

Edwin C. Guillet

Historian, Author & Cobourg Citizen

Nowadays many of us are hard pressed to *read* 150 books in a lifetime. **Edwin C. Guillet wrote that many, and more.**

Born in Cobourg at the tail end of the nineteenth century (September 29, 1898), Edwin never strayed far from home, lived to be 76 and is buried in Cobourg's Union Cemetery.

After finishing high school, he attempted to enlist with the Cobourg Heavy Battery for service in the First World War but was unable to pass the physical examination due to asthma.

In 1919 he enrolled in the University of Toronto, graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Political Economy in 1922. During these years he **developed a keen interest in historical research** and frequented the libraries and archives in the pursuit of knowledge.

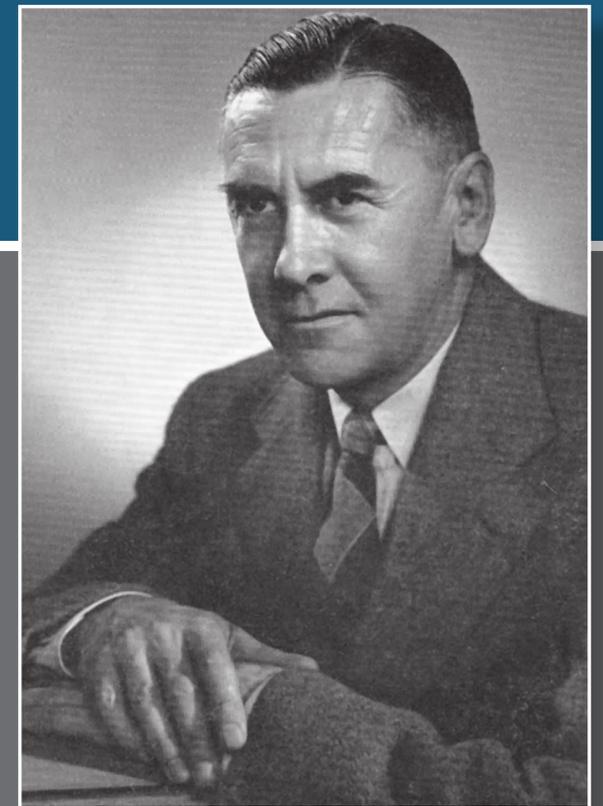
Edwin considered studying law after graduation, but chose to train as a teacher instead. It was while he was at the Ontario College of Education that he met his future wife, Mary Elizabeth Scott.

Edwin joined the staff of Lindsay Collegiate in 1923 followed by a teaching position at the Central Technical School in Toronto from 1926 to 1934. During this time, he completed a **second Bachelor's degree and a Master's degree, both in history from McMaster University.**



After leaving Central Technical School he appears to have concentrated fully on the pursuit of historical enquiry, writing for the *Globe and Mail* and the *Cobourg Sentinel-Star*, and giving public lectures. His publications in these early days included:

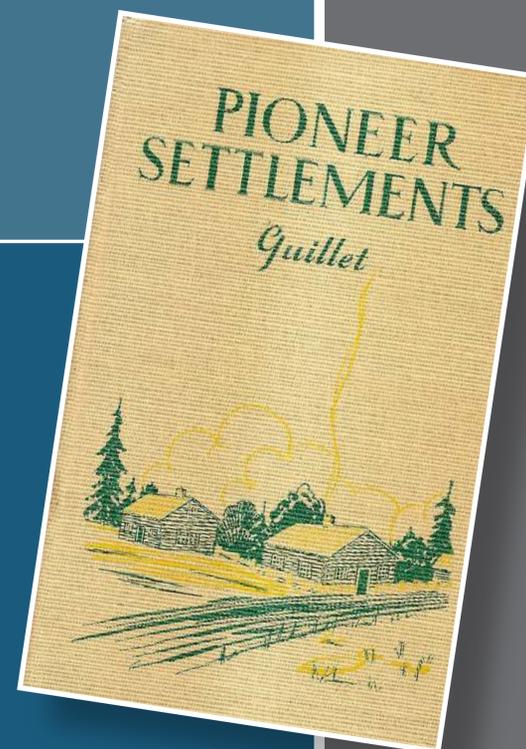
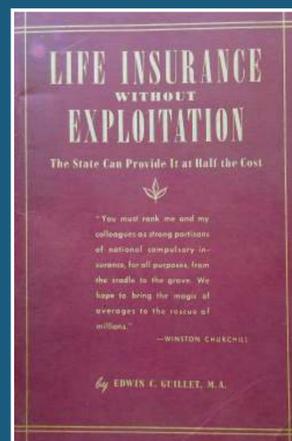
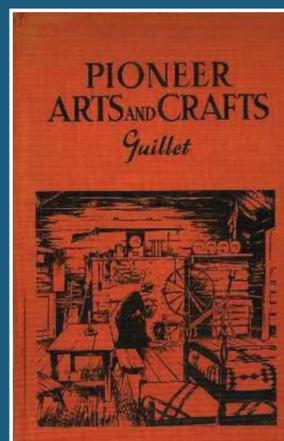
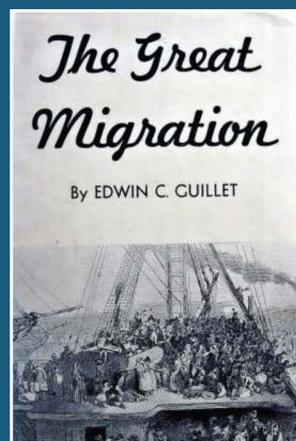
- *The Great Migration*, 1937
- *The Lives and Times of the Patriots*, 1938
- *Pioneer Arts and Crafts*, 1940
- *Life Insurance without Exploitation*, 1946
- *Pioneer Settlements*, 1947



