

2025 Year in Review Branch Reports



ACO CLARINGTON

Branch Report January 22, 2026

By Bernice Norton Branch President

Our Branch received wonderful news at our municipal council meeting Monday January 19, 2026. Jury Lands foundation was given a lease to the building and full support from council to restore the building. Manorville Homes will be doing the restoration. Jury Lands now needs to raise 1.6 million dollars by December 31, 2026.

If you can spare a donation to restore this National Historic site please go to info@jurylandsfoundation.com very dollar counts.

Our branch has been working along side this for over 12 years.

ACO COBOURG & EAST NORTHUMBERLAND

2025 in review report by Rob Mikel, Branch Chair

The branch carried out a full-fledged campaign to get 340 King Street West – the Brookside property - designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. Members were interviewed on several local radio stations. ACO members presented directly to council at different meetings. Through ACO C & EN campaigns we were able to persuade several councilors to vote in favour of the designation. All councilors except the mayor voted in favour and the site was designated – this was a major win.

A second campaign to stop major unsympathetic development in Cobourg's historic core, a nine-story monolithic condo building on 202 Second Street facing the NHS Victoria Hall was carried out.

Rob Mikel, Branch Chair, gave three lectures about Cobourg's architectural history and building to full audiences in Victoria Hall.

The Branch gave a grant towards the restoration of Cobourg Museum's exhibition building.

The Branch continued its communications to members on its website, email notices and through outreach to local heritage and cultural organizations.

ACO HAMILTON Region

Prepared by Shannon Kyles, ACO President

Plans

There will be an Annual General meeting of ACO HRB on February 4. Over the past 5 years our only activity has been Doors Open Hamilton Region, which is a full-time activity for 8 months. While this is a useful event, there are other things that ACO could be doing to engage more members and provide more heritage interaction.

The board is looking to expand, to get more activities and events, and to become more engaged with interventions to protect.

LOC Heritage Conference - June 18-20, 2026

Shannon and Sandra have been attending the conference meetings. Everything seems to be in good shape. The HRB is going to be donating \$2,500.00 towards the conference.

ACO LONDON

Prepared by Benjamin Vazquez, Chair

Over this past year the London ACO has continued to engage in heritage education throughout the City of London. We had two very successful walks, our traditional Geranium Walk in the Blackfriars neighbourhood, and an All Saints walk in the Wortley Village neighbourhood visiting four churches. We have also continued our successful house sign program, placing signs with historical information on dozens of London houses. We have been involved in the very successful London Heritage Awards. And we have been engaged in active lobbying to the city on behalf of several heritage buildings, most notably the Beth Emmanuel Church in the Soho neighbourhood.

ACO MUSKOKA

2025 overview of branch meetings and ad hoc minutes by Karen Lang

Our branch is exceedingly small, with less than 4 active members. We had three organized meetings over the 2025 year, specific to our MuskokaBuilt initiative, which is our main focus. Our branch executive focused on specific projects as follows:

June 27th – Attendees – Tori Robertson, Karen Lang, Peter Kelley (Mayor, Township of Muskoka Lakes), and Susan Mazan (deputy Mayor, Township of Muskoka Lakes).

Discussion points were:

- how to best promote MuskokaBuilt in the short and long term, within the township and district (Between that date and August 30th we set up two opportunities to present the MB platform: one at the Muskoka Lakes Museum and one at the Port Carling Library)
- brainstorm session about synergies with other Heritage Groups (Gravenhurst Municipal Cultural Plan)

August 26th – Attendees – Tori Robertson and Karen Lang
General discussion about the implications of the potential structure changes to ACO, financial challenges of the provincial office and our strategy (if any at this point) to maintain focus on MuskokaBuilt.

October 28th – Attendees – Tori Robertson and Karen Lang
Continued discussion on the best way to preserve MuskokaBuilt if the ACO structure breaks down. We are committed to preserving what we have established to date. Our tentative goal (very much in a brainstorming format at this point) is to look at alignment of this site with other synergistic organizations in Muskoka – including the Muskoka Lakes Association, Heritage groups, Museum, Library Archives.

