



## *Gay Christmas in a Small Town*

by Jeff Harrison

**While many of us grew up in the rural setting of a small town, it was no easy place to fit in throughout the difficult years of coming out.**

We ran away the first chance we got to the more cosmopolitan big lights of the big city. But now as we settle down and look to unwind on the weekends, we find ourselves drawn back to the tranquillity of the country for antique shopping, winery tours and relaxing spa getaways.

For those of us who still have families in small towns, we know there is no better getaway, nor any place else to find quality artisan craftsmanship at bargain basement prices. As the holidays fast approach, escape to the picturesque towns of Port Hope and Elora for unique gift shopping or a weekend away from the commercial craze of Christmas in the city.

## Port Hope

Port Hope is celebrated for having one of the best preserved 19<sup>th</sup> century streetscapes in Ontario. Originally named "Ganaraske" by the native Iroquois Indians of the region, it later became known as Smith's Creek after a former fur trader once the United Empire Loyalists settled in 1793. Believe it or not it was being renamed Toronto, before finally becoming Port Hope in 1817 in honour of Colonel Henry Hope, then lieutenant governor of Quebec.

Stroll the quaint Victorian streets and visit the cafes, galleries and antique shops as you search for the perfect gift for that hard to buy person on your list.



Snow Covered Gazebo



Nativity Scene

Be sure to catch the **Annual Santa Claus Parade** December 1<sup>st</sup> from 1–2pm. Floats and bands and traditional pipers piping will march down Walton Street

to Memorial Park heralding the arrival of everyone's favourite man in red. (Contact 905.885.2004 or 1.888.767.8467).



Eleven Pipers Piping





Christmas Tree in the Morning

**The Kinette Christmas General** (905.884.9476) **Store** at the Knights of Columbus Hall has late night holiday shopping from November 30<sup>th</sup> until December 2<sup>nd</sup> and features crafts, home baking and the annual Christmas Tile.

Take the kids shopping for toys at **Little Lords and Ladies** (905.885.8215, 78 Walton St.) and stop for a treat at their traditional ice-cream parlour.

And for all Santa's little helpers who just can't seem to find enough time to get all their shopping done, December 7<sup>th</sup> is the traditional **Downtown Moonlight Sale**—inject a little holiday romance into your frantic gift purchasing.

After dinner join the **Port Hope Carolers** on November 30<sup>th</sup> at 7pm, as they make their annual **Candlelight Walk** while singing festival holiday songs. Then watch as the town has its official **Lighting Ceremony for the Candlelight Christmas** in Port Hope Memorial Park.

The Municipality of Port Hope Historical Society hosts Wassail Bowl, a traditional Victorian Christmas celebration with punch, hors d'oeuvres and holiday readings at Dorothy's House Museum, Garden Hill December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2pm–4pm. Be sure to reserve early. (Contact 905.797.2625)

Once shopping has been finished and dinner is happily being digested, wander over to one of Ontario's most impressive—and probably little know architectural wonders—Port Hope's restored **Capitol Theatre** (905.885.1071, 20 Queen St). Along with the Lido Theatre in The Pas, Manitoba, it is Canada's only surviving operational "Atmospheric" theatre.

When the depression hit in 1929 Famous Players closed the doors of the **Royal Theatre**, formerly the Grand Opera House. However, manager Stuart Smart refused to accept being out of a job and eventually convinced his employers to convert the theatre into Canada's first movie house designed expressly for "talkies."

“Atmospheric” theatres were specifically designed to give the illusion of whisking the crowd away to some exotic romantic destination and the Capitol was unique with its façade of a Norman castle, complete with leaded glass, diamond-paned windows a marquee that emulates a drawbridge with heavy chains and a courtyard of forested trees. A wonderful destination, the theatre always has something entertaining showing for the whole family.

**Nuncrackers**, an outrageous adaptation of Nunsense runs November 8<sup>th</sup> until the 25<sup>th</sup>. Just in time for Christmas is their annual pantomime, this year’s story being everybody’s favourite rags to riches tale of **Cinderella**. Cheer her on as she tries to win Prince Charming’s love all the while dealing with her incredibly ugly step-sisters. Perfect for the kids, it runs from December 7<sup>th</sup> until the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Musical entertainment for the adults includes the **John McDermott Christmas Show**. The man who croons “Danny Boy” sweet enough to make you swoon sings live December 10, 8–10pm, tickets are \$47. And **George Fox**, one of Canada’s foremost country music stars (next to Ms. Lang, of course) plays his Christmas Show December 14<sup>th</sup>, 8–10pm, tickets are \$31.

