

Golden Memories

by Percy L. Climo

Unnatural harbour made many changes

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THE COBOURG HARBOUR

To the early settlers in the Cobourg area and to those coasting in small boats along the north shore of Lake Ontario, the lovely, attractive, half-moon shaped sand beach, located between present day Green Street and the Factory Creek provided temporary camp sites and resting places that were very accomodating. Fish were available for the catching. The background of cedars provided some shelter. The Cobourg beach was a popular stopping place for all and sundry.

As the hamlet grew and the area settlement increased; so did the local trade. Landing from larger boats, by using the Jolly-boat, from off shore was inconvenient and hazardous in rough weather. Local merchants felt that a harbour was necessary.. Consequently, in 1828, rock-filled timber cribs were placed to form piers at the end of Division and Third Streets. To do this, a harbour company was organized and in 1829, the Cobourg Harbour Company received its charter through an Act of the Upper Canada Legislature.

Work on pier construction continued. By 1832, lake boats

had a landing dock. From that time on, the harbour produced favourable financial returns from revenue. Finally, what is to-day the inner harbour basin, became a pier enclosed port for imports and exports, plus a transportation facility for the travelling public.

The last half of the 1830's witnessed the transfer of stock from local ownership to out-of-town owners. Repairs were neglected but the harbour revenue showed profits. This turn of events placed a handicap on the port.

It is not a natural harbour by any means. The location is subject to the severest storms that Lake Ontario can produce from the east, south and west, lashing its protective piers. Drifting sand was a problem from its beginning. To keep its channel open dredging has had to take place all down through the years.

In 1842, the newly formed Union government by means of its Department of Public Works

and a dishonest superintendent of the Department, took over the maintenance of the harbour and ignored the Cobourg Harbour Company in doing so. The result was that the harbour was left undredged, and repairs to piers were charged at double the cost. In 1850 the government closed out the Harbour Company, the town purchased it, but at a high price.

The esplanade dock was built between the two piers after the town took over, thus closing off the mid-town creek estuary. The coming of the Cobourg-Peterborough Railway brought much trade to the harbour and the 1850's were very prosperous years at the waterfront. Hardships came upon the people of the town and district in the severe local depression of the early 1860's. With the transporting of iron ore from Marmora after 1867, the times for the local people improved and again much trade passed through the port. For the re-

maining schooner days, the harbour served the town very well.

All this time, the drifting sand from the west and piling into the enclosure made for a severe problem. The old town dredge had to maintain the channel and the inner basin, year after year.

In the early 1870's, it was considered that a third pier, at the end of Hibernia Street, would stop the drifting sand. In 1875-1876, the West or Langevin pier was placed some 1500 feet into the lake. The government paid two-thirds of its costs and the town one third. It is a deep, strong pier, well built and still in firm condition below the water.

With the third pier in place the expected containment of drifting sand did not materialize. The heavy storms from the west, with strong undertoe currents, carried the sand around the end of the long pier and the easterly storm washed it into the present outer harbour ba-

sin. The formerly deep water in this area became shallow with the sand.

After the arrival of the car ferry in 1907, the government decided to make the Cobourg Harbour a port of refuge. This was done by installing the two concrete-capped breakwaters at the east and west piers thus closing in the outer basin. It was never planned to use the outer basin for shipping, only to protect the inner harbour.

In very recent years, with the demise of all commercial shipping, the port has been converted to a small craft harbour. This arrangement has been a big success and the future calls for expansion of small craft docks into the outer basin. Under present conditions, the outer basin is unsuitable for this kind of use and is not protected from the severe storms, like the one we had on November 16 and 17, 1989. Summer-time can also produce waves that roll over the piers. To protect this outer basin from



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storms and to make it available for small craft expansion, the huge waves must be stopped on the outside and away from the piers. Placing fill inside of the west pier will not stop the waves but only add to the problem. This filling in, as being promoted by the present town council, will prevent better things from happening at the harbour-front and put a damper on future improvements. It is hard to understand why Council are determined to proceed in this direction, in spite of the otherwise useful plans that have been placed before them.

There is a old saying — "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread."