

# ACO MATTERS



Architectural Conservancy Ontario – Port Hope Branch

Newsletter – February 2026

## CHAIRS' REPORT

What an incredible year 2025 has been for our branch. The contributions made by our volunteers were remarkable, and when you drive down Walton Street, you can see the fruit of this hard work in the scaffolding and ACO grants banners on numerous restoration projects.

The November live auction, led by **Brian Buttery and Blaise Gaetz**, was a highly anticipated 2025 event. It raised over \$15,000 and was a boisterous, busy occasion that featured a greatly expanded tag sale area packed with treasures, as well as delicious on-site catering by Queenies. Huge thanks and congratulations go to all of the auction volunteers who made this day such a smash success.

The ACO Port Hope branch holiday party on December 5th was a spectacular culmination to the year. Over 170 members attended the event at **Allison Doyle's beautiful home, Hill and Dale Estate**. It was truly magical to begin the event by walking up the stone bridge lit by lanterns in the falling snow. The party was beautifully organized by **Darlene King and Shirley Richardson**. We offer heartfelt appreciation to everyone who pitched in to serve food and drink, tote materials, and generally assist. Photos of this wonderful celebration may be found later in this newsletter.

Now the 2026 year is upon us. Usually at this time, we announce the details of our Annual Meeting in February. This year will be different. As you know,

ACO Inc., our central governing body, has been in the process of undertaking important structural changes to strengthen the organization's long-term sustainability. These changes are expected to be announced in April of this year. As a result, the ACO Port Hope branch executive has decided to delay our Annual Meeting until later in the Spring. At that time, we are hoping to be able to share more concrete information about the changes being implemented. The ACO Port Hope branch executive will still observe our board succession governance procedures, and we are excited to announce the following Executive slate, proposed by the Nominations Committee:

**Chair:** Brian Buttery; **Co Past Chairs:** Katherine McHarg and Susan Layard; **Treasurer:** Brenda Willows; **Secretary:** Susan Carmichael (re-joined board in January, 2026); **Directors:** Lydia Bell-Gradon, Greg Cooper, Tom Cruickshank, Malcolm Pike, Jennifer Wadds

As usual, financial statements for the 2025 year will be posted in February on our website for your review. We will share information about the Annual Meeting and Awards Presentation at a later date.

Until then, we thank you once again for being an engaged and active membership. It has been our pleasure working with you towards our common goals.

– **Susan Layard & Katherine McHarg**  
**Co-Chairs, ACO Port Hope Branch**

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# EXECUTIVE

## Executive Committee

**Co-Chair**

Susan Layard

**Co-Chair**

Katherine McHarg

**Treasurer**

Brenda Willows

**Secretary**

Susan Carmichael

**Directors**

Brian Buttery

Lydia Bell-Gradon (Svenningson)

Greg Cooper

Tom Cruickshank

Malcolm Pike

Jenny Wadds

## Committee Chairs

**Auction Committee**

Blaise Gaetz, Brian Buttery

**Advocacy**

Susan Layard

**Communications & Marketing**

Laura Antonik

**Education**

Katherine McHarg, Marnie Bickle

**Grants**

Susan Carmichael

**Membership**

Lydia Bell-Gradon

**Newsletter**

Patsy Beeson

**Bus Tour**

Denise Johnson, Peter McLaughlin

# ADVOCACY UPDATE

By Susan Layard

## The Canadian Northern Railway Station at 138 Hope Street

The red brick building, located on the 15 acre property at the corner of Ontario Street and Hope Street North, was the original 1911 Port Hope station of the Canadian Northern Railway (CNoR), a transcontinental railway company founded at the beginning of the 20th century. The station is a significant Port Hope heritage asset, but it was ineligible for heritage designation all the while it was provincially owned. When the property was placed by the Province on the real estate market in 2024, the ACO Port Hope Advocacy Committee began researching the cultural heritage value of the station and then advocating for its heritage recognition once sold. Last Fall, 138 Hope Street property was bought by a residential developer, Lionston Group of Toronto, who plan among other things, over 250 residential units, a 100-room conference hotel and banquet space, and an AI innovation hub and data centre for the property. At their presentation to a Special Council Meeting last November, Lionston also noted that they support the designation of the portion of their property that contains the old CNoR railway station. The Advocacy Committee is now encouraging Heritage Port Hope to include the station on their list of properties to be designated in 2026.

