

Lenah Field Fisher

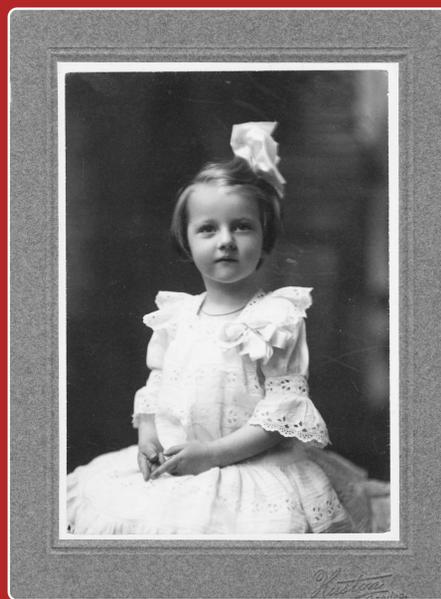
“Saviour of Victoria Hall”

When Lenah Field was born in 1900, it was into a **prominent family and a storied home**. No wonder she is still celebrated.

Lenah's family were longtime residents of Cobourg beginning with her great-grandfather who emigrated to Canada in 1839 and opened a very successful dry goods store, Fields. His two sons both became active in politics, one an MP in Ottawa and the other an MPP in Toronto.

Lenah's grandfather owned the house at 212 King Street West which he had rented to the Koerber family. The Koerber's daughter, Leila Marie, became **Academy Award winning actress, Marie Dressler**. When Lenah's parents married, Mr. Field Sr. gave them the house as a wedding gift, and that's where Lenah was born - in the same home as Marie Dressler.

As a young 'lady', Lenah attended the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph where she studied to become a dietitian. Known as a 'harum-scarum' girl, Lenah possessed a rebellious nature not inclined to follow college residence rules. After ignoring the 9 o'clock curfew, her small stature meant she needed a boost to get through the window. **Help arrived from a then little known Leslie Frost** who was destined to become Premier of Ontario.



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*She's little, but she's wise
She's a terror for her size!*

Guelph Yearbook 1922

Lenah did not enter the political scene until the death of her husband in 1956. Distressed about the impending razing of Victoria Hall, she was determined to save the beloved symbol of Cobourg.

You see Victoria Hall was a mess and many people, most people in fact, wanted to tear it down, but I just wouldn't hear of it and I'll tell you, once I get my head and heart on something, I'm going to do everything I can to make it happen.

Lenah Field Fisher

She was duly elected to town council, but the council men gave her the garbage committee instead of her preferred posting. Lenah fooled everyone and became the best garbage councilor the town ever had. She would ride the garbage trucks and on Clean Up Cobourg Week she donned a pair of overalls and boots to help hose down the streets! She won the next election by a landslide and had her pick of committees. The Public Building Committee was her first choice and she got to work on her pet project, Victoria Hall.



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Upon graduation, Lenah studied in Cleveland and was chief dietitian at a Philadelphia hospital before accepting a position at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Montreal. While there, she met and married Donald Fisher, a rubber company executive.

When Lenah and her husband returned to Cobourg in the early 1930s, they found the little house on King Street besieged by curious tourists anxious to see the home of 'Tugboat Annie', a character created by Miss Dressler. This gave Lenah the idea to open a restaurant. *The Marie Dressler Eating House* or *Marie Dressler's Tavern* was one of Cobourg's finest dining establishments. **Lenah successfully operated the restaurant for 17 years.**

The publisher of the Cobourg Daily Star, James Johnston, was a supporter from the beginning. "It's been a big effort to get the locals in on this....It took a long time. But I'll tell you this: Victoria Hall would have been a parking lot long ago if not for Lenah Fisher.

Maclean's/December 24, 1979
New Life for a Grand Old Lady by Ken Becker



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She convinced the council to give her \$5,000 towards cleaning up the hall, but soon realized it would take much more than that to return "The Old Lady of King Street" to her former glory.

After Lenah made a trip to Ottawa in 1964, **Victoria Hall was declared a National Heritage Site**, which ensured the renovations would eventually be done. It was a long haul. She died before the restoration was complete, but her final bequest made sure that it was.

Lenah had her own unique way of shaking things up! Tired of waiting for a road into Cobourg to be fixed, Lenah took the Minister of Transportation to see its deplorable condition. After reminding him it was his responsibility to fix, **she threatened to ride down the road wearing only a Lady Godiva hat** after notifying the press! The road was fixed in short order!



In 1975 Lenah became the first Cobourg resident to receive the **Medal of Service Award in the Order of Canada**, and the entrance foyer in Victoria Hall is now named in her honour.

Lenah died in 1980 and is buried in the family plot at Union Cemetery in Cobourg.

She once shocked her fellow councilors by showing up at a meeting wearing a grass skirt she had acquired while on a recent trip to Hawaii! Her colourful and fashionable hats were legend!

