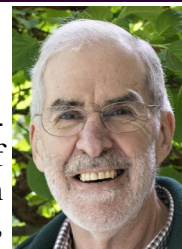




## From the President ...

Dale Standen



This issue of the *Bulletin* is different from issues of the past because of the COVID-19 emergency closures. The usual notices of public meetings, of reports on the previous month's lecture, and of programmed events at Hutchison House are absent. The House itself looks as inviting as ever, though perhaps a little lonely without the usual daily visits by staff, volunteers or guests. Like everyone else, we are all impatient to see the end of the pandemic and to resume our lives in what will be a new normal.

Even though all programming is suspended indefinitely, much work still goes on. There are annual reports and financial statements to produce, grant applications to write, summer and fall programming to prepare, capital and maintenance projects to arrange. The pandemic is forcing heritage organizations and museums everywhere to rethink the way programs can be adapted to the requirements of physical distancing. The PHS and Hutchison House are no exception. Hutchison House has lost all revenue from programs and events while closed and is projected to have dramatically reduced revenue when it is allowed to reopen. Thanks to the regular operating grants from the City of Peterborough and the Province, and to the expected emergency wage support recently enacted by the federal government, the Board of Directors is able to retain staff at the current level until 30 June. Like all not-for-profits, we face great uncertainties and challenges. Hutchison House is certain to face a severe annual deficit. In this emergency, I ask that you consider making a special donation to the PHS or to the Friends of Hutchison House using the donation form in this Bulletin. Many thanks in advance.

In the meantime, here are some updates:

**May 19<sup>th</sup> meeting and public lecture cancelled.** Both the scheduled public lectures of March (Sylvia Sutherland on her career) and May (Dennis Carter-Edwards on Peterborough's deserving poor) will be rescheduled in the following season of 2020-2021.

**Occasional Paper 2020 to be mailed.** The PHS Occasional Paper, the Proceedings of the public health conference of February 2019, will be mailed shortly to paid-up members for 2020. The several essays printed in the OP are especially topical in the current COVID-19 public health crisis.

**Annual General Meeting postponed.** Because of the pandemic restrictions, the PHS Board had to cancel the AGM and dinner originally scheduled for 21 April; the pandemic restrictions also interrupted the preparation of the necessary annual reports and business documents. The amendments to the PHS Bylaw will be presented to the membership at the AGM, once scheduled, for approval, and will be circulated and posted on the website in advance. The provincial emergency measures permit the postponement of AGMs, but also allow them to be held virtually because of the physical distancing restriction. The Board has yet to determine the format of the revised AGM. **Communication with members will be primarily by email and the PHS website. If you have not provided the Society with an email address, you may do so by sending your email and authorization to [info@peterboroughhistoricalsociety.ca](mailto:info@peterboroughhistoricalsociety.ca). Communication by email reduces the Society's costs and workload substantially.**

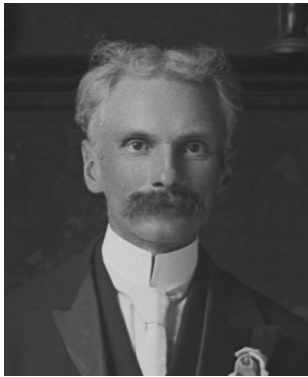
**Heritage Awards.** The deadline for receiving nominations has been extended, date to be determined and announced when circumstances permit. The presentation ceremony will be scheduled and announced at a suitable later date. The nomination form can be downloaded from the PHS website:  
<http://www.peterboroughhistoricalsociety.ca/awards.php>

## Spanish Flu meets COVID-19 in Peterborough

We've been here before. To find a precedent for the COVID-19 pandemic, many commentators have turned to the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918-19. Historical analogies can raise important questions for the present. Past events, however, have different contexts that render the drawing of exact parallels misleading. It may be of interest to reflect upon some similarities and differences between the experiences of 1918 and today.

At a general level, similarities of the two pandemics seem clear enough. Both are the result of novel viruses: the Spanish Flu was novel influenza H1N1, and COVID-19 is novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. Both viruses are highly contagious, having both adapted well to their human hosts from their native animal species. Both are respiratory diseases that attack the lungs. Both viruses show a significant mortality rate, which is the cause for alarm, although statistics in both cases are imprecise.

In 1918, the Medical Officer of Health for Peterborough, Dr. Hewitt Amys, attributed 31 deaths to the



Dr Hewitt Amys  
Peterborough Museum  
and Archives

Spanish flu and complications from pneumonia. These occurred in a three-week period in October-November. A proportional number of deaths with the City's population today would be 130. For Ontario, estimated deaths attributed to the Spanish flu in 1918-19 would translate in today's population to 46,500. No wonder public health authorities and governments are addressing the COVID-19 pandemic with urgency.

