

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS & ACCIDENTS

Accidents and strained relationships between employer and employee have existed from the beginning of human history. The Industrial Revolution with its machinery and factories brought a new importance to workplace safety. As one of the major manufacturing communities in Upper Canada, Cobourg must have had its share of incidents.

EARLY LABOUR CONCERNS

Edwin Guillet reports that the **first workmen's meeting in Cobourg** took place in the summer of 1836. The main concern, as expressed in a resolution, was:

That the number of hours which we now work is nothing better than domestic Slavery, is altogether derogatory to the improvement of our moral and intellectual powers and progress in the arts and sciences, and is one of the chief causes of vice and ignorance.

The outcome, for those employers who agreed to it, was a 10 hour work day: in summer 6am-6pm with two one hour meal breaks, and in winter 7am-6pm with one meal break.

About 1880, Major Laughlan Burwash, later a famous Arctic researcher, got a youthful start **researching labour relations** in Cobourg.

I, a small boy, was sitting on the roadside watching two local citizens digging a post hole. The hole completed, more men appeared and preliminary steps were taken to erect the pole. ... The boss, an outlander, spoke sharply to some of the gang and an argument followed which ended in two of the more resolute picking up their coats and informing the boss that they would "lift no poles for ten cents an hour."



Our first strike?



FIRES

Fires have always been a danger, especially with the frame construction of buildings and the methods of winter heating. **Cobourg has had its share of fires** resulting in both damage and death. In 1864 a fire severely damaged the Globe Hotel. Two men and a boy hung onto the window sills until being rescued by firefighters, but fortunately there were no fatalities. Much less fortunate were the three men who died when the Old Windsor Hotel was torched by an arsonist in 1878.

Mills, above all, seem to have been subject to destruction by fire. The contents of the mills, particularly the **concentration of smut in grain mills**, provided a ready source of spontaneous combustion. The mill at Elgin and Ontario Streets, variously known as Pratt's Mill and Perry's Mill and now simply the Mill, was destroyed by fire in the mid-1880s, and almost again in 1942.



An industrial fire, quite fresh in the memories of many, occurred in 2005 at the Horizon Plastics plant. Over **100 firefighters from 14 fire departments** helped fight the fire. While many neighbours were forced from their homes, there were no injuries.