

A-Cobourg - History
(05-03) P.1



Victoria Hall, Cobourg. Officially opened by the Prince of Wales, September, 1860.

The Town of Cobourg, 1798-1945

by EDWIN C. GUILLET

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ONTARIO TOWNS have now reached an age that gives them some claim to antiquity. While few of them can even approach the towns of Eastern Canada in the extent of their memories, almost all but the mining settlements of the North have now a very respectable history.

Cobourg, County Town of the United Counties of Northumberland and Durham, is situated on low land on the Lake Ontario front of Hamilton Township, seventy miles east of Toronto. Several small streams, and one larger—the Factory Creek—enter the lake near the town, and the swamp cedars that still line their shores enable us to visualize the site as it was before settlement commenced. The Kingston Road, or King Street as it is called in Cobourg, passes through the centre of the town a few hundred yards from the lake.

Cobourg does not date from United Empire Loyalist days, but its first inhabitants followed close upon their trail. The sons of Loyalists, other enterprising Americans, and a few early arrivals from the British Isles made up its first settlers. Tradition and the more factual records of land grants unite to bestow upon Eliud Nickerson the title of first settler on the site of Cobourg, in the year 1798. It appears, however, that Elias Jones, store-keeper, Liberty White, miller, and Asa Burnham and Nathaniel Herriman, farmers, were settled in close proximity to Cobourg about the same time, and within a few years Jones had opened the first store in the district.

Katherine Chrysler White, who came there as a bride in 1813, said the site was 'quite a wilderness, with a few small clearings, only three houses, and a rough cord-

roy road to the Street, leading northwards to settlement was Township, but selected the marriage of C. Wales, to Pr. Saalfeld. At 60 in the German officially it was

If the early ly American between 1813 England and charged half whose services Waterloo. Th in the settle Frances Stew 1822. She fe lived a gay h 'They dress in nothing of giving muff or tippet are very decide where we remain were here, the Th They came to C have the nice people here has each member p

In 1824, Cobourg aged inhab village: 'No built, two h Rev. Mr. M age, and the chapel.' The Green, and hundreds of the Indian.

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The Royal A was the first

roy road to the lake'. The road was Division Street, leading past White's Mills and northwards towards Rice Lake. At first the settlement was called Hamilton, after the Township, but, in 1819, the inhabitants selected the name Cobourg in honour of the marriage of Charlotte Augusta, Princess of Wales, to Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld. At first the name was spelled both in the German and English versions, but officially it was always 'Cobourg'.

If the earliest settlers were predominantly American in origin, they were joined, between 1815 and 1820, by emigrants from England and Scotland, most of them discharged half-pay army and navy officers whose services were no longer required after Waterloo. The first intimate picture of life in the settlement is given in the letters of Frances Stewart, who visited the village in 1822. She found that many of the ladies lived a gay life:

'They dress in very smart suitable style. They think nothing of giving fifty or one hundred guineas for a fur muff or tippet. . . . We went first to the Covert's who are very decidedly English: then to Capt. Boswell's where we remained for tea: two other English families were here, the Faulkners and the Sowdens from Bath. They came to Cobourg a year and a half ago, and now have the nicest farm here, with every comfort. The people here have a book society among themselves, each member paying four dollars per annum.'

In 1824, when Mrs. Stewart visited Cobourg again, there were about one hundred inhabitants and a much-improved village: 'Numbers of houses have been built, two large shops are nearly finished. Rev. Mr. McAulay has a nice new parsonage, and there is a neat little Methodist chapel.' The Methodist minister was Anson Green, and his circuit comprised a route of hundreds of miles east, west, and north into the Indian lands beyond Rice Lake.

The chief topic of conversation in early Cobourg, says Mrs. Stewart, was the projected formation in London, England, of the Canada Company to encourage emigration to Upper Canada; and a good deal of human experience, much of it sad and some of it vicious, is implied in the fact that there still exists a Toronto office of that Company to keep an eye on farm mortgages, some of which originated a century and more ago.

The Royal Mail Line of Stages. William Weller was the first Mayor of Cobourg, 1850.

