



**BENZIE
SANGMA**
Intelligencer

The last of them came into the Bay of Quinte harbour in 1969 carrying its usual cargo of coal. The vital commodity required to heat many Belleville-area homes was dumped near the waterfront coal shed of a local company; the destination of carriers since the early 1900s.

The usual flurry of action met its arrival ashore. Employees of Moira-Schuster Fuels rushed to unload the commodity still precious to few of the area's homeowners and industrial centres yet to convert to using heating oil or to join the new generation of natural gas users.



**A. MacLean
Haig**

Piles of coal mounted rapidly into a shape of a small hill at the site where a ten-storeyed-condominium — The Anchorage — is located today at the south end of Front Street, on the east side of the harbour.

Black dust swirled and settled on skin and clothes of the workers — a scene so familiar to many in this city for generations — a scene from an era that would disappear that year. From then on, the company that has been importing coal to the area for many decades would end that aspect of their business.

Coal business in the city began when in 1850, the Rathbun Lumber and Coal Co. was established on the Bay of Quinte, at the south end of Front Street in Belleville. At that time, the company sold not only coal but lumber, wooden shingles and flooring. In 1905, the Rathbun Company moved to Deseronto and Belleville residents Capt. William E.

Schuster and Walter Belair bought the coal portion of the business. The third partner of the company, Thomas Holgate, joined the company in 1907. At the time the company was called Schuster Coal Co. But when in 1912, Holgate left the company, the name was changed to Schuster Co. Ltd. The company's office was originally located at 54 Bridge St.E. and in later decades, it was moved to 44 Bridge St.E.

At the beginning of the century, schooners carrying 200 to 300 tons of coal, came into the government dock, now Meyers Pier, and dumped its cargo near the Schuster's coal shed. The coal was then removed in bags into the shed by temporary labourers hired just for the job. Later, barges were used to bring in the coal and unloaded in wooden buckets which were then slid along a track located along the inside of the coal shed. Still years later, ships equipped with cranes would come into the harbour and unload coal as far on to the dock as possible depending on the length of the crane. Horse-drawn wagons

delivered the coal to the area customers until the late '30s when they were replaced by trucks.

In 1930, Belair bought out the Schuster Co Ltd. He imported coal from the United States and Wales and brought them in via rail past Pinnacle Street to the coal docks and by freighters. In 1934, he sold the company to Canadian Fuels Ltd. but remained as the president of the company and by 1954, he was the only one remaining of the three partners associated with the origin of the company. That year the company bought out another local business, Moira Fuels Ltd. then owned by former city mayor, A. MacLean Haig. The company's name was changed to Moira-Schuster Ltd. Haig, who died in 1976, stayed with the company until his retirement in 1967.

Haig's son, Archie, who, as a 14-year-old, worked at the coal shed as a summer time helper, came in at the time trucks were used by the company to deliver coals to the area customers.

"There were two or three girls in

the office, few drivers, couple of guys worked in the coal yard. I often went with the drivers who'd put coal in a small dump truck, take it to the customers and unload it in the basement of their houses and people would shovel it from there into their furnace," said Haig.

After the war years, home-heating oil first made its appearance in the market and by 1953, it became difficult to obtain enough supply of oil burners to convert coal furnaces to oil. Also, the prices of coal, which was selling for \$17.50 a ton at the time, could not compete with that of the fuel oil available at a market price of 17 cents a gallon.

Moira-Schuster went out of the coal business in 1969 when coal was selling for \$45 a ton. The company closed the dock and sold the property in 1972 and the familiar coal piles at the harbour front in Belleville vanished taking with it another slice of a bygone era in the city.

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