## The Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT) Case between Southbridge Health Care Inc. and the Municipality of Port Hope regarding 65 Ward Street


According to an update sent out by the Municipality of Port Hope on January 23rd, 2026, the parties representing Southbridge Care Homes and the Municipality attended a mediation assessment session on January 13th, 2026, in an effort to assess the issues relating to Southbridge’s appeal of the Municipality’s denial of a Heritage Permit to demolish the buildings at 65 Ward Street to construct Southbridge’s proposed 192-bed long term care home. In their update, the Municipality noted that “the OLT uses this mediation assessment to decide if a case’s issues, parties, and nature make it a good fit for mediation. At the mediation assessment, it was

decided that four dates will be set for a Tribunal-led mediation, which is a confidential discussion of the issues between only the parties (Southbridge and the Municipality, each with their expert consultants). As this is a confidential process, nothing from the mediation can be disclosed by the parties or made publicly available, unless both parties agree to a verbal or written update.”

On January 16th, 2026, the Ontario Land Tribunal then conducted a Case Management Conference for this long-standing case between Southbridge and the Municipality. At the Conference, the lawyers for Southbridge and the Municipality acknowledged that four dates in the Spring had been set aside for mediation discussions. After allowing consultation around respective schedules, the Tribunal member concluded the conference by issuing an order scheduling a further Case Management Conference on June 19th at 10:00 a.m. and, if required, a Hearing on September 21st, 22nd and 23rd at 10:00 a.m. For further details, please go to <https://www.porthope.ca/en/news/update-on-65-ward-street-january-2026.aspx>.

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# GRAB YOUR DANCING SHOES, WE'RE OFF TO THE TOWN HALL!

Although town halls are now almost always associated solely with municipal government and administration, this was not the case when they were built in the 19th century. These important civic buildings were designed to serve several purposes. They were not only intended to incorporate legislative and commercial offices but also to provide space for social activities. The town hall was planned as a town's cultural hub. The buildings would consist of one, sometimes two storeys, but the dominant feature would be the "open hall", a space adaptable to a wide variety of local activities from commercial markets to a variety of entertainments. In short, they were designed as community gathering places. It wasn't until the end of the 19th century that they evolved into the purely administrative centres they are today.

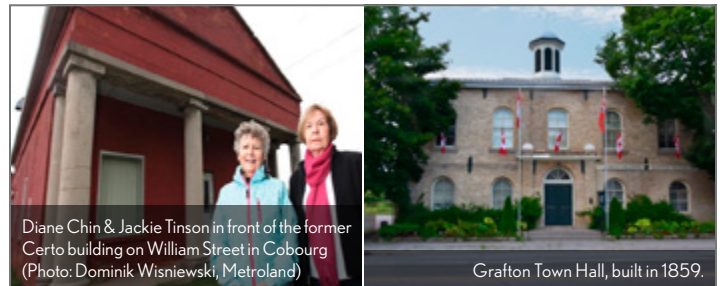
The Port Hope Town Hall followed this mid-19th century pattern. Built between 1851 and 1853, it incorporated a Council Chamber and Court Rooms, along with a market square on the ground floor, and, until the Music Hall was built on Walton Street, a place to host concerts, dances, and gala dinners. Social occasions at the Town Hall continued into the 20th century. Gordon Garbutt, writing in the Evening Guide in 1971 recalls that in his youth:

*"There were occasional dances at the Town Hall which served more as social occasions than as entertainment for young people, who considered the music of local orchestras rather lifeless and the surroundings rather austere. Dancing was permitted only occasionally at the high school."*

Although there is no physical evidence of Port Hope's Town Hall as an entertainment venue (such as the presence of a stage for performances), other town halls have retained physical features that clearly indicate their social function. The 1850s Grafton town hall, for example, still has a fully functional stage in its 2nd floor "open hall" area, with wings stage left and stage right, a small backstage area, and the original hand-painted curtain, as can be seen in pictures from the Haldimand-Alnwick website. This space is now used only as a Council Chamber but when the building was officially opened in 1860 the occasion was marked in this room with a concert featuring the Grafton Brass Band and performances by other amateur musicians.



The earliest town halls were simple structures, often consisting of a single room (the "open hall") with an exterior design similar to that of other public buildings such as schools and Quaker meeting houses, but as towns grew more prosperous, designs became grander and classical elements were incorporated as decoration, classical references being considered a mark of status, refinement, and taste. (Note that even the tiny Certo building on William Street in Cobourg, built in 1909, had classical pretensions.)



Diane Chin & Jackie Tinson in front of the former Certo building on William Street in Cobourg (Photo: Dominik Wisniewski, Metroland)

Grafton Town Hall, built in 1859.