As emigration to America changed from a leisurely adventure to a grand rush to escape poverty and unemployment, depression and repression, Cobourg became a port of entry for lake shipping, then almost entirely by sailing-ship. The Peter Robinson emigration of Irish, arranged at government expense to relieve the unfortunate state of Ireland, encamped, in 1825, on the sandy beach which is now so important a part of beautiful Victoria Park; then they slowly walked out to Rice Lake, and onward by flat-bottomed boats up the Otonabee to Scott's Mills (Peterborough). A few of these, and many later Irish, settled in Cobourg in the district always called 'Corktown'.

The enterprising inhabitants of Cobourg were soon busy forming a company to build a harbour—for there was no natural protection; and a charter for a railroad northward to tap the rich timber resources along the 'back lakes' was being sought in the early 'thirties, before there were railways anywhere in Canada, and but few elsewhere in

1841.
SUMMER ARRANGEMENT
BETWEEN



KINGSTON & TORONTO

BY THE
BAY OF QUINTE.

Six times a week each way.

FROM the 1st of May next and during the summer months, the Mail Stage will leave Belleville for Toronto immediately after the arrival of the Bay Steamers, passing through Port Trent, Brighton, Colborne, Grafton, Cobourg, Port Hope, Clarke, Darlington, Whitby and Pickering.

GOOD FOUR HORSE COACHES

(Entirely new,) with steady experienced drivers, going through from Belleville to Toronto in twenty four hours, and from Cobourg to Toronto by day light.

REDUCED FARES.

Belleville to Toronto, - -	120 miles.	- -	£1 0 0
Cobourg to Toronto, - -	72 do.	- -	0 10 0
Port Hope to Toronto, - -	65 do.	- -	0 10 0

The above line of Stages will leave the General Stage Office, Toronto, for Belleville, every Sunday at 10 o'clock, A. M. and every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday at 5 o'clock, P. M. after the arrival of the Steam Boats from Niagara and Hamilton.

Strangers will find a great advantage in taking this route; by leaving Kingston (the Capital) in a Steam Boat, they have a fine view of the country forming the Bay of Quinte, fast rising into importance since the late alteration of the Seat of Government, and taking the Stage at Belleville, will pass through the above named townships, which for fertility of soil and density of population will yield to none in the Province, thus reaching the city of Toronto at 8 o'clock P. M.

WM. WELLER,

Proprietor.

Cobourg, April 28, 1841.

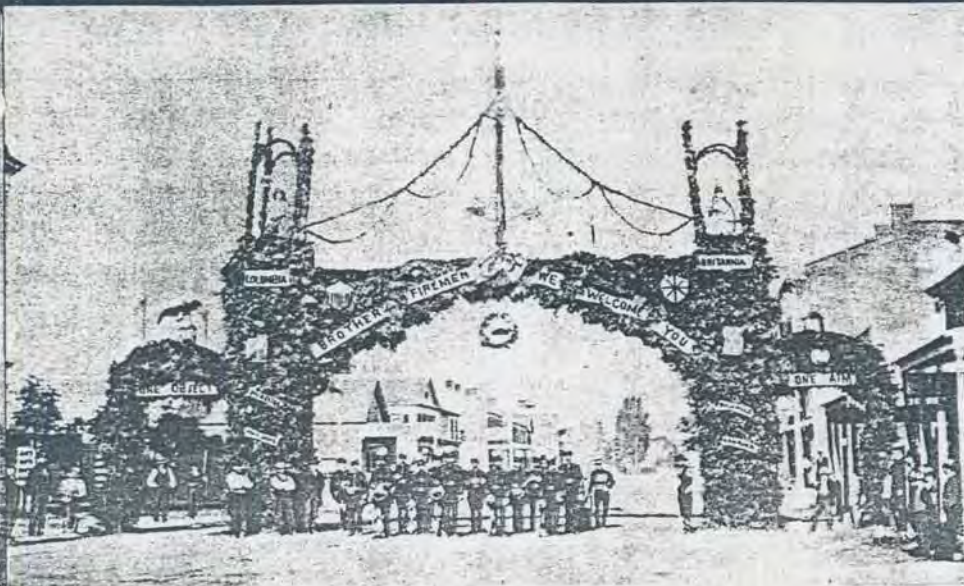
N. B.—A Steam Boat leaves Kingston going up, and Belleville going down the Bay, every morning, (Sundays excepted.)

number, 1860.