Also, running the entire month of December at the theatre is the **Capitol Christmas Festival of Lights & Trees**. Come view the theatre decked out with thousands of lights and a wonderful array of beautifully decorated trees all available to be won by raffle—the perfect gift to your busy self as you run around with hectic holiday plans. (Contact 905.885.1071 or 1.800.434.5092 or capitoltheatre.com).

Friends of Music present the **Exultate Chamber Singers** features Dylan Thomas “A Child’s Christmas in Wales,” December 8th, 8–10pm at the **Port Hope United Church**. (Contact 905.885.1071 or 1.800.434.5092 or porthopefriendsofmusic.com).



There is no better treat after a full day of shopping and an evening of bustling about the town than to retreat to the luxurious splendour of a period bed & breakfast.

**Penstowe Bed & Breakfast** is a Victorian-style inn, each guest suite uniquely decorated to capture the spirit of the times. Choose the boudoir of your favourite romantic couple of yore with the Romeo & Juliet Suite, the Antony & Cleopatra Suite, the Freddy & George Suite, the Napoleon & Josephine Suite, or the Browning Suite. (Contact 905.885.4317, 98 Ontario St, penstowe.com).

**The Manor on Walton** is a beautifully restored 1852 Victorian townhouse, situated in the heart of the Heritage District of Port Hope, steps away from the theatre, shops and restaurants. Complimentary afternoon tea is served in our cozy Tea Room, as are delicious hot breakfasts. Sleep like royalty in the King Edward Room, Queen Victoria Room, Queen Elizabeth Room, or the King George Room. (Contact 905.885.0155, 127 Walton Street, themanoronwalton.com).

**Hill and Dale Manor**, a sumptuously restored two-story house built the early 1850s, lies tucked away in the heart of historic downtown Port Hope on a beautiful wooded four-acre enclave. (Contact 877.238.9132, 47 Pine Street South, hillanddalemanor.com)

## Elora

Nestled amidst towering pines and glacial rock formations, Elora was founded in 1832 by Captain William Gilkison, a British officer recently returned from India. Elora is well-known for its 19th century limestone architecture, its artistic community, and the breath-taking Elora Gorge.



Many different structures have spanned the Gorge at this location beginning in 1819 with an old Indian log bridge. In 1848 David Foote, John Cattanoek and Sailor James Gairns built what was heralded as the first cantilever bridge in North America—the **David Street Bridge**. The magnificent pier which supports the present bridge was built in 1868 by Charles Lawrence, one of Elora's early stonemasons and has recently been beautifully restored. You can walk there along the Elora Gorge Trail or drive by vehicle over the bridge.

Winding peacefully through Historic Downtown Elora is the Grand River. Soak up the atmosphere of historic limestone buildings,

extraordinary craft shops like the **Elora General Store** (519.846.2600, 15 Mill St. East) and the **Grand Gourmet** (519.846.5771, 42 Mill St. West), perfect for gift-giving ideas. Catch a matinee at **The Gorge Cinema** (519.846.0191, 43 Mill St. W.), Canada's oldest continually running repertoire theatre or check out galleries such as the chicly designed **Styll** (519.846.9222, 5 Mill Street East, [styll.com](http://styll.com)).

Elora eagerly embraces the festive season with a Santa Claus Parade, a Tree Lighting ceremony and later store hours for last minute shopping. (Contact Elora Tourism at 519.846.9841, [elorafergus.ca](http://elorafergus.ca)).

Follow the river to the **Elora Mill and Tooth of Time**. After a fire in 1870, an imposing eight-storey limestone mill was constructed, along with a warehouse, making this the largest flour mill west of Montreal. Perched on verge of the Grand River the dining room overlooks the tumbling waterfalls better known as the Tooth of Time. (Contact 519.846.9118, 77 Mill Street West, [eloramill.com](http://eloramill.com)).

