

Lamplighters lead tours down lane to history in Lincoln

Lamplighter

By Janet Foxcroft

Photography by Michal Pasco
and Associates


Not so very long ago, maybe 200 years or so, oil lamps illuminated main streets when the moon was not bright enough. The lights gave rise to the employ of *lamplighters*, often undertaken by teen-age boys or retired men. It was not always an easy job, despite the romance connected to it. A lamplighter was a town employee who lit the oil or gas street lights, generally by means of a wick on a long pole. At dawn, he would return and turn them off using a small hook on the same pole. From time to time, he would come along with a ladder and clean soot from the glass globes, or renew the mantles. In some communities, lamplighters served in a role akin to a town watchman; in others, they were seen as little more than sinecures, that is, holding a "prominent" position requiring little or no work but a salaried one nonetheless.

They were also the "men-about-town" who knew of the comings and goings of many a merchant and neighbour. There is a long history of the role of a lamplighter-as-lightbringer as a symbolic figure in literature.

Borne of history, romance, story-telling and community spirit, is the Lamplighter Tour in Lincoln.

To launch the holiday season in Niagara west, a troupe led by lamplighters delivers facts, fiction and innuendo to bring local history to life through theatre.

Lamplighters guide visitors back to bygone days. Guests learn about local lore as they stroll down memory lane. They visit historic sites with stories to tell of the many characters who lived, worked, loved and played in the community. Oh, the stories they tell! Talented local playwrights have woven tales from the past the likes of which newcomers and long-time residents have never heard. It is a special pre-Christmas treat for the whole family.



John Van Der Beek serves as official lamplighter for the popular Niagara-west history-theatre event