



# THE COBALT LODGE

Newsletter of the Cobalt Historical Society

Box 309, Cobalt, ON P0J 1C0      [cobalthistoricalsociety.ca](http://cobalthistoricalsociety.ca)

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## Former Cobalt Nurse Annie Saunders wins 'Order of the North' Award

In 2018, while writing *The Sterling Women of Cobalt 1903-191*, a book that features Cobalt's first nurse, author Debra North approached the Cobalt Historical Society, and asked that we write a letter in support of nominating Annie Saunders for the Order of the North. At that time, the Jack Munroe Historical Society had selected another recipient, but invited us to reapply in future years.

Debra North was determined to see that the nurse was recognized for her heroic efforts in bringing healthcare to Cobalt. Saunders, in spite of her own health concerns, without money or municipal support, in a town with terrible sanitation and drinking water, and during the 1909 typhoid epidemic, succeeded in reaching her goal.

Happily, so did North. In January this year, the Jack Munroe Historical Society's nomination review committee confirmed that Annie Saunders would be the next recipient of the Order of the North.

The committee will schedule the award ceremony in conjunction with the premiere of a documentary produced by The Jack Munroe Historical Society of Elk City, featuring the life of Jack Munroe.

Below is an abbreviated version of Debra North's 'Order of the North' submission to the Jack Munroe Historical Society.

Annie Saunders was born and trained to be a nurse in England. She came to Canada with her husband and two sons in 1906, responding to an invitation from her brother who was a miner at the Larose mine. One month after she arrived in Cobalt, while still recovering from a bout of rheumatism, a dynamite explosion occurred. It destroyed numerous homes, including Annie's and injuring many. She moved into the Larose bunkhouse and nursed the injured from the explosion. She was the only nurse in Cobalt.

Much of Annie's nursing over the next months included visiting patients in their homes, be it a mining bunkhouse, boarding house, log cabin, or tent. Working conditions were very primitive. Annie had to boil all water, cook, clean, and do the laundry for her patients, and bury waste, often without assistance.

Unfortunately there were no funds to pay for servants when she started Cobalt's first hospital. There were virtually no safety precautions in the mines and no sanitation underground or in town, so illness, accidents and deaths were common. As early as the summer of 1905 the Ontario Ministry of Health had been urging mine owners to build a hospital in Cobalt. The Ministry of Health predicted a high risk of typhoid for the summer of 1906, due to the lack of sanitation. This was in part, due to the September 1905 testing of the water in Cobalt Lake, which determined it to be unfit for drinking.

That summer of 1906, Cobalt had its first typhoid outbreak. Although small, there were too many patients for Annie to manage alone. Elizabeth Fitzgibbon came north from Toronto to assist. By the fall of 1906, Annie had moved the hospital into a rustic wood structure, near the northeast corner of Lang St. and Ferland Ave. That fall, two other nurses, Jessica Dixon and Lydia Davis moved to Cobalt and assisted Annie with this work.

In the spring of 1907, Cobalt had a smallpox outbreak where many died. Annie had only been in Cobalt a little over a year and this was her second episode of a serious,



*Nurse Annie Saunders in Cobalt.*

infectious disease outbreak. Despite having recurrent episodes of rheumatism, coupled with a lack of funds, that year Annie purchased a building on Silver St. She used money she'd been paid by her patients for their care.

By 1908, Annie's deteriorating finances motivated mine managers Robert Rogers and Tom Jones to persuade the other managers to purchase Annie's hospital and hire her to be the administrator. The managers quickly converted the hospital to be for miners only. Not even the miner's family members were to be admitted. However, special accommodations were made for both Rogers and Jones' wives to give birth in the hospital.

