



# ORIGINS OF THE BUILDING

NOW SERVING AS THE EXHIBITION HALL OF THE  
SIFTON-COOK HERITAGE CENTRE

Since the Cobourg Museum Foundation purchased the small property at the corner of Cobourg's Durham and Orr Streets in 1999, there has been an on-going and sometimes heated discussion around the following three questions:

*When was the old limestone building constructed?  
Who constructed it?  
and Why?*

For some years it had been assumed by many that it dated back to the War of 1812, forming part of the defence of Upper Canada against American invasion. They pointed to the building's obvious age and its style, which is similar to barracks elsewhere.

Others suggested that it must have been built by brewer James Calcutt shortly after he arrived in Canada in 1832 and purchased the property which ran down to Lake Ontario. Similar buildings exist in Mountmellick, Calcutt's home town in Ireland. Calcutt certainly did build the mansion which still stands just to the south, and went on to be a prominent Cobourg citizen.



Still others postulate a date somewhere in between, suggesting that British soldiers, no longer needed for defence, might well have been commissioned to build it as a make-work project as they awaited their opportunity to return home.

Records have been searched in Cobourg and Ottawa yielding little support for any one theory, though there is a letter dated 1814 referring to a Depot for military provisions in the area.

We do know that the building was associated with James Calcutt from 1832 to 1853, though as early as 1849 the whole property was listed for sale by Calcutt *"at a sacrifice, owing to the present proprietor having been made to feel the pressure of the times"*.

The property continued to operate as a brewery for some years but in 1877 was purchased by Judge J. D. Armour, who later gained some measure of fame for having presided at the Black Donnelly murder trial in London, Ontario.

It was in part to see whether the early history of the old limestone building could be unearthed that the Cobourg Museum Foundation commissioned a professional archaeological dig.