The Port Hope Town Hall was the town's most important and widely used building in the 19th century, but as the community expanded, the role of the Town Hall as a social centre was gradually eclipsed by the need for more space for the municipality's administrative services, and the role of the Town Hall transitioned from an unspecialized community centre to a strictly administrative one. In other words, Port Hope's Town Hall, which is now seen as somewhere we go to pay our taxes, was initially a much more vibrant and integral part of the social life of the community and somewhere people went to kick up their heels.

— Jackie Tinson

Sources: Two Old Guys Walking; Billy Wilson Photography; Dominik Wisniewski, Metroland; Municipality of Port Hope website; Alnwick/Haldimand Township website; Old Acton Town Hall website; Parks Canada website.



Grafton Town Hall with stage in the background



Grafton Mayor and Councillors in front of the original hand-painted stage curtain



## YOUR DONATION DOLLARS AT WORK

The scaffolding came down just before Christmas and what a pleasure it was to see the new shopfronts on the **Porter Block on Walton Street**. This is the latest project in which Port Hope ACO has allocated funds—money collected from your generous donations, the auction and other fund-raising activities—to deserving buildings in town.

A handsome commercial building from the 1850s, the Porter Block was the work of Rochester architect **Merwin Austin**, who also designed the **St. Lawrence Hotel** next door and **Town Hall**. Current owner **Dave Watson** deserves full credit for taking on such an extensive and sympathetic renovation. So far, he has invested more than half a million dollars in the building, much of it in restoration but also in interior improvements and code requirements. In 2013, ACO helped to finance the removal of paint from the façade brick and this past autumn, we lent a hand in the restoration of the shopfronts. The latter are an ongoing project: later this year, the remainder of the façade will be given the same treatment to match the recently completed work.

**Tom Cruickshank & Susan Carmichael**



## 2026 ACO Bus Tour to Trent Hills: Escape to The Country

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29**

Once again ACO is planning an escape to the country to immerse ourselves in a proud Trent Hills heritage viewing architectural gems, some in local stone with sustainability in mind.

We will start our day at Campbellford's old Post Office/Clock Tower by the Trent river/canal where Jim Peters, Director of Planning, Trent Hills, will meet us to offer an overview of the town's history and architectural features. Then we'll walk down heritage row, Frank St., towards Spite House where Des Conacher, long time member of ACO East Northumberland, will tell us its story.

Next we'll visit an 1860's dressed limestone house with 24" thick walls. The owner, Judy Pearce, is very involved with the town's Heritage Centre and will share stories about her property.

We will enjoy lunch at St Johns United Church, and afterwards Cathy Redden, former Campbellford Mayor and long time church member, will talk to us about its exquisite stained glass windows designed and made by Christopher Wallis, one of Canada's leading artists in the field.

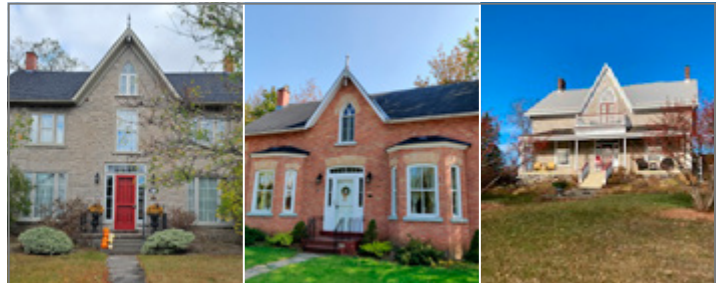
In the afternoon we will head towards Warkworth to tour the homes of architects Dimitri Papatheodorou and Roberto Chiotti, and Carol Dove, inspiring us with their ideas on how to preserve the past while designing homes with today's comforts in mind.

Please join us for a relationship with the past, green space, raw materials, architectural license and dreamers.

We return home with our usual snack/happy hour en route.

- Port Hope pick-up: McDonald's (east end) parking lot just south of 401 – Bus leaves at 8:45 am sharp!
- Cobourg pick-up: Parking lot (west) Hwy 45 just north of 401 – Bus leaves at 9:10 am sharp!
- We will arrive back home to Cobourg and Port Hope before 6 pm.
- Price: \$90 for ACO members and \$100 for non-members.
- Make out cheque to *ACO Cobourg & East Northumberland* and mail or drop off cheque to Acanthus Interiors, 79c King St W., Cobourg K9A 2M4 attention: **Denise Johnson** or etransfer to [info@acocen.ca](mailto:info@acocen.ca) YOU MUST INCLUDE: 1) your email, phone no., address; 2) which ACO Branch you belong to; and 3) name and daytime phone no. of an emergency contact person. Cancellations must find a substitute or lose payment. If there is a waiting list, there is no problem.
- ACO Bus Tour Committee: Peter McLaughlin and Denise Johnson

