A photograph of a window with white, slightly tattered curtains. The window looks out onto a bright, sunny day with green trees and a grassy field. The text is overlaid on the image.

It's Too Clean To Be Abandoned

C'est Trop Propre Pour Être Abandonnée

By
Mike L.

An entry level guide to Urban Exploring
and a story of how Ontario Abandoned Places began

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REVISION 2

This hobby would not be as enjoyable were it not for each of our social media followers who took the time to send a comment, Like and share our content, and provide ongoing positivity.

It also helps when you have great parents!

Urban exploration

The exploration of man-made structures usually abandoned ruins or not usually seen components of the man-made environment. Photography and historical interest/documentation are heavily featured in the hobby and, although it may sometimes involve trespassing onto private property, this is not always the case.

Urban exploration may also be referred to as draining (an alternate form of urban exploring where drains are explored), urban spelunking, urban rock climbing, urban caving, or building hacking.

- Wikipedia

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THE EARLY YEARS

CHAPTER 1

“He Lived and He Died”

I once asked a good friend of mine, Justin, what his life story would be if it were ever published. Justin’s answer was summed up in those five simple words.

What you’re about to read is by no means my complete life story. This book is intended to be a comprehensive look into a hobby that I’ve been involved with for at least half my life. When it will cease to be a hobby of mine, I can’t say. I hope to be exploring the back roads of Ontario for many years to come.

I make no claims of being a professional author or of having a solid grasp of the art of stringing sentences along. I might be guilty of leaving a participle dangling or a sentence running on. If you find yourself cringing at some grammatical faux pas in the course of reading this book, I apologize in advance. Some people are great writers, some are great photographers and others are neither.

This book will attempt to cover most aspects of the hobby we call “urban exploring”. It will answer questions such as, “How do you find these places?”, “What do I do when I’m caught?” and “How can I purchase an abandoned house?” Whether you’re a beginner to the hobby or an experienced explorer, I hope you find this book to be useful.

The content of this book is intended for the beginner explorer but more specifically those who regularly follow our social media. I’m speaking of the families, the mom and dad explorers, and the weekend warriors. Once you’ve become comfortable with the hobby then I’d highly recommend “Access All Areas” by Ninjalicious. His book contains a wealth of information, much more than I could ever hope to fit into this book. It’s not my intention to re-create Ninjalicious’ work and for this reason I waited until I’d completed this book before I decided to peruse his book for the first time. This book doesn’t even cut the surface of what his guide covers.

Let me be honest with you – setting foot onto a property that’s not yours is **trespassing** and is a violation of the Trespass to Property Act (TPA). It’s not criminal, but it can leave you with a dent in your wallet much the same way that a speeding ticket can. There are physical risks involved.

I don’t condone trespassing. You should always seek permission before entering any building that you don’t own.

I entered this world on April 1, 1974. My introduction to exploring abandoned houses began when I was approximately eight years old. Our family lived in an apartment building on Kelly Lake Road in the city of Sudbury, Ontario. There was an abandoned house just down the road from our apartment building. I found myself intrigued by this house even at the young age of four. I wondered what happened to the family that would have led them to leave and wondered where the family might be today.

There was an upstairs floor to the home; I mentally pictured what it might look like upstairs. Would there be a bed and dresser? Personal items? Being so young, I never did work up the courage to venture upstairs. I was worried about the stairs collapsing under me, though I look back and think they were probably quite sturdy. The house was eventually demolished and along with it, the mystery of what may be upstairs. That was my first visit to an abandoned house until my teenaged years.

Our apartment on Kelly Lake Road was within view of the Inco Superstack. When I was four years old I thought that whatever was flushed down the toilet would exit out of the Superstack. One day I took a pair of my underwear, flushed them down the toilet and ran to the window to watch my underwear exit the top of the stack. It didn’t happen. What did happen was that a plumber had to be called to unclog the toilet. Sorry, Dad.

Every summer our family would take a vacation to my grandparent’s home in Thamesville. Both of my parents worked as elementary school teachers which afforded us to have summers off as a family. From the back seat of the car, I’d observe the occasional abandoned house along the highway and wonder to myself what might be inside. It occurred to me to ask my parents to stop the car and to pull over to investigate but with a seven-hour drive ahead of us I knew the answer would be no.

My grandparent’s home was modern from outward appearances but inside it was evident that they had lived in a much earlier era. The guest room contained an old bed

with a wooden head frame. It was the kind of head frame that had two sliding doors for storage. An old lamp and hand mirrors sat on the antique dresser. In the laundry room was a wringer washing machine. A wringer washer consists of a large open tub where you reach in to pull out the wet clothes. The clothes are then fed between two rollers that squeeze the water out of your clothes while you try not to get your fingers caught in the roller.

My grand-parents living room television received signals via an aerial antenna mounted to the side of the house. A box on the television would turn the aerial outside to allow you to tune in different stations. In the hallway closet was an old Brownie camera, I often wondered what year it might have been used last.

Visiting my grandparents was a visible reminder that homes existed from eras other than the ones I'd ever known. Being from the big city of Sudbury, I found a certain pleasure in visiting Thamesville each summer. The population was smaller, the majority of the town were elderly residents and life seemed to move at a slower pace. Thamesville is a small town of approximately 900 people and they have their own small newspaper. In the paper, they used to have a section to announce who had received visitors from out of town that week. You know you're living in a small town when news consists of who came to visit you from the big city.

Life in small towns isn't bumper to bumper traffic, big box store chains and the sound of horns and sirens. It's the sound of crickets at night while watching humidity lightning. It's about the sound of the occasional passing train. It's about farming the land to earn a living.

Some evenings when my grandparents and parents had retired for the evening, I'd walk the streets of Thamesville to admire the quiet town, perhaps walk to the train station and wait for a passing train.

The years turned to decades. My grandparents have since passed away and upon looking back I can't think of anything else I'd rather have been doing in the summers than visiting them. When you're younger, I don't think you truly appreciate what it's like to have your extended family alive. You rather assume it will last forever. It doesn't.

Today young families are moving into the homes that were once occupied by senior citizens in Thamesville. In 1998, my grandparent's house was sold, renovated and now there's nothing left in Thamesville for me but memories. My other grandparents lived in Temagami. They passed away several years earlier. Their house was also reminiscent of an earlier era – the front door even used a skeleton key to lock.

Back in the city of Sudbury I often spent my weekends taking aimless trips. On a Friday evening, I might make a spur of the moment decision to get in the car and drive to Temagami and back. The reason? Absolutely none.

Some nights Justin might call me up and ask if I'd like to go for a ride. We might head to North Bay or Parry Sound. Other nights we'd drive aimlessly using the car radio clock as a compass. If the minutes were odd, we'd turn left. If the minutes were even we'd turn right. My brother had the same passion to drive the highways and was known to drive his Mustang to Toronto and back in the same night. The reason? Absolutely none.

It was this combination of passion for road trips and admiration for a small-town way of life as I'd observed in Thamesville that I think made the urban exploration hobby appealing to me. Through the hobby, I'm able to walk through a doorway of an abandoned house where it seems time stopped ticking decades ago. It's a reminder of what life was like long ago and a reminder of memories of a childhood spent in small towns. It's a reminder that life wasn't always about checking e-mails, posting to social media and digital television.

How did I discover the hobby anyway?

CHAPTER 2

Internet Relay Chat (IRC for short) is an internet application that allows a person to talk to other people in virtual chat rooms. In 1995 I found myself passing time in a Sudbury-based chat room on IRC. I had no particular use for chat rooms but this was a way to kill time as Facebook and Myspace were still some years away from being part of our everyday vocabulary.

Someone in the chat room brought up the subject of an abandoned prison that was located just outside of Sudbury – the prison was known as Burwash Correctional. I'd never heard much about Burwash although for years my family and I had seen the signs on my family's route to Thamesville advising motorists not to pick up hitchhikers.

Burwash Correctional Prison was a complete town-site that consisted of a small twenty-bed hospital, church, school, power station, post office, skating rink, and a blacksmith. Beyond the townsite were the actual prisons.

I eagerly inquired on IRC whether there were any buildings left at this prison, and was told that the whole townsite was left behind. I had this image of a complete town hidden off of the highway. I pictured the rows of houses along deserted streets and pictured myself wandering through the houses. It sounded like absolute serenity to walk a town undisturbed by anybody else and to hear no other sounds except nature.

A few days after I took a road trip down Highway 69 to find Burwash. Arriving at the townsite I was met with disappointment. There was not so much as a single structure left standing. Years earlier the military had conducted training using the buildings and ended up demolishing them. The only things left now are foundations and a small cemetery where prisoners were buried. These were prisoners with no family to claim their bodies. It's sad to think that they're still buried out there in what is essentially a forest.

The vision of spending a day wandering alone in an entire town was one that I couldn't forget. Surely there had to be other places like Burwash to be found?

The next day I took a visit to the Sudbury Public Library on MacKenzie Street. I wasn't sure exactly what I was looking for and tried several keyword searches on the

book database including one for 'ghost towns'. This search brought me to the shelves of Ontario history and to a series of books by Canadian author Ron Brown.

Ron Brown has numerous books to his name including Ghost Towns of Ontario Volumes 1 and 2. I checked both books out of the library and excitedly made my way home. Ron's books were a great resource as they not only contained a history of some of Ontario's old towns but also photographs and directions. There was a ghost town nearby named Milnet which was located just past the town of Capreol.

Milnet isn't actually abandoned; the properties are used seasonally. An old wood mill can be found in the bushes beyond the seasonal homes. I was pretty excited to have found my first 'abandoned' property using Ron's books. Over the course of the next few summers I'd make return visits to Milnet to observe any changes in the land. It wasn't a particularly large place to explore, and very close to civilization. It left me thirsty to find other ghost towns.

In 1995 digital cameras were just being introduced to the consumer. I was using a Point and Shoot 35 mm film camera for my photography. Having twenty-four photos per roll of film, I had to be selective in the subject matter. Today's digital era allows us to take an excessive number of photos and filter them out at a later time whereas film tended to force one to be more mindful of the composition.

As social media was still some years away if you wanted to meet people with similar interests as your own, you'd have to find a website forum dedicated to your interest. It was through an online forum that I came across another ghost town enthusiast named Yvan Charbonneau. Yvan was a French Canadian who had the same passion for ghost towns that I did. The back of his car contained several rolled up old maps and scribbled notes. Yvan had been across Ontario exploring old mines, ghost towns, mills, you name it. I met up with Yvan one day and we did a tour of Northern Ontario mines including Sudbury and Desaulniers. I'll say this about Yvan – he is an incredible researcher. He'd go to a library in the town where the ghost town was located and spend hours researching. He had the most comprehensive notes and details I'd ever seen. He alleged that he had several details that Ron Brown had gotten incorrect in his Ghost Towns of Ontario books.

We'd later meet a man named Cameron Bevers. Cameron's interest was in highways. He was as passionate about highways as I was about ghost towns. Cameron could tell you the history of most any Ontario highway and his goal was to travel every highway in Ontario. I don't know how our paths initially crossed but Cameron, Yvan and

I ended up taking a road trip to the Wawa area. It was an incredibly long trip with Yvan guiding us along the way to all sort of old mines.

There was no Urban Exploration Resource, no Ontario Abandoned Places, no Facebook, no Twitter, and no Instagram at this time. If there were other people interested in ghost towns or abandoned buildings, we didn't know about them nor would we know how to even contact them. UER didn't come to exist until 2002, seven years later. I'd never even heard the words "urban exploration".

I wrote to Ron Brown to inquire if he had any other books on ghost towns. The response was a large box mailed to my house containing every single one of Ron Brown's books, including one autographed. What a gentleman. My travel horizons expanded with this new batch of books to read.

After each road trip, I'd take my roll of film to be developed at Walmart. You'll be lucky, very lucky, to find a Walmart that develops film today. I still have several envelopes of these original photographs in the garage. After a road trip, I'd bring the developed photos over to my parents. They were always curious to see the places their son had been exploring. Looking at my film photography it's clear that I lacked an understanding of what good composition consisted of. I'd take photos without any thought as to what would make a good shot, and had never even heard of 'staging'.

Where some people see ghost towns as nothing more than old piles of wood or a building that needs demolishing, I saw a part of Ontario's history. I saw a way of life that's no longer important. I'd show my photographs to anyone who was willing to see them, and I wanted people to know about these places not just drive by them daily.

The question was, how could I share my love for this hobby with others?



Sawmill in the ghost town of Milnet – taken 1999 (35 mm film)



Sawmill in the ghost town of Milnet – taken 1999 (35 mm film)



Chimney foundations are all that remain of this former home in Milnet – 1999 (35 mm film)

CHAPTER 3

From 1995 until approximately 2005, I used Ron Brown's books to visit many of Ontario's heritage sites. I visited ghost towns with names such as Newfoundland, Seguin Falls, Depot Harbour, and Dufferin Bridge. A typical road trip would begin by leaving Sudbury by 9 a.m. which allowed for about ten hours of exploring including driving time between locations. As I began to cross off the locations nearest to me in Ron Brown's books, it took longer to drive to the destinations on the next trip.

Eventually, I'd be driving in excess of five hours one way to reach my first location. This made it difficult to continue to photograph new locations while trying to reach as many places before the sun began to set. The cost of fuel added up but to include overnight accommodation would certainly make it cost prohibitive. On occasion, I'd meet up with Yvan when he was in the area and then carpool but mostly I traveled alone. I often wished that someone could accompany me for sake of company and security.

The hobby was becoming a true passion of mine as I traveled to new parts of the province and discovered more of Ontario's heritage. I visited old mines, historic graveyards, mills, rail towns, and colonization roads. Colonization roads were built as a result of the Ontario government's attempt to attract settlers to the province. As an incentive to move to Ontario, the government would offer a parcel of land to anyone willing to clear the land and build a homestead. Sometimes the land was infertile resulting in failed crops. The winters could be quite harsh and child mortality during these times was quite high.

There's most likely a pioneer graveyard near a colonization road where you can discover the graves of the early settlers who cleared the land and built up these communities. As a testament to the high mortality rates, you'll often find grave markers belonging to children, some younger than a year old.

One of my earliest journeys was to the Nipissing Colonization Road, a 120-kilometer road constructed in the 1850s. The Nipissing Colonization Road is located in the area of Parry Sound. During my first visit here I was overwhelmed with the experience of walking through the graveyard in absolute silence, not a single motor vehicle to be heard. The only sound was the occasional wind blowing through the trees.

As I walked through the graveyard I pictured the families as they'd have stood in the spot that I was standing while they buried their young. I imagined the overwhelming sorrow they must have felt. I pictured the horse-drawn carriages taking people from one town to the next. The roads back then were quite rough and unpaved, unlike today's highways. It was common for a traveling couple to spend the night in one of the hotels found along these colonization roads in order to allow their horses to rest.

While I'm not a regular photographer of historic graveyards, I do think that they're an opportunity to ground yourself and to fully appreciate the difficult times faced by earlier generations. On a day when you find yourself irate because your cell phone data is slow or your Amazon order was lost, these places are a reminder of the families who faced larger first world problems than our own.

Having now accumulated two photo albums worth of photographs in my travels, I felt others should be able to share in the beauty and history of these locations by being able to look at these photos and to read the stories of these forgotten places.

The primary challenge was that I had no idea how to create a website. There were no Instagram or Flickr dumping grounds to throw photos on. I decided to learn how to create a website as a means of publishing my travels. The process was confusing at first as I found myself struggling with simple concepts such as HTML headers and body tags. Initially, I used a piece of software named Hotdog to create some basic web pages.

My local internet provider offered free space for website storage provided the content was of "benefit to the public". I created a very basic website which went by the name of "Mike's Ontario Ghost Towns". The title was simple and to the point. The website began with approximately 20 ghost towns, courtesy of Ron Brown's books.

At the end of each road trip, I'd download the images off of my camera to the computer, create thumbnail images and create a write up on the location I'd just visited. This information was then manually uploaded to my newly created webpage.

From 1999 until 2002 my website was operating under a forwarding alias. The website URL was "ghosttowns.cjb.net" where cjb.net was the forwarding service that forwarded to my personal website. It was not a very effective method to attract visitors.

Many months later I sat down to try and brainstorm website names that might better attract people to my site and to define what the purpose of the site was.

Ontarioghosttowns.com was the domain name I finally decided upon. Other possibilities included mikesghosttowns.com, abandonedplaces.com, and ghosttownscanada.com. I ended up creating the Ontarioghosttowns domain name in 2002.

By this time people were learning about Google and web traffic had been picking up as people were finding my website. You can imagine my surprise one day when I randomly overheard some co-workers at the Government of Ontario talking about my web page. Word was spreading even in the workplace.

It was sometime in 2002 when I made the decision to take the website to the next level. I wanted an easier way to add my photography to my website rather than manually creating web pages. If I was out of town I'd have to wait until I returned home to use the Hotdog website editor to create a web page and Paint Shop Pro to create image thumbnails. It was time to learn a more advanced language than HTML. The two choices were PHP and ASP. PHP is a Linux based language where ASP (Active Server Pages) is a Microsoft language.

An image thumbnail is a smaller version of a large picture. It's used to allow you to view a series of images while deciding which one(s) to view full size by clicking the smaller image. The name originates from the size of the image – about the same as your thumb's fingernail.

