



MY HOMETOWN

Lights, Camera, Cobourg!

The cinematic charm of a quaint Canadian harbour town

by Lynn C. Bilton, Cobourg, Ont.

Before the pandemic hit, people who visited the historic harbour town of Cobourg, Ontario may have occasionally found themselves doing a double-take. Watching folks, all dressed up in early 1900's attire, made those passing by stop and stare. It was a busy year of filming in Cobourg and the downtown core seemed to change its wardrobe on a weekly basis. For example, just one week later, the scene changed to an American setting by replacing every Canadian flag with the Stars and Stripes for the filming of *Ginny and Georgia*. I can only imagine what the visitors must be thinking when they see such a

dramatic change of setting, and if they've taken a wrong turn!

Up until 2020, filming activities in this picturesque town made these sights quite common. Cobourg had become one of the province's go-to locations for filming. In 2019, production companies who filmed there included Shaftesbury Murdoch Inc. (*Murdoch Mysteries*), Netflix (*Ginny & Georgia*), TF Content Ltd. (*Hey Lady!*) and Marblemedia (*Landscape Artist of the Year Canada*).

Cobourg boasts many historic Victorian and Edwardian buildings, which makes the town a good setting for *Murdoch Mysteries*. Victoria Hall, which

was built in 1859, is a perfect "stunt-double" for Toronto's old Union Station. In fact, fans have fun picking out local settings around town. The Ravensworth manor, named and styled after the Ravensworth Plantation in Virginia, was a breathtaking location for the wedding of Constable Henry Higgins (played by Lachlan Murdoch and Ruth Newsome (Siobhan Murphy)). The boardwalk in Victoria Park is the scene for a fast-paced roller-skating episode in Season 10 where Murdoch investigates the murder of one of the champions in this ruthless sport, and Bagot Street also offered a perfect stage for a bicycle chase-scene. View-

ers have now witnessed Constable George Crabtree (portrayed by Canadian actor Jonny Harris) ask two different women on two separate occasions for their hand in marriage. Both proposals took place at the pergola in Victoria Park, with Lake Ontario in the background.

Ginny and Georgia is a Netflix series set during the present day, in a fictional town called Wellsbury, in New England. Part of the first season was filmed in Cobourg throughout 2019. El Camino Restaurant became the "Blue Farm Cafe". Scotiabank became "Beachway Trust, Massachusetts" and the versatile Victoria Hall starred once again as the backdrop for the local fall fair.

Another show, called *Hey Lady!*, is a CBC GEM original comedy series starring veteran Canadian actors Jayne Eastwood and Jackie Richardson. One

From left to right: Murdoch Mysteries background actors (extras) in downtown Cobourg; Victoria Hall is the perfect backdrop for a fall fair in Wellsbury, New England.

trailer features a scene in the historical "Old Bailey" courtroom inside Victoria Hall, while the series *Landscape Artist of the Year Canada* highlights the famous view from Cobourg harbour in one episode.

Adam Bureau, Coordinator of Arts, Culture and Tourism for the Town of Cobourg, stated (prior to the pandemic) there are audience "followings", and this "attracts more tourism". "In Cobourg, the arts are so popular and all of these events bring together the community spirit and add to the economy."

At the moment, due to Covid-19, the town has had to turn down requests to film in Victoria Hall which is presently closed to the public. *Murdoch Mysteries* was in town briefly in November 2020, filming on private property at Cobourg's eastern edge. Any future filming will include detailed Covid-19 policies and procedures.

Covid-19 and social distancing is also affecting background actors (extras). Miranda Lukaniuk-Lipovisek, who has 30 years

of experience in the film industry (and created Local BG Talent), has a new workshop called, "Getting Back Into Background Post Pandemic", that "will highlight all you need to know about the film industry protocols that have enabled our industry to continue to operate." Miranda's goal "is to continue to develop digital technology with a local company, Kleurvision, which will change the way background performers are being cast in this industry for the better ... across Ontario."

In September 2019, I stopped by the *Murdoch Mysteries* set at the old market building. When I joined the gaggle of women watching from across the street, several of them asked anxiously, "Have you seen him?" Everyone smiled. We all knew the "him" was Yannick Bisson who portrays Detective William Murdoch.

Covid-19 has created a mountain of challenges, but things are progressing to a new normal. There will be "Lights, camera, action" once again in Cobourg and we'll look forward to spotting "him"! ■