterborough area were acquired as we celebrated the anniversary of the Peter Robinson Emigration Experiment. However, we also saw the arrival of many new titles concerning the history of Peterborough and surrounding areas in the last 200 years. These titles cover topics from local cinema to public health, to a history of Catchacoma Lake, just to name a few.

If you are interested in perusing any of these titles, please come visit our archives building at 567 Carnegie Avenue. The library is available Tuesday to Saturday, from 10 am to 4 pm. A full list of titles in our library is also available to view online, here: <https://15185.rmwebopac.com/>  
We look forward to seeing you!

- *"I Hear a Boat A-Whistlin": My Stoney Lake Memoirs* by Aileen Young, c. 1992.
- 1927 edition of the T. Eaton Co. Limited catalogue for spring and summer. c. 1971.
- *Another Day in Paradise: Reflections of a Peterborough Bookseller* by Mark Jokinen. c. 2022.
- *Back to the Future: 130 years of Public Health in the Kawarthas* by The Peterborough Board of Health. 2020.
- *Brief History of Cavan Township and Millbrook Village: From the Year 1816 to 1937* by Mary Sloane Eakins. 2016.
- *A Cruel Bargain: The Commuted British Soldiers in Upper Canada* by Robert John Gordon. 2025.
- *Early Days in Upper Canada: Experiences of Immigration and Settlement 1790-1840* by David Williams. 1972.
- *Evolution of a District Health Council into a Regional Planning Body: The Haliburton, Kawartha and Pineridge District Health Council* by Dawn Berry Merriam. c. 1996.
- *From Cork to the New World: A Journey for Survival* by Michael McCarthy. 2009.
- *From Tap to Toilet: The Introduction of Water Works and Sewers to Peterborough* by Dennis Carter-Edwards. 2025.
- *From Whence They Came: The Peter Robinson Settlers* by Christy Roche. c. 2015.
- *Hay Township Highlights: 1846-1996* by The Hay Township Book Committee. c. 1992.
- *History and Reminiscences of Bowmanville* by J.B. Fairbairn. 1988, c. 1906.
- *Irish Catholics of Downeyville* by Dan and Monica Sullivan. 2025.
- *Ketchum Hunt Club: One Hundred years on Catchacoma Lake* by Catherine Dibben and Barbara LaPierriere. c. 2025.
- *Lift Lock Centennial: Official Souvenir Edition* by The Peterborough Examiner. 2004.
- *Moonlight, Music and Motion Picture under the Pines: Jackson Park, 1905-08* by Robert Gordon Clarke. c. 2024.
- *My Heart, My Hands: A Century of Volunteerism in Canada* by Betty Steele. c. 2000.
- National Geographic Magazine vol.1, no.1, 1888. *National Geographic Society*. Reprinted 1964.
- *Origins of Some Anglo-Norman Families* by Lewis C. Loyd. 1999.
- *Oshkigmong, the Curve in the Lake: A History of the Mississauga Community of Curve Lake: Origins of the Curve Lake Anishnabek* by Mae Whetung-Derrick. c. 2015.
- *Our Lady of Mount Carmel: Hastings Parish Sesquicentennial, 1847-1997* by Virginia A. Lynch. 1997.
- *Peterborough: Spirit of Place* by John McQuarrie and Elwood H. Jones. c. 2025.
- *Peterborough Remembers Its' Fallen: The City and County Citizens' War Memorial* by Donald Willcock. 2021.
- *Pillar of the Community: The Story of Peterborough's Carnegie Library* by Matthew R. Griffis. c. 2013.
- *Pilots of the Purple Twilight: The Story of Canada's Early Bush Flyers* by Phillip H. Godsell. 1955.
- *Planting the Province: The Economic History of Upper Canada, 1784-1870* by Douglas McCalla. c. 1993.
- *Professor Symons: A Canadian Life as Told Through His Papers* by Kathryn Matheson and Robert D. Taylor-Vaisey. 2023.
- *Rev. Vincent Clementi: Renaissance Man of the Kawarthas* by Catherine Dibben, c. 2023.
- *Rideau Boating and Road Guide: Where to Dock, Shop, Wine, Dine, Explore & Enjoy*, c. 1995.
- *Shopper's View of Canada's Past: Pages from Eaton's Catalogues 1886-1930* by G.P de T. Glazebrook, Katherine B. Brett and Judith McErvell. c. 1969.
- *Sir John A. MacDonald & the Apocalyptic Year 1885* by Patri Dutil. c. 2024.
- *Sir Sandford Fleming: His Early Diaries, 1845-1853*. c. 2009.
- *Surnames of Ireland* by Edward MacLysaght. c. 1980.
- *Tennis by the Otonabee: A History of the Quaker Park Tennis Club* by Christopher Dummitt. c. 2022.
- *Thomas Need: A Settler in the Backwoods of Upper Canada* by Dawn Bell Logan. c. 2022.
- *Trent-Severn Waterway: Then and Now* by Elizabeth Bower. c. 2009.
- *Wagon Road North* by Art Downs. c. 1993, c. 1960.
- *World Atlas: Census edition* by Rand McNally & Co. c. 1964.



