

President Bob Berry opened the meeting at 9:55 am with 58 members in attendance. He welcomed and introduced today’s seven guests: Hugh Thomassin, Jerry Collins, Shawn Mansouri, Dave Fisk, Ron Galbraith, Elmer Warkentin and Ezio Di Emanuele.

Announcements - President Bob Berry

- announced that the fees for the Club’s next fiscal year are due as of April 1, 2024. Dues can be paid by cash or cheque (made out to “Royal City Men’s Club”) or e-transfer to royalcitymensclub@gmail.com

Ken Marchant

- if you have ordered tickets to see “Jersey Boys” on April 13th, see Warren Gregg to pick up your tickets;
- Today will be the close-off date to order tickets for the Guelph Little Theatre production of “Fire Alarm” on April 28th. Bob Denis is handling the purchase and distribution of the tickets;

Ed Herold – Re: Coffee Gatherings at the Symposium:

- announced the change of seating location at the Symposium is now to the left as you enter in the area of the booths. This should improve the problem of noise and make hearing better.

Bob Berry

- Announced that due to the increase in the number of members attending Thursday coffee gatherings we are going to try to split the location of venues. As a trial we are going to see if we can start having interested members go to either the Symposium or the Uptown Grill on Woolwich Street opposite to the entrance to Riverside Park. Kerry Gennings will make a reservation for Thurs. March 21st.
- Bob also informed members that there are 35 pairs of “freebee” sunglasses available that are suitable for viewing the solar eclipse that is going to be partially viewable from Guelph on April 8th. If you want a pair of glasses pick up a pair from the welcome table. **(CAUTIONARY NOTE: Do not look at the eclipse unless you have proper approved eye protection.)**

Doug Davidson introduce today’s speaker, Susan Ratcliffe, speaking on *Guelph’s Underground Tunnels* or *Under Where?*

Bio:

Susan Ratcliffe, Community heritage advocate.

After spending 31 years as an English teacher, Susan retired into life and work in the community. She chaired the Board of Directors of the Eden Mills Writers’ Festival and was a member of Heritage Guelph for ten years. She now works part time as a reference librarian at the Guelph Public Library, and is a committed advocate for heritage both in Guelph and in Ontario.

She is past President of Architectural Conservancy Ontario and President of its Guelph and Wellington branch. She is now Site Co-Ordinator for Doors Open Guelph, has been a historical walking tour guide for the Guelph Arts Council for 30 years, is a member of the Yorklands Green Hub Board of Directors and writes and speaks on issues of Guelph heritage. Recipient of the Lieutenant-Governor’s Ontario Heritage Award for Lifetime Achievement.

Presentation:

Underwhere: exploring stories and myths of Guelph’s tunnels.

Everyone has heard the story of Al Capone or the Sleeman brothers smuggling the beer from the Albion Hotel through a tunnel, but is it true? And the tunnels in the Ward, or at GCVI,

or at Heritage Hall? Is there a life underground in Guelph? Let's explore!

Underwhere – is about exploring stories about Guelph's Tunnels and the myths or truths about these tunnels;

- When Susan conducts walking tours around Guelph, the most common question she gets is: "Where's the tunnels";

She talked about the universal appeal about tunnel's and "what's under there?"

- There are superstitions and stories about monsters connected around the stories about tunnels;

- She talked about tunnels in general such as the sewers in Montreal, the "Diefenbunker", railway tunnels, car tunnels, and some famous tunnels such as the spiral railway tunnels in BC., the Chunnel Tunnel between England and France;

- In London, England there is the Waterloo Graffiti Tunnel;

- There is the Brockville Railway Tunnel which is now preserved with a walking trail about a kilometer long and a wonderful light show.