As PHP looked quite complicated, I opted for what seemed easier - ASP. I started by printing out articles on simple ASP procedures like printing the time, printing strings and passing variables. I glued these articles into a three-ring notebook. I'd often refer to my notebook as I coded. In time I began to better understand the ASP language and didn't require my notebook as often. I began storing website locations into an Access database which made the website more efficient.

Access Database made things possible like putting locations into alphabetical order and being able to search for locations by keywords.

For several years my website operated as a one-way flow of information. That is, I published the locations and people viewed the information. I had no real idea how many people were using the website because it wasn't possible for people to interact with it. For example, there was no option to leave a comment or to LIKE a photo. I had only my monthly stats to tell me if the website was being utilized. From what I could tell, I was seeing maybe 10,000 visits per month which I was quite pleased with. (Average traffic is now 30,000 visitors per month)

On occasion, I'd receive a message from someone who'd stumbled upon my website from a search engine, which motivated me to continue adding content. An example:

Please let me be "the tip of the iceberg". It would be impossible to calculate the impact you have had on peoples lives, memories, sense of place and history. Your earliest notations and entries regarding Burwash were critical to the renewed interest and activity in and around the Industrial Farm. You have the same impact on anyone connected with each and every "ghost town" you include on your site.

In many instances yours is the only history descendants have of a place in the family history at a particular point in time - and they cherish it. You have provided a wonderful resource and a point of departure for others who, although are not associated with the places you have listed, share your passion and greatly value your contribution to "ghost town hunting". Your guardianship of the history you have assembled is extremely important - children yet to be born will be accessing your work in some manner yet to be determined. I do hope you will find the energy and interest to continue your work.

Regards MC
Manotick

During the initial years of "Mike's Ontario Ghost Towns", all of the content was as a result of my own personal travels. Because I continually needed to travel further each trip to find new places, I began to solicit photographs from other people.

By 2006-2007 I'd learned of other people who were interested in ghost towns. Explorers by the names of Copy-Six, ThePhotoMat and Jaimie Richter were some of the people who graciously submitted content to the website. By soliciting other people (and crediting their photos) I was able to continue to add new content to the website even if I wasn't able to drive to these places personally. This was particularly useful in cases where the content was from places like Thunder Bay.

By 2009 I wanted an environment where I could view the people utilizing my website and have a means whereby I could interact with them. To accomplish this I downloaded a package of scripts that allowed a person to create a member-based website. Through implementing these scripts, a person could register on my website as a member. Membership would allow people to send messages to me and to other members. With a membership option in place, I slowly began building up a community of members.

With visitors now able to register an identity, I was able to put names to the people who were visiting my website. Some of the earliest members being: Golson Molden (Robert), Rick D (a fellow Sudburian), Clay 70, Don The Buggy Guy, Spydrgryl, Rick Couper, Riddimryder and Timo Explorer.

With the ability to log in as a member completed, I took the website one step further and did something that would radically change the way I was able to add content online. I created a script that would allow me to upload photos from anywhere in the province and the website would resize them automatically. Until this point in time, I would have to manually load photos into Paint Shop Pro and resize them into a small thumbnail. I'd then have to manually create an entry into an Access database.

With a script and a component known as ASPJpeg, the website now handled the uploading and displaying of photos. It didn't happen overnight, there was a lot of debugging and trial & error. I was getting better acquainted with the ASP language and able to program more tasks the more I learned.

The rest, as they say, is history. Over the years as people discovered the website, our online community grew. I'd estimate I've had over 25,000 members join the website since it began. I've removed inactive members on two occasions which includes several "one-time" visitors; the exact total of members is not known. The scripts that I'd once downloaded were replaced by hand-written code.

By now there were other websites popping up documenting ghost towns and abandoned properties. Ghosttownpix began November 30th, 1999 and Urban Exploration Resource began on September 19, 2002. The first mention that I can find of my website is November 3, 1999. The earliest urban exploring website that I can find is infiltration.org, founded in 1997.

I like to think of these as the glory days. The hobby was off the radar of most people, out of the media, and still relatively small in terms of participants. People were willing to share locations and there was a sense of comradery between people. If you didn't know where to find a location, someone would be pleased to tell you.

CHAPTER 4

As I made my way across Ontario in search of old ghost towns, I was becoming increasingly disappointed with the results. Given the age of the structures, many places were nothing more than piles of collapsed wood by the time I found them. In other cases, there was nothing more to be found than cement foundations. I was exhausting many of the locations in Ron Brown's books and finding that the time spent traveling wasn't worth the results.

Up until now, I'd been putting all of my focus into 'ghost towns'. A ghost town isn't necessarily a forgotten town with tumbleweeds blowing through the streets. A ghost town is simply a town which was abandoned due to the economic activity upon which it had been founded being removed or closed. I'd found the occasional motel, run-down house, and industrial buildings over the years.

I'd been losing a lot of enthusiasm to explore ghost towns and decided to focus more on other areas of the urban exploration hobby. If you were to ask me why I didn't explore abandoned houses and industries from the beginning, I wouldn't know what to say to you. They never crossed my mind to search them out I suppose?

And so in 2009, I made the decision to take down the ghost town page and rebrand the website as "Ontario Abandoned Places". The new name effectively told people the type of content to be found, the province for which it was found while the name still reflected ghost towns. In hindsight it may have been a better decision to rename the website to "Canadian Abandoned Places" but at the time I was thinking provincially not country-wide.

Today the website covers locations from across Canada but the website name remains the same because it's a recognized brand name.

When Ontario Abandoned Places (OAP for short) began to become recognized as a resource for urban explorers and photographers alike, membership skyrocketed. It was not uncommon for there to be 10 to 12 users online at once. While this might seem small in comparison to a website such as Facebook, keep in mind that we're talking about

people from across Ontario with an interest in abandoned buildings, and a time before everybody was using social media.

There were new locations added almost daily to the database. I was now coming to learn that there were other enthusiasts of abandoned buildings out there who'd also been visiting locations across their province. Different areas of the province would produce different photographers each with their own expertise on abandoned places in their local areas. For instance "Doom VS" covered the Kitchener-Waterloo area, "Ground State" covered the Niagara Falls and St. Catharines areas, I had Northern Ontario covered, "Clay70" had his own ghost town collection, and of course Yvan had his extensive list of old mines and ghost towns.

Initially, information on OAP was broken down into two types of locations: Basic and Full Member. Basic locations were viewable by anyone and were indexed by search engines so that they could be found online through sites such as Google and Yahoo. Full Member locations were hidden from the public and from search engines. Only members with increased access could view these locations. The purpose behind this was to prevent vandalism and thefts from occurring at these properties. Fire, theft, and mischief are the three largest enemies for abandoned properties. My policy was that if you had a collection of photographs to submit to OAP, you were eventually made into a Full Member. The idea, of course, is that a vandal likely wouldn't take photographs of various properties along his or her travels. It was a less than perfect system but there was simply no way possible to ascertain a person's intentions when they were alone in these properties. The Basic/Full Member system worked quite well for several years. Basic entries were the well-known properties whereas Full Member were properties that were lesser known and in better condition (eg. no vandalism).

A problem eventually arose years later when the number of Full Members reached over 100 people. By this time it was no longer possible to keep any location off of the proverbial radar. Once a person added it to OAP it could be seen by potentially 100 sets of eyes, making it impossible not to be shared outside of the website.

The only way that OAP could operate as an environment where people could feel comfortable adding content was to ensure that their information would be safe from the wrong set of eyes. To be clear, we're talking about intangible information – an address or a set of GPS coordinates. This information is easily shared with other people.

To use an analogy...

You find a fantastic fishing location with lots of fish. It's serene, the water is clean and there are no other people in the area. You want to share the location with your fishing friends so they can also enjoy it. For the entire summer, you and three friends enjoy this great spot.

One day a friend of yours decides to share your fishing location with his co-worker. A month later the lake is filled with boats, people are sea-dooing in the water, there are beer cans all over the shore and someone's spray painted the rocks. You regret sharing your fishing location with others.

It could be said that people found the fishing spot on their own, the same applies to abandoned buildings. It cannot be determined if vandalism is from locals or people using the internet to find them.

While this is merely an example, it serves to demonstrate what happens in the digital era with these properties. Urban explorers aren't the only people interested in properties. There are graffiti 'artists', those who profess that aerosol is art so long as it's not sprayed on their own homes. There are scrappers, people who rip out copper piping and other metals to be exchanged for cash. There are arsonists, people who find thrill in lighting fires in abandoned places. Finally, there are the treasure hunters, those who'll back a truck up to a house and fill it with antique furniture, china, photographs and anything else of value.

It became my duty to try to evaluate members as to risk, and grant them an appropriate level of access. This was never a perfect process given that I hardly knew these people. The primary criteria that I'd use were: the member's age, dedication to taking photographs and their personality (the way they interacted with other members). For years I tried to grant access to those who I felt deserved it while withholding it from those who I felt didn't. For example, there was one fellow who posted a photo with one of his crew carrying a crowbar. In another instance, there was graffiti visible in a member's photos, the graffiti was identical to the member's name. In these cases, access was denied.

Sometimes when I chose to decline someone access, they responded back with a polite and understanding message such as, "I understand, I'm sorry it didn't work out for me. Good luck with your site." At times this character strength impressed me so much

that I'd grant them access regardless – a pleasant personality means more to me than one's ability to add photographs.

It also worked the opposite way. At times I'd have to decline access to someone who up until now had been polite and warm to me, only to be told off. "You don't know how to run a fucking website, you're a shitty administrator." I was told. It came to a point I'd mentally cringe when having to tell someone their membership was being revoked. I waited for the verbal assault that might follow. I often wondered if I had any true friends out there.

In a situation where you're having to grant or deny people access, there will always be feelings of hurt, anger or resentment. People don't always take kindly to someone else having Full Member access while they remain at Basic access. It's for this reason that I wish I could roll back the clock to a time before I began my website. If I could do it all over again I would do it under a pseudonym (a fake name). The reason is that over the years I've truly found out how low people will go when denied access or banned.

The results were sometimes shocking.

Former members sometimes created website pages and Facebook pages about me. In one extraordinary circumstance a former member began leaving pieces of paper in abandoned locations with slogans such as: "OAP is a cocksucker", "OAP molests his cat", and "OAP is a communist". The identity of this person is known to me. Whereas you and I would be packing our camera gear for tomorrow's road trip, this person was sitting at their computer printing out sheets to leave in slanderous dedication to me. In other instances, the people I chose to explore with were targeted with our faces being superimposed onto stock photos to suggest we were in a gay relationship. The identity of this person is also known to me.

Fortunately, older members could understand what it was like trying to create a system where it was necessary to keep the wrong people out. They understood the issues that arose running such a website. It's not something I'd really wish upon someone, and if I could do it all over again I'd have enlisted the help of people outside of the hobby to act as volunteer administrators. I've found it most difficult to try to be a website administrator AND an explorer who wants to explore and meet other people. Someone, somewhere, had a friend who'd been banned or who was denied access to my website and this often created issues if I wanted to meet a new person in the hobby.

To this day the access system remains far from perfect. The latest revision has several different access levels and a new member now works their way up through the levels. This was due to everyone having all or nothing access, whereas now access can be

distributed based on criteria such as people I know in person and feel I can trust. If you examine another three-letter database website for urban explorers that operates under the 'all or nothing' access system, you'll understand why our system was necessary. All or nothing doesn't work.

There have been several discussions over the years with our members about whether access is too easy or too difficult to receive. The general consensus is that it should be something that is earned, not easily given, because once you open the vault of locations, you increase the risks. Members now have the ability to fine-tune the access and decide for themselves who they prefer to share their information with. In many cases we see locations lasting several years before being 'discovered' outside of the website – so the access system seems to be working.

By about the second year of OAP being in operation, the comradery between people began to change. Egos developed and personality conflicts arose. Based on member suggestions, I decided to create a blocking system to allow people to mute comments from problematic members. Some days I was almost afraid to log in to my forum, worried what drama of the day might be unfolding between people.

In the end, I realized I couldn't program my way out of human nature, people would be people no matter what. It seemed that for every week that went by, I was faced with a new problem pertaining to member's inability to get along on the website.

One former administrator felt I was trying to micromanage things including how other administrators handled issues.

I eventually decided that members needed to sort things out on their own rather than my trying to fulfill this quest to have harmony among all explorers. I stopped trying to solve interpersonal disputes and removed some of the constant complainers and drama queens. That improved the atmosphere dramatically.

Whether you're a former member, current member or prospective member please understand that I've tried to make the best decisions possible but I learned as I went. It was never possible to have an online environment 100% free of disputes even though I tried to hold onto that vision for the longest time.

Today the site is drama free, most everyone gets along and it's a fairly enjoyable atmosphere. I'm positive there are worse forums out there that one could be a member of. As the saying goes, friends may come and go but enemies accumulate.



The racing stripe added three horsepower. Cold air intake near the license plate



The early days

Mileage adds up and takes a toll on vehicles. The 1987 red Mustang that I drove for much of my ghost town travels from 1999 onward. The transmission had been rebuilt once already and now rust was beginning to eat away at the body. I could see through inside the trunk to the ground below and the radiator needed refilling daily. I'd gotten several years out of the Mustang and decided to park it permanently. I removed the plates and left the car in my apartment building's parking lot. It remained there for a few months until one day it vanished from the property. The landlord said he didn't tow it away and to this day I don't know if it was stolen, towed away by the landlord next to us, or something else. If you have my Mustang, treat it well.

CHAPTER 5

Make no mistake, people were meeting up and making new friendships based on interests in photography long before OAP existed. I don't take credit for that. The website came along at a time when Google was not quite a household name and before the social media rush. However, the website was instrumental in bringing people together who enjoyed the urban exploring hobby.

For several years the idea had been tossed around of holding a user meeting. This would be a gathering of people from across Ontario who were members of the website and provides an opportunity to put faces to the names of one another. The idea began as a supper meet however members wanted to do some exploring too.

I began by putting together some maps of potential locations to visit but was soon overwhelmed by the effort required to plan this event. A member named "Fortress of Solitude" (FOS) offered to take care of booking the restaurant, some of the map work and to be a driver. Another member named "Maureen E." offered to be a driver. "Finz519" offered his support in putting together some industrial locations while "Trailblazer519" put together a list of places for the Cambridge area.

And so it came to be that on the morning of July 28, 2013, the first user meet of the website took place. As I drove to the carpool lot and observed the large group of people I was quickly filled with a feeling of nervousness. Public speaking isn't really my thing, but this was my show and the show had to proceed. With maps in hand, members chose which set of properties they wanted to visit. We tried to keep it equal in terms of the number of persons per map in order to have only one car per group. I didn't want a caravan of vehicles stopping in front of abandoned properties as it would draw attention to ourselves.

By 10 AM we had three groups of members leaving for the day in search of abandoned properties. I kept in touch with the groups throughout the day to see how things were going and to determine if we'd be finished the day at roughly the same time.

It was refreshing to be in a vehicle with other people interested in the hobby. Conversation constantly revolved around abandoned locations and personal stories in the hobby.

It began to rain only after we'd finished for the day and were on already our way to Beertown in Cambridge for food and drinks.



From left to right: Trailblazer, Halton Explorer and his fiancé, Frodo, Rick D, BigPaulSmall, Ann Faith, Mobilework's wife (back), Teeko, Mobileworks (back), OAP (green shirt), LowkeyImageDesign (back), Alex and Maple, Maureen E., Dave Summer, Timo Explorer, FOS, Ground State and Finz. Missing: Darkman

The photo is intentionally small to protect the identities of the explorers (I have a larger version). Name tags were used initially as we got to know one another but by the day's end, they'd been removed as names were learned. The user meet is reminiscent of better days before cliques, egos and online arguments made the likelihood of these people ever coming together again impossible. In all, 22 people attended and there were no cancellations.

During the dinner, I looked around at the large group with a sense of satisfaction. Everyone was talking about urban exploring and having a beer. It felt great to have made it to this event, and it was a group effort.

I thought to myself, this is amazing. What could possibly go wrong?

As it turns out, quite a lot.

CHAPTER 6

In 2012 not everyone was getting along with each other on the website. I found myself having to ban my first member. It did not go over well with that person as you might expect. I received several personal attacks via messaging.

2013 to 2014 was a particularly tumultuous time to be the administrator of OAP. I was growing tired of the incessant bickering occurring on the website and removed a few more problematic members. Up until this point, I'd tried being rational with people but it wasn't always working. I've never enjoyed having to remove people and tried to avoid it at all costs.

Another problematic member with a history of not treating locations with respect was removed from the site. I'll call this problematic member, "Jefferson" (not his real name). Jefferson had a lot of opinions and had no qualms sharing his thoughts with other people.

In November of 2014 when one of my member's Facebook accounts was hacked, Jefferson put the seed into that member's mind that it was me who'd hacked the account. That led to two members leaving the site as a result of Jefferson's allegation (the person that had their account hacked and his friend). The truth is, I had nothing to do with the event. This was the beginning of the trickle of departures to take place.

In January of 2015, I made the decision to remove a few of my Administrators admin access and put them back to Full Member. This was by no means a punishment, I felt that there were just too many admins at this point each with their own way of handling things. Two of them didn't appreciate the way I went about removing their Admin access overnight without giving them advance notice. While my decision didn't impact the way they were able to access the website, they both insisted that their accounts be closed and all their photos to be removed. This further demonstrates that once you issue somebody a certain level of trust, it's difficult to take it back.