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A-Cobourg - History
(95-03) P. 3



Firemen's Festival
in the 1870's

the world. The 'Cobourg capitalists', as they were usually denominated in neighbouring Port Hope, tended to bite off considerably more than they could chew, and well over a million dollars disappeared in the Cobourg and Peterborough Railroad and other ventures that failed. But if their reach exceeded their grasp their initiative was certainly commendable, and a great deal of prosperity, as well as depressed times, arose from their activities. In 1832, two of 'the literary Stricklands'—Mrs. Susanna Moodie and Mrs. Catherine Traill—passed through Cobourg and found it a bustling place, so many immigrants arriving daily that accommodation at inns could hardly be obtained; but they were glad to find 'a select society' and 'many families of respectability'—that illusory something which was to become the *sine qua non* of the Victorian way of life.

The next thirty years was the heyday of Cobourg. The town had two newspapers,

one of which, the *Sentinel-Star*, has had 114 years of unbroken existence. Lovell's *Canada Directory* for 1857-58 gave the population as 'about 7,000', a figure Cobourg has never approached since. Its growth had been rapid. In June, 1837, the settlement had become an incorporated village governed by a Board of Police consisting of a President and four members. In 1850 it was incorporated as a town, with William Weller as first Mayor.

As there were then no railways, the roads were very important. Plank roads were tried and found wanting in the 'forties, and toll roads took their place, lasting down to the closing years of the Great War. The following broadside emanating from Port Hope was inspired by something more venomous than grim humour, for incendiaries actually burned the toll-house:

TENDERS WANTED

Tenders will be received until the 20th inst. for the construction of 100 Mud Scows to run between Cobourg

Old Victoria College, Cobourg. The College removed to Toronto in 1892

and Port Hope on the two places. The Company is necessary. The Court week was full of the said Mud Scows. The exact toll from the escape alive through such exaction. The Company in the 15th day of May.

On December occurred. The Cobourg grand free of the three-mile Peterborough. Fifty of the tained at d Hall. Many dresses delivered of William was undoubtedly 'I know,' he said to hurt my feet running stages mouth as well comparing in the past, when you one, in order to after all I am new things be-

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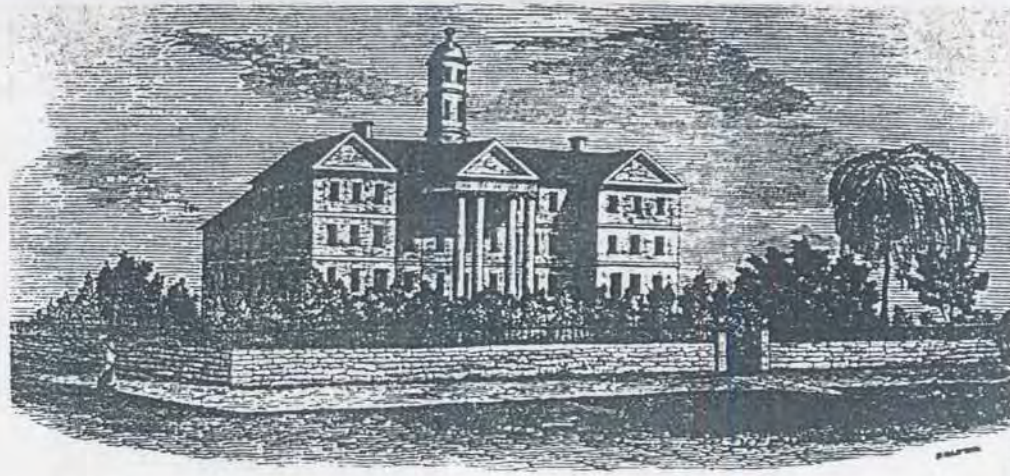
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On the beach in
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Old Victoria College, Cobourg. The College removed to Toronto in 1892.