As such, our meetings for the organizational purpose of this branch were relatively ad hoc, and related specifically to the tasks identified above.

ACO NORTH WATERLOO

ACO North Waterloo Region Activities Report for 2025 by Marg Rowell, President

In 2024 ACO Advocacy at Queen's Park advocated with the provincial legislature that the government encourages retrofitting existing buildings to reduce energy costs which would be better for the environment. As a result, we launched the Heritage Housing Lecture Series, with the theme of the creative reuse of buildings. The first lecture was in March by our member Sandra Parks, who gave an illustrated talk about converting a daylight factory style building into open concept condos. The building was a former shoe factory in Kitchener.

In April the second lecture took place in St. Mark's Place, the former Lutheran Church on King Street, in Kitchener. The speakers, Graham Cubitt and Linda Nydam, both from Flourish (a development services company allied with Indwell), described how the church with the additions, has been transformed into a more energy efficient building that supports affordable housing. Indwell has been converting buildings for supportive housing in a number of communities in Ontario.

The third lecture took place in May at St. Matthew's Church. Joe Mancini of The Working Centre spoke about the conversion of the Mitchell Button factory on Victoria Street into energy efficient spaces which provided much needed living spaces and a new St. John's Kitchen and Outreach Centre.

In August, we wrote a letter to Kitchener Council and advocated (unsuccessfully) for the saving of two properties in the Civic Centre Neighbourhood Heritage Conservation District.

In late September, our branch participated in Doors Open Waterloo Region. We had a display about ACO in the former Waterloo County Gaol (Jail) that has been saved and converted to court rooms and offices. Gail Pool, Frances Stewart, Deb Westman and Warren Stauch greeted visitors and explained how the jail was spared from demolition.

On Saturday, October 25th there was a bus tour of two heritage districts in Kitchener. The tour explained to ACO members and members from the public about the oldest district, Doon in

south Kitchener and the newest district near St. Mary's Hospital, that contains many homes, known as Victory Houses, that were built after WWII.

In November we had a meeting featuring the author Don Mikel who has a new book published called *Canadian Architectural Styles: a Field Guide*. The talk illustrated the various architectural styles found in Canada and had images of these styles. Don brought some of the books for purchase.

Our branch was represented at the Wilmot Township Heritage Day that took place at the New Dundee Community Centre. Our display featured information about the work of the ACO.

All of the events were well received and attended.

Two ongoing projects of the branch are: to update [WaterlooBuilt](#) which is a searchable database where you can look up information about various styles and descriptions of buildings that have been listed and designated. Our website also has the [Directory of Heritage Practitioners](#), which lists individuals and firms that have expert knowledge to help owners of older buildings with maintaining them.

ACO PORT HOPE

ACO PORT HOPE YEAR IN REVIEW 2025

The year 2025 has been an exciting one for ACO Port Hope. There was standing room only at the Annual Meeting in February, and it was a resounding success. The event was highlighted by presentations on three significant heritage conservation projects currently underway in Port Hope:

- Whitehall, an 1812 Cobourg residence that has been moved to a site in Port Hope's Ward 2 where it is being meticulously restored
- The Walton, a former downtown hotel, is being re-purposed as a condominium building and
- The Music Hall, the former 1871 O'Neill's Opera House, that is being restored to its former glory as a music and event space

Fundraising has also been very successful this year. The April ACO Port Hope trip to the Dordogne region in southwestern France, specifically the medieval village of Domme, raised over \$9000 for our branch and the ACO Port Hope Heritage Auctions in April and November raised over \$30,000. ACO Port Hope's fundraising initiatives have enabled the branch to offer numerous restoration grants to help preserve the significant architecture and heritage landscapes in our Town.