For several years we'd been able to enjoy everyone on the same forum and I do mean everyone. Most every explorer that I know of from the early 2000s has been on OAP at one time or another. I believe a falling out was bound to happen under any

circumstance. As we continued to grow in membership I think that the different personalities and egos were taking us into a direction that I didn't want to go.

In May of 2014, the entire urban exploration would be tested in a way that still leaves several people uneasy when they hear the words.... Graham House.

Graham House was originally posted by a relatively new and unknown explorer. On the day he posted photos of this house, it was so amazing that explorer's jaws dropped. Graham House was a rural farm-house located in Ontario. Inside everything was perfectly preserved. There was china in the cupboards, a table set up in the living room, silverware in the cabinet, fake flowers on the table. The living room contained several old electronic stereos and a gramophone unit. The couches were arranged in their original positions. The beds were made and clothes hung in the closet. The dresser drawers contained albums of the occupant's entire life ranging from elementary school ribbons to post-secondary graduation diplomas. In an upstairs bedroom, there were shelves filled with hundreds of books. A magnifying glass and a box of old coins in a bedroom made me think of a child long ago laying on the bed and examining each coin carefully. Room after room was locked in a state where time stopped.

Every room of this house was so perfectly preserved and it appeared to have been left vacant around 1982 (32 years from the time it was discovered). The power still worked. The kitchen had some holes in the floor and the fridge was in jeopardy of falling through the floor. A large hole had developed in the ceiling at the front of the living room that was allowing water to enter and cause damage.

Shortly after the original photos were posted, explorers from all across Ontario requested to know where to find this house. The original photographer was not willing to reveal where it was. As it would turn out there were some clues in the photos and within a week a few explorers had established where the property was.

I was one of those people who had been trying to find out where the property was. I'd narrowed down to within a square kilometer but was still not exactly sure where to find it. I'd tried asking people who up until now had been good friends of mine in the hobby but I was turned down. This house was deemed so special that people said it couldn't be put on OAP which allegedly would happen if I received the location whereabouts. I promised not to post it to the website but was still denied.

In the end, I asked one of the few people who did know the address, and explained to him that it was only a matter of time until I found it – and would he share it? He graciously did.

On November 20, 2013, I visited the Graham House for the first time. It was absolutely amazing, a visual time machine set back to the 1980s. At the same time, I was now one of the cursed people who knew where this location was. People began to ask me where it was and I was put in the uncomfortable position of telling them that it couldn't be given out. It was the same feeling I'd felt when I was denied the location myself. What particularly troubled me was that by not releasing the address to those that asked, would they, in turn, quit my website in protest? People can be touchy. It was almost easier to say that you didn't know where it was located, that to jeopardize online friendships.

Many explorer friendships were tested with this house and to this day it remains a sore point for some people to discuss. The rationale was understandable, this location needed to be protected. In the end, it was perhaps one dozen people at most who knew where to find it and several more being denied knowing.

It also came back to bite me. Jefferson, the member having been banned from my website for a while now, asked if he could be allowed back onto my website. Out of approximately 20 people who've been banned, I'd say 15 of them have later asked to return to OAP. I decided to give Jefferson a second chance as I tended to do with people.

Not long afterward a documentary producer contacted me to inquire if I wanted to be involved in an urban exploring documentary. I'm not the type to appear in front of the camera, so I passed on the offer but I let others know through our website forum should they want to participate in it. Jefferson contacted the producer and plans were made to produce a short documentary. I then forgot about the whole thing.

Fast forward a few months and Jefferson asked me if I'd be willing to share with him the Graham House. I was reluctant but felt that he was trustable and wouldn't give it out. So I shared it with him with the explicit instructions that he does not share with anybody else. The politics of the hobby of course.

A few weeks went by and I received a message from Jefferson asking if I wanted to be credited in his documentary. I began thinking to myself, what was I being credited for? And then it clicked! I asked Jefferson if he'd taken this producer to the Graham House. He had, but he explained that the producer remained in the car and didn't enter the house.

I was furious. At the time I didn't connect the two events (the documentary offer and asking for the Graham address) as these had taken place months apart. I told Jefferson to remove any footage of the Graham house from the documentary as it was never part of our arrangement.

In the fall of 2014, the documentary was released. I watched it and wasn't pleased with it at all. In the documentary, Jefferson and his wife are shown inside the house while a third person is holding a video camera. In the documentary Jefferson says to the camera person "You aren't supposed to be here because someone didn't want you here". A reference to my asking that nobody else be allowed to know where the house was.

I understood now why Jefferson wanted one of the 'Grade A' locations, it was intended to be used in the documentary all along. After some discussion, we mutually agreed that Jefferson would remove himself from the website. I couldn't trust him after this act. Your word is your bond in this hobby.

I won't reveal who this person is suffice to say that the experience left a bad taste in my mouth. At the same time, it was just one of many incidents that make the Graham House two words that we try not to speak about anymore. It holds many negative memories.

At the time of our first visit to Graham House, there was a large hole in the roof just over the living room window. It was not only allowing rain and snow inside but also raccoons. There were several piles of raccoon feces present during our second visit that was not there previously. There's an unwritten rule in the hobby that we try to keep our presence in these houses a secret, lest a property owner seal their house up. In this case, I felt that preserving the perfectly intact state of this house outweighed any potential actions that might result by contacting the owner. I didn't want to see the house damaged further by weather or animals.

I devised a plan to phone the owner and tell her that I'd been driving by the house and noticed a hole in the roof. The homeowner questioned what I was doing on her property, but I explained that I had just been driving by. I tried to ask her a few questions about the history of the house but she began to sound upset. I felt that this conversation might be bringing back some uncomfortable memories. A tarp was placed on the roof shortly afterward, so the plan was somewhat successful.

The reaction from the community was mixed. On the one hand, some felt that this was the wrong thing to do in case the owner ended up securing the property. In their eyes, the right to continue to trespass outweighed preservation of the house. On the other hand, others felt that this was the right decision. After all, you'd do the same thing for your own neighbor, right? I'd like to think so.

Background

The daughter of the family that lived in the Graham House is a senior in her 70s. She'd been living in the home of an elderly male friend who was in his 90s, providing around-the-clock care to the man. The two were acquaintances through their church. There have been various suggestions as to why her parent's house was left vacant. A family dispute that forced the daughter out? The daughter planned to return at some point in the future? The house had been willed to the church?

We actually encountered the daughter while exploring this house one winter. She'd stopped by to gather mail from her mailbox and we presume she saw our cars parked around back. With the driveway blocked by her truck, we had no choice but to reveal ourselves to her. She was confused as to why we were on her property. We showed her the interior of our cars and trunk space to prove we weren't there stealing items and explained that we were only taking photographs. The woman said that people had been in the house over the years taking various items that included a book with the complete history of the house. It wasn't the best time to ask for a history of the house, though she did indicate that she did, in fact, own it.

The house has since been fixed up and someone is living in it now. Closure.



Graham House (Dave Summer)

Jefferson and I no longer speak to one another but I hold no negative feelings toward him. I can be quite outspoken when it comes to people saying unkind words about the things I've worked toward. I'm not saying that all of the drama was one-way. I've been at the center of a few mud-slinging fests.

Sometimes I look back at the early days and wonder how we all were ever able to be a community where everyone got along with one another? The answer is that realistically a rift was always destined to occur, it just took time for people to get to know one another. Believe me, these rifts and disagreements aren't limited to OAP; they happen on almost every urban exploring forum.

The last two years have been much better as not only has the website drama disappeared but the exploring scene seems to be coming together where rifts used to be present. Don't let anyone discourage you from joining an online community. There are a lot of talented people out there with knowledge to share.

And this is how Ontario Abandoned Places began... with a vision of sharing ghost towns with people to a complete database and community.

2019 is our 20th anniversary of being online. It's been a rollercoaster of ups and downs but I don't think I'd have it any other way.

CHAPTER

7

While it's not possible to know everyone personally in an online community, one does get to know people through one's online interactions with others. I like to refer to OAP as a community because that's exactly what it is. People have found exploring partners through the website and we've also had relationships take place with people having met on my website.

It's not always possible to keep in touch with all of our members and so sometimes a person's absence is not immediately noticed. Such is the case with a member named Don Dekker. Don's full pseudonym was "Don the Buggy Guy" in reference to his love of Volkswagens. He joined our website in June 2009.

In early 2013 I noticed Don's extended absence from the website and did a Google search to see if I could find him. I was shocked to discover an obituary belonging to Don. Don Dekker was a young explorer, 23 years old when he passed away on September 16, 2012. Don had been a member of the website for four years and in that time had added over 60 photo galleries in addition to having met other members to go exploring.

I made the decision to contact his mother to find out what had happened. It wasn't an easy decision because it would likely reopen wounds. Don's mother was pleased to hear from me and appreciated that I took the time to reach out. Don's death occurred in the process of exploring an abandoned property. I won't go into the details, they aren't pertinent.

Don's mother, Karen, explained that the family was trying to buy a grave marker for Don's burial site. I approached the members of our website and informed them of what had happened. If I can say anything about our members, it's that they're great when it comes to supporting one another. Members donated to a fund organized by myself to help the family afford a grave marker. In total approximately \$500 was raised by members of OAP. We aren't just a website but a community of friends.





THE EARLY EXPLORATIONS

CHAPTER 8

Burwash Correctional was the catalyst for my interest in the urban exploration hobby. On September 14, 1914, the Ontario Government passed an Order in Council to establish the Burwash Industrial Farm. Construction commenced on the 35,000 acres of land and by the end of the same year, 150 prisoners serving sentences of two years or less were transferred to Burwash. Burwash housed low-risk inmates who could benefit from outdoor work and learn different trades while they were incarcerated.

The site consisted of five campsites: Camp 1 (Camp Spruce) which was constructed in 1914. Camp 2 (Main Camp) was built by sixty prisoners housed in a tent camp and completed on January 31st, 1916. Camps 3 and 4 were bush camps.

Camp Five was also a bush camp, constructed in 1917 to house fifteen men and staff for winter logging operations. In 1925 the camp was rebuilt to accommodate up to 125 inmates who worked in forestry, farming, and construction. The camp consisted of a powerhouse, auditorium, dining room, dormitory, and offices. The guard's quarters was a separate building with a pool table and a sun porch.

In 1917 the Guelph Reformatory was turned into a temporary veteran's hospital and rehabilitation center. 200 prisoners were transferred from Guelph to Burwash bringing the population to over 350 men.

Travel to Burwash was primarily by train as there were no roads leading to the site. It wasn't until 1933 that a road built by the inmates connected the Wanapitei River with Estaire. The road connected Burwash with other roads to Wanup, Sudbury, and Coniston. Burwash was no longer a remote isolated area. In a few years, cars were making it possible for people to visit Burwash and for staff to go shopping in Sudbury.

When the Trans-Canada Highway was built, prisoner escape attempts became more frequent. Signs were posted along the highway instructing motorists not to pick up hitchhikers.

Camp Five underwent major changes with a \$2.6 million upgrade. The camp's name was changed to Camp Bison and was officially opened in a ceremony on June 8, 1960. Over 400 guests and dignitaries attended the ceremony. Camp Bison could accommodate up to 210 inmates.

On July 10, 1974, Ontario Minister of Correctional Services, Richard T. Potter, announced that the Burwash Correctional Centre would close. The cost to run Burwash was deemed too high, outdated equipment would be costly to replace and the closure would save the provincial government money.

Burwash's last day of operation was February 13, 1975. Residents of the estimated 175 town-site houses were told they would have to vacate their homes. Some residences took their homes with them - literally.

In 1977, a Steering Committee was established by the Ontario Government to recommend possible uses for the remaining prison complex and the 35,000 acres of land. This led to the Federal Government purchasing the property in October for \$1.8 million dollars.

In July of 1979, the land was leased to the Regional Municipality of Sudbury for a goat farming operation to produce mohair.

In 1990 the government bid on 8000 acres of land to be used for military training. Some of this training involved using explosives to destroy much of the original townsite. The only remaining building is Camp Bison. All other buildings were demolished in 1994.

An Ontario Heritage Trust plaque was unveiled at the site on August 6, 2006. Around 2007 the cemetery, overgrown and difficult to find, was cleaned up and a sign posted to mark the location. There are an estimated 12-20 prisoners buried here many of whom had no family to bury them properly.

There is still much to explore in the former Camp Bison. The trek will take you approximately an hour and may involve walking through water. The property is private of course but admission can be gained by contacting the property owner. The owner's name is Josh Reynolds and his phone number is 705-988-3780. Josh is also on Facebook. The entry fee is \$20 per person.

Burwash is located approximately 38 kilometers south of Sudbury. Bring rubber boots.

CHAPTER

9

In 2002 as my website was slowly getting known, I received a message from a man named Leonard Gervais. Leonard had found my website while searching for photos of the old Burwash Prison. He invited me to the Burwash Reunion which was being held on September 2nd and 3rd, 2002.

The reunion was a gathering of former workers, prison guards and their families who grew up in the townsite. I eagerly accepted Leonard's offer. I arrived at the reunion not knowing what to expect. Making my way to the main area I overheard people talking about where their houses used to be, and of friends who'd passed away. This was for all intents and purposes a large family reunion.

Leonard took the time to show me around the area, pointing out where the ice rink and other buildings used to be. As I walked around some people asked who I was. I explained that I operated a website of abandoned places. A few people recognized the site, saying "Oh you're the fellow who runs that page." As the day went on, my level of discomfort was growing. I didn't feel that I belonged here. The stories being shared weren't mine nor were the memories and I decided to leave around supper time.

I've recently learned that Leonard passed away in 2017.





The path that leads to the inmate cemetery



Inmate cemetery

CHAPTER 10

The Screaming Heads

Beginner explorers will enjoy this particular location. It's free, open to the public and you can spend all day exploring it without fear of being confronted. The location is named "The Screaming Heads" and it's the home of retired teacher Peter Camani. Peter has created an immense Artscape of concrete sculptures throughout his 310-acres of land.

There are trails to take you through meadows and ponds where you can view Peter's artwork. The fields are filled with 18 to 20-foot tall ceramic faces and hands that appear to be exploding out of the ground.

Peter's home is named the Midlothian Castle because it resembles a medieval castle. The castle is guarded by a two-headed dragon that also happens to function as a chimney. There's also a warrior princess. A giant head in the back of the building serves as the artists' studio.

There are hundreds of "screaming" concrete heads to be seen. Peter also has a most unusual business plan: For \$10,000 you can have your ashes mixed in with your own cement sculpture and live on eternally as part of this art display.

Entry is at your own risk but with permission. Please don't enter the house itself unless invited. Donations are welcomed.

Address:
981 Midlothian Road
Burks Falls, Ontario





CHAPTER 11

CFB Falconbridge

Pearl Harbour demonstrated the ability of enemy bombers to cross enemy lines and drop bombs on targets. Aircraft could be fired upon from land or intercepted by air if they were detected in time. Radio waves could be sent out into the air, bounce back and provide the location of enemy planes. The technology was known as Radio Wave Detection and Ranging (RADAR).

On May 29, 1951, the Pinetree Planning Office (PPO) was established to establish long-range aircraft warning. It was estimated that by 1954, the USSR would have the capability to send long-range bombers. Canada and the United States mutually constructed a three-layered line of radar systems to detect incoming threats.

The Pinetree Line was built along the US border to detect pending attacks on North America. Pinetree consisted of thirty-three radar stations on Canadian soil. Construction was completed by 1954 at a cost of \$450 million.

Pinetree Line was later backed by the Mid-Canada Line. The Mid-Canada Line consisted of ninety-eight radar stations built across the middle of Canada. The radar stations were built by 1957 at a cost of \$250 million.

When the likelihood of an attack changed from bombers to Intercontinental Ballistic Missile, the Distant Early Warning (DEW) line was constructed in the Arctic, rendering the other two lines obsolete.

On August 15, 1952, CFS Falconbridge base began operations. CFS Falconbridge was part of the Pinetree Line radar bases. The base was self-contained and contained a chapel, mess hall, operations center, headquarters building, fire hall, and even a ski hill. The recreational buildings contained a bowling alley, sauna, and wading pool.

The station's operational call sign was "Tomboy".

In 1975 a detachment of CFB North Bay's Air Weapons Control and Countermeasures School opened in Falconbridge. The school taught how to plot targets, weapons control, and radar anti-jamming techniques.

Radar operations were closed down on December 31, 1985, when radar tracking technology had improved. The entire base was disbanded in August of 1986 and put up for sale. The complete town-site was appraised at approximately \$1.3 million dollars. A company named General Leaseholds purchased the property for a mere \$140,000. The

property changed hands once more before finally being sold for over one million dollars to Pine Ridge Developments. Pine Ridge Developments began renting out the former PMQ houses, which remained lived in to this day.

Several of the larger buildings continued to deteriorate and local residents complained of the minimal safety improvements made to the aging structures. In 2007, Kona Management purchased the property and immediately began improving the homes and sealing up the dangerous old buildings. In 2007 the operations center and the radar towers were demolished.

Address:

Take highway #85 from Sudbury to Garson/Falconbridge road and turn left at Radar Road. Radar Rd. can also be reached from Val Caron.