Annie's small hospital had only thirteen beds. Problems arose when the owners wanted the hospital to be used only for miners. Over 80% of the population at this time were men, but many did not work in the mines. There were of course small numbers of women and children as well, who needed medical care and many women required assistance during childbirth. As a result, in addition to their hospital work, the nurses needed to visit many in their homes. As the hospital could not even accommodate all the miners who required care, the nurses frequently had to travel significant distances to see miners in their bunkhouses. Not surprising, the nurses generally had to work at least twelve-hour days with seldom a day off. Annie continued to ensure that everyone was seen by a nurse whether or not they could pay.

Annie was housed in the hospital but agreed that she would not be paid a salary or the purchase price of the hospital for a full year. She knew that all of the other nurses and staff would be paid - just not her. It certainly wasn't a good deal for Annie. Cobalt mine managers and owners had been given multiple fines since 1905, because they had not started a hospital as required by the Ontario Ministry of Health. Having Annie build a hospital out of her own pocket, saved the mine owners these fines and they now got an experienced manager for free for a year. In the summer of 1908 Annie's youngest son Raymond, age thirteen, was diagnosed with epilepsy. In the early 1900s epilepsy was considered a mental health illness and many were sent to asylums. Raymond spent a year and a half in a hospital in Woodstock, Ontario. She must have been torn between Raymond and Cobalt. She did not move to Woodstock to be close to him, instead she stayed in Cobalt to nurse. Annie probably thought she was doing the best thing for her son, by paying for Raymond to get the best care in a good hospital.

### **1909 Fire and Typhoid Epidemic**

Then in July of 1909 a fire destroyed a large portion of Cobalt. Large numbers lost their homes and had to sleep in tents with poor hygiene conditions. With so many having no access to clean water, it is not surprising that only one month later, the largest typhoid epidemic in Ontario started in Cobalt.

Annie sent to Toronto for help and 100 nurses came north. Annie noted that some nurses from Toronto refused to care for those who could not pay. Her response to this was "nurses that make nursing their profession must forget about the high fees for the moment if they wish to help humanity. We cannot gain from experience if we are going to always gain by the pocket."

Annie wrote of the Cobalt Hospital during the outbreak. "The many months of worries and troubles in getting matters advanced to the present state, have fallen heavily upon me, and at times I have felt doubtful if there was any good to be done, even for humanity's sake, in continuing with the struggle I have had from the very commencement."

In September 1909 during the typhoid epidemic the Ministry of Health ordered 600 homes to clean up. They met with great resistance and threatened to quarantine the entire town. They ended up fining 50 people for non-compliance, including Cobalt's Minister of Health! How discouraging for Annie that despite all her efforts and the worst typhoid epidemic, she had made so little progress in persuading mine owners and the local residents that sanitation is essential to good health.

Fires and health issues would continue to be a problem. It was noted in the annual Ontario Provincial Health Report that Cobalt was the only town that required a full chapter every year from 1905-1911 inclusively. The year 1912 was the first time Cobalt didn't have its own full chapter. Originally, many thought Cobalt would only exist for a few short years, so plans had never been made to make it a permanent settlement. As it lasted longer than expected, it became difficult to add needed infrastructure later. Annie was fighting an up-hill battle. People were focused on the silver 'fever' and get-rich-quick schemes. It was also a time when the general public were not well informed or accepting of the connection between poor sanitation, inadequate hygiene, and serious illness that can lead to death. But she did not give up.

By the time Annie left Cobalt in 1915, the town had running water and a sewage system. Though mines were still dumping tailings and cyanide wash, there was less household and business waste thrown in the streets. There had been two additions added to the hospital, and it employed more nurses. She had encouraged the Victorian Order of Nurses to set up an office in Cobalt, to assist with care in the home. Public health education was starting to make an impact as people were beginning to practice healthier habits.

Annie worked for nine years in Cobalt, despite her own ill health. She selflessly built the first three hospitals out of her own pocket, devoting her time and effort to the community at the expense of her own family. Before leaving Cobalt she ensured that there was a health care system for all residents.