In 1918, the sciences of virology and epidemiology were in their infancy, as was the infrastructure of public health. It was known that viruses were transmitted by close personal contact and that they lingered on surfaces but the process at the cellular level was still a mystery. An influenza virus was not seen under a microscope until 1933. The only effective vaccine was against smallpox, which nevertheless still appeared in sporadic epidemics. Other contagious diseases that could kill, usually children, were endemic and also frequently epidemic: measles, diphtheria, typhoid fever, scarlet fever, tuberculosis. The fear of deadly disease that COVID-19 has aroused world-wide today was, in 1918, a more common life experience everywhere.

In contrast to the state of medical science in 1918, today a great deal more is known about viruses, and the edifice of public health is vastly more extensive and better prepared. At the same time, thanks to vaccines and other advances, recent generations in the developed world came to take for granted the near elimination of many deadly diseases. The experience of SARS and other recent viral outbreaks to some extent reawakened a concern that new diseases are a present danger.

In 1918, the responses of Boards of Health and governments to the Spanish flu were remarkably similar to current measures against the spread of COVID-19. They advocated and employed physical distancing, contact-tracing, hand washing, coughing and sneezing into handkerchiefs, isolation and disinfecting. At the peak of the epidemic in Peterborough, Dr. Amys closed theatres, dance halls, schools, Sunday schools and churches, and threatened to close all factories if things became desperate. When the hospitals were overwhelmed, in four days he turned the vacant Oriental Hotel on Hunter Street into an emergency hospital. Volunteers organized food delivery to flu victims isolated in their homes.

Some responses of citizens to emergency measures were also similar. Businesses pleaded in 1918, as now, for exemption from closure on grounds of special hardship or essential service. Amys held firm, though he compromised with the clergy whom he permitted one Sunday service before finally closing the churches.

In 1918, as now, opportunists and scammers blossomed. They preyed upon the fearful with promises of miracle protections against influenza, with names like Fruit-a-tives, Tanlac and Dr. Hamilton's Pills. My email spam folder receives daily urgent ads for products that claim to protect against COVID-19.

There are also notable differences between the Spanish flu of 1918 and COVID-19 today. Whereas mortality from COVID-19 appears highest among seniors over 60 and those with compromised health, mortality from the Spanish flu was uncharacteristically high among healthy adults between the ages of 25 and 50. The first confirmed death in Peterborough in October 1918 was a 22-year old male. Of the 29 severe cases admitted to the Nichols Hospital before the opening of the emergency hospital, only three were over 60 years of age. All the others were between the ages of 14 and 45.

Today, with a much larger proportion of the population over the age of 60, COVID-19 poses a danger of high mortality.

Another difference now from 1918 is the timing and extent of measures taken to limit the spread of the pandemic. In October 1918, Amys and the Board of Health were waiting for evidence of influenza becoming severe before ordering emergency closures. Unlike today, there were no means of testing for the virus and they were flying blind. By the time they imposed measures, the virus was already out of control and the death toll across the country was staggering.

Conditions that encourage a pandemic are found both in 1918 and today. The First World War aided the rapid spread of the Spanish flu with troop movements and increased international shipping; today's globalization in commerce, business and travel aid the rapid spread of COVID-19.

Our public health authorities today - federal, provincial and municipal - have been monitoring COVID-19 since first news from China in January. The capacity of public health agencies and private corporations, such as airlines, to communicate and trace individuals and their contacts is infinitely greater today than in 1918. Then, there was no radio, television or internet, and telephones were far from universal. Today, with radio, television, the internet and smart phones, campaigns to promote physical distancing, self-isolation and personal hygienic practices have bombarded us since before the first case of COVID-19 was detected in Canada. At the same time, social media facilitates the spread of misinformation.

It is yet to be seen whether all current emergency measures have succeeded sufficiently to "flatten the curve" of COVID-19 infections in Canada. Compared with 1918, draconian measures to control the pandemic are being taken much earlier, and more comprehensively, while infections and the death toll are still relatively low.

We won't know the outcome until the pandemic is past, and it will pass. What we do know is that authorities took lessons from the Spanish flu experience of 1918-19 to improve public health responses, and they will take lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well. SARS 2003, Ebola in Africa and measures taken in Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea against COVID-19 have shown that we already have knowledge to prevent or impede pandemics. Though essential, knowledge alone is not enough: it must be accepted and applied. Acceptance and application are political and cultural challenges, not medical scientific ones.

**Dale Standen**



Oriental Hotel  
Peterborough  
Museum and  
Archives



## Hutchison House Report

Gale Fewings



There are many things that I love about Hutchison House: the early morning sun bathing the keeping room in a warm glow that never fails to delight the senses; the faint smell of wood smoke; volunteers and visitors sharing their stories; getting up close and personal with the artefacts. It is the tangible things at the museum that I will miss once I've moved on. It has been a great honour and privilege to have spent so much time in such a charming old house.