Radome base with the radome missing. The radome looked like a large golf ball (35mm film – 1999)



Stepping inside the radome base (35mm film – 1999)



Pumphouse (35mm film – 1999)



Unknown building last used as a convenience store (35mm film – 1999)



Chapel - last purposed as a convenience store (35mm film – 1999)



(35mm film – 1999)



Fire station (35mm film – 1999)



Administration building (35mm film – 1999)



CHAPTER 12

Balaclava

There are actually three ghost towns in the province of Ontario named Balaclava. This one is located in the district of Renfrew. The town was named after the Crimean War Battle. It began in 1854 when partners Duncan Ferguson and Donald Cameron built a dam with the intention of constructing a saw-mill. The business plan failed and the water rights were subsequently sold to William Richards in 1868.

Richards completed construction of the saw-mill and added a sixty-horsepower water wheel to provide power to the main saw. Earlier generation mills relied upon animals or wind for power. By 1860 the town had grown to include a blacksmith shop, hotel, and worker homes. A turbine was eventually installed to power a generator that provided electricity to the mill, homes, and stores.

The Richards family operated the mill until 1957.

In 1903 a sawdust burner was added to comply with pollution legislation. Up until then, the mill would dump the sawdust directly into the river.

In 1915 a fire destroyed part of the mill which was resulted in the mill being rebuilt.

In 1957 the mill was taken over by David Dick but by this time the supply of timber was running low and the mill could output only a few thousand feet of board per year compared to one million feet per week at the peak of operations. By the end of the 1960s, the mill had ceased operations.

The mill still stands today but the owners don't want people trespassing on the property.

Address:

Balaclava is located along Scotch Bush Road (County Road 513) in Renfrew County. The coordinates are approximately 45.389666,-76.950327.



The former general store (35mm film – 2000)





Sawdust burner (35mm film – 2000)

CHAPTER 13

Horaceville

Hamnet K. Pinhey received a one-thousand-acre parcel of land as a reward for having served as a King's Messenger during the Napoleonic war. Pinhey had already amassed wealth through his London importing and ship insurance brokerage businesses. Pinhey retired and left England around 1820 to make his way to Upper Canada.

Pinhey traveled by boat up the Ottawa River to a hillside location that would become the site of his new home. He built a small log cabin to live in until his possessions and family joined him a year later in 1821.

Pinhey began construction on a permanent two-storey home that was completed in 1821. It featured a verandah and separate stone kitchen. The following four years were spent adding on another two-storey addition. The main floor served as a grand parlor, the upstairs contained three servant's bedrooms. A third addition completed in 1841 consisted of a Grand Entrance and staircase, master bedroom and a second kitchen.

A grist mill and sawmill were added along with a lime kiln, ash house, and church, St. Mary's. The first service was held October 7, 1827.

Within a decade of St. Mary's Church being built, a large crack in the foundation had developed. Repairs were attempted but it was determined that the church was structurally unsound.

By the 1970s much of the property was deemed dangerous due to structural integrity. The property remained in the family until 1971 when Miss Ruth Pinhey, the last family member living in the house, passed away.

Today the property is maintained by the Pinhey's Point Foundation.

Address:
270 Pinhey's Point Road
Dunrobin, Ontario



35 mm photos taken in the year 2000





St. Mary's Church
Erected by the Honorable Hamnett Kirkes Pinhey and the Rev. Amos Ansley
October 7, 1828



CHAPTER 14

The Cat Lady House

The Cat Lady House stands out for many explorers because it was the first place where they had an opportunity to explore their first time capsule house. A time capsule is a reference to a location that's been perfectly preserved for several years if not decades.

The house was located at 4250 Walker's Line in Burlington, Ontario. It belonged to Flora Fern Miller (b. 1909). Flora and her husband Simon McCullough moved to the city of Burlington during the 1970s. Flora, now retired, decided to open a hobby farm under the name of Ferndale Farms. Animals on the farm included ducks, geese, and racing horses. Fern also provided care for the neighbour's horses

The 43-acre property was home to many animals that randomly showed up to the farm, 'Outsiders' as Fern called them. The animals included 24 raccoons, 3 opossums, a wolf named Pinocchio, 5 deer and several rabbits.

As Fern grew older, she sought the assistance of neighbours for help with feeding the animals and cleaning the barn. To avoid being snowed in during the winter she had a second house built close to the road. The older house was given to a couple who in turn would help in the upkeep of the aging property.

Fern was an avid lover of cats. She owned between seven to ten cats. Her house was filled with cat decorations, cat scrapbooks, cat calendars, cat ceramics, and of course pictures of her cats. She owned a Cadillac that had cats airbrushed onto the body and a custom license plate "Cats 14".

The house was uniquely decorated with almost every room in the home covered in wallpaper including the ceilings. Even the bathroom was wallpapered!

When Fern was hospitalized in 1995, she had a friend visit her three times a day to care for her and to deliver meals. This friend would regularly visit Fern to provide her with food, take her for ice cream, etc.

With her health fading, Fern signed a "Do Not Resuscitate" order on February 17, 2000. She passed away the following day.

Fern had previously expressed a desire for her property to be used as a conservation area or wildlife refuge and that some of her belongings be given to the Oakville Humane Society. It appears that a legal dispute arose between the person once responsible for her care and with Conservation Halton, the organization some believe Fern willed her property to.

The house was originally shared to the urban exploring community by an explorer named Freaktography. It quickly became the 'hot spot' given its untouched state.

Some of the items found by explorers included a note left on the fridge instructing "Dad" to handle the kittens three times daily. There were various items spilled across the kitchen counters though the kitchen was remarkably intact. There were medication containers in the kitchen and personal hygiene items on the bathroom counter. The fridge contained food from 2002. An unmistakable smell of cat urine hung in the air from the litter boxes stacked on top of another.

Within a year portions of the ceiling began to fall down. By 2013, vandals had found the property and spray painted the walls and television. By 2014 most everything inside had been tossed about, destroyed, succumbed to natural events or been stolen.

In 2014 a German medium (a person who can speak with the deceased) alleged that Fern contacted her stating that she was still living in the house.

The story of the Cat Lady House came to an end on February 2nd, 2016 when it was destroyed by arson.











L to R: OAP, Freaktography, Doom VS



The Cat Lady

CHAPTER 15

Camp 30

In 1922, 300 acres of farmland was donated to the government to build a school for troubled boys. Construction on two buildings was completed in 1927. The property was used for education until 1941 when the government turned it into a prisoner of war camp. The students were sent to live in various homes throughout Bowmanville.

Modifications were necessary before prisoners could be kept here. Barbed wire fences had to be put up, guard towers and living barracks to be constructed. In 1941 the first Nazi Germany prisoners began arriving. It's estimated that 880 prisoners were kept at Camp 30 during its time as a POW camp.

The living conditions were not intolerable. The amenities included an indoor swimming pool, theatre, athletic complex and concert stage. Prisoners were permitted to play soccer, football, and hockey. Prisoners were able to purchase cigarettes, cigars, matches, pens & pencils and razor blades.

After World War II ended the property was given back to the Ministry of Education and used as a boy's school again until 1979 when it was closed. The property continued to be used for various educational purposes until 2008.

Area residents would very much like to see the property be restored as a heritage site but vandalism has been extensive. Graffiti has been painted on all walls, inside and out. Any attempts to seal the buildings with plywood result in boards being ripped out. Cameras were installed in 2016 to detect trespassers and several trespassing tickets issued. The following year, legitimate tours were conducted of the site between June and September.









As we were wrapping up our July 23rd, 2014 visit to Camp 30, my counterpart stopped to have a cigarette outside of my car. I heard some noises coming from the grass behind us and found two small kittens wandering in the grass. They weren't afraid of me and allowed me to pick them up. It was upsetting to me in the sense that I knew I couldn't leave them there. We looked around for more kittens or the mother but found nothing.

I asked some passerby if they would like two kittens but they declined. The decision was made to take the two little kittens back with us to Toronto where they'd stay the night with my photography companion.



After dropping off my companion I departed for my own home. During the drive I received a text from my exploring friend:

“My girlfriend thinks they're adorable and wants to keep them. I'll get you for this.”

The kittens ended up being given to a couple who already owned two adult cats. I had someone who lived in the Bowmanville area return to the area to try to find other kittens or the mother. None were found.

Address: Camp 30 is located on Lambs Road in Bowmanville.

More information can be obtained here: <http://jurylandsfoundation.ca>

GPS Coordinates: 43.92887,-78.667774

CHAPTER 16

The Grow Op House

Our story of the Grow Op House begins on September 3rd, 2015 when it was first added to the OAP website. The house was located on five acres of land located at 14740 Keele Street in King City, Ontario. A 9,000 square foot mansion was constructed on the property sometime between 1995 and 1998. The house contained an attached double garage, skylights, sauna, and basement bar with a backdrop of the Toronto skyline. Outside was an outdoor pool and tennis court. Value of the property was just over \$1,700,000.

The house was custom built for a Hungarian born man named George Fejer. Mr. Fejer had a long history of building and selling kit cars & racing cars including the Chinook. It's possible that Mr. Fejer moved to Florida in 2008, the year that his property was put up for sale. The house was purchased by a family who lived in the home for approximately four years until the property was put back on the market in 2012.

What transpired afterward is not exactly known. One story is that a real-estate agent used the property for a licensed and legal grow-operation. This seems highly unlikely as anyone selling a house worth \$1.7 million would be continually asking the realtor about the status of his property. It also seems unlikely that a realtor would invest into this business venture.

There's a theory that the property was used as an illegal grow operation and that the hydro meter had been bypassed. This also seems questionable because realtors would continually be showing the house to prospective buyers.

Another theory is that the house was sold or rented to someone who used the property as a legal grow operation for medical marijuana. This seems to be the most logical of the theories though it remains unclear an expensive location would be chosen, only to alter the property in such a way that it would be difficult to ever sell again. Holes were cut into the ceiling, windows were boarded over and mold would be of concern. A media article quotes the Mayor of King Township as saying that the operation was legal and federally licensed.

When explorers posted their videos to social media, the theories grew wilder:

- The mansion belonged to a woman with cancer who grew marijuana for herself
- A drug dealer owned the mansion and was busted

What is known is that the house was unoccupied as there were no beds, dressers or clothing in the house. There were children's toys in the main area of the house and relatively new appliances in the kitchen and laundry room.

This is how the house appeared when it was originally lived in:



The tiled wall has a water fountain on each end of the wall where water trickles down.







You'd feel happy as a clam in this bathtub



The previous photography is copyrighted by The Martin Sheikhan Team of Re/Max Performance.

On February 12th, 2015 at 5 p.m. a fire broke out at the residence. Police and firefighters arrived in response to the fire, deemed an arson. Police removed some grow-op equipment from the house, which was not being lived in nor actively in use for growing plants.

This is how the house appeared on September 5th, 2015, seven months following the fire:



A child's play-tent and laundry basket filled with toys



The state of the kitchen after the house was vacated





L: Take note of the fire damage to the floor and stairs

R: Vents have been cut into the ceiling



L: The tub has been lined with plastic and filled with soil.
R: Water hose connected to the upstairs bathroom



Compare this photo to the same bedroom
on page 80

Soot is evident on the master bedroom doors. There were also clean circular areas of the floor where flower pots used to be.



In the basement recreation area was a bar with a large background image of Toronto



Curiously enough, an old telephone listing for this house reveals a name similar to an individual charged with trafficking in drugs. While speculation abounds, the exact story behind the grow-op mansion still remains cloudy.

Unfortunately, we posted exterior images of this house, which expedited the vandalism soon to follow. It would have occurred regardless, but I now regret ever posting this one to social media.

These two photos, courtesy of Emily Rodgers, speak for themselves as to what inevitably happens to perfectly preserved properties.





CHAPTER 17



The Studite Monastery story begins with an order of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church known as the Studite Fathers. Studite monks living in Ukraine were forced underground by Communists during the Second World War. A small group of monks was able to enter Germany where they established a monastery in 1946.

In 1951 the group of monks from Germany were directed to Woodstock, Ontario by Bishop Isidore Borecky. They lived on a 97-acre farm located across from Southside Park and used the farm's slaughterhouse for a church.

In 1964 the monks began construction on the Holy Dormition Monastery. It could hold up to a dozen monks, contained a dining room and recreation area. (*Sentinel-Review*, Aug. 2, 1975)

The Superior of the Holy Dormition Monastery was a man named Father Wilinski (Herbert Wolinski).

In June of 2000, Wolinski established the Woodstock Peace Lighthouse of Icons. Inside the lighthouse were more than 100 religious icons and paintings. The lighthouse was intended to attract interest in the monastery and to attract tourists. Construction was halted by winter when the monastery was unable to pay bills for the \$2.5 million project.

By 2013 Wolinski was the last of the Studite monks living in Canada.

In 2014 the property had been vacated though there were signs that local kids were using the basement as a place to socialize. Around March of 2017, the property was sold to a developer, the doors were boarded up. Extensive vandalism soon followed.

The property was demolished in January of 2018 to make way for new housing. The lighthouse still stands though at the time of this publication it's being gutted for demolition.









Above: Recreation area
Right: Reception hall







This is why we can't have nice things...



CHAPTER

18

Ivan Letnik was born in the Republic of Slovenia, in a country of uprising and internal chaos. Realizing that Yugoslavia held no future for him, at the age of fifteen Letnik attempted to escape to neighbouring Austria. His first attempt failed but he was successful during his second attempt on August 8, 1956. He spent time in Graz, Austria where he lived with distant family members and volunteered for the Red Cross helping people who had also fled their homeland. Letnik never informed his parents that he was leaving the country, they found out weeks later when Austrian authorities contacted his parents.

When a Red Cross official offered Letnik an opportunity to go to Canada, he accepted it. On August 8th, 1957 a year to the day since he'd fled his home country Letnik departed for Canada by boat.

Letnik arrived in Canada speaking no English and with only two dollars to his name. A German-speaking couple directed him to resources where he was able to obtain work at the Toronto Golf and Country Club. When the club closed for the season, Letnik found work as a dishwasher at the year-round St. Georges Golf and Country Club in Etobicoke. It was there that he learned how to cook food and to speak English. Letnik worked his way up to a cook and was eventually promoted to sous chef by the time he was 19 years old.

The work allowed Letnik to save up enough money to bring his girlfriend over to Canada in 1959 and the couple was married. Letnik had been in Canada for four years now and decided that he'd reached a crossroads where he could either remain at the golf course or he could open his own restaurant. He took the initiative and opened a thirty seat restaurant named the "Pop-In" located at Dundas and McCaul. The restaurant served basic meals such as breakfast, and dinners such as pork chops and potatoes which cost 45 cents.

In 1966 Letnik's restaurant had earned him enough money that he was able to purchase a 1966 Chevrolet Impala and boat passage to Europe. He drove to New York where he boarded the SS France which took him to La Havre, France. Letnik drove the remaining 1500 miles to Yugoslavia where he was reunited with his family. He remained in Yugoslavia for three months and made the return voyage back home to Toronto.

Around 1966 Letnik bought the building that his restaurant was located in, and sold the business. In 1966 Letnik's restaurant had earned him enough money that he was able

to purchase a 1966 Chevrolet Impala and boat passage to Europe. He drove to New York where he boarded the SS France which took him to La Havre, France. It was while crossing the Atlantic on the SS France that Letnik realized his dream of opening a restaurant on the water.

Letnik drove the remaining 1500 miles to Yugoslavia where he was reunited with his family. He remained in Yugoslavia for three months and made the return voyage back home to Toronto.

Upon his return to Toronto, Letnik began the search for an appropriate vessel to use for his restaurant. The search took him three years, resulting in the purchase of the Normac.

The Normac began as the “James R. Elliot” built in 1902 to serve as a fire tug. The boat was then sold to the Owen Sound Transportation Company where it was converted into a freighter and passenger ferry. The boat was renamed Normac after Captain Norman McKay who was the founder and manager of the Owen Sound Transportation Company. The Normac was used to ferry passengers and cars through Northern Ontario waters. It was retired in 1968 and then sold to a private owner.

A year later on July 23, 1969, the Normac now under the ownership of Ivan Letnik, made its way from Wallaceburg to Toronto. The ship was painted white with a red hull in order for the ship to stand out from the street. The Toronto Harbourfront Commission permitted Letnik to temporarily leave the ship in the Toronto harbour. At the time the area wasn't an area that you'd find tourists and restaurant patrons; it was a shipping area filled with warehouses, cargo ships and dock workers.

“Captain John's” floating Restaurant (1518756 Ontario) was officially opened on August 8th, 1970. The business became a popular tourist location that attracted famous Canadians such as Brian Mulroney, Mel Lastman, Robert Campeau, Steve Stavro and Bob Hope. The business brought tourists to an area of Toronto that offered little in the way of tourism and helped to increase the popularity of the waterfront.



1970 photo by Brian Westhouse,

The arrangement to dock the ship in the Toronto harbour had always been temporary because Letnik had intended to move the ship to Ontario Place, it remained where it was until it 1981.

On the evening of June 2, 1981, there were 270 diners enjoying their dinner at Captain John's Restaurant. At approximately 9 p.m. a Toronto Island ferry approached the boat without any sign of slowing down. The ferry rammed the boat causing diners to flee the restaurant. A two-foot hole in the boat's hull led to the boat's sinking despite repairs to fix it.

Letnik took the City of Toronto to court for the damages.