### **Upcoming Cobalt Exhibit at the McMichael Gallery**

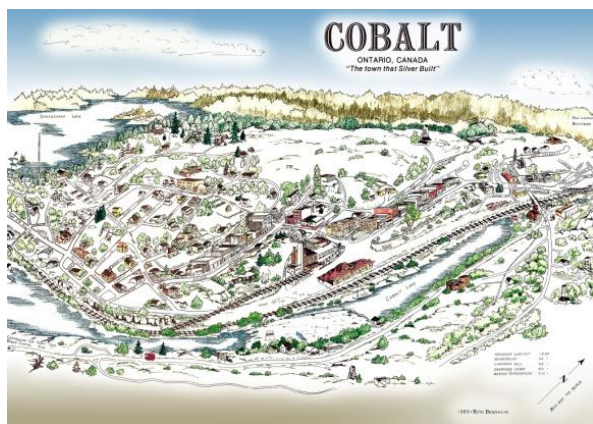
A reminder of an upcoming exhibit at the McMichael Gallery that features artists who painted in Cobalt. Works on display are by the usual Group of Seven and their cohort, plus Rev. E Gilmour Smith who was active in the arts in Cobalt and later in Timmins between the 1930s and 50s. The show opens November 18 and runs to April 21, 2024.



*Grandview Ave, Cobalt by E. Gilmour Smith, 1937*

### **Update on ONR Assessments**

Joe Viscek of Ontario Northland advises us that assessment work of ONR property in Cobalt continues. Phase One of the environmental work has been completed, and it is hoped that Phase Two will begin in 2024. This work affects two sites on the Heritage Silver Trail - the Townsite and the Right of Way.



### **Cobalt Map by Ruth Bernache**

We have received some inquiries as to how the new Cobalt Map by Ruth Bernache, and soon to be an available CHS puzzle, could be accessed to download and printed.

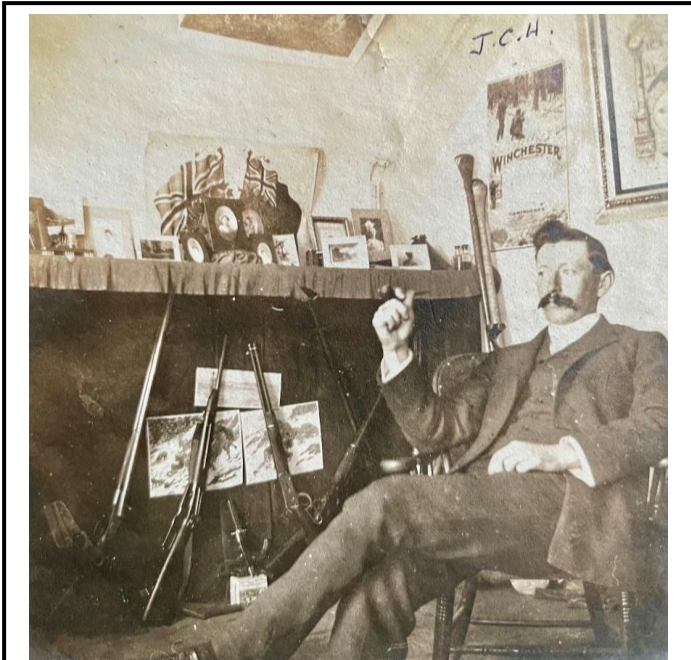
This map has now been put onto our Cobalt Historical Society website ( [www.cobalthistoricalsociety.ca](http://www.cobalthistoricalsociety.ca) ) under the 'News' Section. Follow the directions for either a colour or black and white download/save and printing.

