



DRESDEN 1957

Original photo from Keith Philpott archives

*Dresden 1957, a documentary currently in production, is **the untold story of Ontario's worst workplace tragedy**. It is also an immigration saga, the story of the building of modern Canada, a powerful cautionary tale, and a rich human drama. Above all, it is a story about us as Canadians - and how we came to be the country we are today.*

The Story

In 1957, my father, Keith Philpott, was the site engineer for the construction of a pumping station in Dresden, Ontario. He was 25 and recently arrived from Britain. He had serious safety concerns, but the contractor didn't listen.

Two weeks after work began, one side of a 35-foot pit collapsed and six workers, all Dutch immigrants, were buried alive. It took 38 hours to recover all of the bodies. Despite the horror of the disaster and widespread news coverage, the deaths were ruled accidental, and the contractor was acquitted at a trial. Within three years, this story had disappeared entirely from public memory.

Using my father's diary, letters, and photos as a narrative thread, this film finally tells the lost story of the Dresden cave-in. Through the eyes of people who experienced it, we learn about building of modern Ontario in the 1950s, the post-war wave of Dutch migration, the challenges these families faced, and the tragedy that changed their lives.



Editing an interview with a relative of cave-in victim Dirk Ryksen.

This Project

Dresden 1957 is a feature documentary currently in production. This lost story has special meaning for many Canadians, including workers' and safety organizations, immigrant groups (especially Dutch Canadians), as well community groups and historical societies in southwestern Ontario.



To date we have invested \$225,000 into this project, including \$80,000 gifted by our supporters in a crowdfunding campaign. We have shot nearly 40 interviews (including family members of all six victims), beautiful Southwestern Ontario locations, and simple recreations. We have assembled a wealth archival materials, such as newsreels, photographs, letters, news clippings, engineering plans, and other documents.

Next steps

We are working to raise \$200,000 CAD, which will allow us to complete production and post-production, including 3D models of the disaster site, restoration of archival assets, sound design, an original score, editing, graphics, finishing, legal and administrative costs.

Why it matters

The story of the Dresden cave-in offers a powerful lens into Ontario's history and contemporary themes of immigration, inequality, and the price of seeing others as "less than." The mystery of this story's complete disappearance only adds urgency to its retelling.



August 14, 1957, working to recover the bodies after the cave-in

Our Team

- **Eric Philpott**, writer/director: With over 20 years of experience in film and broadcast technologies, Eric has a gift for storytelling and making complex material accessible and engaging. He taught history in Germany, Canada, and the U.S. In 1992 he directed a German-language production of *Our Town* which toured in former East Germany.
- **Joseph Crawford**, editor & consulting producer, has a rich background in editing film, TV, and music videos. He headed in-house production for Monster Group, Australia and as a post-production consultant.
- **Pawel Kacprzak**, cinematographer, has extensive international experience in film and TV, specializing in documentaries. His work has appeared on Amazon, ARTe, HBO, the Discovery Channel, and others.

Contact

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