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and Port Hope on the Macadamized (?) Road connecting the two places, which is owned by Cobourg Capitalists. The Company feel that the new mode of conveyance is necessary, as the loss of horses, wagons, and valuable lives in the fathomless abyss of mud during court week was fearfully alarming. Until the completion of the said Mud Scows the Company will continue to exact toll from those who may be so fortunate as to escape alive through the gates. Though the legality of such exaction may be open to question, they confidently expect that in view of the public spirit of the Company in providing the Scows aforesaid the public will submit to be victimized. Dated at Cobourg this 15th day of March, 1859.

Simon Grumpy,
Sec. Road Co.

On December 29, 1854, a notable event occurred. This was the official opening of the Cobourg and Peterborough Railroad. A grand free excursion across Rice Lake on the three-mile trestle bridge and on to Peterborough regaled a thousand citizens. Fifty of the more prominent were entertained at dinner in Peterborough's Town Hall. Many and appropriate were the addresses delivered on this occasion, but that of William Weller, stage-coach proprietor, was undoubtedly the cleverest:

"I know," he said, "why you have called upon me—it is to hurt my feelings, for you know I get my living by running stages, and you are taking the BIT out of my mouth as well as out of my horses' mouths. You are comparing in your minds the present times with the past, when you had to carry a RAIL instead of riding one, in order to help my coaches out of the mud. But after all I am rejoiced to see old things done away and new things becoming WELLER."

But the Rice Lake trestle bridge shortly gave way, the forces of nature, it is said, being aided by men hired by the rival railway from Port Hope who loosened the bolts as spring approached and the ice was about to crush against the structure. Hard times fell heavily on Cobourg. A traveller, John Mawe, describes the change in a letter to

the press, comparing things in the late 'fifties with what he found in the early 'sixties. In the eighteen-fifties

"Everyone thought that Cobourg had a fair chance to vie with Hamilton and Toronto as a centre of industry. The building of the Grand Trunk Railway brought many families to town. It was a time of good pay and free expenditure. . . . Everybody would soon grow rich; eating, drinking, and pleasure were the order of the day. Lots of champagne to be had; sundry little parties every night somewhere; select balls at \$5 a head for the upper ten were held with great *clats* and dollar hops for the mechanics."

But in 1864—
"The G.T.R. must have let me off at the wrong place. The harbour has no shipping; the lumber now goes via Port Hope. There is not much public spirit now; Cobourg looks dry and sleepy. Even the sidewalks cry out for repairs. One of the sidewalk planks sprang up and nearly killed a magistrate; all his own fault, say the townspeople—what business had he at the end of the board! Apathy is the order of the day. Inattention to public business suggests to strangers that the town has gone to the dogs."

