



# THE COBALT LODGE

Newsletter of the Cobalt Historical Society

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## Still Standing (and we want to keep it that way.)

Following notice of Cobalt's intent to designate the Right of Way site on the Heritage Silver Trail Ontario Northland Railway installed temporary barriers and no trespassing signs on two sites: The Townsite and the Right of Way. ONR is the property owner, and they are conducting safety and structural assessments. We do not know when the testing will commence, or how long the sites will be closed. We are concerned that "temporary" barriers might turn into permanent ones.

### Only Four Still Standing

How many headframes of this vintage are still standing? There are seven in all. If you consider the buildings that are still on the original ground and have not been re-purposed, there are four.

Just four.

One is the Waldman, another is the Provincial. Both of these have been fenced off and allowed to die a slow, natural, if undignified death.

### The Townsite Mine Trail Site #1

Then we have the Townsite Mine at the south end of the Cobalt. It has surely escaped calamity over the years. Local residents will recall when in 1987 the "world's biggest pothole" appeared on the highway adjacent to the Townsite property. Subsidence due to underground mining caused the collapse.

The Townsite was chosen as the starting point of the Heritage Silver Trail. The opening ceremonies were

held in front of the headframe in 1999.

Since then, more holes have opened on the property. Last year, fencing around the open cut near the parking lot was enlarged to secure the space. Due to the ground conditions however, we are unable to contemplate the major expenditures that would be required to restore the building. It would cost tens of thousands of dollars to conduct feasibility studies alone.

### The Right of Way Mine Trail Site #9

At the north end of Cobalt Lake, is the Right of Way, arguably the best preserved and iconic of the four still standing on their original footings. The Cobalt Historical Society has spent close to \$100,000 on this site over the years. We shored up the foundation and replaced the roof and installed new floors and stairs inside.

As you know, that roof is now leaking. We want to safeguard our investment as well as the building. We are grateful for our steadfast membership who have donated generously to help raise money for repairs.

### Our Concerns

But now, we have a problem. Do we continue to raise the money not knowing if we will have a roof to fix at the end of the day?

A greater and more frustrating concern is that the barriers that were installed do not completely secure the site. Many visitors will continue to use the property as before, especially those with vandalism in mind. We are prohibited from entering the site to clean up and repair damage. We, the guardians of the site, are unable to do our job to keep the buildings secure.

### How you can help

If you wish to comment on the situation, or if you have questions of Ontario Northland Railway, please contact Erin Mullens at [Erin.Mullens@ontarionorthland.ca](mailto:Erin.Mullens@ontarionorthland.ca). Handwritten letters are great, too. Address them to Erin Mullens, Legal Services & Corporate Governance Department, 555 Oak Street East, North Bay, ON P1B 8L3 Tel: 705-472-4500, ext. 361



Barriers erected at the Townsite and Right of Way sites.

*continued*

## Still Standing (continued)

One such letter sent to ONR regarding closure of the Right of Way follows:

Dear Erin: I am a member of the Cobalt Historical Society as well as several industrial heritage groups. I am hoping that Ontario Northland will partner with the Cobalt Historical Society in protecting the Right of Way site. It is a remarkable building and one of few remaining mining buildings that combine the function of the headframe and rockhouse.

In my humble opinion it is imperative that the site be protected. I recognize that the site being owned by Ontario Northland sort of complicates preservation efforts.

The building is too unique to be allowed to self destruct.

Respectfully, Mike O'Byrne

And he shared the response from the ONR:

Hello Mike,

Thanks for taking the time to share your knowledge and interest in the headframes. We too value the importance and significance of mining to the development of the North.

Ontario Northland's top priority is the safety of the public. As the owners of the site, we had to make the difficult but necessary decision to temporarily restrict access to the sites while an environmental and mining assessment is completed to fully understand the hazards.

It is anticipated that the assessment will begin in June 2021 and take approximately six months to complete. At that time we should have a better understanding of how the site can be maintained and used in the safest manner possible.

We will keep all stakeholders and members of the public informed on results of the assessment.

Thank you,

Renée Baker, Communications Manager

Ontario Northland

[renee.baker@ontarionorthland.ca](mailto:renee.baker@ontarionorthland.ca)

And so we watch and wait.

## Remembering Eric E. Smith



*Eric Smith ca 1953  
John Hunt photo*

Sally Smith Cameron Naftel wrote to us about her father Eric Easter Smith and provided clippings from her family scrapbook. Combined with records in our files, we are delighted to share musical memories of this most community-minded Cobalter.

Eric Smith was born in Kent, England and he began to learn music when he was five. His family came to Toronto when he was six, and moved to New Liskeard ten years later. Sally said that her father played a variety of instruments and when he was 20, he began to teach in the Tri-Town area. "Dad was hired by the school boards to teach music and conduct orchestra and band in the high schools." He also taught violin to individual students. Smith was president of the Ontario Registered Music Teachers' Association, and worked each year for the music festivals where an award was presented in his name.

Smith founded and conducted a community orchestra called the Haydn Concert Orchestra which brought together players from New Liskeard, Haileybury, and Cobalt. For over three decades, the orchestra presented two classical music concerts each



*Leader of the band: Eric Smith back row, next to the bass player. 1950*



*Eric Smith and his string orchestra, 1925. Eric seated in the front row, just left of the music stand.*

The clothing stores were located on Silver Street, at street level beneath the Legion.

“My mother teamed up with a friend and opened the Olive Susan Dress Shop. Both businesses flourished in the early 1950s and until dad’s death in 1957. Mother closed both stores and retired from business in 1958.”