BY ELWOOD JONES

During 2025, the Trent Valley Archives added 85 fonds to our holdings, which now brings the number to 1,280. Many of the fonds were small, but still had nuggets of interest to local researchers. Some had photographs including downtown Peterborough, labour support of Tilco strikers, school photos at Armour Heights Elementary School and Thomas A. Stewart

Secondary School, photos tied to genealogy, productions at the Grand Opera, two Stevengraphs of the Oxford-Cambridge boat race, crowds watching the parade at the 2nd annual Veterans Day in 1947, and a collection of tabloids focused on birth announcements between 1979-1994. There were also technical publications related to land assessments, and others to tourism in Peterborough and Bancroft. A disbound file of the *Peterborough Review* for most of 1878 was fascinating.

### *New Acquisitions to our Map Collection*

We continued to strengthen our significant collection of maps. The Rob Roy collection contained hand-plotted cruises used for boating courses designed by Rob Roy and the Peterborough Power and Sail Squadron, together with plans, charts and maps related to the Kawarthas, Florida, Lake Ontario, the Thousand Islands, topographical maps in Ontario, and sales of charts. Our new collection of maps from the Registry

Office contains maps for Ennismore 1822; Monaghan 1817; Smith partially showing Otonabee Communication [Portage Route] 1818; Smith No. 36 up to 1855; and Otonabee 33 1838, all showing lots located. We also received a significant transfer of maps from the Peterborough Public Library featuring maps across Canada; one view from Space; two federal election maps of 1987; County maps of Ontario; an Extensive Top Map collection (modern); aerial photos; and Nautical Charts for the Trent Severn & the Rideau Canal. Peter Johnston, our map volunteer, thinks we could develop a good checklist of the maps.

### *The Kiwanis Music Festival [TVA Fonds 800]*

We had some interesting personal items related to Terry Hawkins, who won competitions in the festival in the 1940s. This prompted us to review the documents we had received earlier. We have the original syllabus, programs, concert programmes for the night of the winners, as well as some



*Veteran's Day parade taken by Don Ivison from the Morris Duke Studio, August 4, 1947. (Image Credit: TVA F1281, Veteran's Get Together Fonds)*

correspondence, news clippings related to the judges, and news clippings related to the soloists, duets and groups who competed. It is an impressive collection, which has been turned into a good Excel list. Our records only go to 2017, but are quite detailed for most years. The annual spring event continues, and the current syllabus for 2026 is online at Peterborough Kiwanis Music Festival - Syllabus.

### *Veteran's Parade and Tilco Strike Photographs*

Ed Arnold shared two photographs of a parade that occurred in Peterborough in the late 1940s. We found an interesting account of what was described as the biggest parade in Peterborough history. While looking through our great run of the *Peterborough Weekly Review* for the 1940s, there were big ads for the 2nd annual Veterans' Get-together for the Civic Holiday on August 4, 1947. The large parade route was from Charlotte and Aylmer Streets via George Street to

Nicholls Oval. At Nicholls Oval, there was a vaudeville show (two performances), a beauty contest for Miss Peterborough, races and games for children, a soccer game, and a baseball match. The evening ended with dancing from 9:30pm.

According to the *Peterborough Examiner*, Tuesday, August 5, 1947: The parade attracted 10,000 people who all seem to have gone to the Oval. All branches of the military participated, and most of the large industries in town also had floats. The *Peterborough Examiner* even reported on the winners of the races. There were claims that the Master of Ceremonies gave the award to the wrong person. It seems there is something new to learn every day at Trent Valley Archives! [See fonds 1281].

Ed Arnold also brought some photos related to the 1966 Tilco strike, which was the topic of a Fourth Line Theatre production in 2023. There are seven photos dated June and July. The people are identified in the main photos but not in the July 15 photos of the CGE UE protest in

support of the Tilco workers. [TVA Fonds 1280] These photos complement the ones we have in the McBride fonds [Fonds 148], but are different. The TVA has D'Arcy Jenish's script and research for the Tilco strike play at Fourth Line. [Fonds 1197].