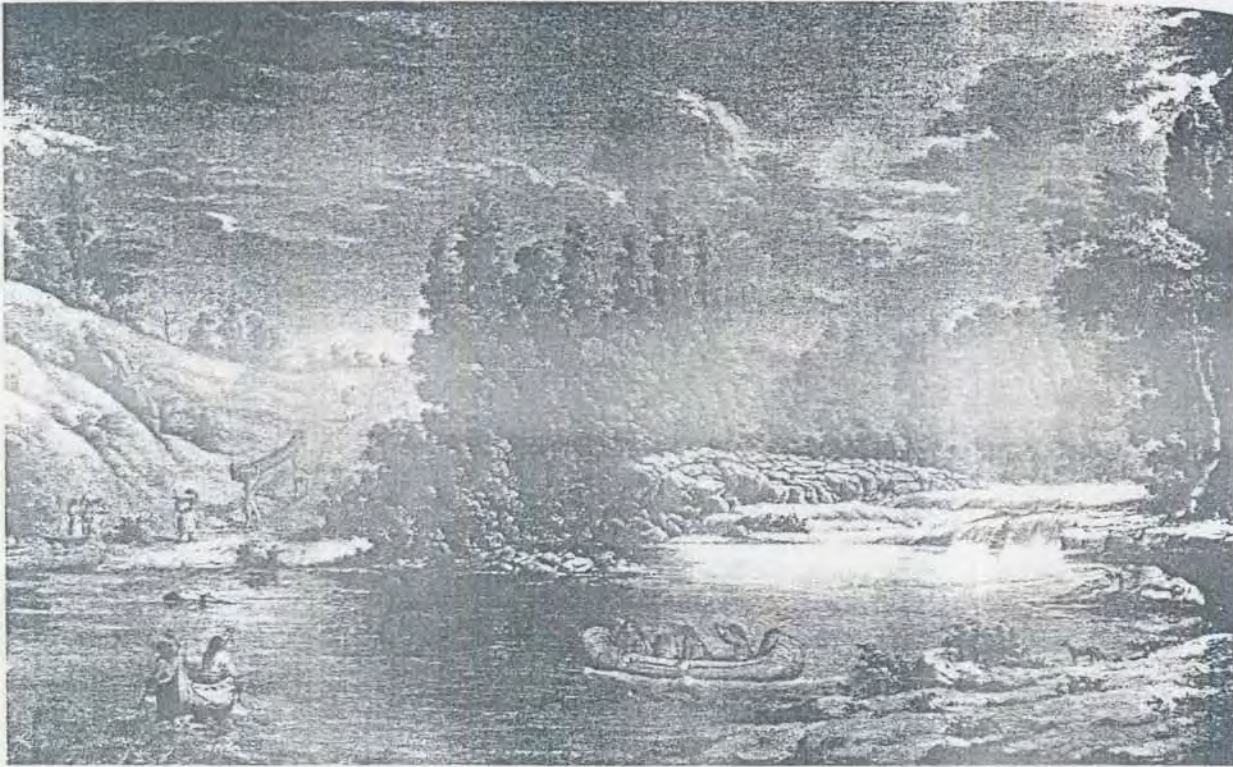
But the Woollen Mills resumed operations, and in the 'seventies the Crossen Car Works developed from the old Helm Foundry, so the depression came to an end. And if you like walking you can still travel over the old Cobourg and Peterborough Railway roadbed past Baltimore and on to Harwood on Rice Lake, and, as you enjoy the pastoral scenery, reflect upon Burns' words,

"The best-laid schemes o' mice and men
Gang aft a-gley".

Business card, Albion Hotel, in the '940's



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(05-03) P.14



WHITE MUD PORTAGE, WINNIPEG RIVER

PAUL KANE

Courtesy National Gallery of Canada

When we think of educational life in Cobourg we naturally recall Old Victoria, which was for half a century, before removal of the College to Toronto, so prominent in the cultural advancement of the district. But Cobourg has always been noted for the number of its inhabitants of intellectual and cultural taste and accomplishment. In or near the town once lived Paul Kane, noted artist, Archibald Lampman, prominent poet, and Gerald Hayward, world-famous painter of miniatures; while the early columns of the *Cobourg Star* contain the poetry of Rhoda Anne Page, Frederick Rubidge, and other early residents whose literary productions—still, unfortunately, unpublished—rank far higher than much that is in print. Consider this poem from the pen of Rhoda Page:

VOICES FROM THE WOODS

We talk of lifeless things, and creatures dumb,
Of stocks and stones, and voiceless flowers and trees;
To me there seems strange eloquence to come
From every one of these.

One eve I wandered in the quiet wood,
The light leaves rustled in the summer gale,
Whose sighing through the forest solitude
Went like a spirit's wail.

The tall oak reared his branches to the sky,
Lordly and proud—the stately and the strong—
The type of daring thoughts and actions high
That live in memory long.

A woodland king he seemed—but near his side
Drooped gracefully a weeping willow tree:
That spoke of strength and might and manhood's
pride.

This of humility

For its green branches bent them to the sod,
And softly kissed the lowly daisy's face,
As if the humblest workmanship of God
Were worthy an embrace.

The trembling aspen quivered in the breeze,
Wavering like weakness in temptation's breath;
But the still, solemn cypress grew by these,
And preached unshaken Faith.