Letnik had been looking at purchasing a second ship and found a 296-foot ship named the MS Jadran ('adriatic' in Yugoslavian). The ship was constructed in 1957 and contained five levels, 355 staterooms, and room for 500 people. In the fall of 1975 Letnik along with a crew of sixteen men sailed to Yugoslavia to bring the ship back to Canada. The ship was purchased from the Yugoslavian government for one million dollars. It arrived in Toronto on November 20, 1975. The trip back to Canada took three days. (Source: Mike Filey's Toronto Sketches, Dundurn 2014)

The economic situation of the past 20 years and poor tourism seasons began to take their toll on the restaurant. The celebrities and corporate parties became fewer. Letnik attempted to negotiate deals with the nearby hotels in which tourists received discounts.

In 2002 the restaurant filed for bankruptcy protection because it now owed over \$5 million to various creditors. In August of 2008, the public health unit ordered the restaurant closed after finding 11 infractions,

In 2009 Letnik's lawyers argued that the ship didn't rest on a foundation and couldn't be assessed for property taxes. A judge ruled that since the ship had been moored to the shore since 1975, it could be taxed. Letnik attempted to appeal this ruling but was denied.

That same year Letnik put the restaurant up for sale at a list price of \$1.5 million which was subsequently reduced to \$1.1 million. Despite nearly forty years of operation, Letnik was unable to sell the restaurant. By now reviews for the restaurant were indicating that the level of service and food quality was diminishing.

On May 11th, 2015 approval was granted by the Federal Court for Marine Recycling Corporation to take ownership of the vessel and scrap it. On May 28th, 2015 two tugboats pulled the vessel out of the harbour before a crowd of hundreds of spectators.











CHAPTER 19

Whether you're new to this hobby or a seasoned explorer, there's one rule that we generally try to follow. That rule is "Take nothing but pictures, Leave nothing but footprints." What this means is to not steal any items and leave nothing behind in way of garbage or graffiti. If everyone followed this, locations could remain in their perfect state for years except for natural decay. Unfortunately, we live in a world where people find entertainment in vandalism, and greed in taking items home.

The rationale is often, "It won't hurt to take one item from a house that's probably going to be demolished." Take that justification and multiply it by a hundred people who might visit a location over a few years and a house can be emptied of its contents quickly. Even if a property is destined to be demolished, if everything was left as it was, it would make for fascinating exploring and great photography.

It's often for this reason and nothing else, that we tend to hold the best locations to ourselves and close friends. It's not that people don't want to share, it's that all too often we see the destruction caused by humans.

This chapter is about taking something home from an abandoned property.

On November 17, 2009, I was exploring the back roads of St. Charles, Ontario. I came across a rural cabin that a cat was living in.



I looked for a food dish or litter box but could find neither. The interior of the cabin stank of cat urine. The exterior of the cabin was filled with garbage bags, oil containers, and assorted computer parts.

I didn't expect this little guy to live through the winter and felt the best course of action would be to take him to an animal shelter. I wasn't willing to let him loose in my car in the event that he urinated in the car. I'd never be able to remove the smell.

I pretended to offer him some food and he came to me. I put him inside a garbage container but the lid didn't fit and he jumped out. I gave up and went about my travels for the day.

Later in the day I passed the cabin again and decided to give the rescue attempt another try. I found another garbage container with a lid that fit. The inside of the container was full of muck. Using a jug of water conveniently left behind, I rinsed out the muck from the bottom of the container.

Again I was able to lure the cat and place him inside the container. I was an hour from home and didn't know of any animal rescues in the area therefore the cat would have to come back to Sudbury with me. Initially I tried to keep one side of the lid open to allow air inside. When I did so, a set of paws immediately appeared at the top of the container. If I closed one side of the container, the paws appeared at the other end.

It had to be quite stressful for the little guy.

I then tried to poke air holes in the lid using a pair of scissors that I found. That didn't work either.



The only way to get this little fellow home was to seal him in the container. I stopped along the way several times to allow air into the container. Say what you will about this being cruel, but to leave this fellow on his own all winter would be crueler.



It was heartbreaking to hear the sound of the cat meowing during the ride home but if he was meowing it meant that he was alive. By 5 p.m. I was back home and on the phone to the City's animal shelter. I explained that I had a stray for them and sought reassurance that they didn't euthanize their animals. They didn't.

The cat was brought into the shelter and he immediately began to clean himself off. The cat had no RFID implant. While speaking to the staff, they told me that they don't accept animals from out of the Sudbury area. The reason for this was in the event that the shelter was accused of stealing an animal. It would cost me \$52.

I then said, "Oh did I say I found him in St. Charles? I meant to say Sudbury."

And with that, the cat had a nice warm home at the shelter.

Rainbow District Animal Control & Shelter Services
411 W St Agnes Street #Box 646 Azilda, ON P0M 1B0 (705)673-3647

Incoming Animal Receipt

Animal's Name:		Animal Identification	
Animal's Code No.:			
Animal's Status:	Stray	Shelter Entry Route:	Shelter
Detailed Status:	At-Large	Date of Entry:	11/16/09
Species:	Cat	Location City:	
Primary Breed:	Domestic Long Haired	Location Info:	5:53pm
Secondary Breed:	Mix	Finder's Name:	
Sex, Altered:	Male, Unspecified	Finder's Code No.:	
Age:	3 yrs	Surrender Conditions	
Age Group:	Adult	The undersigned agrees that they are not the legitimate owner for this animal. They understand that a false statement	
Weight:	Unspecified		
Size Group:	Unspecified		

It's been suggested to me that the cat could have belonged to someone in the area of the house he was found at. However another explorer had also found him on an earlier visit. I also contacted two shelters in the St. Charles area to let them know if someone was missing a cat, where to find him. At the time I didn't own a cell phone and couldn't look up local shelters until I arrived home.

CHAPTER 20

As Canadian families continue to have fewer children over the years, schools and churches are seeing declining enrollment. As a result, these buildings are ripe for exploration when a window of opportunity presents itself.

Erin Continuation School is one such example. It was built in 1923 and combined elementary and secondary students under one roof. Males and females were segregated and there were separate entrances for each gender. The address was 190 Main Street in Erin.

Until 1942, students who attended Erin Continuation School would have to stay in Erin or find their own transportation into town. This was considered expensive by many families and so many children remained at home after finishing Public School. In 1942, John Maude began driving students into Erin on a daily basis.

The school operated until 2000 when it was closed and classes moved to a building on Daniel Street. The school bell and cornerstone were moved to the new location. The former school continued to be used occasionally by the Main Place youth center.

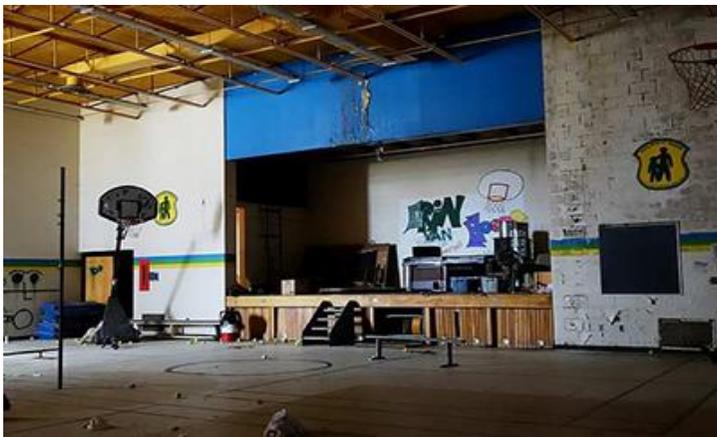
The township of Erin didn't declare the building a heritage structure because it didn't want to deter any potential buyers. The property was eventually purchased by Kensington Square Developments and the school demolished in September of 2017.



Historic photograph from 1914. Wellington County Museums and Archives. A2011.32









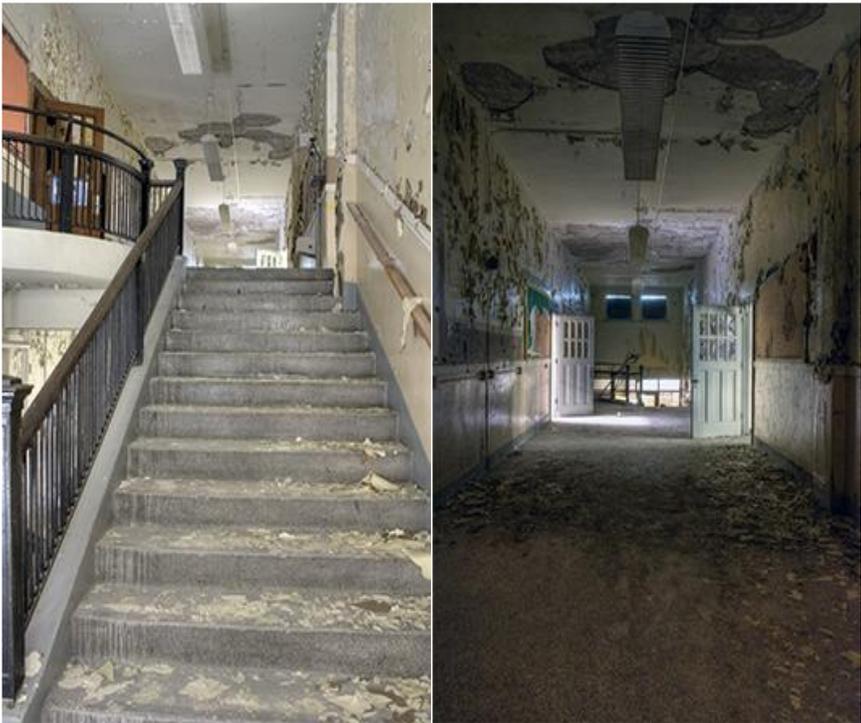
The above colour photos were provided by Motleykiwi. What a waste of a perfectly good Whirlwind pinball machine.

CHAPTER 21

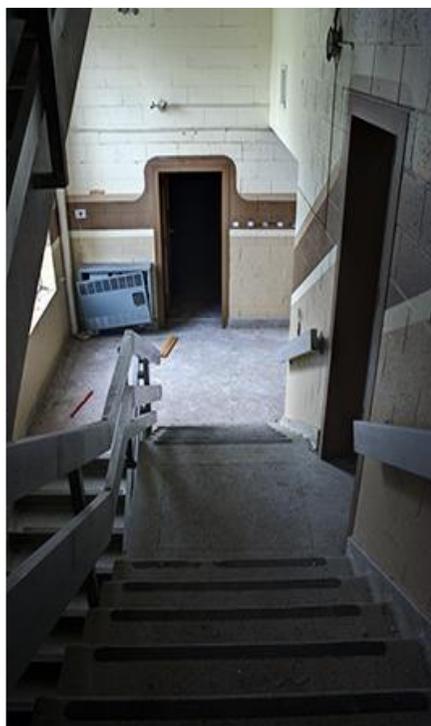
Avon Public School was located at 140 Caledonia Street in the city of Stratford. The first day of classes held in the school was May 7, 1914. Additions were made to the school in the early 1950s.

The school closed in 2004 after the school board deemed it too costly to repair and maintain the building. A decade later there was still no change in the property – a “For Sale” sign was still out front.

Tricar Condo Projects eventually purchased the property and subsequently demolished the building.







GETTING STARTED

CHAPTER 22

Mentally Preparing

Before you get in the car and head out in search of abandoned properties there's an eventuality that you should be prepared for - being caught. Property owners may make attempts to seal their properties, only to have someone later rip a board off a door or window. It becomes a cat and mouse game between property owner and trespasser. Over time the anger and frustration build up as the owner returns to their property to discover new vandalism and/or more items gone missing.

At some point you may be caught and there can be several different outcomes:

The person may be a neighbour who asks you to leave. This is your best case scenario.

The person might be the owner and politely ask that you leave. They may even allow you to look around the property. In this case you may or may not be given permission to enter inside the building. For liability purposes some property owners will not allow you inside their building.

And the worst outcome – an irate property owner. You could find yourself blocked in by their vehicle if you parked in the driveway.

In my twenty years of exploring I've found that it doesn't get any easier when you see a vehicle pull into the driveway. Your adrenaline will start to rush, your heartbeat will quicken. This is your body's fight or flight response.

In one situation we pulled into a property and parked behind the house. This was to keep out of sight of any passing vehicles. The owner lived next door and observed us driving in. We watched as his truck pulled out of the house next door and made its way to where we had parked. By this time we were out of the car and had our cameras in hand. He was calm but suspicious as to why we were parked behind his house rather than in front. We explained that we drove past his house and wanted to take photos of it. The man appeared to be a little annoyed but politely advised us to leave. We apologized for the inconvenience and left.

There will be other cases where someone will pull up on you and not be so friendly. In one of my more intense encounters, I was stopped on the side of the road looking at a rural house. I'd gone inside to take some photos and stepped outside in time to see a man running towards me. The man also happened to be carrying a rifle!

I'd passed him on the way to this house, and waved to him. A simple gesture I find that helps alleviate concerns when a strange vehicle is in the area.

The man came up to me and began screaming about the house being private property. I'd thought about getting in the car and turning around before he reached me but the presence of the rifle was intimidating. The man angrily asked, "Don't you know this is private property?" I explained that I'd not seen any signage. His temper worsened as he screamed, "Do you see that red post over there? That means NO TRESPASSING."

As with most encounters, it was a matter of apologizing and allowing the person to cool off. Part of the reason he was upset was that he'd found his property on the internet with photos taken by another urban explorer. I happened to know who the person was, but didn't let on. This serves as an example that when you're confronted, you might be dealing with someone who's simply fed up with repeated trespassers. You're paying the price for every person who's ever set foot on this property.

In the end after he'd said his piece, we went our separate ways.



There have been some members of my website who ended up leaving the hobby after being confronted. The hostile encounters were too much for them to handle.

One of my administrators encountered a farmer that drove a bulldozer up to his car and threateningly placed the bucket inches away from the car's hood. He got into the face of the man's wife who happened to be keeping watch in the car (while her partner was in the house). As he was shouting, saliva sprayed in her face.

If there's one thing you should take away from this chapter it's this: farmers are a different breed. Their livelihood is made from the fields that they maintain. When people trespass on them in off-road vehicles, it threatens the crops. It's the general consensus of explorers that farmers are prone to being more threatening than a non-farmer.

And when these confrontations do occur, they can play in your mind for days to come. You may go home and replay the incident in your mind. It might even keep you up at night. You might feel anger, anxiety, or fear. Perhaps the person has written down your licence plate and you spend the next week in fear of getting a phone call.

When you receive a speeding ticket, you tend to keep that on the front burner of your mind and watch your speed for the next month. In time you gradually forget about it and might drive over the speed limit again. This is how your brain works. The next time you go exploring, you'll be afraid of being caught again. You'll feel anxiety as you hear a car approaching, only to drive past you. It's a learned experience and I'm afraid to say that over the years it doesn't get much easier.

I find that it helps to have more than one person. The reason for this has nothing to do with physical advantage. Having more than one person makes it less likely for the anger to be directed at any one person. Instead, you as a group take the brunt of the anger rather than directly.

No matter what, you're in the wrong. Accept it. Apologize.

And a personal peeve of mine... if you're caught, please don't tell the person, "I found your property on OAP". I'm not certain why people do this. It could be that they're scared and think that this will excuse their trespassing by throwing us under the bus. I've received messages from strangers telling me that when they caught people on their land, the people caught showed them the location on OAP from their mobile device.

It could also be that the person feels that they had a right to be on the property because we have it as a location on the website. We have a disclaimer for a reason. You should always seek permission. Take ownership of your actions.

In a later chapter for those who don't seek permission, I'll explain how to handle confrontations that are intense from the start. If I've not scared you away from exploring, read on.

CHAPTER 23

What To Bring

When you head out on your explorations it helps to have all of the equipment that you might need. Fortunately, this is not a complicated list.

Camera Gear

In addition to your camera, be sure to bring a lens cleaning cloth, extra SD Card and if you have one – an extra battery. If you're out shooting for the day and run out of space, you'll be thankful to have that secondary card. Batteries have been known to die inexplicably while out exploring, or they may not like cold weather. A spare, or portable 12-volt car charger is recommended.

The scope of this book will not cover what lenses to use because that in of itself could be an entirely other book. Many of you will be shooting with the stock lens (18-55mm) and for all intents and purposes that will be fine. If you plan to explore long term then I'd recommend a wide angle lens such as the Sigma 10-22 mm.

One of your first investments should be a tripod. A tripod will allow you to take long exposure photographs which will be important when shooting in darker conditions. It stabilizes the camera and prevents blurry images.

If your camera captures GPS information in the photos, I recommend turning it off or removing the EXIF data before uploading to the internet.

GPS

Most locations are identified by GPS coordinates. These consist of a decimal latitude and longitude number that represents the location of a property using imaginary circles covering the Earth. If you look closely at a globe, you'll see these lines. It's preferred to use GPS coordinates because address markers may not always be visible on the road and some GPS devices may not have the street name in its index.

Fortunately if you don't own a GPS unit, you can download an offline version for use on your cell phone. These offline versions don't require a data plan. I recommend Here We Go.

Cell Phone

It goes without saying that a cell phone should be carried. The reasons are obvious... car trouble, injury, being locked inside a building, or communicating with one another inside large properties.

Portable Light

In some cases you may find a room completely dark. It helps to carry a portable light. This can be as basic as a \$4.00 LED light from Dollarama or it could be as advanced as a portable LED lamp. Some photographers will use small candles to light up a room.



