

# Historically Speaking

The Newsletter of the Cobourg and District  
Historical Society

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## The Secret Life of William Lyon Mackenzie King

On January 23, 2018, we will be hosting Professor Christopher Dummitt, Professor of History at Trent University's School for the Study of Canada and also the co-founder of the Canada 150 project. Dr. Dummitt will be talking about the secret life of William Lyon Mackenzie King who served as Prime Minister for twenty two years and died as a respected but not particularly charismatic leader. After his death, Mackenzie King's private diaries were made public and the world learned that he was a man who led a double life. He was an eccentric bachelor who communed with the spirit world, his deceased mother, and his beloved dog Pat. He also connected with prostitutes believing that he could "save" them. Christopher Dummitt's recently published book, *Unbuttoned: The Secret Life of William Lyon Mackenzie King* is about both the story of the man and the story of the diaries themselves. This promises to be an intriguing evening which will raise questions about the public *vs.* private persona, the role of executors in destroying documents, the role of historians in exposing secrets and, of course, who William Lyon Mackenzie King really was. You can read more about Professor Dummitt at <https://www.christopherdummitt.com/>.

Learn all of this and more in this fascinating presentation on Tuesday, January 23, at Victoria Hall. Doors open at 7:00 PM for coffee and cookies, before the meeting begins at 7:30 PM. It will probably be a cold evening so button up. If, due to inclement weather, the meeting must be cancelled notification will be sent to members by email. Admission, including refreshments, is free for members and \$5 for non-members. Annual membership is \$25 for individuals and \$30 for a family. All are welcome so bring a friend or two!

## Our Previous Meeting

### The Northwest Passage: A Trip through Time

The Northwest Passage is Canada's northern gateway. Phyllis Durnford, who is so passionate about the Arctic that she has visited our Far North three times, presented a travelogue about her most recent trip. Phyllis noted: "By now everyone knows about the Franklin Expedition, but there's much more to the story of the Northwest Passage. People have been using that route since the end of the last Ice Age and the time of the Bering Land Bridge." She took us on a journey using numerous photographs and personal reminiscences that demonstrated just how profoundly the lifestyle of the Inuit has changed. In one generation they have literally gone from igloos to microwaves!



## ***Damnatio Memoriae* and Sir John A.**



No historic figure – Tommy Douglas, Queen Victoria, Egerton Ryerson or even Sir John A. Macdonald – can emerge unscathed from scrutiny based on currently fashionable standards of justice and decency. It might be understandable if the newly minted opprobrium resulted from previously concealed transgressions such as those revealed in King’s diaries. However, in most cases the “shocking” and “disgusting” actions were widely known and approved of by the target’s peers.

In pursuit of political correctness and respect for the delicate sensibilities of today’s students, the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO) has demanded that all schools whose names recognize a Father of Confederation and our first Prime Minister be renamed. It is understandable that elementary teachers, having little necessary passion for history, could be duped into supporting erasure of the past in order to foster the latest notions of political correctness. However, it seems inconceivable that an organization of professional historians and whose sole *raison d’être* is the study of history could do the same. Yet the Canadian Historical Association (CHA) has also succumbed to similar sophomoric demands. Two thousand years later we still attempt Roman *damnatio memoriae*!

The following article by Professor Bradley, reproduced here with permission, was published in the December 23, 2017 edition of the *National Post*:

The august Canadian Historical Association’s pronouncement that the name of Sir John A. Macdonald should be removed highlights the depths to which our intellectual associations have fallen. Every past luminary had faults, warts, and held ethical positions that might seem “wrong” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the notions espoused and implemented by Sir John A. Macdonald were held by and approved of by the vast majority of his peers. It makes no sense for any historical understanding to apply a modern mode to a past context -- that past must be viewed and studied within its own

narrative and we do a disservice to ourselves by attempting to rewrite our past via this form of removal, which can only lead to a history devoid of debate.

The membership of the CHA must oppose this recommendation and might also suggest that those who advocate such historical revisionism step down to be replaced by those who more truly understand the role and place of the study of history, especially at the public school levels, in a modern evolving society.

*Dr. Jon Bradley, Associate Professor, McGill University; Beaconsfield, PQ*

The pandering to a vocal minority's demands to destroy memories of our first Prime Minister has recently expanded. The Kingston building used by Macdonald for his law offices from 1849 to 1860 has been occupied by a pub named "Sir John's Public House" for many years. To avoid controversy it has recently been renamed "The Public House". The exterior plaque erected by Parks Canada to commemorate Macdonald's use of the building is expected to remain at least for now. I am not certain that Sir John would drink to the changes!



## Cockburn Plaque Unveiled

On December 5 a group of dignitaries including local politicians and representatives from Parks Canada unveiled a plaque in Victoria Hall celebrating James Cockburn's national



historic significance. Speakers included Councillor Aaron Burchat (representing His Worship Gil Brocanier), Rob Washburn and Rob Franklin (photo to the left) who provided a convincing impression of Cockburn.