And the dark, sullen, sombre hemlock there,
Stood dull and cheerless as despondency;
But a sweet briar was blooming, fresh and fair,
Hard by the gloomy tree.

And round his rugged trunk her branches twined,
All rich with scented leaves, and buds, and flowers,
Sweet as the gentle words and accents kind
That brighten grief's dark hours.

Oh! many a voice from the sequester'd wood,
In the deep calm of a still summer even,
May whisper to the soul in thoughtful mood,
Wisdom that comes from Heaven.

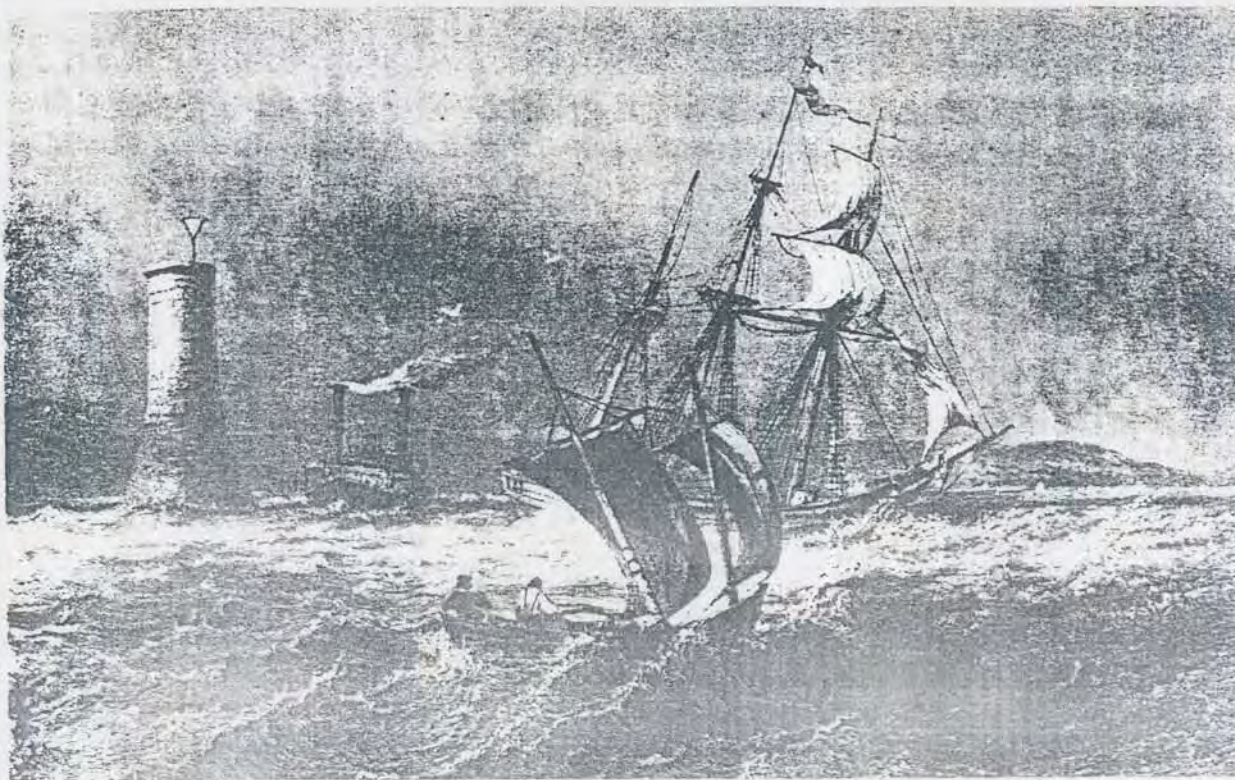
Free from such public amusements as motion pictures and radio, the citizens of the nineteenth century were much more resourceful in their diversions. The National