The community-minded Mr. Smith served on the Cobalt-Coleman public school board for ten years. He was on Town Council for five years and worked as Board of Works chairman, as well as financial chair in 1957. He was a director of the Business Men’s Association and a board member of the Cobalt Branch of the VON.

He was also active in the spiritual health of the community. He conducted services in the Lakeview Bible Chapel and was one of the forces behind the South Temiskaming Camp of the Gideons. He was “well known throughout the district as a lay preacher at many Protestant churches.”

When he died in 1957, he had been a resident of Cobalt for 28 years. Left to mourn were his daughter Sally Rose Smith, a teacher at North Cobalt, and his wife, the former Olive Caroline McMillan. The family lived at 66 Jamieson Street, Cobalt.

In tribute to this remarkable man, all places of business in Cobalt were closed the afternoon of his funeral.

*From the family scrapbook – Olive and Eric Smith in front of their stores on Silver Street.*



year. “The 25-piece orchestra, the first and only one of its type in Temiskaming district, has distinguished itself in many centres across the north.”

“After he retired from music, my dad opened a menswear store where he sold top quality merchandise.”

CONGRATULATIONS  
**COBALT**  
on Your  
**50 YEARS of PROGRESS**

You'll be the target for admiring glances when you choose your new suit from our striking selection of smart styles, custom-tailored for extra quality. Single-breasted, two-button and one-button links, and double-breasted.

Shine in Nylon, basket weave and everglided! New versions of an old favorite. The classic done on smooth lines with an interesting button arrangement above the waist and pegged with deep pockets below. You'll love it as always in natural, you'll love it more in the new pastels.

**ERIC E. SMITH** | **OLIVE SUSAN SHOP**  
MEN'S AND BOYS' WEAR | LADIES' WEAR  
99 1/2 Silver Street | Dial 4886 | Silver Street | Dial 4693



### Collectibles: Old Stock Certificates.

Board member Reiner Mielke is compiling a database of silver mining companies for all of the Temiskaming region. He has about 1,850 names to date, and for many of them he has images of the share certificates. But he did not have this one. Note the name of the owner of the shares: the one and only, Alfred LaRose!

CHS member Shirley Gilson sent us the photo. Also known as “Shirlock the Stock Detective”, Shirley offers a service to help people uncover information about mining companies connected to old share certificates, and whether the company is still incorporated. If you wish to engage her services, email [sagilson@gmail.com](mailto:sagilson@gmail.com) for details.

**Submissions** for the Newsletter are most welcome and needed. So if you have some piece of history to share please let us know. Send them to [chs@heritagesilvertrail.ca](mailto:chs@heritagesilvertrail.ca)

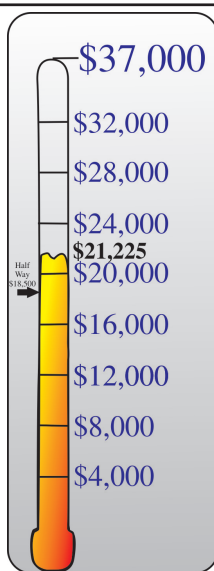


## Fund Raising Update

We are over half-way to our goal for the roof repairs with \$21,225 in donations. Yes, we continue...

Donations by mail are fine or you could send us an Interac e-transfer from your bank using this email address: [chs@heritagesilvertrail.ca](mailto:chs@heritagesilvertrail.ca)

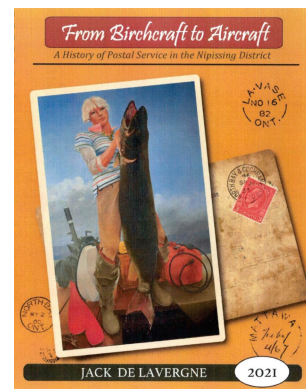
Together is the way it works. Thank you.



### New books

Recently, we received two books. *TW and Mary Foster in Northern Ontario* is the story of photographer and entrepreneur Thomas Wilfred Foster and his wife, written by his grandson, John Weatherburn. The story is well illustrated by Foster’s photos from the very early days of Cobalt, Haileybury, Porcupine and Kirkland Lake. Weatherburn draws on grandmother’s memoirs to string the story together. Debra North tells us that John’s “grandparents married June 19, 1909 in Haileybury. They never lived in Cobalt.” Foster was in town to document the aftermath of the July 1909 fire. To acquire a copy, contact [jweatherburn74@gmail.com](mailto:jweatherburn74@gmail.com)

Jack de la Vergne’s book, *From Birchcraft to Aircraft a History of Postal Service in the Nipissing District* is a full-colour show-piece that clearly demonstrates the author’s passion for documenting local history. A quote from the back cover says, “Inside is found a treasure trove of philatelic gems that are sequenced to reflect the fascinating history of this portion of northern Ontario.”



Even though, as Jack cautioned, only 3 of the 308 pages refer to Cobalt, local historians will appreciate the work. “Of 250 published copies, 150 have been sold and about 60 copies have been provided to local museums, libraries, family members and contributors. The remaining copies are earmarked for a sales venue at the North Bay museum when Covid finally surrenders.” We are indeed grateful to be one of the recipients.

### 1972 Oral Histories: an update

At the Cobalt Public Library, we found two binders of oral histories that were compiled in 1972. The library had already digitized the Cobalt residents’ interviews some years ago and made them available on their website. These new binders contain stories from Haileybury, North Cobalt and out of town residents. Summer library staff will scan the two newly discovered binders of interviews. As well, they will compile an index of all the names that appear in the 1972 histories.

### Membership Renewals

Stay current with our website and Facebook page. Thank you for renewing in 2021.