The above photo was taken using an LED light magnetically attached to the vent on the ceiling. You may also wave your light around the area to be photographed in addition to a long exposure shot in what is called 'light painting'.

Other considerations include:

- Spare socks, toque for winter (and one for your forgetful friend). Keep in mind the temperature inside buildings can be colder than the outside temperature
- First Aid Kit
- Pen and notepad. You may find some locations have been demolished or sealed up. This helps if you plan to keep updating the status of your locations.
- Energy bar and Gatorade (particularly on hot summer days)
- Money/ATM card for the mid-explore lunch
- If you're visiting a building known for having transient or homeless persons, some people like to bring cigarettes or change to offer. It's about respecting one another in the same space.
- Chalk (some buildings have a chalk board which explorers like to use as a sign-in registry)
- Toilet paper (at some point in this hobby you WILL be thankful you brought this)
- Hand sanitizer (you'll be grateful that you did)

What Not To Bring

- Breaking and entering tools.
- Spray paint (we've all seen dicks on walls by this point)

While I explore I do so without alcohol or drug use. I prefer to have clarity over impaired judgment. I know others in the hobby who prefer to explore with either substance readily available. Your personal habits may differ from mine.

CHAPTER

24

Who To Bring

If you're like me you have a few close friends that you enjoy exploring with. I tend to stick to the same small select group of people when I explore. At the same time as a website operator, I'm always open to meeting new people in this hobby.

If you're planning to explore with someone (or more) that you're meeting for the first time then I highly recommend making it a short day. Perhaps an hour or two with some backup locations. The reason for this is group dynamics. You don't know who you'll be meeting and depending on several circumstances you may not want to spend an entire day with them. If your personalities click then you can dig into the backup locations.

You might have someone squeamish who wants to remain in the car all the time. You may find someone who smokes but you don't. The smell to a non-smoker can be intolerable. You might not like the way someone drives. I've been on some trips where the driver kept looking over at me while talking, which resulted in the car drifting. Yikes! The person might be overly negative. The person might be overly talkative (I know one explorer who constantly talks due to nervousness). Any one of these characteristics could lead to you wanting to end a trip early.

You might run into the one guy who always seems to cancel on you. An hour before you're set to leave, he says that he's broke or some family matter has arisen. I generally allow someone three strikes. If they cancel three times after committing to a trip, I no longer invite them out and place the onus on them to approach me instead. Providing short notice doesn't always give you enough time to find someone to replace them.

On any extended road trip, there will always be a period of silence while driving. This usually occurs after the preliminary introductions, small talk and lengthy discussions have ended. Embrace it, you can't always be expected to be speaking. I find silence to be indicative of one another's mutual comfort level. If an entire road trip is silent though, maybe there's tension. I can tell you that in almost two decades of exploration, I haven't encountered any people that I wanted to throw out of the car. Some were mildly annoying but we're all different. Maybe I've annoyed someone as well?

When it comes to a road trip, whether you have close friends or strangers with you I highly recommend making an arrangement for covering the cost of gas. Sometimes the driver doesn't want any gas compensation while other times it's welcomed. A typical road trip for us is between five to ten hours long. During that time it's not unusual to go through \$50 in gas. There's also the mileage in returning people to the carpool or back their house. If you'd like to be compensated for gas, make it known before the trip.

Some drivers have run into issues where their companions say they'll pay for gas, then don't. This puts the driver in the uncomfortable position of deciding whether to continually pester the person to pay up, or to write it off. Offer to help with gas, it's the least you can do even if the driver doesn't accept it.

If you're traveling in a group of four, it can be as easy each putting in \$10.

Safety

The number of female explorers is ever growing. The ratio of female to male followers on our social media is approximately 6:4 in this equal opportunity hobby. There are explorers both male and female who explore alone. Often this is based on the unavailability of others rather than preference.

As a male, I feel safe exploring with other people even people I'm meeting for the first time. The reality is that the same can't always be when you're a female. A female explorer from Ontario who'll remain nameless, once stated she went exploring with a male (who'll also remain nameless). When they'd arrived at the remote destination, he wouldn't allow her transportation back home unless certain conditions were met. I'll leave it at that.

This isn't to suggest that it's completely unsafe to explore one male to one female as strangers. I've explored with at least 20 women without issue, just me and the other person. Whenever possible I try to meet the husband, or parents if it's someone living at home. This provides a sense of reassurance, my car's licence plate is right there, and I make sure that they have our contact information. However for the most part the years of knowing one another through the website is enough reassurance.

What normally occurs though if the person you're looking to invite is a female and doesn't know you, she'll ask if she can bring a friend. This is perfectly natural. Sometimes even having a female in your own group is enough to reassure another female who'll be meeting your group for the first time. Another option is to take two vehicles.

Whatever arrangement you make, the goal is to make sure that everybody feels comfortable. I've never encountered any issues on any road trip when it came to the people in the car. The worst case someone forgets to send gas money.

Sometimes though, preparations don't go as planned. Okay, not sometimes, just once in twenty years to be precise. As part of operating a large community website I try to get out and meet new people each year. In the summer of 2016, I offered to meet a female member from my website for a visit to a newly discovered mansion. The idea was we'd meet up at a mutually agreed upon place close to the destination. I had some concerns about her so just to be safe, I ensured I'd have a companion with me. And she in turn was welcomed to bring a friend.

The mansion was not well known and still very much a secret in the exploration community. I knew where it was, she did not. Given the tendency for people to be particular about sharing great new finds, I jokingly said to her, "I'll have to put you in a windowless van and blindfold you." for the drive there. I then followed that with a "Just joking."

There was no response to my message and sensing maybe something wasn't quite right I wrote to her a few days afterwards to ask her if she understood that it was a joke. Not a lewd joke, not a sexist joke, not an insensitive joke – a joke. A few more days later I happened across a photo on Facebook posted to a page with a screenshot taken of her cell phone and a sent text message reading: "Oh my God. I think you're right. He was trying to lure me to the mansion."

The actual definition of lure is to tempt a person to do something or to go somewhere. By that definition I can say that each month I either lure, or someone lures me to an abandoned property. It usually starts with a message such as, "I just found a great new house. Are you interested?" and consider me lured. But back to my story...

What particularly confused me was that we'd both be taking our own vehicles and meet there which means she'd have the address the night before. She was welcome to bring a friend along, while I'd be doing the same. I suppose if you wanted to bend reality, I could have rented a van, tried to persuade her and her friend to put on blindfolds. Then I'd try to bribe my friend with a hamburger to get in the back as well. Knowing him though, he'd have felt claustrophobic in the back of a van. I think tying him to the roof would have been better.

Something just wasn't adding up. How could someone actually believe this even after explaining it was a joke and knowing there was no van?

Things began to make sense when I learned that the person the text was sent to, just happened to be a former member that I'd banned two years earlier. What better person to consult than a banned member with no knowledge of the situation, and a reason to blow things out of proportion because they hated your website.

Even our female members laughed and said they'd take the imaginary van if only to see this beautiful mansion.

I wasn't planning to include this story in this book. I'm including it because after three explanations to this person that it was a joke, and one apology for any misunderstanding, this person to this day still rants about it. Great life-skills.

End of story.

Another consideration when meeting people is smoking. Whether you're the driver or passenger, it's important to remember not everybody smokes. In such a case it should be established if the vehicle will be smoke free. Maybe everybody smokes so it becomes a non-issue.

CHAPTER 25

The Rules

I like to compare this hobby to a group of hobby knitters. I picture a group of ladies in a room arguing over knitting. “No! You can’t use the English style of knitting you fool. Continental style is the only way to go. It’s so much easier to learn.” “But I don’t want to follow your rules. I like the English style!” An outsider observing this would shake their head in confusion. Why are there rules for a hobby? Who enforces them?

In the exploring hobby there are no actual rules. There are however expected policies that explorers like to abide by. The reasons these policies exist is easy to understand. It’s to prevent vandalism and to preserve properties.

I’m not going to demand that you follow these. I’m going to ask only that you consider them, and consider the reasons as to why these are generally adhered to.

- 1) Take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints.

When you steal something from a location, it escalates your being on a property without permission into a criminal act. Example: Some explorers were caught inside the vacant portion of the St. Thomas Psychiatric Hospital. One of them had a small trinket in their pocket taken from inside the facility. That person was charged with break and enter. The reason for this is that it’s implied that you entered for the purpose of committing a crime.

If every person who visited a property took just one item home, there’d soon be nothing left for the remainder of us to enjoy. In particular time capsule houses that are left perfectly preserved. By leaving items as they are, future photographers can enjoy the same state of the property as you did.

Leaving no trace of your presence won’t alert a property owner to your presence. It’s also a common courtesy that you don’t leave your Tim Horton’s cup on the counter of someone’s farmhouse. It goes without saying that spray painting walls also changes the state of a property.

2) Park away from the property.

All too often people will park at the end of a gated driveway or in the driveway. If you're there without permission it's like placing a large billboard at the side of the road that reads "I'm inside your house."

It also allows someone to pull into the driveway boxing your car in, as we've found out in the past.

If you can find a nearby road or parking lot, use it and walk in. In some cases, there's no place to park. If possible, do a 'drop off' whereby you let a few people out to walk in. You can drive the car away and then trade off when the first group is done taking photos.

There will be times where it's not possible to park your car anywhere, or it's easier to conceal your vehicle behind the building.

3) Loose lips sink ships

You'd be amazed (or would you?) that there are places on social media where the sharing of addresses is encouraged. Don't be surprised if these properties are trashed and empty of all possessions. Social media is followed by people with different intentions. Some want to scarp for metal, some want to take valuables, some just want to wreak havoc.

I occasionally receive messages from strangers made up of only three words: "where is this?" There's no hello, no introduction, no reason for asking nor any thank you. It comes across rather cold. At least introduce yourself and explain why you're asking.

I also receive several reasons for people asking for addresses:

I'm doing a film shoot and require a farmhouse.

I'm shooting a music video and need a location.

My friends getting married in a week and we need a location.

I'm looking for an abandoned house to purchase.

I have a metal detector.

I'm Geocaching.

I'm looking for a place to play paintball.

No matter what the request is, it comes down to the same circumstance every time. I don't know who you are nor do I know why you're asking. There are very few people in the hobby who won't divulge locations due to being greedy. It's simply that they don't know the person who's doing the asking. I understand the frustration when people see a beautiful house on our media and are declined when they ask if they can have the address. This is a necessity, it isn't personal in nature.

There's also a silver lining in the cloud. By being selective in whom you share properties with, other explorers may be more inclined to share with you. Nobody wants to hand over a newly found mansion free of graffiti and vandalism to someone who they know will provide the address to anybody who asks.

This isn't to suggest that we're all selfish individuals. On the contrary, you need to demonstrate that you can be trusted. Trust doesn't occur overnight. This is the nature of the hobby.

When posting photos to the internet, I recommend sanitizing them first of any identifying information. This could be a phone number on a phone, a mailing address on an envelope, or an easily recognizable building in the background. This isn't so much a necessity when posting well-known locations that everybody knows about. This is meant for small houses hidden from public view. This is how the Graham House was found by other people.

Establish friendships with other explorers. Go on road trips with them.

4) Credit

Have you ever given someone a location and later on read a comment left on that person's photo from someone else like "Great find" or "How do you find these places?" In time you just might. No one person finds every place they document exclusively on their own. Sometimes we're handed these places by other people. Common courtesy is to credit the person particularly if the location is bound to generate a lot of online activity. At the least, ask the person if they'd like credit. They might not even want it but you've asked and that's a sign of mutual respect.

In closing, you don't have to follow any rules or expectations in the urban exploration hobby. For those who don't, you could just find the roads to location information regularly blocked.

CHAPTER 26

How Do I Find These Places?

The answer to this question can be summed up in six short words: get in your car and drive.

Seriously, get in your car. Drive.

I'm not going to go into great detail in this chapter. There are too many people out there with the wrong idea of having fun with abandoned houses. Without giving away all of our secrets, here are some recommendations:

Use Google Satellite View. This tool allows you to see a bird's eye view of roads and properties possibly hidden from view.

Another method is to look for the black and yellow "No Trespassing" signage. Often this can be a telltale sign of something behind the gate just waiting to be explored.

Online news media will often have articles on factories, resorts, hotels and hospitals that are closing or that have closed. By utilizing keywords in Google you can easily find these articles (Example: "St. Catharines hospital demolition"). Entering a search phrase such as "St. Catharines demolition" is more likely to present you with a list of demolition companies. Other suggestions include "(city goes here) factory closed out of jobs"

Look for green address markers along back roads. These are fire markers used to help firefighters find addresses. If the driveway is overgrown, it may bear looking into.

Word of mouth. People who work as transport drivers and hydro workers often find abandoned properties while working. Reddit may also be helpful given the number of people from any given city who use it.

Urban exploration websites may have entry-level locations. We certainly do.

And again, get in your car and drive the backroads. Look for roads named "1 Line, 2 Line, Sideroad, etc."

Visit the MLS real estate website.

Good luck!

CHAPTER 27

It's Too Clean To Be Abandoned

Now that you have your exploring partner, camera equipment, and back roads mapped out, let's proceed to the next step.

How does one identify that a property is abandoned? First of all, you should understand that in the hobby people use the term 'abandoned' as a catch-all adjective. There are many circumstances that could apply to a property that isn't readily known. A property could be for sale, it could be caught in legal limbo (eg. a contested will), the owners could be in a retirement home, the land could be used for farming and the house no longer used. A property could be in between owners, it could be undergoing renovations or it may be awaiting demolition.

When we speak of an "abandoned" property it's in the context that the property isn't currently in use. It's not implying that there is no owner nor is it suggesting that the property has truly been abandoned and forgotten about.

If this were the case then our website should be renamed from "Ontario Abandoned Places" to "Ontario Abandoned, Seasonally Used, For Sale, Awaiting Demolition, Farming Use Only, Legally Contested and Undergoing Renovations Places"

We can't always learn the reasons behind a property no longer being used. The term 'abandoned' encompasses all of the above scenarios. If a person doesn't own the property then more than likely the bank will. After all how often does someone just walk away from their land?

What are some of the signs that you could look for to determine if a property is abandoned?

- Driveway is overgrown and there are no tracks in the mud, snow.
- Large snow bank by the road and an unplowed driveway during the winter
- Rusty chain and padlock at the end of the driveway
- Holes in the roof or worn roofing tiles
- The hydro meter is missing. Without the glass portion containing the analog or digital meter, the house has no electricity



- If there are vehicles on the property don't necessarily dismiss the property. Look at the rear licence plate (front plate if it's a truck) for the validation sticker in the upper right corner. This will indicate the year that the vehicle is registered until. If you see 2018 or later, this is a bad sign. 2017 would be great while 1976 would be fantastic.
- Is the grass maintained? This isn't always accurate as properties that are no longer in use may have the grass cut to keep up appearances.
- Cobwebs in the windows or door frame

Sometimes appearances can be misleading. One summer's day two explorers who will remain nameless were between locations when they passed an old house. They turned around and took a closer look. The grass was overgrown. A car with an outdated registration was in the yard (not the driveway). The paint on the house was worn and peeling. The deck at the side of the house where the side door was, was old and rotting. The roof looked to be in poor condition. There were no lights visible in the windows.



This photo is from 2013 with freshly cut grass. In fact, a person can be seen in the image on a riding lawnmower.

One explorer waited in the car while the other one tried the side door. It wasn't locked. Standing behind the door was an elderly woman in her nightgown. This could have turned out much worse if the two explorers had entered and the woman was in bed. The explorer was left to come up with a spontaneous explanation – they were looking for a woman named Donna. Wrong house, sorry.

I believe that what happened was the husband passed away and the property fell into disrepair. It looks worse than the above image. At some point I'd like to stop by here and inquire if she requires groceries or yard work.

There may be times where you're uncertain whether a house is abandoned or not. The grass is cut, the roof is in good condition, there's hydro working. It could be that the property is in-between owners, it could be for sale, or it could have been purchased by a developer. When properties are purchased by developers or up for sale, the hydro isn't necessarily turned off. I can think of one particular mansion where the hydro works and the kitchen is dust free. If the developer has their way, the building will be demolished. It won't be used in any capacity ever again – for all intents and purposes it's abandoned.

Often when immaculate locations are posted to social media, viewer comments will read, "It's too clean to be abandoned" or "You did a break and enter". Both remarks are nonsense. You cannot base whether a property is abandoned based on a lack of dust or dirt. Without a functioning HVAC system, open windows, smoke, airflow and outside dirt there will be little dust to accumulate.

If it's a break & enter when the house is immaculately clean, how much dust and debris must accumulate before it's not a crime?

The presence of electricity alone can't be used to determine the status of a property. There's a particular farmhouse in Ontario that's located down a long road. It hasn't been lived in for decades. There appear to be no signs of maintenance and the interior has remained untouched. It's a remarkable time capsule and yet the hydro works and the telephone has a dial tone. The hydro company may have forgotten to disconnect the electricity in a house or the electronic bill withdrawals may be continuing to occur while the owners are in a retirement home.

There are times where a property may be put up for sale and found via the MLS system by an explorer. In this case the property isn't abandoned. Keeping in mind the actual definition of urban exploring, these type of homes still present as exploration potentials. Some explorers don't care for the modern state of these houses, others find them enjoyable to photograph.