**Any questions please contact Denise: Email [Johnson.4d@gmail.com](mailto:Johnson.4d@gmail.com) or phone 905-372-0996.**





# EDUCATION COMMITTEE UPDATE

by Katherine McHarg

## NEW CO-CHAIR

Our committee has a wonderful new co-chair, **Marnie Bickle**. She brings a wealth of experience working with cultural and heritage groups, and was a past co-chair of the House Tour. As part of her past work with the education committee, Marnie has researched and written several of the newer walking tours, including this year's "Saints and Sinners". We welcome Marnie to the education committee with open arms.

## WALKING TOURS

The Education Committee recently created this year's schedule of heritage walking tours, which includes two brand new tours! The season includes six different tour offerings held over twelve Saturdays this coming spring and fall. The new tours are entitled *Saints and Sinners* (a downtown exploration of historical churches and taverns) and *Union Cemetery – A Living Past* (a stroll through the impressive Port Hope cemetery).

### New 2026 Schedule

**May 16:** *Parade of Stately Homes - Augusta and Dorset West*

**May 23:** *Windows of Walton Street*

**May 30:** *Memories of King Street*

**Jun 6:** *Saints and Sinners*

**Jun 13:** *Welcome to Englishtown*

**Jun 20:** *Union Cemetery – A Living Past*

**Aug 22:** *Saints and Sinners*

**Aug 29:** *Windows on Walton Street*

**Sep 5:** *Parade of Stately Homes – Augusta and Dorset West*

**Sep 12:** *Union Cemetery – A Living Past*

**Sep 19:** *Memories of King Street*

**Sep 26:** *Welcome to Englishtown*

As always, tours meet at 11:00 at a location specified on eventbrite when you order your ticket, and tours run for approximately 90 minutes. Watch for further information in the weeks to come.

We were approached by Hibernata Festival to provide mini walking tours of our downtown area for Family Day weekend in February. Groups can meet at the Walton Street bridge at 11:00 am on Feb. 14 and 15 for a free thirty minute taste of the history of some of our fascinating downtown buildings.



## DIGITAL ARCHIVE PROJECT WITH THE STUDENTS OF TRINITY COLLEGE SCHOOL

This past December, a group of dedicated TCS student volunteers met for a week to scan, upload and index old paper materials from our branch's office into our growing digital archive. Here is an article written by the group's leader, Vidushi B., about the service learning experience entitled *Week Without Walls*.

*Week Without Walls is a program at Trinity College School where staff and students dedicate a week to participating in service activities. All students are assigned to one of 70 different sites around the area where they help out various communities and organizations. This week is about performing acts of service, no matter how small, to leave a lasting impact. This reflects service as a key value at TCS, helping students understand the importance of giving back and grounding this skill as a crucial part of their lives.*

*This year, I had the opportunity to work with the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, and along with my two groupmates, our job was to file important documents into a digital portfolio. My group spent time taking photos and scanning various historical documents, and then organizing them in a Google Drive. This is important as any documents that are damaged or lost can be easily retrieved digitally. These files reflect Port Hope's incredible architectural history, and I am privileged to have had the chance to contribute to conserving its rich heritage.*

*Written by Vidushi B.*

**Trinity College** has approved our branch as a recipient of service work in an upcoming Service Saturday this winter. Vidushi has offered to continue the important work on our digital archive with her team. Partnering with Trinity College has been a highly successful endeavour, with both organizations gaining in the process. We hope to expand this partnering work with our other community schools in the future.



Photos from the

# 2025 ACO HOLIDAY PARTY: HILL AND DALE ESTATE

photos by Greg McHarg



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# HOPE TOWNSHIP BARN SURVEY



*A gambrel-roofed bank barn in admirable condition near Garden Hill. The date “1903” is fretted into the gable boards*



*Typical of Northumberland County, this barn north of Elizabethtown adopts a very long footprint*

There aren't as many barns in rural Port Hope as there used to be. The countryside is still primarily agricultural, but considering the number of subdivisions and rural estates, not to mention the decline of the family farm, few are the local residents who need a barn these days. Moreover, those that do often find that the typical 19th-century barn is obsolete: too small, hard to adapt to current farming methods and most of all, impossible to maintain. This is all to say that the traditional barn—that icon of the farm economy—is a vanishing species.