The ACO Port Hope Education Committee Walking Tours were a triumph again this year. What a pleasure to see groups of Port Hope visitors and residents alike roaming our streets on Saturdays in the Spring and Fall soaking up the municipality's rich cultural and architectural history.

The ACO Education Committee also helped to host the launches of two books in Port Hope this year: *Ontario's Port Hope – A Cultural Story*, by Bruce Bowden and Nigel Dickson, and *The Ontario Cottage Perfect of its Kind* by Lynne D. DiStefano and Dan Schneider. Both were very well attended and received.

On the advocacy front, the ACO Port Hope Advocacy Committee continues to stand up for the Old Hospital and the File Factory in Port Hope. As well, we nominated the 1911 Canadian Northern Railway Station for designation, now that it is no longer provincially owned, and this nomination seems to have been positively received. In addition, a sub-committee of the ACO Port Hope Advocacy Committee has been formed to study the heritage barns in the Port Hope area. The committee has begun creating a local barns inventory which will be used as a basis for further analysis of those barns which warrant additional research, documentation and protection.

Finally, the ACO Port Hope membership continues to grow, and we greatly appreciate our members' devotion to raising money and building support for the preservation of Port Hope's unique heritage architecture and landscapes.

ACO SOUTH BRUCE-GREY

Prepared by Ted Cobean

2025 has been a tumultuous year for ACO South Bruce-Grey as it addressed the Fire Orders issued by the Walkerton Fire Chief regarding Victoria Jubilee Hall (VJH) which it holds in trust for the community.

After conducting a Fire and Safety inspection of Victoria Jubilee Hall (VJH) the Fire Chief noticed various areas in the building that needed attention. During 2025 we have completed most of the requirements such as: Fire resistant door painting, closure sensors on selected doors, fire resistant drywall to furnace rooms, replacement of some doors with metal fire doors, caulking existing openings in walls and beams left by contractors when wiring was installed. Additional fire requirements will be carried into 2026. All the Fire requirements will be completed at Victoria Jubilee Hall during 2026.

Despite the above orders, VJH had 5-6 shows performed on stage in our Opera Hall for receptive audiences.

ACO STRATFORD-PERTH

2025 Year-end Report January 2026 prepared by Dan Schneider, President. This report is for the period January-December 2025. Highlights:

1. In 2025 the branch executive added three more properties in Stratford to our Watchlist (potentially endangered sites), including the Stratford Normal School, the best preserved of the four original teachers' colleges in Ontario. A historic industrial site in St. Marys related to the quarrying industry and which includes six striking concrete pillars was also added to the list. President Dan Schneider wrote a letter to the St. Marys Independent about the need to preserve the pillars site and later attended a Town Council meeting that considered the matter.

2. Two members of the executive (Cambria Ravenhill and Dan Schneider) attended the very successful 2025 Ontario Heritage Conference in June in Prince Edward County.
3. The Branch continued to closely follow the ACO Re-Imagined process and restructuring proposals. On March 1 Dan attended a meeting of branch chairs and the provincial executive in Guelph to explore models for a future ACO organization. In October the branch executive voted in principle to pursue an affiliate/Not-For-Profit Corporation status for the branch and appointed a five-person transition team to investigate further.
4. On November 22 Dan and Vice-President Lutzen Riedstra attended an in-person information session in Waterloo on three models for a revitalized ACO.
5. The Branch held its 2025 Annual General meeting on June 4 at the Stratford Country Club. Two executive members that have been appointed by the Executive in the previous year were elected to the executive: Valerie Mills-Milde, Membership Coordinator, and Danielle LeDuc, Website and Social Media Coordinator. All other executive members remained, bringing the total number of members to 10.
6. Just before the AGM the annual guest lecture was given by Lynne DiStefano and Dan Schneider, co-authors of *The Ontario Cottage: Perfect of its Kind*. The book includes several houses from Stratford/Perth County. As requested by Lynne, her honorarium was later used to purchase three copies of the book which have been given to local high school libraries.
7. *The Ontario Cottage: Perfect of its Kind* was released in late October. A book launch and presentation was held in St. Marys on November 6 and in Stratford on November 9. Proceeds from the November event, which was by donation, went to benefit the Stratford/Perth County ACO branch. An article on Dan, focusing on the book and mentioning his ACO connections, appeared in the St. Marys Independent.
8. The branch local historical plaques program is the flagship program of the branch. The end of 2025 saw the number of ACO S/PC plaques increase to 436. Plaques Coordinator Michele Bailey was interviewed on local Rogers TV program "What's Up Stratford."
9. Branch representatives continued to work with a local documentary filmmaker on plans for a film about architectural preservation in Stratford. The branch is considering providing research and funding assistance to the project.
10. Thanks to Danielle, Website and Social Media Coordinator, the existing website has been updated, and plans are in the works for a revamped site in 2026.

