



PETERBOROUGH

HISTORICAL SOCIETY | EST. 1897

Issue 483

February 2022

PETERBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The winter and spring monthly meetings and speaker series will remain virtual and continue our regular schedule on the **third Tuesday of the month: January, February, March and May at 7:30 p.m.** The meetings will be conducted on Zoom with a question and answer period following the speaker's presentation. Attendees will be provided with the link to join meetings when they register by email to the email address provided.

“The Lakefield College School Archives: A Powerful History Teaching Tool” Wendy Darby

Wendy Darby is a teacher and archivist at Lakefield College School. A strong believer in the active use of archival collections, Wendy incorporates archival resources to bring the history curriculum to life. Originating in the early days of Samuel Strickland, Lakefield College School has played an important role in the development of the community as well as in the broader field of education. Wendy's talk on the scope and use of this cultural asset provides a window into a significant local historical treasure.



Tuesday, 15 February 2022, 7:30 p.m. on Zoom. Register to attend by sending an email note to info@peterboroughhistoricalsociety.ca with “Archive” in the subject line. Deadline to register is noon, 15 February.

“Ways To Give”

<https://phs-hutchisonhouse.ca/support/donate/>

Peterborough Historical Society and Hutchison House Museum, like all heritage organizations, depend upon donations to meet operating expenses in providing all their programs and events.

Thank you for your generous support!

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.



UPCOMING EVENTS

**Peterborough Historical
Society**

**Monthly Meeting
by Zoom
Members must register**

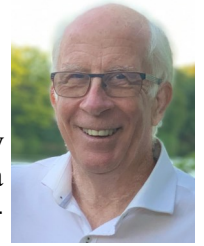
**PHS Zoom Meeting
at 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, 15 February
Speaker Wendy Darby
Tuesday, 15 March
Speaker Michael Chappell
Tuesday, 19 April
Peterborough Historical
Society AGM
Tuesday, 17 May
Speaker Dennis Carter-
Edwards**

**Hutchison House
Museum**

See our website and social media channels for all up to date information regarding the museum's COVID-19 regulations and events.

From the President ...

Bob Taylor-Vaisey



First and foremost, we have bolstered our staff with the appointment of Alice McMurtry to a part-time position as Assistant Curator of Hutchison House Museum. Alice joined us for a six-month contract in 2021 and we are delighted that she can bring a considerable amount of expertise to the Museum.

I indicated in the January *Bulletin* that there will be a number of vacancies on the Board and a need for volunteers for various committees. In this issue, we have identified the opportunities to expand the composition of the Board.

Our Annual General Meeting is not too far away; you will find an announcement about the AGM later in this *Bulletin*.

We face some interesting challenges in 2022: to ensure a diverse and skilled Board, to create a robust sponsorship and fundraising program, to publish our 43rd Occasional Paper and to take a new look at programming and exhibits. There are no roles too small, and no expectations too broad. What we also know is that small historical societies and local museums are in a new era of transforming from the way we were to the way we need to be.

The Peterborough Historical Society and Hutchison House Museum boast an enviable reputation in our province, and, with your ideas, commitment and energy, will carry that reputation on. How will we define what that new norm will be? With your help and support. Do not hesitate to send me any suggestions at bob.taylorvaisey@gmail.com or info@peterboroughhistoricalsociety.ca.

The Peterborough Historical Society Board of Directors

Are you looking for a unique volunteer leadership opportunity? The Board of Directors of the Peterborough Historical Society offers opportunities for a number of leadership skills and interests.

- governance
- community collaboration
- member engagement and recruitment
- marketing
- financial oversight
- legal oversight
- human resources
- program development
- writing, editing and publishing
- philanthropy/fundraising

The Society depends upon energetic, active people who want to do something different and interesting, and to join others in contributing to a worthwhile community enterprise. All experience and expertise are welcome: business, not-for-profit, public service, education, heritage, trades, professions, hobbies. The community's history is inclusive.

The Peterborough Historical Society is one of the oldest in Ontario. It provides a monthly speaker series, publishes a monthly Bulletin and an annual historical paper, presents annual heritage awards and engages in community outreach. It owns and operates Hutchison House Museum, an acclaimed historic house museum that offers a wide range of school and public programs and events illuminating local history.

Explore the PHS website for further information: www.phs-hutchisonhouse.ca.

Expressions of interest and further inquiries should be directed to:

Bob Taylor-Vaisey, c/o Peterborough Historical Society

Phone: 705-740-2600; Email: info@peterboroughhistoricalsociety.ca

Postal address: 270 Brock Street, Peterborough ON, K9H 2P9.

PHS Previous Month's Meeting "John A. Macdonald, Elizabeth Hall and Beavermead Farm"

The January lecture featured a tale of mystery, intrigue and possible romance. The speaker, local author Ken Brown, tackled a long-held myth that Sir John A. Macdonald had a romantic connection with a Peterborough widow, Elizabeth Hall, the wife of the late George Baker Hall. The myth stemmed from a letter Elizabeth wrote to Macdonald in 1861 addressed to "My loved John" and signed "love from loving Lizzie."

