

GOLDEN MEMORIES

By Percy L. Climo

The tiger and the west piers

Back in the year 1828, those citizen-merchant-pioneer entrepreneurs, par excellence, had a lot of backbone, grit, guts and foresight when they started to create a harbour on Cobourg's beach. They must have observed, at times, the huge waves that rolled in on their shore when severe storms moved in from the east, the south, and especially from the west. Those huge combers would crash, then retreat dragging along silt and stone. Lake Ontario can be a terrible "tiger" at times. They must have observed, in severe winters, what ice can do to structures built into the water. Yet, undaunted, those organizers proceeded to build piers into the lake, to sink supporting timber cribs, filled with stone, that would close in a basin for anchorage plus docks for the unloading and the loading of the larger boats of that time.

Their project was started in the year 1828 without waiting for government approval which came the following spring. The east pier was placed at the end of Division Street. The west pier, a bit to the west of Third Street.

Their method of building piers was to sink a crib, leave a gap, then sink another crib. The gaps

were bridged over with the heavy timber topping.

Sooner or later the deep water basin became shallow with drifting sand and silt. The spaces between cribs were closed in, but still the filling in of the harbour continued. The lake levels fluctuated between five feet over a period of seasons. High water brought in fill piers which rendered the harbour basin almost useless during the years of low water. That old "tiger" can make for trouble. Dredging was required to keep the harbour operative.

After the year 1850, the esplanade dock was built between piers. Eventually the mid-town creek estuary was filled in and built up to what we have today.

The waterfront between Port Hope and Cobourg has gone through remarkable changes since Augustus Jones came down the lake shore with his survey party in July of 1791. At that time he records, both in notes and map, a large bay with extensive marshes from Peter Rock northward. Two peninsulas enclosed this bay, one extending south-east from Gage's Creek, the other sweeping, in a north-easterly direction, from Peter Rock to the present day shore.

Old "Tiger", with its claws of

heavy easterly storms, scratched away at both beach and bank. The westerly storms swept the loosened material all the way to Cobourg. This erosion has continued down through the decades.

Today, our tourist camp site, the section across the harbour-front, the tank farm, the Legion Village, and the school sports field - all these areas were lake when the harbour was commenced in 1828. Sand, silt and stone has been constantly piling up against west piers, sweeping around their ends and driven into the harbour basin by easterly gales.

The Cobourg harbour was a busy port with the export of iron ore and other products after the year 1867. Then, consideration was given to construct a third pier into the lake at the end of Hibernia Street. A harbour extension plan was finalized in 1873. A timber pier, rock filled, was to be constructed 1,500 feet into the deep water to stop the drifting of sand into the harbour basin. The Federal government paid two-thirds of the cost with one-third paid for by the Harbour Trust. The whole work was controlled and managed by the government.

The lowest tender was accepted in September 1873. That contrac-

tor failed to respond. One year was lost in getting the work started. The next bidder, Messers Row and Koyle, proved to be reliable and they started to place cribs in May of 1875. Thirty-two cribs, each 30 feet square, and filled with stone, were placed end to end that season. According to government reports, 17 additional cribs were in place in 1876, and the structure finished off with heavy timber and plank topping.

This story does not have the space to relate about the later break-water, concrete capped additions, that changed the harbour to a port of refuge in times of heavy storms.

Government reports tell us the West or Langevin pier is a very sturdy structure, well built. The underwater portion is the same today, solid and deep. The cribwork started opposite the south entrance to Legion Village and good solid cribs are buried be-

neath the south part of Hibernia Street. No deterioration takes place in such underwater structures.

Sooner or later the populace is going to tire racing around the country on choked highways. Medium sized excursion boats and cruise ships will return to the lakes. They will be looking to lake harbours for stopping places. That west pier will be needed. It would be a big mistake to bury the west pier.

That might be compared to trading off a most valuable asset for a mess of pottage.

Landfill on the west arm will not stop old "tiger". He will come in and destroy any placements.

The heavy ice of severe winters will also help old "tiger". The harbour basin will be useless for small craft dockage. Go out beyond the pier and breakwaters and stop old "tiger" out there. The harbour area will then be protected from storm and ice.

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