THE LIGHT TOWER

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THE LIGHT TOWER, BETWEEN COBOURG AND PORT HOPE, 1840

W. H. BARTLETT

Reproduced from *Canadian Scenery*, by N. P. M. 2014

Societies of St. George, St. Patrick, and St. Andrew were then strong forces in town life. Forty toasts were frequently proposed at their anniversary banquets, and those who were not long since under the table made their way homeward as the sun rose. The volunteer Fire Brigade of Cobourg was also, for sixty years, a great force in community and social life. From time to time—as elsewhere—incendiary fires occurred, and not infrequently were the members charged with setting them to provide a race for the various companies and their hand-drawn machines. The Firemen's Parade and Grand Ball were for many the events of the year, and public enthusiasm was equalled only by the pride of the members. "When the old Brigade came to an end half a century ago," said Fred W. Beebe to the writer, "I left Cobourg. The old town could never again be the same to me, and I went to seek my living elsewhere."

There were, too, the Mechanics' Institute, forerunner of our public libraries, the Temperance Society to apply the brakes to immoderate drinking, and Agricultural and Horticultural Societies holding fairs and

exhibitions. In the eighteen-forties the Cobourg cricketers played a match with the Hamilton club. Three days were needed, one to make the journey by steamship, one for the match, and one to return home. Later, baseball, curling, lawn bowling, and Hockey tended to replace the old English game, and Cobourgers ranked high in championship play in all these sports.

Though Cobourg never suffers so seriously from floods as does neighbouring Port Hope from the overflowing of the Ganaraska, yet there have been instances of considerable damage. In May, 1864, occurred the most disastrous flood of the Factory Creek, on which there were then six or seven mill-ponds compared with one now. When the banks of the largest gave way, trees, fences, bridges, and huge rocks were hurled with astonishing velocity towards the lake. For miles along the lake shore were great quantities of floating timber; while the flooded region was a scene of unparalleled devastation. Three lives were lost, and many thousands of dollars' damage was done to the property of those who had the misfortune to live in the path of the flood—

A-Cobourg - History (65-03) P.6



COBOURG IN 1853 FROM WELLER'S HILL
The Factory Creek empties into the lake to the west of the town.

fortunately on the outskirts of the town, not in its centre. Just a few weeks earlier, on April 9th, the Globe Hotel, reputed the best hostelry between Toronto and Montreal, had been destroyed by fire, so the townspeople considered that they had more than their share of disaster that year.

The founders of the town included so many men of high intelligence and integrity that it is almost invidious to name a few. Ebenezer Perry, Andrew Jeffrey, George Ham, W. S. Conger, and William Weller formed, in 1837, the first Board of Police (the municipal council of the time), but many others were prominent in the town's development before and afterwards. Asa and Zaccheus Burnham, Walter Riddell, D'Arcy Boulton, J. H. Dumble, Dr. John Beatty, George Guillet, M.P., Colonel Vance Graveley, Senator William Kerr, C. C. Field, M.L.A., Sam Clarke, M.L.A., and C. C. James must be mentioned for their varied and important contributions to Cobourg and the country generally.

Many famous people once lived in Cobourg. Sir John Macdonald and Chief Justice Draper studied in Cobourg law offices, as did Mr. Justice W. R. Riddell and Judge E. C. S. Huycke. Among notables in the entertainment world are Katherine Cornell, Marie Dressler, and Beatrice Lillie, all of them intimately connected with Cobourg. Nor should Nancy Crawford (née McCarthy), Cobourg's benefactress, be omitted in any reference to the town's greats. In her will she left generous bequests to religious and educational organizations and set aside a large fund for the benefit of the poor of the town.

Old Victoria College, now the Ontario Hospital, always stands out in pictures of Cobourg, both architecturally and from its lofty situation. Among Cobourg's other notable buildings is Victoria Hall, the municipal building, erected 1856-1860 when it was thought that Cobourg would shortly be a city. Planned by Kivas Tully, famed Toronto architect, built by the Burnets,

COBOURG H

held, and after the grand dinner that concluded the show the gentlemen of Cobourg held steeplechase races—in which, of course, they themselves rode.