What can you do when you're uncertain as to whether a building is being used?

Try leaving a \$2 coin on the doorstep or a piece of duct tape across the door. Check back at a later date to see if they are still in place. This isn't a perfect system as an urban explorer could theoretically snag your coin and try the door. Another alternative is to simply ask a neighbour. If we're exploring a building and there's no chance of doing so without a neighbour seeing us, often we'll approach that neighbour. We'll introduce ourselves and ask about the history of the house. The neighbour may provide a bit of history about the property. They may say that the owner lives a few roads over, or in another country.

If the owner doesn't live nearby we might then ask the person, "Do you mind if we just take a look around and take a few photos?" The response 9 out of 10 times is, "I can't give you permission as it's not my place but I don't care if you look." This accomplishes two things: first, it introduces us to the person who'll be observing our approach to the house. They see us, they get a glimpse of our personality. They see our camera gear. It helps that we're primarily in our 40's rather than 20's. Ageism does factor. Secondly, it removes any worry that the neighbour will be on the phone to the police and allows us to take our time exploring.

There's a former nudist camp located at the end of a dead end street in Somewhereville, Ontario. If the neighbours see you driving down the road and don't exit back out immediately, they'll phone the police. People, particularly those in rural settings, enjoy their tranquility. They don't want groups of explorers visiting the abandoned house on their street.

If all else fails, muster up your courage and try knocking on the door or looking in the window.

One of the most asked questions received on our Facebook page is, "How is this left abandoned?" There are several reasons:

- The developer has purchased the property for demolition
- Something serious has occurred in the house making it undesirable to buyers
- The occupant(s) has moved into a long-term care home
- The occupant(s) has passed away leaving nobody to clean out the house
- The property is used for farming only. The house is ignored
- Occupants moved into a modern home that costs significantly less money to heat. Also, the lengthy driveways would need plowing in winter
- The property is in use seasonally
- Former grow operation or property seized as proceeds of crime
- The house is in between owners, perhaps undergoing renovations
- The builder ran out of funds

CHAPTER 28

No Risk, No Reward

The urban exploration hobby is not without risks. This chapter is not intended to be a legal resource or safety manual, it's merely a guide.

Watch for uncapped water wells in grassy areas. These may not be visible in winter.

When entering a room, pay attention to the floor. Sometimes holes are covered with paper or cardboard. Floorboards may be rotting. I know of a few explorers who've fallen through floors. It's an idea to put one foot out first to test the floor while keeping your weight primarily on your other foot. Rooftops may also be weak.

As you enter doorways or windows, be mindful of stinging insect nests. These have been found in door frames, in holes in walls and even inside a mattress. They are sometimes built under car hoods and in refrigerator freezers.

Boards might have rusty nails in them.

Building undergoing renovation or demolition often contain light fixtures and heating vents hanging from the ceiling. Explorers have been known to hit their heads on these particularly if its dark out, or they're looking through a viewfinder.

Don't explore alone. If you do, try to let someone know where you're going to be.

When ascending or descending stairs be prepared to encounter animals using the house for shelter. You may encounter a raccoon darting to safety or a cat running past you. This can be momentarily frightening and you don't want to lose your balance.

Bring a respirator with you. The air quality in old buildings can be atrocious not to mention the presence of asbestos or black mold. Also, bring a flashlight. It's common to find properties where an entire floor has boarded windows and is completely dark inside.

Basements could be flooded with several feet of water. Flooded basements and weak floorboards are a deadly combination.

When opening doors, ensure that they won't lock behind you. This is crucial if there's no alternative way out of the area you're entering. A friend of mine was exploring a psychiatric hospital and closed a door behind him in a stairwell. The door locked behind him. There was only one other exit one floor above and it too was locked. If in doubt, prop the door open with something that's not liable to slip out of the doorframe.

Leave the spray paint, knives, pepper spray, lockpicks, etc. at home. You don't want to be caught with them and if you need them, you're doing it all wrong.

While exploring the now abandoned Splatalot game show location, I stepped into some muddy ground next to the moat. I immediately lost my balance and fell forward into the water. It was deeper than a shoreline normally would be and I quickly found myself up to my neck in water. Not knowing how to swim (yep) I hung onto a Styrofoam block for dear life. My beloved Canon Rebel sunk to the bottom of the muddy moat.

When you first approach a location do a drive by first. This allows you to verify if the driveway is chained off, vehicles or people are on the property and if there are neighbours out or farmers in the field. Once you've done that consider whether you're going to park away from the location or pull in. If you pull in, try to do so quickly and at a time when no oncoming vehicles are approaching that could see you.

You can also park on the side of the road a short distance away and have someone in the vehicle posing as they're on their cell phone. While this does attract attention, it also indicates to passerby that you've stopped to take a phone call.

CHAPTER 29

Paranormal Activity

Undoubtedly one of the more popular questions that I receive is, “Do you ever encounter paranormal activity?”

Between my exploring friends, we have an average of fifty combined years spent exploring buildings. The total number of paranormal experiences during that time is **zero**.

We’ve never heard the sound of children laughing, observed doors closing on their own or seen cupboards slamming open and closed. We’ve never encountered floating orbs (that weren’t attributed to dust), any apparitions, and no demons. At most perhaps the sound of footsteps was heard which could be a person or animal. No hamburgers floated past us in mid-air. Demons didn’t come out of the walls.

Compare this to the lives of some Youtube authors out there who average a paranormal haunted house in almost every single location they visit. Either ghostly beings love coming out for the video camera and I’m missing out ...or... there’s a fortune to be made staging these videos and selling branded merchandise clothing at three times the retail cost to teenagers.

This isn’t to say that paranormal phenomenon doesn’t exist, I’ve never observed any. Maybe it does.

CHAPTER 30

Caught In The Act

So you've been caught by the property owner or neighbour. What do you do? If you're young and agile you could decide to run. I'm too old to be outrunning people and there's something to be said about accepting responsibility for your actions.

When someone approaches you, take the initiative to say "Hello" and give them a wave. This can catch someone off guard, and you also come across as friendly (which I'd hope that you genuinely are). At this point, you're going to find out rather quickly the temperament of the person who's approaching you.

If it's a neighbour there will be a less personal attachment to the property. They could still be upset and they may threaten to phone the police. A lot of the outcome is dependent on your behavior. If you present with attitude (eg. tell the neighbour to go f-himself) you're going to increase their anger. Remember, you're in the wrong. If you've not stolen anything and not forced entry, you've not committed a crime. I should point out that being older may make a difference. There's no way around it, younger people may not be given the benefit of the doubt that older people do.

It could also go the other way where the neighbour is simply curious and checking up on the property. Explain your presence to them, satisfy them that you meant no harm.

Now if the person happens to be part of the family that owns the property you could be in for a varying degree of anger. In order to understand this better, we're going to look at the Stress Model of Crisis.

Disclaimer: I cannot, and do not, make any guarantee that this information will work for you. As always, you should seek permission before you step onto someone's property.

The following image illustrates what your behaviour is when you're calm and collected. We call this the Baseline and it's the Pre-Crisis State: A person who hasn't yet reached a crisis.

The next stage is the Triggering Phase. A person has found you on their property and is now angry (triggered). Their heartbeat has increased, their face may be flushed. This is probably the stage that you'll encounter a property owner in.

Depending on the interaction, the person may advance to the Escalation Stage or Outburst Stage if:

- You talk back to the property owner, you're verbally abusive.
- You try explaining to him or her that you were only taking photographs. Their anger grows rather than subsides. Why is this happening? Why aren't they calming down?
- You attempt to leave the area quickly.

It's crucial to understand that at this stage what you say and do can change this process. Your mind is saying to you that you should simply apologize and walk to your car. By doing so the individual may try to physically detain you, or assault you. How would you react if you found someone trying your house doors and then wanted to scurry back to their car while you were standing there? You'd want to unload a can of verbal whoop-ass and only then would you consider allowing them to leave.

Remember, you CAN be placed under arrest by the property owner (R.S.O. 1990, c. T.21, s. 9 (1)). Although you may have committed no actual crime, the person feels wronged. As much as you want to get out of there, stay. I've been there myself when the angry hunter approached me.

We were exploring in the Stratford area one summer and after wrapping up the day, happened to come across what appeared to be an abandoned house. I turned the car around and we pulled into the driveway. We walked around the house, looking in the windows and determining what might be inside. Unbeknownst to us, the owner had seen us from his house in the distance.

Until he noticed us on his property, he would have been at the Baseline Stage.

By remaining there and bearing the brunt of the anger you're allowing the person to dissipate their anger (by venting). It could be that they've had thefts in the past but you're the only person they've caught. It could be that they've just had a personal life issue. Whatever the reason(s), you're getting a piece of their mind.

You might offer up an explanation such as, "We thought it was abandoned. We didn't mean any harm." or "We didn't know anybody owned it" but to do so is to roll the dice. This could help the situation as the person realizes you didn't mean any harm and weren't in the process of stealing from the property. It could go the other way and bring the person to the Escalation Stage. Perhaps they get out of their vehicle, walk to within two feet of you and begin to swear. "What do you f-ing mean you thought it was abandoned? There's a new gate at the end of the driveway. The grass is cut."

The man remained in his car but began to yell at us. He demanded to know what we were doing on his property. We explained that we'd passed by the house and thought it was vacant.

At this point, he was in the Triggering Stage. He was upset at our being on his property now that he had pulled into the driveway and was communicating with us. It was important to de-escalate the situation.

What you don't want is the Outburst Stage. It's seldom that an explorer is physically assaulted during property owner encounters. I don't know of any second-hand experiences but that's not to say that it couldn't occur.

Be aware of your breathing, try to breathe deeply. Keep your body language non-threatening. I would suggest you not interrupt the person. When the opportunity presents itself do apologize and be sincere. You want the person to drain off their emotions not escalate them.

After the man had shouted at us for a bit I said, “I can understand why you’d be upset. I wouldn’t want people looking around my property either.”

I strongly suggest being sincere in your apologies. Remember, a property owner could just as well read this chapter just as you are right now.

At that point, my exploring partner asked, “So what’s the story with this house? When was it last lived in?” While the question was genuine, it also redirected him.

It may seem ironic that there’s a chapter included in handling confrontations while at the same time offering advice on exploring properties. It’s important to keep in mind that the properties that we explore, may belong to a family. There may be an unhappy story behind the reason for it being vacant. People do steal items from these properties. These are all factors that can make an encounter turn unfriendly very quickly.

When asked the question on social media, “What gives you the right to enter these properties?” my answer is always, “There is none.” The fact of the matter is that it can be an invasive hobby. There’s no other way to put it unless you’re in denial. I can only say that if you take nothing, leave nothing, and remain respectful in how you treat these properties they can be enjoyed by others. It’s not my intention to address the morals of the hobby – for that is a characteristic unique to each person reading this book.

The man explained a bit of the house’s history. He mentioned that two college students were arrested not long ago after stealing items from the house.

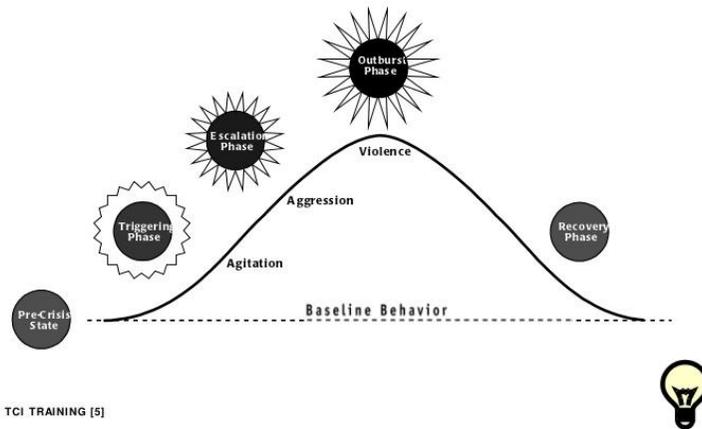
He was calming down, having now expressed his anger and perhaps coming to understand that we meant no harm. Apologies were again offered. By the end of the conversation, the man was laughing with us as he sat in his car.

We wished him well and we were both on our way.

This isn’t black magic or hypnotism, it’s human psychology. Please don’t take from this that offering up false apologies is the intention of this chapter. The intention of this chapter is to accept responsibility for your actions.

Part of that means receiving a verbal lashing if it presents itself. Yes, it might very well haunt you for a week to come, and you might be upset. Welcome to the hobby.

Stress Model of Crisis



In two decades of exploring I've never received one trespassing ticket. Perhaps part of the reason is merely circumstances, the right time and right place. It could also be that there's merit in what this chapter discusses.

Something to think about.

If there is no other way to approach a building without being seen, sometimes the direct approach works. Walking right up to someone with a smile and a few questions can sometimes open the right doors... figuratively and literally. We've had success by walking up to security guards and asking if they'd mind if we could look around. While it might sound ridiculous, in one circumstance he said yes. So long as we were gone by the next shift-change.

CHAPTER 31

In the earlier years of the hobby, if you wanted to share photos of an abandoned location, it was done primarily through e-mail or on private forums. I think the earliest forum for explorers was ghosttowns.com, founded on March 6, 1998. As far as urban exploring goes, its sites like this that would be considered the original social media of the hobby.

Social media is defined as, “websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking”.

With social media, anyone can be an author, reviewer, prankster, vlogger or challenger. It takes only one person to decide to create a challenge of the utmost stupidity and see who follows. I’m speaking about challenges such as eating Tide Pods, snorting condoms, lighting themselves on fire and knocking out random strangers for video entertainment. Social media can make you wealthy. Example: A seven-year-old boy earned \$22 million in 2017 creating toy review videos.

Before photo dumping websites like Flickr, YouTube, Facebook, Reddit and Twitter, the hobby was still ‘off the radar’. It was barely spoken about in the media, nor was it seen as mainstream or edgy. With the creation of modern sharing websites, this is no longer the case. These sharing websites offer seemingly unlimited storage space compared to the limited storage of private websites and forums. They also boast larger audiences. For these reasons, many photographers choose social media over traditional home-made websites. It’s difficult to beat unlimited storage at no cost. Urban exploration is now widely disseminated to households across the world.

The effect of modern social media on the hobby has been both positive and negative. Many seasoned urban explorers including myself view social media as the worst thing to happen to urban exploring. Locations are much more difficult to keep private now as it takes only one person to recognize a location. In some circumstances, it might be a neighbor, former resident of an institution or someone who once attended an event in the building. With the ability for other people to leave comments on your photos (often with no way of disabling them) this can escalate the destruction process.

People are able to re-share content in their own feeds, taking away the original author’s ability to control comments. Other times a person might download your photo

and repost it on a website like Reddit to ask where the location can be found.

Abandoned properties posted on social media aren't only viewed by urban explorers; you also have metal scrappers, graffiti artists and people who make money by buying and selling vintage items. By taking photographs in an abandoned property over a duration of time, one can see the chronological progression of damage caused by these kinds of people: Valuables disappear, items are tossed to the floor, copper is ripped out, graffiti appears on walls, etc. It's not unusual to see comments on your photography from people who admit that they'd take home an antique if they knew where the location was.

In extreme cases, unattended properties are also targets for arson.

The rate of location destruction has increased as more people are alerted to the whereabouts of abandoned properties. Social media has taken what used to be an underground hobby and turned it into a pastime where everybody is an up and coming 'urban explorer'. It's become more difficult to keep properties secret.

What you do find posted online is often titled as clickbait:

"Gone Wrong"

"Cops were called"

"We found a haunted...".

"One kill = remove a piece of clothing" (gaming videos)

"She didn't realize the camera was still on..."

"Wait until you see what happened next..."

Then there are the fake beefs, fake breakups, real clowns in your living room, pranks gone wrong, etc. etc. There's a certain sense that one needs to be disingenuous in order to attract readers.

If you plan to go the YouTube route, at some point you'll come to a crossroads where you have to make a decision. Do you make videos that conceal the identity of the location or do you reveal it to all? It's a personal and ethical decision. Again, this is something that will affect how openly people are with sharing locations with you. It's political because it needs to be political.

Social media isn't all negative of course.

There are always new places being discovered through a larger network of explorers. There's no shortage of people willing to tag along with you on a road trip. I'm reminded of earlier days where I often took trips alone because there was nobody to travel with. Our forum has several male and female members who are looking for other people to explore with.

It provides a large audience to view your photography. A photographer of abandoned buildings can easily accumulate upwards of ten thousand followers given the right platform and marketing efforts. There's a certain sense of pride and pleasure in reading the accolades in the comment section of one's page. A single image might see between fifty to three hundred Likes, and motivation to keep continuing to take photos.

There are opportunities to network with other explorers, to trade locations and meet up with new people for explorations.

Fact: Whether you have 50, 500 or 50,000 followers the average engagement rate on your photography is often approximately 0.01% of your followers. At best, it's 2%.

Social media also allows explorers to learn of new places to explore that they might not have necessarily known about before.

You can't blame social media for all of the damage caused to abandoned properties. Much of the vandalism happens from local residents, who are aware of the property long before it's posted to social media. There are also database websites including OAP that, unfortunately, can be used by vandals in search of places to damage.

Get in before the damage and document before it's too late!