I will, however, take a plethora of good memories that will last the rest of my lifetime (good Lord willing). I have gained a whole new family in the volunteers; I count many of them among my dearest friends and I hope to continue to see them in a different setting. This job has been a great learning experience and that knowledge too will stay with me.

I have an abiding appreciation for the resourcefulness of the early settlers and undying respect for our Indigenous peoples. Without the local Indigenous communities, the emigrants would certainly not have survived their first harsh winter.

As we attempt to navigate the 'new normal' due to the COVID-19 pandemic, life seems to be more of a struggle for some than others. There seem to be more questions than answers these days and one can only guess if or when things will return to some semblance of order and predictability.

We've all heard about the shortage of yeast in the stores because people have taken to baking bread and buns while staying home. One of my go-to settlers is Catharine Parr Traill who wrote "*The Canadian Settler's Guide*", first published in 1855. I'm sure that most members of the Peterborough Historical Society are already familiar with her writings.



Feather Pen



Fritillaria



Daffodils

In her guide, Catharine gives several recipes on fermentations for bread such as curing brewer's yeast, hop-rising, hop-yeast with potatoes, sugar-yeast, leaven cakes, buttermilk cakes, and salt-rising.

Mrs Traill's Bread Recipe: "Wash and pare half a pail of potatoes, taking care to remove all dark specks; throw them into a vessel of clean water as you pare them, as they are apt to acquire a brownish colour, which spoils the white and delicate appearance of the bread. Boil the potatoes till reduced to a pulp, bruising any lumps smooth with a wooden beetle or pounder: it will then have the consistency of thick gruel: when cool enough to bear your hand in it, stir in as much flour as will make the mixture the thickness of thick batter; add a good handful of salt, and two cupfuls of your hop barm or any good rising that you may have. A deep, red earthen pot, or a wooden pail, will be a good vessel to contain your sponge. It is a wise precaution to stand your vessel in a pan, as it is apt to flow over. If set to rise over-night, it will be risen time enough to work up in the morning early; in summer we seldom make this potato-bread, on account of the potatoes then not being so fit for the purpose, for, while young, they will not boil down so smoothly; but from the month of August till May, it may be made with great advantage. The quantity of sponge, above, will raise two large milk-dishes of flour, or about twenty pounds of flour. If you have a large kneading-trough, you can mix the whole at once, and knead it well and thoroughly; but if your trough be too small for convenience, divide your sponge, and make two masses of dough, working it very stiff on your board, scoring the top with a knife, and cover it up by the fire with a clean cloth; or you can make only half the quantity, using of course, less potatoes and water. In about two hours, or maybe longer, you will have a light dough, like a honeycomb, to make into loaves. When baked, take your bread out of the pan, wet the crust of your loaves over with clean water or milk, and wrap them in a clean cloth, setting them up on one side against a shelf till cold. This plan keeps the bread from becoming hard and dry. For lightness, sweetness and economy this is the best bread I know, resembling really good baker's bread in texture and look. I cordially recommend it to the attention of the Canadian housewife."

We sometimes forget that modern times lead to time saving conveniences. Making bread today can be done in a few hours with a package of yeast instead of two days as in Mrs. Traill's day.



Hutchison House Oatmeal & Molasses Bread





**PETERBOROUGH  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY**

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*NOTE: Until further notice  
please use email only as a  
method of contact.*

## Volunteer Opportunities

The Peterborough Historical Society has openings for volunteers to serve on the volunteer Board of Directors. Experience in finance, management, human resources, office administration or project management are of particular interest. The time commitment is approximately 6-9 hours per month.

As a member, you know that the PHS is one of Ontario's oldest historical societies. It serves to preserve, promote and engage the public in the rich heritage of the community. The Society owns and operates Hutchison House Museum, a gem of our built heritage and a site where citizens encounter the history of the city and region.

The Board has approved a strategic plan with exciting and ambitious goals. Service as a Director is an opportunity to work with a dedicated team of staff and volunteers in a worthy and rewarding community enterprise.

For further information email: [info@peterboroughhistoricalsociety.ca](mailto:info@peterboroughhistoricalsociety.ca); phone: 705-740-2600.



### PETERBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY SPECIAL DONATION

I wish to make a special donation to the Peterborough Historical Society to assist with the operation of Hutchison House in the challenging circumstance of the COVID-19 pandemic. Please allocate my donation as follows:

☐ Peterborough Historical Society

☐ Friends of Hutchison House

I wish to pay by:

Cheque: ☐ Make payable to the Peterborough Historical Society

Credit Card: ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard

Name on card: \_\_\_\_\_

Card #: \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date: (mm/yy) (\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_)

Security Code: (\_\_\_\_) (3 digit # on back of card)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail payment to: Peterborough Historical Society, 270 Brock Street, Peterborough, ON K9H 2P9

The Peterborough Historical Society acknowledges with thanks the support of the City of Peterborough, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport of Ontario, and the Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough.