The greatest crowd came to Cobourg, in 1859, to see the execution of Dr. William Henry King of Brighton for wife-poisoning. The scene was the old Court House (now the Home for the Aged) to the northwest of the town, in the old settlement long called Amherst. Ten thousand spectators, including a tribe of Indians, came from all directions and crowded into points of vantage. The event was highly satisfactory to all concerned, for even Methodist Victoria College closed for the day, the doctor rose to the occasion with a typically Victorian address from the scaffold, a woman or two fainted in the crush, every one was satisfied that justice had been done, and the hangman's rope was cut up for souvenirs (the writer was bequeathed a piece!). The other great legal battle in Cobourg was the far-famed libel suit of Sir Arthur Currie *versus* Preston and Wilson, in 1928, when Canada's war-time Commander vindicated his good name in the face of charges relating to the Battle of Mons which closed the Great War.

In early Cobourg the industries were, in general, small but very numerous. A flour mill or a sawmill was frequently the nucleus of pioneer settlements, and a distillery was often operated as an adjunct to the grist mill. Besides these, early Cobourg had foundries and machine shops, coopers and tanners, brickworks and cabinet shops, saddlers and harness-makers, and shoemakers who really made shoes. There were two marble factories (presumably cutting tombstones), a carriage-maker, two chandlers or candlemakers, a soapmaker who used wood ashes for his potash, a ropemaker, three brewers, and numerous shipwrights and builders, carpenters, tinsmiths, plasterers, blacksmiths, and painters.

The modern industries of the town are steady rather than spectacular. The hundred-year-old Woollen Mills near the mouth of the Factory Creek has been converted into the Cooley Machine & Arms Company. Once a distillery, the old factory buildings on

Nearly half a century ago, it was to be the Mecca of financiers in summer and so many of the homes were erected in the suburbs, and Pittsburgh steel and such Canadian pace. The Cob-

COBOURG IN 1847



A-Cobourg
 History
 (C5-03)
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William Street have long manufactured mat-
 ting and carpets. The old Model School on
 University Avenue (which the writer once
 attended) is now the Lydia Pinkham Medi-
 cine Company; while the old Steel Plant on
 Ontario Street has been converted into
 Douglas-Pectin Limited. The Cobourg Dye-
 ing Company, Canadian Cannery Limited,
 Donald McKinnon & Sons, Edwards &
 Edwards Limited, the Bird-Archer Com-
 pany, and the Dominion Wheel and Found-
 ries Limited comprise the chief other indus-
 tries of Cobourg. For nearly forty years the
 two great car ferries running winter and
 summer from Cobourg to Charlotte, port of
 Rochester, have given to the harbour some-
 thing of the appearance of an ocean port,
 and when the St. Lawrence development is
 completed it will be one.

Nearly half a century ago Cobourg began
 to be the Mecca of American aristocrats and
 financiers in search of a place to spend the
 summer and some of their wealth. Palatial
 homes were erected on elaborate estates in
 the suburbs, and Civil War generals and
 Pittsburgh steel magnates hobnobbed with
 such Canadian visitors as could keep up the
 pace. The Cobourg Horse Show, supported

by these summer visitors, became world-
 famous just prior to the Great War, and
 hotels like the Arlington and the Columbian
 provided a gay and cosmopolitan rendez-
 vous. But times change, as well as tastes,
 and what remained of the great summer
 residences largely passed into disuse during
 the Great Depression of the early nineteen-
 thirties.

Always a very loyal town, Cobourg has
 supported the war effort of the second World
 War as it did the first—and the wars, rebel-
 lions, and Fenian scares of the past. Perhaps
 the spirit of old Cobourg is best exemplified
 by a story told about 'Squire' George
 Daintry, Mayor in 1864-1865 and prototype
 of 'the fine old English gentleman' in the
 well-known song. At the time of the Fenian
 raids in '66 the townspeople were aroused
 by the rumour that Irish invaders had set
 sail and were crossing the lake to attack
 Cobourg. Squire Daintry was so incensed
 that he took down his old fowling-piece from
 the wall and marched to the harbour, hop-
 ing to have first shot at the invaders. Much
 to his disgust, none arrived, but on the way
 home he shot a stray pig and felt much
 better!

LT. PHILIP BAINBRIGGE

Courtesy Public Archives of Canada

COBOURG IN 1843