### **Joseph Chambers Houston Mine Developer & Manager**

Here's a secret about the way things work in research land: if you reach a roadblock, just wait a while, and the answer usually surfaces when you least expect it. For example, early in 2022, we received a digital collection of photos scanned by Valerie Hostetler. Though we cannot confirm absolutely, Val believes Joseph Chambers Houston was the photographer. The photos belonged to Houston's grandson, James Joseph Hylands, Val's first cousin, once removed. We had hoped to investigate Houston and the subjects of his photos, but other priorities took our attention. The project was put on hold. This past March, Allan Stacey granted us permission to use article No. 10 from his series, "Just Passing Through," featuring, you guessed it, *Joseph Chambers Houston, Mine Developer & Manager*. Well, that certainly made our job easier! Thanks to both Val and Allan for thinking of the Cobalt Historical Society!

See the Research page on our website for the entire article and all of Houston's photos. What follows combines highlights from Allan's essay, and a sample of Houston's photos.





*Joseph Chambers Houston*

*The photo is captioned "Sudbury headquarters 1902 - 1905." Stacey proposes that this capture of "J C H" was possibly taken in the home of Dan O'Connor, the man who hired Houston to work on the development of the Temagami iron deposits.*

*Given that the mining man was rarely in one location for very long, Stacey suggests that, "It is unlikely that Houston would have had that many rifles (5, at least) and a shotgun in a semi-permanent residence."*

Joseph Chambers Houston was born on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1873 in Swilly Mount, Londonderry, County Donegal, Ireland. When he was eleven, the family immigrated to Kansas, and by 1895, he had left home.

From 1899 to 1900, Joseph worked for two years as a fire ranger for the Ontario Government in the Temagami-Montreal River area. In an article in *Field and Stream and American Angler*, J.E. Meiers, of New York City took a guided fishing tour from Haileybury to the Montreal River, through Lady Evelyn Lake, Lake Temagami and back to Lake Temiskaming in September of 1900. On their first day they traveled from Haileybury by logging road to Sharp Lake, where they met Joe Houston:

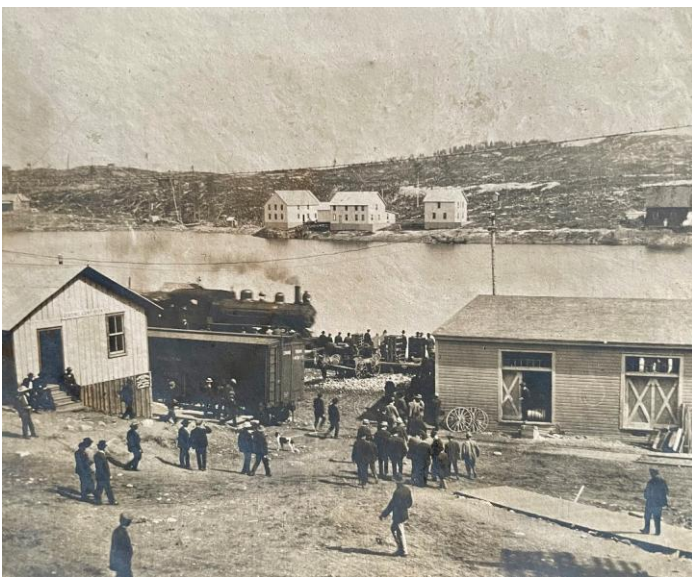
*It was a tired and hungry company that finally reached Sharp Lake, and a halt for dinner was decided upon. On an elevation commanding a view of the lake we found the cabin of Joe Houston, a veteran of the forest, employed by the government as fire ranger and game warden. His latchstring was out, and we received a hearty welcome.*

*The dinner call was responded to with alacrity. How good that first meal in the forest tasted! Joe Houston joined with us and enlivened the repast with some interesting experiences, told in an inimitable way, that brightened his otherwise lonely station.*

"The 1901 Canada census for Montreal, Quebec, reports that [father] Moses Houston had moved his family to Canada in 1895 and was working in the shops of the Montreal Street Railway before becoming an insurance collector. Besides wife Margaret, the recorded family included Joseph, now 28 years old and reporting as a miner. Five other children fill the household."

