

Richmond Hill Historical Society

Annual General Meeting – January 20, 2026

President's 2025 Report

It seems impossible that I am delivering a report about the goings on of our Society in 2025, but from the vantage point of January, 2026, I can report that the past year has seen its share highlights. 2025 was a busy year and I want to begin by acknowledging the hard work of our Executive Committee and other member volunteers in making that busy year a successful one! I also want to take this opportunity to once again congratulate two of our members – Andrea Kulesh, our Vice-president and Treasurer, and our member, Marj Andre, who both received City of Richmond Hill Volunteer Service Awards at a ceremony earlier in 2025.

Like last year, I want to start by reporting on our efforts to ensure that our Society conforms to the new requirements outlined in the Province's new ONCA legislation. Using templates and advice from the Ontario Historical Association, we were able to finally craft new Bylaws that are up-to-date and meet the parameters set by the Province. The draft was reviewed by your Executive for the final time – and approved - at its May meeting, which allowed for the draft to be distributed to the Society's membership and ultimately approved by a show of hands a few weeks later at our regular May meeting. That positive vote was the culmination of more than a year of effort and was gratifying, to say the least.

With an approved set of new Bylaws, we were in a position to submit them to the Ontario Business Registry, which acknowledged their receipt. As a Charitable Organization, we were also required to submit them to the Canadian Revenue Agency, which also acknowledged their receipt. Finally we sent a copy to the Ontario Historical Society, and we are now in a position to begin operating our Society with a new and improved set of Bylaws – an important milestone!

One aspect of the new Bylaws that became apparent quite quickly was the need to more formally acknowledge the many procedures and requirements that they describe, rather than rely on memory and past practices. This requirement has set an agenda for the coming year that will see your Executive drafting and discussing a list of procedures and policies that will have to be formally approved and that

will ultimately be part of a Procedures Manual that will include, besides our new Bylaws, a Vision and Mission Statement, a Values Statement and a list of at least 25 procedures that will inform our efforts on an ongoing basis. We will certainly be keeping you up-to-date as this work unfolds.

An aspect of regular Society life that has been the subject of fairly frequent discussion in 2025 has been our meeting arrangements at the Central Library. I'm sure you will all recall the process that led to the decision to relocate our meetings from Wallace Hall to the Library, and we have realized real benefits from that decision, especially in terms of budget flexibility. The change has had its ups and downs, however, especially relating to having to change meeting locations on occasion, or being squeezed into a smaller room. In an effort to try and improve this situation, we met with Library management, and I believe we have been able to resolve most of our issues. We have been able to have access to the full Room A/B space, and we have agreed that we have a consistent fallback location (if we ever need it) in the Library's Conference Room on the 4th Floor.

The meeting room arrangement with the Library has also enabled us to upgrade the social aspects of our Society, a situation that has not recovered from Covid and the move from Wallace Hall. We are now able to invite members to arrive at meetings as early as 6:30 PM to allow for more social activities and conversation until the meeting formally gets underway at 7:00 PM. Having the bigger room has also enabled us to more effectively arrange our two "social events" of the year, at Christmas and at our June award presentation and "bring and brag" meeting, and we are also able to do a better job in terms of refreshments.

Another aspect of our effort to improve the social benefits of the Society has been to explore opportunities for tours or outings to areas of interest around our community. We were able to arrange a tour of the Sharon Temple, just north of Newmarket, last September, that went quite well, and we are considering other possibilities, including the York Region Public School Board Museum in Markham, the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum, and the Ontario Archives.

In addition to outings outside of our normal meeting schedule, the Society has also been busy with a variety of outreach activities in locations around the City. The first event in 2025 was the Mayor's Levee in January, followed by Councillor

Chan's Spring Fair in May, and Marj Andre's Connecting the Community event at Delmanor on the same day. An outreach disappointment in the last year or so has been our inability to get what we refer to as our "Liberal" articles into the online version of that weekly newspaper. We have carried on producing the articles for our own Newsletter, however, and we will continue to try to break the ice with York Region's on-line publication.