George Baker Hall came with his family to Peterborough and acquired the government mill on the west bank of the Otonabee River from his father. Prominent in law, business, land dealings and politics, Hall died in February 1858 leaving his widow and four young children to struggle with his substantial indebtedness and irate creditors along with the 471 acres of land that he bought on the east bank of Little Lake and named Beavermead.

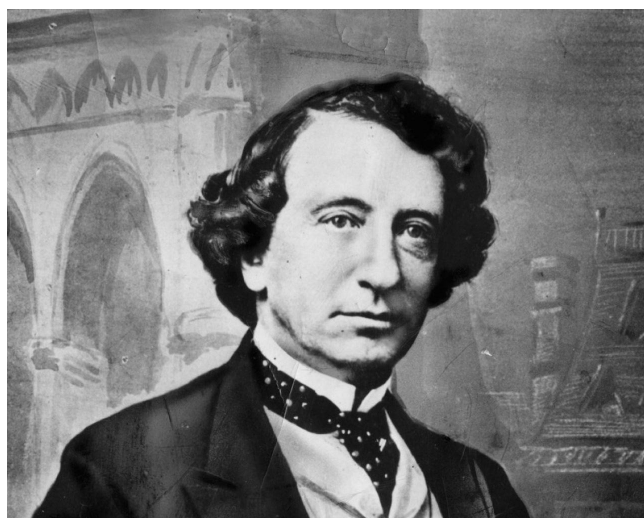
The three executors of Hall's estate, his father John, Thomas Fortye and leading businessman Robert Nicholls, struggled to convert the estate's assets to cash to pay off the debts. Finally, at a sheriff's auction, John A. Macdonald, acting through his local agent and friend, Robert Dennistoun, purchased all the property. This was a financial gamble but Macdonald was hopeful that subsequent subdivisions and the sale of individual parcels, especially along the waterfront, would recoup his costs.

Through meticulous research, the speaker highlighted the various attempts by Macdonald to unload his Peterborough property at as much of a profit as possible. In this, he was only partially successful as numerous attempts to create subdivisions failed. The land was eventually sold in large blocks to only a handful of buyers.

While the property today is very valuable – the new Canadian Canoe Museum will be a centerpiece of this land – this was not the case in the mid nineteenth century. Railway tracks of the Cobourg and Peterborough Railway bisected the land and sawmills and breweries and other enterprises all added their industrial biproducts into the environment.

But what of the "love connection" between Macdonald and Elizabeth? While both were grieving the loss of spouses at similar times, Ken found no "smoking gun" to prove definitively that there was ever an intimate link between the two. Although Macdonald took a personal interest in the family and helped to find a career for Elizabeth's son, the political friendship that he formed with George and an abiding affection for Elizabeth may or may not have led to a proposal for marriage. The historical evidence is inconclusive. Elizabeth died young at age 41 in 1865. Perhaps, as Ken concluded, having endured the hardship of watching his first wife suffer and die, Macdonald was unwilling to be nurse to an unwell partner.

Dennis Carter-Edwards



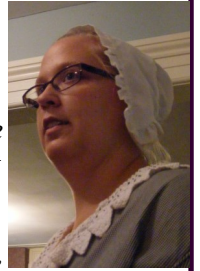
John A. Macdonald
(Google)



Elizabeth Hall
(Hall-D'Olier
fonds, 2021-
020,
Peterborough
Museum and
Archives)

Hutchison House Report

Erin Panepinto



“What a different winter this has been to what I had anticipated. The snows of December were continually thawing; on the 1st of January not a flake was to be seen on our clearing, though it lingered in the bush. The warmth of the sun was so great on the first and second days of the new year that it was hardly possible to endure a cloak, or even shawl, out of doors; and within, the fire was quite too much for us.... The 1st of March was the coldest day and night I ever experienced in my life; the mercury was down to twenty-five degrees in the house... during this very cold weather I was surprised by the frequent recurrence of a phenomenon that I suppose was of an electrical nature. When the frosts were most intense I noticed that when I undressed, my clothes, which are at this cold season chiefly of woollen cloth, or lined with flannel, gave out when moved a succession of sounds, like the crackling and snapping of fire and in the absence of a candle emitted sparks of a pale whitish blue light, similar to the flashes produced by cutting loaf-sugar in the dark or stroking the back of a black cat; the same effect was also produced when I combed and brushed my hair.”

(Excerpt of a letter, 9 May 1833, Catharine Parr Traill, *Backwoods of Canada*)

Much like the cold winter described by Catharine Parr Traill in 1833, winter in Ontario has been slow to start this year; this week, however, has finally seen what we would consider normal temperatures and the snow looks like it may in fact be here to stay. While advances in modern technology have mostly prevented the dryness in the air that causes the static electricity that Catharine describes, I still receive shocks every time I turn on the bathroom light or open the filing cabinet from January to March.