ACO TORONTO

ACOTO Year in Review Board Report 2025

Alex Miller-Gerrard, ACOTO Board Chair

Advocacy Files

1. **Ontario Science Centre (OSC)** There have been no positive developments to report regarding Ontario Place. However, the site remained in the public eye throughout the past year. In January 2026, the Supreme Court of Canada agreed to hear a constitutional challenge to the province's Rebuilding Ontario Place Act, brought forward by the Ontario Place Protectors. The group argues that the legislation limits court oversight and exempts the redevelopment from environmental, heritage, and municipal regulations. Although earlier challenges were dismissed by lower courts, the Supreme Court's decision to hear the case highlights the broader significance of the issues raised. A hearing date has not yet been set, and we will continue to follow developments closely.
2. **Ontario Place** At this time, there are no positive developments to report regarding Ontario Place. The situation remains fluid, and the site continues to attract public attention through ongoing media coverage and public discourse. We will continue to monitor developments closely and assess opportunities for future advocacy as they arise.
3. **TOBuilt (Open-Source Database of Toronto's Built and Intangible Heritage)** Work on the TOBuilt database continues, with ongoing efforts focused on expanding and refining entries related to Toronto's listed and recognized heritage properties. This remains a key initiative for the branch, supporting public access to heritage information and encouraging broader engagement with Toronto's built and intangible heritage. ACOTO welcomed a new Coordinator, who joined the branch at the end of 2025. The coordinator's role includes partial responsibility for TOBuilt, with a focus on supporting the platform's expansion, making recommendations to the board regarding volunteer recruitment and training, and helping to ensure its long-term sustainability. In parallel, the Board continued to research potential grant opportunities to support future development and enhancement of the database.
4. **ACOTO Symposium:** The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario's Toronto Branch hosted its annual symposium, continuing a longstanding tradition of exploring contemporary issues and ideas in heritage conservation. Previous symposium themes had included Intangible Heritage, Housing and Heritage, Main Streets, Modernist Schools, and Demolition.
5. **Branch Growth and Governance** The branch has recently recruited three new board members, strengthening our capacity to support advocacy, programming, and ongoing initiatives. In addition, we recently welcomed a new Treasurer, supporting the branch's continued financial stability and governance.

ACO WINDSOR-ESSEX YEAR IN REVIEW 2025 Panelists

ACO WINDSOR-ESSEX YEAR IN REVIEW 2025

Prepared by Tammy Dewhirst on January 16, 2026

The Windsor-Essex branch marked its 30th anniversary in 2025, a milestone that coincided with an especially active year. Volunteers played a central role throughout, contributing to events, strengthening partnerships, and supporting residents in ways that advanced the organization's mandate. Their steady involvement helped the branch navigate a full calendar of initiatives while continuing to meet community needs effectively.