I mentioned earlier that our June meeting is primarily a social event, but it has two main components. The first is a "bring and brag" session which gives members an opportunity to display and discuss some of their treasures. The second, though, is an opportunity to honor the recipient of the Bert Hunt Heritage Award, which in 2025 was the City's Legion Branch, chosen for its many contributions in Richmond Hill, including its annual Remembrance Day activities at our Cenotaph. The primary rationale for recognizing their heritage efforts, though, was for their "No Stone Left Alone" program, which honors Richmond Hill's fallen veterans by marking their gravesites every November with poppies, flags and candles. It is an impressive and respectful program, and the Society was pleased that we were able to thank them for their efforts with our Bert Hunt award. As I said at the June meeting, Bert would have been pleased.

I also mentioned earlier that our move to the Library, which is rent-free, gave us a lot more flexibility with our budget, and one of those flexibilities was our ability to make donations to organizations in Richmond Hill that shared our heritage values. 2025 is the second year that we have been able to make such a contribution, and we were pleased to make our second donation of \$600.00 to the City's Heritage Services Program to provide for free guided walks in order to showcase our City's historic buildings and sites. Facilitating such a program aligns well with our mandate, and represents an important role for our Society in the community.

Budget flexibility also raises the issue of just how we raise money to finance the operation of our Society. We are very fortunate that we have been the recipient of a fairly generous provincial grant for number of years (\$1100.00), which is very helpful. We also collect annual membership dues, of course, which accounts for about \$600.00 a year and we fund-raise through a variety of efforts including the annual Maple Syrup Festival, Curtain Club Charity Nights and a number of small raffles and 50/50 draws at Society events. We also receive occasional small

donations and, of course are happy to receive small donations at our refreshment table at our meetings. Not having to pay \$1500.00 in rent every year is what gives us the flexibility I spoke of earlier to make donations, and provides for other regular expenses like insurance (\$700.00), PO Box rental (\$200.00), speakers' honoraria (\$700.00), brochure and other printing requirements (\$500.00), website costs (\$140.00) and a number of other miscellaneous expenses associated with bank charges, office supplies, etc.

Highlighting the various roles the Society plays in our community is one of the elements in our ongoing efforts to increase our membership. We have certainly welcomed a number of new members to the Society in the last year or so, but 2025 began with a more concerted effort to discuss a more formal Membership Strategy, and we have been working on it and improving it as the year has progressed. Part of this effort will simply be to try and be more visible in the community, and to showcase the benefits of Society membership, as well as describing our values, mandate and vision, and bragging about some of our accomplishments. Our hope is that this effort will be evident in 2026.

I did want to highlight the roles that two of our Directors play on two of Richmond Hill's Council Committees. The Society has permanent seats on the Heritage Richmond Hill Committee and the Heritage Centre Advisory Committee, and you will be hearing from both of them as part of this AGM, so I won't dwell on the work the committees have been doing, but I do want to acknowledge the work that Agnes Parr and David Hunt do on these two Committees. Agnes has been working with Heritage Richmond Hill since the last municipal election, but David Hunt thankfully agreed to take on the Heritage Centre Advisory Committee early this year after our former member, Cameron Telch resigned. My thanks to them both.

I have been highlighting a number of important events, processes and happenings during 2025 in this report, but I want to conclude with a reminder that the regular business of our Society – the heart of our Society – is the everyday routine of activities that occur every month. Regular Executive meetings, regular members meetings with speakers, a couple of social events a year, a significant presence on Facebook, website postings complete with visits and views and regular newsletters are vital to our success.

The reports you will now be hearing from your other Executive members will also give you an even better sense of what your Historical society has been engaged in over the last year.

Thank You

Respectfully Submitted by:

Jim Vollmershausen

President

Richmond Hill Historical Society