**The Dalby House/Gordon Block** is another cozy dinner retreat featuring live music. The impressive flat iron building at the intersection of Metcalfe and Geddes Streets was erected in 1865 by Andrew Gordon, a harness maker and business leader on the north side of the river. (Contact 519.846.9811, 143 Metcalfe Street).







Christmas in Elora



The Spa at Log Cabin

Winding down after a full day of hiking, shopping and sightseeing has never been easier or more decadent. **Log Cabin Heaven** is a secluded, five acre hilltop country spa retreat, offering one private luxurious guest suite accommodation for the ultimate in pampering. Offering spa amenities and gourmet dinners, directly across from the Elora Gorge, it features an indoor heated pool, waterfall and cedar sauna in our quarry stone spa. The Great Room offers a 20 foot ceiling with stone fireplace and 7 foot marble dining table, where you will enjoy a continental breakfast or full breakfast prepared by our resident Blue Ribbon California chef. (Contact 519.846.9439, 7384 Middlebrook Road, logcabinheaven.com).

**Wiggitt Hall** was originally built in 1891, as a doctor's home and office, later becoming the Notre Dame Convent and schoolroom. In 2004 the red brick Victorian was converted into a cozy bed and breakfast. Stay in William's Room, the suite named after the original master of the house; Florence's room, William's wife and incidentally the first woman in Elora to drive a car; or Marion's room named for the daughter of the house. (Contact 519.846.0024, 249 Geddes Street, home.cogeco.ca/~wiggithall.



Elora Street Scene

## Day trip to Fergus

A mere five minute drive away from Elora and its postcard perfect gorge is the farmer's market of Fergus—a perfect day trip. Start at the Fergus Market, originally a foundry erected by Beatty Brothers 1878. A fresh food farmer's market for the longest time it's now lined with artisan and craft shops.

After exploring the historic downtown, head over to The Fergus Brewhouse in the village centre. The limestone structure was originally built as the home of Thomas Watson, the proprietor of the Webster Tannery. After Watson was forced to claim bankruptcy, Dr. Abraham Grove purchased the tannery and converted it into a flour mill. Later it became his electrical generating plant when Dr. Groves installed two generators & steam boilers. One provided direct current that was used for the arc lights on Main St. & the Doctor's hospital. The other gave 60-cycle alternating current to *The News – Record*—the local paper. When the presses were ready to roll, a member of staff had to run down to the power house & tell them to turn on the alternating current. Dr. Groves extended the electric system to Elora in February 1900. As far as is known, he was the first man to transmit electricity between two towns in Ontario. Now a pub serving excellent food, they also have a couple of cozy rooms to rent out for those wishing to stay the night. (Contact 519.843.8870, 170 St. David Street S, [fergusbrewhouse.com](http://fergusbrewhouse.com)).

Just around the corner and down the main strip is the Breadalbane Inn, one of the finest examples of Scottish architecture in the area. Built in 1860, by one of the founders of the town, this charming stone inn features ornate ironwork, high ceilings, walnut banisters and an imported marble fireplace. Enjoy gourmet dining in the stunning glass conservatory or retreat to one of their opulently appointed Victorian suites. (Contact 519.843.4770, 487 St. Andrew St W, [breadalbaneinn.com](http://breadalbaneinn.com))

Built in 1850, **Drew House** is distinctive for its fine architectural details such as the wrap-around porch with its hand-carved bric-a-brac trim, cathedral windows and 18-inch limestone walls. Drew House not only offers six private rooms in the Coach House but also Gourmet Cooking Classes, a series of courses featuring the talents of your host Roger Dufau, a noted food expert and chef. Originally from the Basque region of France, Roger strives to use the freshest organically-grown products whenever possible. (Contact 519.846.2226, 120 Mill Street, [drewhouse.com](http://drewhouse.com)).

The **Grand River Guesthouse** is a spacious, picturesque three-level Country home on the banks of the Grand River. Visit Mennonite farmers' markets, hike or ski the Elora Gorge trails or just relax in the idyllic surroundings. (Contact 519.846.5980, 94 Water Street, [grandriverguesthouse.com](http://grandriverguesthouse.com)).

All the B&B's listed will be happy to help you arrange for theatre tickets, reservations at excellent restaurants, winery tours, or treatments at luxurious spas—all of which are close at hand.

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**Port Hope Photography** All photos courtesy of Port Hope Tourism.