Guillet portrait by Yousuf Karsh, 1953



Guillet Home on James St.



In 1948, Edwin completed a **popular history of Cobourg, Cobourg 1798-1948**, produced by the Business and Professional Women's Club of Cobourg in honour of the 150th anniversary of the first settlement there.

In his dedication to the book, Mr. Guillet noted that it was written

“with the cooperation of many Cobourg citizens, past and present, whose enthusiasm has recorded much of the life and spirit of the old town that must otherwise have been lost.”

This is a fascinating book complete with first hand reminiscences of Cobourg in the nineteenth century, vintage photographs and maps of the area and other unique stories and accounts of Cobourg's bygone days. Several pages of the book are dedicated to a detailed history of the **Cobourg and Peterborough Railway**, complete with period anecdotes and an account, with photographs, of a two-day hike along the right of way undertaken by Mr. Guillet and his sons in 1948.

Almost seventy years after publication, Cobourg 1798-1948 has taken on a new dimension of interest through the advertisements, photographs and well wishes of many Cobourg businesses and industries that were thriving in 1948. It is an interesting glimpse into the life and commerce of the town at the time.

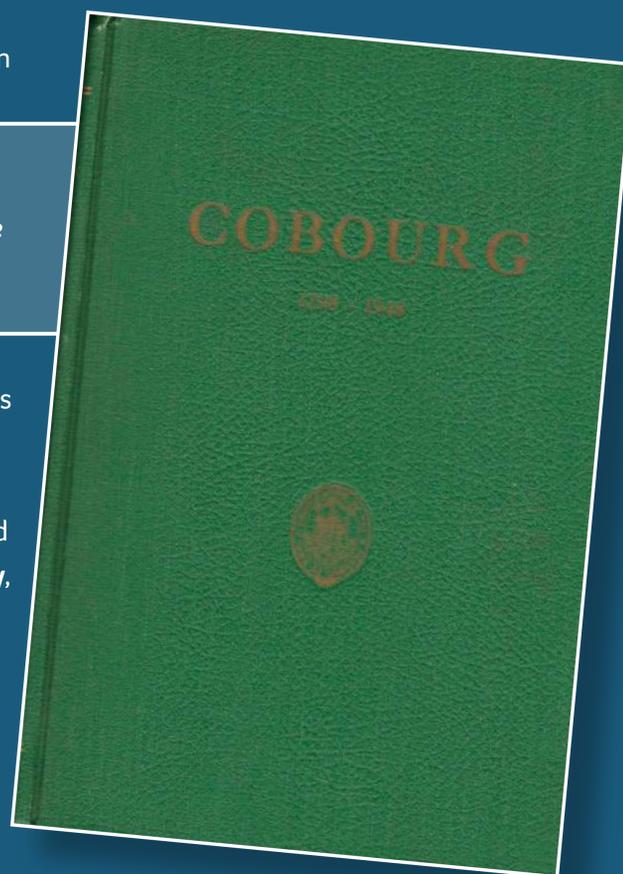
Other significant publications followed:

- *Pioneer Inns and Taverns*, 1954-56
- *The Pioneer Farmer and Backwoodsman*, 1963
- *Pioneer Days in Upper Canada*, 1964
- *Pioneer Travel in Upper Canada*, 1966
- *Early Life in Upper Canada*, 1963
- *Pioneer Settlements in Upper Canada*, 1972

From 1958 to 1962, Edwin Guillet was the research historian for the Ontario Department of Public Records and Archives. In 1963 he was appointed consultant on Canadiana to the Library of Trent University.

In 1960, he received an **Honourary Doctor of Laws degree from Queen's University** Kingston Ontario.

Edwin Clarence Guillet passed away on 26 June 1975 at the age of 76.



COBOURG AND PETERBOROUGH RAILWAY LOCOMOTIVE, 1870
A typical locomotive operating on the nine-mile extension between the River Trent and the Marmora Iron Mines at Blairton

Blairton Locomotive from *Pioneer Travel in Upper Canada*