Before the discovery of silver in 1903, Houston worked at several mines in the West, as well as "examination work on iron." Stacey suggests that, "The most likely candidate for the latter may have been the prospecting work of Sudbury's former mayor, Dan O'Connor, in the Lake Temagami area. O'Connor had surveyed a number of locations in the vicinity of the northeast arm of Lake Temagami prior to 1902 and spent some time developing them as he awaited the arrival of the railway in the immediate area."

By 1905, Houston was in Cobalt as a manager at the O'Brien Mine. Later, in 1907, he held a management post with the Right of Way Mine. Later still, he worked at the Sifton-O'Brien and Bonsall Mines in Gowganda. Unconfirmed reports say that he then worked in Mexico, and in 1910, at the Sheep Creek Camp near Salmo, British Columbia, leasing and working a silver-lead property.



*1907 looking east from "The Square" - Cobalt Lake Mine on far shore, the Reading Association building on left.*



“Houston’s next assignment, beginning in March 1911, was manager of the St. Anthony gold mine of the Sturgeon Lake Development Company. Ever the optimist, Houston suggested in August of 1911 that the St. Anthony gold mine was second only to the Dome mine in the Porcupine (Timmins gold camp). Unfortunately, the mine shut down the next year.

“By 1912, Houston was manager of the Schumacher mine of Schumacher Gold Mines, Limited in the Porcupine and in February of 1916, Houston resigned to become general superintendent of the Dome Mines Company, Limited. “A succession of postings followed his stint in the Timmins area. In 1918 he was manager of the gold mine of Kirkland Porphyry Gold Mines, Limited, ...” and he supervised development work on an adjoining property of the Orr Gold Mines, Limited. In 1920, Houston returned to Gowganda where he was president of Cane Silver Mines, Limited. In 1921 he was in Mexico examining mine properties.

Then, back to Cobalt! In 1924, where he oversaw the re-opening of the Penn-Canadian mine for a Toronto investment securities company. Next, the Cobalt Contact Mines, where he designed and supervised the construction of a fifty-ton per day mill on the shuttered Green-Meehan silver property, just east of North Cobalt.

His next job was as consulting engineer for Furness Gold Mines, Limited, an unsuccessful gold play in Deloro Township. In 1926, he investigated a gold mine in “Duprat Township near Rouyn-Noranda, where his progress report was ‘awaited with keen interest.’ While in Quebec he also took a turn as engineer and field for Boischatel Mines Limited.

After a “short stint in 1927 as consulting engineer for Bennett Mining Company, Limited, a gold mining venture with properties in various locations in the Temiskaming district” he was director and company



*Neil "Foghorn" McDonald on Prospect Ave across from the Canadian Bank of Commerce. McDonald was well-known in mining circles and his nickname was due to his booming voice.*

engineer for Shooniah Mines, Limited, located in Central Manitoba. In mid-summer of 1928, he worked for “Perry-Kirkland Gold Mines, Limited [Ontario], followed in September 1929 with examinations of the holdings of Marriot Mines, Limited in the Cadillac-Malartic area of Quebec and engagement as consulting engineer for Clermont Mines, Limited with property north of La Sarre station on the Canadian National Railway.”

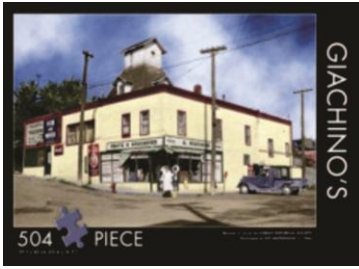
“...the 1930’s was the time for Joseph Chambers Houston to slow down as he was moving into his 60’s. During this decade his main ventures were as consulting engineer for Oro Grande Development Company (1932) in the Long Lake area of Manitoba; consulting engineer for Bailor Gold Mines, Limited (1934) in the Rice Lake area of Manitoba and mining engineer for Arnold Kirkland Gold Mining Syndicate (1938) in Arnold Township, Kirkland Lake area. “His last recorded venture was part-time manager, in 1941, developing the gold property of Wampum Gold Mines, Limited, located 45 miles north of Fort Frances at Wampum Lake.” In the 1940’s Houston and his wife Margaret move to Toronto, and his son James Joseph Browne Houston, an aeronautical engineer with de Havilland Aircraft Company, lived with his parents.