### *Louis St. Laurent's Visit to Peterborough*

There have been several visits by Prime Ministers to Peterborough, but the *Peterborough Examiner* coverage of the visit of Louis St. Laurent to open the Civic Hospital is the most interesting. The news story was accompanied by a map of his visit and a summary of his ten stops planned for Saturday, May 20, 1950. The first stop was the CPR station. Three of his stops were for school children (King Edward Park, Victoria Park, King George School). He visited Canadian General Electric (CGE), Westclox, and Quaker. Lunch was in his private railway car, and the day ended at the Peterborough Club and with a civic dinner at the Empress Hotel.

*Veteran's Day parade taken by Don Ivison from the Morris Duke Studio, August 4, 1947. (Image Credit: TVA F1281, Veteran's Get Together Fonds)*



### Canada's Biggest Trailer

The Trent Valley Archives acquired a salesman's book of McGinnis Trailers [TVA Fonds 11] and also a notice of milk wagons built by H. B. McGinnis. The plant was at McDonnell and Bethune Streets, but in the 1960s moved to a plant on Lansdowne, east of Downers' Corners (Ashburnham Drive). So, I took extra interest in a news story [*Peterborough Review*, August 11, 1949] which showed the employees in front and above what was considered Canada's biggest trailer, which was 31 feet long. The trailer was built for Halliday's of Burlington who intended it for display. "The massive trailer will be complete with self-generating electricity, loud speakers, and platform for a twenty-piece orchestra." McGinnis was "famous" for its "silver" line of trailers as well as milk and bread delivery wagons and truck bodies." It was the largest in its field. In 1949, the plant had 16,000 square feet and employed 60 specialists. The names of the employees are contained in the caption of the picture. Harry B. McGinnis started the business in 1932. His home was on Belmont St. between Homewood and Hunter, a house inspired by the prairie architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright.

### Hubert Sills, Electrical Engineer

The CGE Peterborough Works News, for which we have a major run from 1943 to 2000, has been used by several researchers. One interesting biographical article featured Hubert R. Sills, who had just become a fellow of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers. [Works News, August 12, 1955, page 3]. His was a remarkable career. He designed the generators in over half of the electrical plants in Canada.

Plans Airport." R. C. Patterson, president of the Aeronautical Institute of Canada, at a meeting of 150 businessmen, stressed the importance of getting a 35 or 40-acre site. It was important to be in a position to act after the war. The speaker was introduced by Alderman Glover, seconded by H. L. Garner. "Mayor James Hamilton spoke and so did Senator J. J. Duffus, "for his efforts to secure an airfield." This is a missing link between the city's efforts to get a training school in 1940 and an airport on Chemong Road by 1947.

### Planning the Peterborough Airport

For several years, I have been hunting down the history of airports in Peterborough. But I came across an article in the *Peterborough Review*, June 24, 1943, which surprised me. The headline read "Peterborough



CGE UE protest in support of the striking Tilco Plastics workers, July 15, 1966. (Image Credit: TVA F1280, Tilco Strike Protest Fonds)




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## THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS!

On Sunday, November 23, we invited our volunteers to join us for our annual Volunteer Appreciation Event at the Highland Park Visitor Centre. Our Archivist, Elwood Jones, gave a well-received speech about each volunteer's contributions to the Trent Valley Archives. He and TVA President Maddie More presented two volunteer awards: the Keith Dinsdale Memorial Award for Outstanding Volunteer and a new award, the Herb Franklin Memorial Award for Extraordinary Service in Support of Trent Valley Archives.

2025 was a busy year for the Trent Valley Archives, with the Bicentennial of the Peter Robinson Emigration, one of our busiest walking tour seasons on record, our second Trent Valley Archives Theatre production, the release of several new publications, and the completion of projects contributing to our long-range plan. Without a

dedicated group of volunteers by our side, we would not have been able to take on all of the opportunities that came our way and have the successful year that we did. We want to thank every one of our volunteers for their unwavering support throughout the year!



2

**1. Trent Valley Archives volunteers at our Volunteer Appreciation Event, November 23, 2025.**

**2. Herb Franklin Award recipient Michael Parnell (pictured second from left) with TVA Archivist Elwood Jones (far left), Sue Franklin (second from right) and TVA President Maddie More (far right), November 23, 2025.**



3

**3. Keith Dinsdale Award recipient Ruth Kuchinad (pictured centre) with TVA Archivist Elwood Jones (left) and TVA President Maddie More (right), November 23, 2025.**