And in Guelph:

- There are rumours about the underground tunnels under Guelph and in particular, The Albion Hotel built in 1855;

- She showed a video of a commercial for Sleeman Beer and the myths connected to Al Capone being in Guelph during Prohibition;

- there's a myth about the lady ghost who lived in the Albion Hotel;

- beer was made in the Albion Hotel and there is a story that during Prohibition there was a tunnel from the Albion Hotel to the Speed River into which beer was poured to get rid of evidence in the event of an expected raid being made by the police;

- There was a tunnel from Catholic Hill that carried water to the Albion Hotel to make the beer;

- there are stories about Al Capone and Rocco Perri, a guy who worked for the mob in Guelph and looked like Al Capone which may be why people think that Al Capone visited Guelph. However, there are no written records of Al Capone being in Guelph;

- Susan told the story of how beer was made in Guelph and then sent by boat across Lake Ontario where the labels were affixed to the beer bottle before distribution.

- She told stories connected to Sleeman Breweries and smuggling during Prohibition.

- The Sleeman Manor & the Sleeman Brewery across the road from it had a tunnel connecting them.

- Black Heritage Hall & the Underground Railway are a source for questions asking "where are the tunnels." Escaped slaves came to Canada and Guelph, but there are no underground tunnels.

- Another source of questions comes from the Ignatius Jesuit Centre in Guelph. The stories are that during WWI the Jesuits hid and protected men who didn't want to serve. They did this by having men hide by going through a tunnel from the Center building to the novitiate building behind the Centre building. However, there are no tunnels there.

- So, are there any tunnels in Guelph? You need to know that Guelph is built on limestone bedrock and to build tunnels there would have to be a lot of blasting of rock. This would cause it to be very difficult to build a tunnel.

- Most stories about tunnels seem to be about tunnels in The Ward. One story is about a still in a tunnel in the basement of a house in the Ward, but this blew-up.

- At the Spring Mill Distillery when the renovations were taking place to convert the building to the present day distillery, a carpet was found and lifted up to reveal these large tanks underneath. These tanks were used to store beer in and are now outside of the entrance to the present Spring Mill Distillery.

- There is a true story about two lost tunnels found under the old Paradise Gardens/Dessert Inn, on Woodlawn Avenue. One tunnel connected the Desert Inn to the old Imperial Tobacco plant. There was a mobster who lived at the Dessert Inn and the tunnel was used to smuggle cigarettes out of the plant for Imperial Tobacco. The second tunnel went across the road to the Guelph Woodlawn

Cemetery and came out in the Cemetery Mausoleum. Apparently, mobsters went down stairs at the Dessert Inn and through the tunnel to the Cemetery Mausoleum where a black car was parked for the mobsters to escape in.

- There are lost tunnels that existed from the location of the current Guelph Farmer’s Market to what is now the front of today’s City Hall where Royal City Fair was held. The tunnels were used to provide a route for horses to walk from the horse barns (now the Guelph Farmer’s Market) to the exhibition show ring (now the front of City Hall).
- There were some small tunnels discovered under Baker Street parking lot that were used for some businesses that existed in the 1800’s.

So, does Guelph have any tunnels?

- There is a tunnel at the old Guelph Reformatory between the jail administration building and the maintenance building behind the jail.
- There are underground rivers and streams under Guelph:
- Susan talked about Pond Creek & Silvercreek. In the 1800’s there were a number of islands between present day Gordon Street and the Hanlon Expressway. These islands and the braids of the Speed River have since been eliminated. The top braid of the river was filled in and is now where Wellington Street exists.
- She showed a heritage map of where the Pond Creek Tunnel used to be around 1850.
- There are some old tunnels under the Grand Trunk Railway line that permit the flow of Silvercreek which flows into the Speed River.
- there are wind tunnels located now under RWDI Consulting Engineers in the south end of Guelph for testing wind in tunnels.
- there are tunnels at St. Joseph's Hospital between the hospital that used to go to Nursing Residence when it was a nursing school.
- and there are tunnels (culverts) for frogs in various locations around Guelph.

Why look for "Underwhere"? Because people are fascinated by what’s underground.

- There are “Deeper Explorations” and Susan provided the names of books for reference.

Susan Ratcliffe responded to a Q&A

Bob Berry thanked Susan Ratcliffe for her presentation and gave her a token of appreciation.

Next Meeting: March 28, 2024 with Dr. Ruth Rivkin – *Adaptation of Polar Bears to Climate Change*

Adjournment @ 10:55 am

Recording Secretary: Kerry Gennings