Joseph Chambers Houston died February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1955 in his 83<sup>rd</sup> year. A long and interesting life.



*These gents are part of a 1906 delegation from New York, standing on the deck of T&NO car. If they look like they are enjoying themselves, it’s because they are “Three Sheets to the Wind and everything pulling” as per the caption.*

## Help Support our Fundraising Efforts - Cobalt Puzzles



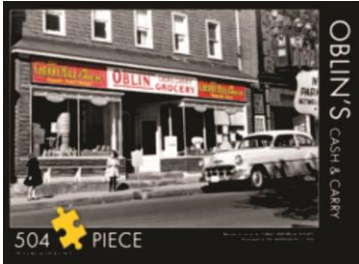
**Giachino's Coniagas Shaft House  
#4 circa 1945 as a grocery store.**



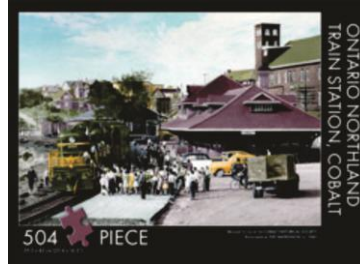
**The Iconic Right of Way Mine  
Photo by Charles Dumaresq.**



**Right of Way Mine Reflections  
Photo by Sue Nielsen.**



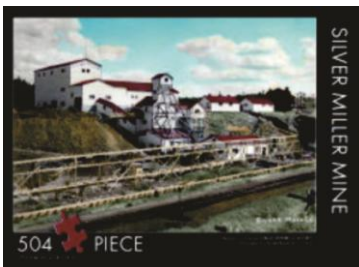
**Oblin's Cash and Carry  
Circa 1945 on Lang Street.**



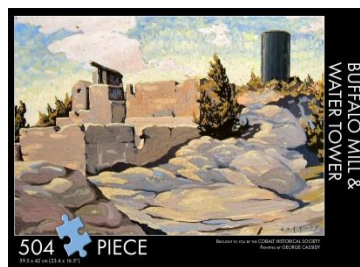
**Ontario Northland Railway  
Station Cobalt 1945.**



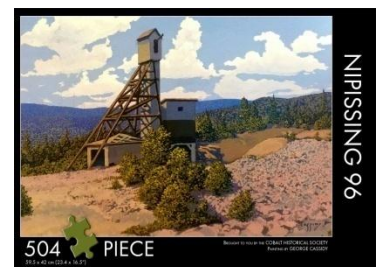
**Cobalt Public School  
Photo circa 1955.**



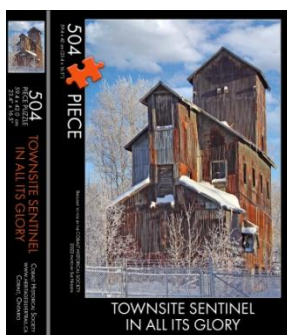
**Silver Miller Mine  
Photograph circa 1950**



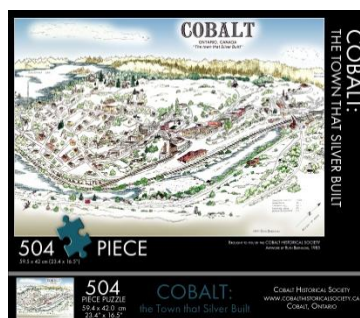
**Buffalo Mine & Water Tower  
George Cassidy Print**



**Nipissing 96  
George Cassidy Print**



**Townsite Mine**



**Cobalt Map by Ruth Bernache  
COMING SOON!**



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