

# A Shout-out to Town Criers

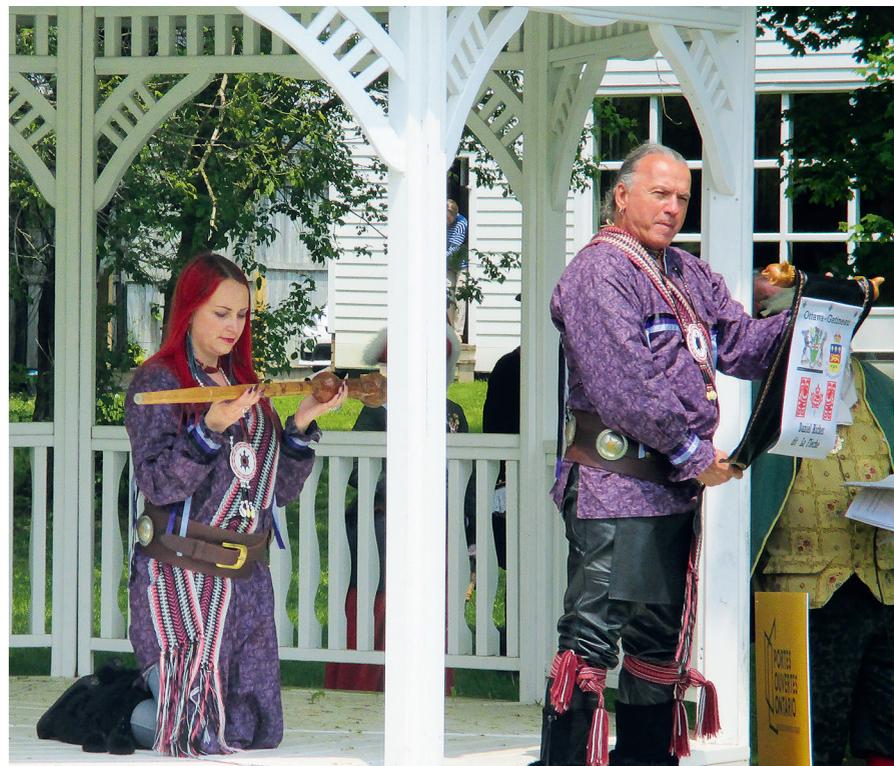
Hear ye! Hear ye! A venerable role from the past lives on in modern times *by Lynn C. Bilton, Cobourg, Ont.*

**W**ith backdrops of Cobourg's heritage harbour and the historic Grafton Inn, the Ontario Provincial Town Criers Championship was held on Saturday, June 1, 2019. This event is billed as the oldest annual competition of its kind in North America.

Mandy Robinson was appointed the first female Town Crier for Cobourg in 2015, and her enthusiasm for the role is contagious. We had met a few weeks prior to this event and she encouraged me to attend.

A hearty welcome from Bill McKee, Ontario Guild of Town Criers president, was followed by the benchmark cry from guest crier Dave Rose of Easton, PA. The competition itself featured three cries on different topics. The assembled crowd was captivated by the very first one, "The Home Town Cry," in which virtues of the towns the criers represent were extolled. Victoria Hall, the crown jewel of downtown Cobourg, was the topic of the second cry. In the afternoon, the venue shifted to the Grafton Inn, where the third cry offered competitors the option of choosing an inn, tavern or heritage architecture as the topic.

Voices rang out loud and clear in this unique contest. Some offerings were of a sing-song nature, while others were delivered in a more sombre tone.



Each contestant presented an interesting and lyrical version of their personal take on the task. Elaborate costumes complemented each crier. For those in attendance, it was an entertainment treat.

Daniel Richer Dit Lafèche, who proudly represents Ottawa, was voted the champion crier, in addition to being named the best ambassador. He was accompanied by his partner Julia Dudley, who ceremoniously accepted his staff as he spoke. Daniel, a town crier since 1981, is the

**Clockwise from above: Julia Dudley and Ottawa crier Daniel Richer Dit Lafèche; Cobourg crier Mandy Robinson; a group photo of event participants and special guests.**

only fully bilingual and Native crier in North America. He has introduced both Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau and our current Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau.

According to the Ontario Guild of Town Criers website, town criers go back in history



a Notice" actually comes from the act of the town crier, who, having read his message to the townspeople would attach it to the door post of the local inn or tavern, so it could be read by anyone who could read for themselves. It was yesteryear's version of posting something on Facebook!

The role of a town crier offers up an interesting perspective on our past. Citizens relied on the crier for the latest news, be it good or bad. Criers would announce upcoming events, taxation changes and even declarations of war, so it is with respect that we salute these important communicators of long ago.

Perhaps there will be an occasion in your town for you to call upon the services of your local town crier to announce a celebration or community milestone. And, by tradition, the message should of course end with a rousing cry of "God Save the Queen!" ■

to times when most people in towns and villages were illiterate. The criers, many of whom were women, were the latter-day news anchors, reading the proclamations and news to all in the village square. They could be officers of a royal court or a public authority, making announcements as required.

In North America, the colourful concept of a crier has been around ever since Europeans began arriving here. "Oyez" which means "hear ye" is a call for attention. The term "Posting