That's why a committee of the Port Hope ACO was formed this past year. Their mission: to catalogue the remaining barns of Hope Township. Under Susan Layard's chairmanship, six of us—Brian Buttery, Jim Sculthorpe, Bruce Bowden, Curtis Brisbois, Phil Carter and yours truly—are driving the backroads of the municipality and making notes on the barns we've encountered along the way. We have recorded addresses, taken pictures of the better barns, and plotted all of them on a township map. For now, we're not sure what the final result should be: an archive? a website? a power-point presentation? Whatever the case, we think it's important that we go out in the field and document them before it's too late.

Turns out there are more barns still standing than we assumed: perhaps about 300, especially if you count smaller outbuildings like stables, pig pens, chicken houses and drivesheds. As we drove our rural roads, the first thing that's apparent is that barns aren't nearly as architecturally varied as houses. Even so, you can't help but marvel at their “folk engineering.” They are so overbuilt—well beyond the engineering requirements of today's building codes—that it is no wonder that so many are still standing after over a century.

There was a time when you could judge a farmer by his barn. In the era of the family farm, the size and condition of a barn spoke volumes about the ambitions and aspirations of its owner. In fact, a settler often put more resources into his barn than his house, for after all, it was the key to his livelihood. In Hope, the better barns

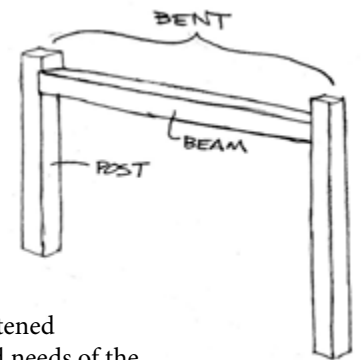
are on the more fertile farms toward the lake, while up in moraine country, where agriculture wasn't always a sure thing, barns tend to be smaller.

A barn has two, perhaps three functions:

- to house livestock
- to store hay over the winter
- and sometimes, to store grain.

In Ontario, there are English, American and German influences in barn design, but the standard in Northumberland was a “bank” barn, built into the side of a hill so that the “basement” opened at ground level. Here is where the animals were kept. “Upstairs” was the hay mow, soaring some 30 or more feet high. (Keep in mind that the hay was stored loose in the days before baling.) Meanwhile, grain was stored in a separate room.

The basic building block in barn construction is something called a “bent:” an H-shaped arrangement of 10-inch by 10-inch (or larger) posts connected by a hefty beam (see illustration). At a glance, a bent looks like the goalposts on a soccer pitch, but its function is to take all the weight of the structure: rafters, joists and other wooden components are fastened to it. Depending on the means and needs of the farmer, a typical barn would comprise five or more bents.



Though very much in the shadow of more pretentious architecture, the humble barn should be greatly admired by anyone with an affection for traditional architecture. As cataloguing progresses, our committee will be thinking of ways our branch can celebrate them.

– Tom Cruickshank



## Major Upcoming Events

**Bus Tour** April 29, (p. 4)

**House Tour** October 4, 10am – 4pm

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Why not place an advertisement in the pages of *ACO Matters*?

Our readership is interested in buildings and their preservation, furnishing, gardens, and everything else connected with them.

Contact Patsy Beeson at [pbeeson@eagle.ca](mailto:pbeeson@eagle.ca).



## Membership Renewal Form

Please enrol me as a member of the **Port Hope Branch of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario**. I have indicated below my/our applicable membership category.

New  Renewal

**Name(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**E-Mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

- Individual Membership: \$65**
- Household Membership (for 2): \$80**
- Each Additional Member: \$15**
- Full-time Student/Emerging Professional: \$20**

**Tax Creditable Donation:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Note:** Membership is free for individuals who donate a minimum of \$1,000 in the calendar year.

**Total Enclosed:** \_\_\_\_\_

- I am interested in volunteering for ACO Events.**
- I give permission for ACO to contact me electronically.**

### Payment Options

- 1. E-transfers:** From your bank's Interac service, the address is [etransfer@acoporthope.ca](mailto:etransfer@acoporthope.ca). please provide your email and mailing address in the message box and indicate that the payment is for membership fee and/or donation.
- 2. Cheque:** Please complete this form and mail it with your cheque payable to **ACO Port Hope at P O Box 563, Port Hope, Ontario L1A 3Z4**
- 3. Credit Card:** to pay by VISA or MasterCard, contact Architectural Conservancy Ontario ([acontario.ca](http://acontario.ca)) online. Please indicate that you wish to join the Port Hope branch.

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