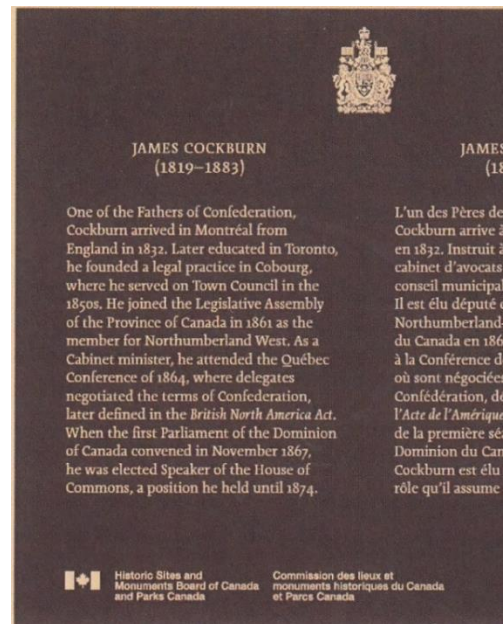
### **Cockburn Backgrounder**

*(Courtesy of Parks Canada)*

James Cockburn is one of the Fathers of Confederation.

In 1864, he attended the Québec

Conference, during which delegates negotiated the terms of Confederation, later defined in the British North America Act of 1867, which helped to build the constitutional foundations for a new country called the Dominion of Canada. After Confederation, Cockburn was the first Speaker of the House of Commons.



Born in England, Cockburn moved to Montréal with his family in 1832. As a young man, he studied law in Toronto and then established a legal practice in Cobourg, Ontario. In the 1850s, Cockburn entered politics, serving as a town councillor in Cobourg before entering the legislature of the Province of Canada as the representative for West Northumberland in 1861. After initially opposing their politics, he soon came to support such Liberal-Conservatives as John A. Macdonald. A Cabinet minister, in 1864, he attended the Québec Conference, where delegates negotiated the terms of federal union within British North America. When the first session of the first Parliament of the new Dominion of Canada convened in November 1867, Cockburn was elected Speaker of the House of Commons, a position he held until 1874.

Cockburn lost his seat in 1873, but he returned to the House of Commons in 1878. He pursued patronage throughout his political career, receiving some support from Macdonald, who set him to work on the codification of Dominion Statutory Law in 1881. [*Derogatory comment copied verbatim from the document provided by Parks Canada.*] Cockburn's health was declining by this time. He died in 1883. James Cockburn has been well-remembered in the town of Cobourg. A room in Victoria Hall has been refurbished to resemble the offices used by Cockburn in 1860-65, and since the late 1990s, the civic holiday in August has been known as James Cockburn Day.

## Membership Matters

### *In Memoriam*

Doreen West, a long-time CDHS member, passed away in November of 2017. She was born in the village of Baltimore and lived there most of her life. Renowned for her great love of history, Doreen wisely realized that the history of her village needed to be recorded for posterity, so she did it! Her detailed, well-researched history book entitled *Baltimore Memories* includes many invaluable photographs, family histories and stories that might otherwise have been lost.

Doreen was also gifted in the art of needlework. She immortalized her childhood in



Baltimore in an ambitious and well-executed masterpiece in fabric, measuring three metres by one metre. Using the appliqué technique, her brilliant creation in the folk art style is historically accurate in its illustration of the streetscape of the village and many people, both young and old, at work and play. It

evokes her childhood in the 1930s and 1940s when Baltimore was a bustling village with many stores and services.

In 2012, when Doreen was our guest speaker at CDHS, she delighted us by displaying her colourful mural and explaining each of the many scenes. It now hangs in the Hall of the Baltimore Recreation Centre. The young Doreen was a figure skater and a member of Baltimore's Silverblades. Another needlework art piece that Doreen created features a skating theme. She sewed herself into this one, along with her other Silverblades friends. This work is appropriately displayed in the foyer of the Arena of the Recreation Centre.

Doreen will be remembered as an historian and needleworker par excellence. We are fortunate that she had the foresight and the ambition to immortalize Baltimore in both the printed word and in her needlework depictions of the past.

Take a drive to the Baltimore Recreation Centre, located on Community Centre Road, to see this wonderful woman's creative genius.

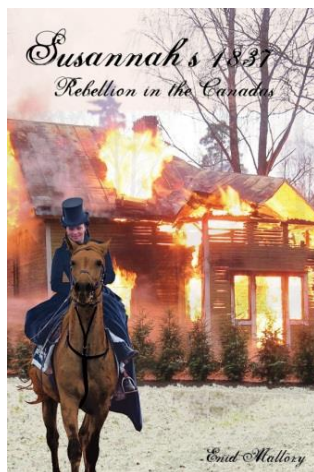
### ***Executive Position***

Unfortunately, personal obligations in other areas of their lives have led several members of the CDHS executive to make the difficult decision to resign from the board. Fortunately George Kamphorst has agreed to fill the position of Treasurer and Diane Chin is our new Programme Chairperson. If you have some free time and would like to assist our society please consider applying for the position of Membership Coordinator. Contact any member of the executive to discuss this opportunity.

## **Announcements**

### ***Rebellion of 1837***

Enid Mallory, a Peterborough author with 11 other published books, has recently completed



a new work: *Susannah's 1837: Rebellion in the Canadas*. It is available both as an eBook and in a paperback edition. This historical novel set in Toronto during the William Lyon Mackenzie uprising in Lower Canada describes a year of profound change for Canada. In 1837 we become a kinder, more tolerant people but not without pain and suffering and death for many in Upper Canada and many more in Lower Canada. Canada's coming-of-age story is told through the eyes of young Susannah. Although born into Toronto's privileged Family Compact she now has to deal with dramatic change in her family and her heart as she learns about death and loyalty and love.

The Kindle eBook is available from Amazon Canada (<https://www.amazon.ca/>) for ca\$4.99 and the paperback edition can be ordered from Amazon (<https://www.amazon.com/>) for us\$15.99.

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