The museum began January 2022, unfortunately, the same way it began January 2021: closed. Once again, rising numbers of COVID-19 throughout the province have put a strain on our healthcare system and museums were one of the many businesses forced to close their doors to the public for the time being. Staff and volunteers are still working hard behind the scenes to keep the museum going and we thank everyone for their continued support and patience.

Please check our website and social media channels for all up-to-date information.

A BIG thank you to Rachel Baker, Don Willcock and Linda Chandler for helping with the food preparation for our curbside Hogmanay meals as well as filming our first footing. You will find our first footing video on the Hutchison House Museum YouTube channel:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQvUNc56VBwk9xVqN_Lqnyg.

Display cases at Hutchison House Museum



Notice of Annual General Meeting of Members

In accordance with Provincial authorization, notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the Peterborough Historical Society will be held by means of a **ZOOM webcast meeting on Tuesday, 19 April 2022, at 7:00 p.m.** for the following purpose:

1. To elect Directors
2. To appoint Auditors for the Corporation and to authorize the Board of Directors to fix their remuneration
3. To receive the Financial Statements for 2021, reviewed by Tim Nicholls, Chartered Accountant
4. To transact such other business as may properly come before the meeting.

Only paid-up members of record at the close of business on 15 April 2022 will be entitled to attend and vote at the meeting. **If you will be attending by joining the Zoom meeting, register by responding by email to: dstanden@trentu.ca, before 5:00 p.m. Friday, 15 April 2022.**

Members who wish to attend and participate, but who have not yet provided an email address to the Society, should do so before 15 April 2022 addressed to D. Standen, Secretary, Peterborough Historical Society: dstanden@trentu.ca.

Several days prior to the AGM meeting date, an email will be sent to **registered eligible members of record** with the link and password enabling them to join the meeting at the scheduled time.

All reports, documents and other materials for the AGM will be posted when available in advance on the website of the Peterborough Historical Society: www.phs-hutchisonhouse.ca.

Dated at Peterborough this 21st day of January, 2022.

Dale Standen, Secretary

Display cases at Hutchison House Museum





**PETERBOROUGH
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

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Museum**

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phs-hutchisonhouse.ca/

Hutchison House:
[phs-hutchisonhouse.ca/
hutchison-house/](http://phs-hutchisonhouse.ca/hutchison-house/)

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Voices of Peterborough's Past A Reminder of Peterborough's Industrial Past

Victoria Place is a 45-year-old community of retirement homes on the west shore of Pigeon Lake. Several weeks ago, during a property cleanup, the directors uncovered two six-foot long pieces of cast iron. They noted the reverse-embossed print declaration "Jos Peacock & Son Peterboro" at the bottom of one of the pieces. Their prospective journey to the scrap metal yard was delayed while one director sent these photos to the Peterborough Historical Society. Did we know anything about what the castings were for and who Joe Peacock was?

The many local foundries were a key part of Peterborough's manufacturing history. Numerous castings similar to these and iron thresholds abound on the storefronts of the city's old downtown on Water, King, Simcoe, Hunter, and other streets. The names on them include John Whyte, Central Iron/Bridgeworks, Wm Hamilton Manufacturing Co., and Moffatt and King. The oldest threshold marking is for Wm Helm, 1863.

Joseph Peacock (1846-1911), a "moulder" by trade, was engaged in foundry work in Peterborough and elsewhere for at least 35 years. Beginning at the Ashburnham Mowry foundry in the 1870s, he had later stints with both the Wm Hamilton Company on Reid Street and later, Walter Green's establishment on McDonnell Street. For a short period around 1897 he operated a foundry in his own name.

When I sent this information to the owners of the castings, I suggested to them that they had some fine pieces that recalled both the character of architectural building components for local commercial storefronts, and the excellent local manufacturing capabilities of Peterborough in the late 19th century. I volunteered that if the owners had no love for them, I would be happy to assist with a possible repatriation to Peterborough. For several weeks I heard nothing. And then, a note stating that the board had agreed to give them to me "for your collection". When and where should they deliver? I do collect many things, but in the interests of matrimonial harmony, have not engaged with 250-300 pound pieces of ironwork. Kathleen and I drove up to Victoria Place to take a look. We determined that the two objects had at one point been one ornamental piece just over 12 feet long. They had been relaxing half-buried in the dirt behind the old barn for over 100 years with no signs of rust. Quality Peterborough workmanship!

It made sense to me that the two pieces of cast iron could easily become an outdoor horizontal display somewhere in town. A local businessman I approached with this idea declared them to be "super-cool" and said that he was sure he could find a place to display them. Hopefully, this will happen. When and where? We will let you know.

Ken Brown