It is not the intention of this chapter to tell you whether to use social media, whether to share addresses or how to promote your videos. That is something you'll have to decide as you gain experience in the hobby. Some people have no issues sharing addresses because they feel everyone should benefit from visiting these buildings. Some people prefer to err on the side of caution and be selective with giving out addresses.

Remember – there are no rules in a hobby – only personal preferences.

CHAPTER 32

How To Purchase An Abandoned House

This chapter does not constitute legal or other professional advice. If you're serious about purchasing an abandoned property, you'll want to consult a realtor.

The process of purchasing an 'abandoned' house is a little more complex than one might expect. The concept of a truly abandoned house means that there's no name on the deed to the property. This, of course, is improbable.

I receive several requests each month from followers who ask how they can purchase an abandoned house. Unfortunately, most of them don't specify a region or city. It would be like me asking a realtor to find me a home on the market for my family to move into without providing a city. If you did provide me with an area of Ontario, I could search our database of thousands of properties for any possibilities. It sounds like a great business opportunity on my end, but I'm content with operating a hobby site.

99% of the time I opt not to fulfill these requests as they are simply too time-consuming. It takes time to go through a city and cull the database for prospect properties. Then the addresses would need to be compiled and a photo attached showing what the property looks like. There's also the matter of providing this information to a complete stranger.

If you don't know where to find an abandoned property the only course of action I can suggest to you is to ask someone who actively explores abandoned properties. You might also try driving the back roads and rural routes. There are also websites such as Reddit and Facebook city pages where you could ask on.

Option One:

The easiest method is to try contacting the township in which the house is based. For instance Grey County Township, Erin Township, Guelph Eramosa Township, etc. Due to privacy acts, this may or may not be successful. In one instance I was able to obtain the name of a numbered Ontario company for an abandoned motel several years ago.

Option Two:

You'll want to perform a Title Search. A Title Search will provide you with the name of the property owner, any mortgages on the property, any liens, a list of previous sales and transfers and any other documents registered to the title.

In order to perform a Title Search, you'll require the Property Identification Number (PIN) which is in the format of 12345-6789. A PIN search can return results in a matter of hours. This number is found on Property Tax Assessments which in this case, you probably don't have.

Alternatively, you could try the municipal address. If the property is listed under the municipal address, the PIN number is not required.

The PIN and/or municipal address can be entered at the following websites:

<http://www.documental.ca> (fee)

<https://www.speedysearch.ca> (fee)

<http://www.centrolegalworks.com> (fee)

<https://www.onland.ca> (free to search for PIN number and property details. Fee for parcel register)

<https://www.teranetexpress.ca> (registration required)

Option Three:

Need it to be said, contact a real estate agent. I'm just an explorer, not a realtor.

Option Four:

Inquire with neighbours in the immediate vicinity. They may know the owner's name and where they live.

Option Five:

Leave a business card and or note on the property. Results may vary.

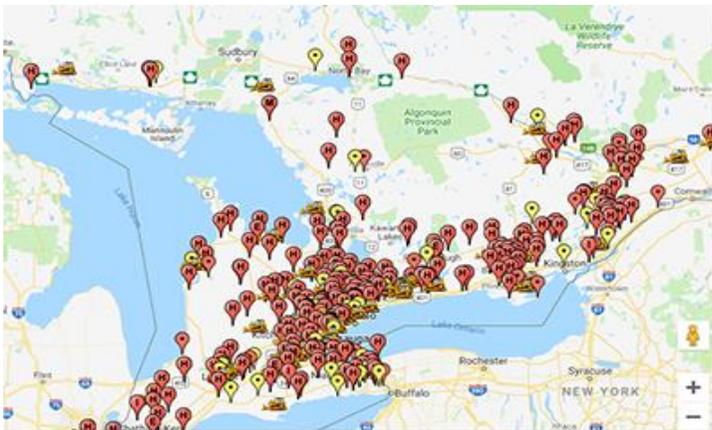
Option Six:

Visit your nearest Service Canada to obtain a Parcel Register. The “address for service” can be found on the transfer document.

Option Seven:

Infrastructure Ontario via an Open Market Sale

As you can see from the image below these vacant properties are literally everywhere! There are 450 pins shown out of a possible 8,033 pins for Ontario.



REFERENCE

CHAPTER 33

Trespass to Property Act - Table of Contents

Introduction

- 1) What is the exact law pertaining to trespass within the province of Ontario?
- 2) If I want to approach a property to ask permission, is that in itself an act of trespass?
- 3) How is private property marked? Is there a specific format to be used for signage?
- 4) Is a property owner legally allowed to detain me?
- 5) Is trespassing a criminal offence? Will I have a criminal record?
- 6) What is the fine for a TPA offence?
- 7) What is the process for making a citizen's arrest?
- 8) Are there any defences for the TPA?
- 9) Are there any limitations on trespassing charges?

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Introduction

It's important to be aware of the trespassing laws as they apply in Ontario.

If you are interested in exploring a location that does not belong to you, don't become discouraged. Access is often available by going through the proper channels. This may involve a phone call to the property owner, knocking on the front door, or simply asking a security guard for access.

This article is not meant to assist you in breaking the law; it is meant to better help you understand the law. It is hoped that you will try all legal channels when you visit a location.

Finally, under NO circumstances should you ever force your way into a location. There is a difference between trespassing and break & enter.

The Law

Before we discuss the law itself we need to define some key terms:

"**occupier**" includes,

- (a) a person who is in physical possession of premises, or
- (b) a person who has responsibility for and control over the condition of premises or the activities there carried on, or control over persons allowed to enter the premises, even if there is more than one occupier of the same premises; ("occupant")

"**premises**" means lands and structures, or either of them, and includes,

- (a) water,
- (b) ships and vessels,
- (c) trailers and portable structures designed or used for residence, business or shelter,
- (d) trains, railway cars, vehicles and aircraft, except while in operation. ("lieux") R.S.O. 1990, c. T.21, s. 1 (1).

In other words, when the term 'premises' is used within this article it could be referencing a boat, trailer, railway car, plane, shed, house, barn, building, etc.

"**night**" is defined as the hours between 9 pm and 6 am.

TPA refers to the "Trespass to Property Act"

Contents

1) What is the exact law pertaining to trespass within the province of Ontario?

The law pertaining to trespass is covered under the Revised Statutes of Ontario (RSO), specifically R.S.O. 1990, CHAPTER T.21.

Section 2, subsection 1 states that:

Trespass an offence

2. (1) Every person who is not acting under a right or authority conferred by law and who,
- (a) without the express permission of the occupier, the proof of which rests on the defendant,
 - (i) enters on premises when entry is prohibited under this Act, or
 - (ii) engages in an activity on premises when the activity is prohibited under this Act; or
 - (b) does not leave the premises immediately after he or she is directed to do so by the occupier of the premises or a person authorized by the occupier, is guilty of an offence and on conviction is liable to a fine of not more than \$2,000.
- R.S.O. 1990, c. T.21, s. 2 (1).

Translation: You must be acting under a right or authority to be on the property (example: you have been given permission, caretaker, security, etc.). The burden of proof rests on you to prove that you have the permission of the property owner to be on his/her property. You could be found guilty of trespassing if you are inside a dwelling or involved in an activity on the property (eg. camping or hunting). You could also be found guilty if you do not leave the premises when asked to do so by the occupier or someone authorized to speak for them.

Example: If you are asked to leave the property by a neighbor, and that neighbor has been given the authority to act on the behalf of the property owner, you are guilty of trespass if you refuse to leave.

2) If I want to approach a property to ask permission, is that in itself an act of trespass?

No. Section 3, subsection (2) states that:

Implied permission to use approach to door

(2) There is a presumption that access for lawful purposes to the door of a building on premises by a means apparently provided and used for the purpose of access is not prohibited. R.S.O. 1990, c. T.21, s. 3 (2).

Translation: If there is a door located on a property, it is presumed that access to that door is not prohibited as long as you are using it for legal reasons and that the door is for the purpose of entering and leaving.

3) How is private property marked?

This is defined in sections 5 to 7 of the TPA:

Method of giving notice

5. (1) A notice under this Act may be given,

(a) orally or in writing;

(b) by means of signs posted so that a sign is clearly visible in daylight under normal conditions from the approach to each ordinary point of access to the premises to which it applies; or

(c) by means of the marking system set out in section 7. R.S.O. 1990, c. T.21, s. 5 (1).

Form of sign

6. (1) A sign naming an activity or showing a graphic representation of an activity is sufficient for the purpose of giving notice that the activity is permitted. R.S.O. 1990, c. T.21, s. 6 (1).

Example: A picture of a person swimming indicates that swimming is permitted.

Idem

(2) A sign naming an activity with an oblique line drawn through the name or showing a graphic representation of an activity with an oblique line drawn through the representation is sufficient for the purpose of giving notice that the activity is prohibited. R.S.O. 1990, c. T.21, s. 6 (2).

Example: A picture of a swimmer with a line through him means no swimming is permitted.

Red markings

7. (1) Red markings made and posted in accordance with subsections (3) and (4) are sufficient for the purpose of giving notice that entry on the premises is prohibited. R.S.O. 1990, c. T.21, s. 7 (1).

Yellow markings

(2) Yellow markings made and posted in accordance with subsections (3) and (4) are sufficient for the purpose of giving notice that entry is prohibited except for the purpose of certain activities and shall be deemed to be notice of the activities permitted. R.S.O. 1990, c. T.21, s. 7 (2).

Size

(3) A marking under this section shall be of such a size that a circle ten centimeters in diameter can be contained wholly within it. R.S.O. 1990, c. T.21, s. 7 (3).

Posting

(4) Markings under this section shall be so placed that a marking is clearly visible in daylight under normal conditions from the approach to each ordinary point of access to the premises to which it applies. R.S.O. 1990, c. T.21, s. 7 (4).

Translation: Section 7 basically means that a large red dot is a sufficient notice to warn you that trespassing is not permitted. A yellow dot means that certain activities are permitted.

In areas such as a lawn, orchards or vineyards no notice is required. It is implied that this land is private property.

4) Is a property owner legally allowed to detain me?

Yes, and so are the police.

Section 9 of the TPA states that:

Arrest without warrant on premises

9. (1) A police officer, or the occupier of premises, or a person authorized by the occupier may arrest without warrant any person he or she believes on reasonable and probable grounds to be on the premises in contravention of section 2. R.S.O. 1990, c. T.21, s. 9 (1).

This further means that a neighbor may detain you if they are authorized to do so. Note that if you are detained by the property owner or someone acting on their behalf and you attempt to forcefully leave, you are RESISTING ARREST. This could upgrade what is a Provincial Offence to a Criminal Offence.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING PRIVATE ARREST

Upon being detained by the property owner, they MUST turn you over to a police officer. The Trespass to Property Act has a civilian arrest authority but no civilian release authority.

The arresting person cannot 'change their mind', 'give you a break' or 'get you off the property and let you go!' Nor can your supervisor, or any other civilian authority release them or order you to release them.

Once arrested, you must be turned over to the police. Period! Anything else could result in the person arresting you, being charged or sued.

This is stated in Section 9, subsection 2:

(2) Where the person who makes an arrest under subsection (1) is not a police officer, he or she shall promptly call for the assistance of a police officer and give the person arrested into the custody of the police officer. R.S.O. 1990, c. T.21, s. 9 (2).

5) Is trespassing a criminal offence? Will I have a criminal record?

No. Trespassing falls under the Provincial Offences Act, which means that it falls under provincial legislation. There is no criminal record involved. It is quite similar to receiving a speeding ticket except in that case it would be a Highway Traffic Act offence.

You should know however that it could be a crime if you trespass by night (9pm-6am):

Section 177 of the Criminal Code of Canada states that:

177. Every one who, without lawful excuse, the proof of which lies on him, loiters or prowls at night on the property of another person near a dwelling-house situated on that property is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction. [R.S., c.C-34, s.173.]

Translation: If you have an excuse, the burden of which can be proven, such as your missing dog running out from the bushes, you are likely to be let go. If you are caught in the bushes of an occupied house without a legitimate reason, you are in serious trouble.

Note that this must occur at night, not the daytime.

6) What's the fine for a TPA offence?

It's approximately \$65 (\$50 plus a Victim Surcharge) and can be paid at your local Provincial Offences Office. Other alternatives include pleading not guilty or requesting more time to pay the fine.

7) What's the process for making a citizen's arrest?

A citizen's arrest would be when a property owner or a security guard detained you. The process should be as follows:

- a) The person should identify themselves and state to you that you are under arrest.
- b) The person should lightly touch you on the shoulder or elbow to indicate that they are in control of the situation.
- c) The person must give you a reason for being arrested, this is a requirement under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
- d) Advise you of your right to legal counsel under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

This can also be used to your advantage. Let's say that a security guard or private citizen attempted to arrest you for trespassing on property. They approached you and told you that you were under arrest and to wait until the police arrived. The police arrive and take you into custody.

What's missing from this? The security guard or property owner did not advise you of WHY you were being arrested. This forms the basis of a great defense and having the charge thrown out, but this advice should be sought from a legal representative.

8) Are there any defences for the TPA?

Trespassing is considered an "absolute liability" offence which means that it is up to you to prove your innocence, not for the accuser to prove your guilt. There are however two defenses to the Trespass Act:

- a) "color of right" – A person believes that they have an honest belief that they had an interest in or title to the land in question, which would allow them to do as they wished on the land. An example to this would be a neighbor who places a fence on property that he thought was his. If an opposing neighbor establishes that the fence is on his property, the original neighbor would not be charged because he had an honest belief that the fence was on his property. This would be difficult to use as a defence for urban exploring.
- b) "implied permission" – it is implied that a front door of a house will be used to receive visitors. A person wishing to speak to the owner of the premises is expected to use the front door and is not trespassing unless a notice is posted indicating otherwise.

9) Are there any limitations on trespassing charges?

Explorers enjoy posting their photos online to sites such as Flickr and Facebook. The question is, could a person be charged with trespassing after the fact?

The answer might surprise you. There is a **six-month** limitation on Provincial Offences beginning from the date that the offence occurred.

In essence, there is a statute of limitations on the Trespass to Property Act. Be forewarned though that it is possible, by appearing before a Justice of the Peace, to have that time period increased.

Closing Comments

The Trespass to Property Act is meant to protect property owners from other citizens being on their land. This is any citizen's right as I'm sure you would not appreciate people traveling from across Ontario to snoop through your backyard either.

If you are approached by a property owner, consider trying to set the precedent for future explorers. Be friendly and courteous and explain the reason for your presence. Show them your equipment, explain the historical significance behind their building and why you're interested in their buildings. Many people are willing to discuss the history of their property if given the opportunity. Permission is often only a phone call away.

There is nothing to be lost by being courteous. Being rude and ignorant will only make it more difficult (or police involvement more likely) for the next explorer.

Running away may even result in the property owner attempting to detain future explorers.

CHAPTER 34

Glossary of Terms

abandoned: a term given to a property that no longer fulfills its original purpose.
b&e: break and enter
bando: slang terminology for abandoned
BM: Basic member, the first level of access for new members
coords: short form for co-ordinates (see GPS)
curbex: taking photos from inside your vehicle rather than getting out to do so
db: short form for database, a method of storing a large amount of information online.
FM: Full member, the second level of access for members
gps: Global Positioning System, a numeric system used to measure location
lc: location creator (one who has created a database location entry)
LED: light emitting diode
OAP: Ontario Abandoned Places
PO : property owner
pon: Provincial Offence Notice (your trespass ticket)
poe: Point of Entry. The current access point into a building but may not necessarily be a doorway. Liable to change frequently.
tourist: A term referring to someone who primarily explores someone else's locations
UER: Urban Exploration Resource
urbex: Short form for urban exploring (or exploration)

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Resources

Abandoned UE

<http://www.abandonedue.com>

Ghosttowns (perhaps one of the oldest exploring websites in existence)

<http://www.ghosttowns.com>

Life of Nife (Youtube channel from a fairly new explorer)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoqiYh67c508xiLBHNENYOg>

MikeOnline (Northern Ontario explorer)

www.mikeonline.ca

Ron Brown's website (author of several exploring books)

www.ronbrown.ca

The Secret Lens (Southwestern Ontario explorer of unique finds)

<https://www.facebook.com/TheSecretLens>

Tikitrex (Youtube channel containing informative Ontario exploration videos)

<https://www.youtube.com/user/TikiTrex>

Urban Exploration Resource

www.uer.ca

Urbex Barrie (An Ontario explorer with several years of exploring to his name)

<http://urbexbarrie.blogspot.com>

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Fiso and wife, Maureen E., Dave Summer (top), Maple (bottom), Alex, OAP (top), TheGirlNextDoor (bottom), JimmyEnduro and Dani, ..., ..., Talker and Motleykiwi.

Fiso works for a secret agency so we have to protect his identity.





Final Thoughts

I don't consider myself to be an amazing photographer, amazing author or an expert on exploring. I do consider myself as someone with years of experience and with experience comes knowledge. With that knowledge comes a desire to share that knowledge with others.

I hope that this E-book has been beneficial to you in some form.

December 31, 2018



About the Author

Mike L. has been exploring the roads of Ontario for the last twenty years. He was born and raised in Sudbury, Ontario and now lives in the city of Burlington.

In his spare time he enjoys spending time with his family, all you can eat chicken wings, horror movie marathons and planning his next road trip.

He's yet to find orbs in any abandoned building although the quest is ongoing.