Awards:

- In January, the branch was honoured with the 2024 John R. Park Homestead Award from the Essex Region Conservancy Authority, recognizing significant contributions to preserving the region's human and natural heritage.
- The branch once again voted to put forward nominations for the Annual ACO Heritage Awards, continuing our yearly tradition. We were pleased to see our Amherstburg nominees recognized with awards in their respective categories, and we remain proud to celebrate the creativity and commitment of all the nominees.

Community Partnerships:

- We coordinated support from retired City of Windsor Heritage Planner John Calhoun, who provided architectural guidance to the Harrow Early Immigrant Research Society as they worked to designate and promote key heritage buildings in the Harrow core.
- We continue to maintain our connection with St. Joachim Church, Our Lady of Assumption Church, Save the Jackson Park Bandshell Group, Save the Windsor Barn Group, the Essex Region Conservation Authority, Windsor-Essex Jane's Walks, and other community organizations and heritage focused groups.
- We collaborated—and continue to collaborate—with the Municipality of Essex to identify historic buildings and spaces in historic Colchester that were omitted from the heritage register due to an informal agreement.
- We provided guidance and support to community members who sought our expertise, including the Tecumseh Historical Society and several local realtors.

Events:

- We moderated an Art Windsor-Essex Community Conservation at Night panel on stewardship of heritage properties, held as part of the promotion for Windsor-

Essex Jane's Walks 2025. Panelists included David Garlick (Duff-Baby House), Mary-Katherine Whelen (Amherstburg Freedom Museum), and Ken Acton (Windsor Region Society of Architects).

- We partnered with Windsor-Essex Jane's Walks for the 2025 Festival, which—with 54 walks—ranked as the third-largest Jane's Walk Festival in Canada. Our involvement included planning, promotion, host recruitment, fundraising, and leading several walks and talks. In the fall, we also helped plan and volunteer for the Spooky Jane's Walk Fundraiser.
- We co-sponsored the "Spotlight on Architecture" program at the Windsor International Film Festival. After the screening of *The Lost City of Melbourne*, retired professor Frank Perissonati delivered a talk on Windsor's lost architectural treasures.

Municipal Activism:

- We submitted strong letters of support to Windsor City Council for the proposed Walkerville Heritage District and to Amherstburg Town Council for the Downtown Heritage District. Amherstburg's district was approved on June 24, 2025, protecting 146 of the 165 buildings on its Heritage Register.
- We met with planners and councilors across all seven municipalities in Essex County to emphasize the urgency of designating listed properties before the January 1, 2027, deadline. To date, only the Town of Essex has designated all properties on its list.
- We attended public meetings on proposed redevelopment projects, including the proposal for 825 Riverside Drive, home to the culturally and architecturally significant Windsor CBC Building.
- After Our Lady of Assumption Church was denied monument status for the third time, we prepared a letter advocating for reconsideration.
- We partnered with the Save the Jackson Park Bandshell Group to advocate for the designation of the Bandshell—a landmark of architectural significance and a cultural cornerstone of the historic Emancipation Festivals. We continue to work with the group to encourage the City of Windsor to purchase the adjacent Windsor Stadium, convert it to parkland, and restore the Bandshell.
- We submitted a letter to Amherstburg Town Council—read aloud by a delegate on the Council floor—urging Council to halt consideration of selling the Town's historic Carnegie Library to finance a proposed Town Hall. The letter emphasized the exceptional value of preserving a Carnegie Library that still fulfills its original purpose.

- We continue to champion the adaptive reuse and restoration of Belle Vue House in Amherstburg, actively engaging with and lobbying community leaders to move this important project forward.

The year ahead offers an opportunity to strengthen the Windsor-Essex branch's foundation while expanding its reach. Attention to membership drives will help bring more voices, skills, and perspectives into the organization, ensuring a broader base of support for ongoing initiatives. At the same time, increasing the branch's bandwidth—both in volunteer capacity and organizational resources—will make it easier to respond to emerging issues and sustain long-term projects. With these efforts in place, the branch is well positioned to continue its advocacy work, championing heritage preservation and community engagement with steady, purposeful activism.