

Memories of old C.C.I. by Percy Climo (undated)

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My memories of Cobourg Collegiate Institute go back to my very young childhood days. Although I was in my teens when I became a student in this hall of learning, I still recall early impressions received from the outside. During my first six years, our family resided in downtown Cobourg on King Street in the next block east of where the C.C.I. building stood.

At the time of my very young years, commercial buildings on King Street west of Spring Street terminated. Except for one corner grocery store at King & Hibernia, the Collegiate was set in a residential area of neat houses and triple lawns. Adjacent to the school there was a terrace of four houses with doorsteps touching the sidewalk. Next came the former Congregational Church set in from the street with its grey brick walls and a small peak roof belfry, without a bell. A vacant lot separated the church from the store building at the corner. The north side of King Street was all residential in the block opposite the School. The ancient Clench home built in early days was then the residence of Jack Webster's grandmother. Jack also lived on King Street two stores away from the Climo store and he was a playmate from a very tender years. Jack would take me with him to see his grandmother and across the street stood the Collegiate. The building became a familiar sight.

My parents attended the former Congregational Church and, from very young years, the writer attended Sunday School, held in the long rectangular room, adjacent to and behind the Congregational Church. This was a one storey structure with windows on three sides. From this Sunday School room, one was able to view the rear of the Collegiate, across the back garden lots of the terrace houses that occupied the area between the church and the Collegiate building. The Collegiate was also a familiar sight from the Sunday School room.

When I was perhaps four years of age, my parents had provided me with a pair of knee-length rubber boots. It was customary in those years to have an outdoor ice rink on the Collegiate playground. In the spring a fair sized pond of water formed on the rink ice. I recall wandering to the C.C.I. playground, at this time, wearing my rubber boots. I do remember some boys urging me to venture into this pond with the result I waded in. The under ice proved too slippery for good walking and down I went, getting thoroughly soaked in the process. I made a direct retreat for home, and a change of clothing, much to the consternation of my mother.

The C.C.I. playground was lined with chestnut trees. In the fall of the year, for a small boy, this locale became a treasure hunt for chestnuts.

Later on, when our home was located in the west end of the town, we often passed the C.C.I. on our way to the George Street School. Usually, on November 1st. one would see a delivery rig, an old buggy, or some such vehicle placed across the entrance to the front door by Halloween pranksters.

The C.C.I. always had neat clean lawns and well-kept grounds. Mr. John Walden, that hard-working, quiet, efficient man was caretaker for many years. His familiar figure was associated with old C.C.I. in early days and later, as a student, Mr. Walden always had our respect.

The C.C.I. students of the 1910 - 1920 era were familiar faces on King Street, walking to and from School in groups four and five abreast. It may be fitting to recall some of the old King Street places that the older grads will remember. West from the Town Hall was the Balmoral Hotel, on the corner of King & Third. On the west side of this three storey building Jack Hall had a barber shop. Next was a vacant lot surrounded by large sign boardings. The Dan Denton family had a flower shop in the first section of a row of buildings. William Hill's boot shop, a fancy goods store owned by a Mrs.

Swan; a Chinese laundry, followed by Jimmy (Jap-a-lac) Gillard's wallpaper, hardware, print etc. shop. Jimmy was a familiar figure on King Street for many years. Most people were not aware of the fact that Jimmy had a large old picture of King Edward VII in his back shop, and behind the picture was a built-in shelf. This shelf was a handy hiding place for his selection of liquor bottles. Jimmy lived to a grand old age. West of Gillard's store was a double brick dwelling and an old wooden house. Later this wooden terrace was removed and the new Sparling and Reeson Garage was erected in its place. For a few years this garage was used in winter for a curling rink by the Cobourg Waverley Club. In earlier years before W. W. I the Gilroys had a second hand store. The next place was Boper Brown's livery and, by the year 1910, Swaddling had a garage and bicycle shop. Finally on the corner of King and Hibernia was the Armory. As a small boy the writer remembers "Dick" Turpin as caretaker of the Armory.

In 1914, the latter became a very busy place and during the war years many C.C.I. students left their studies to sign up for overseas service. Several drafts of the Cobourg Heavy Battery were recruited here under Major McKinnon and the 139th Battalion under Colonel Floyd.

On the north side of King Street, westward from George Street, stood the British Hotel, operated by Lester Caughey. Father Allison formerly was 'mine host'. Adjacent to the British Mrs. Healey operated a stationery and book store. Many old students may recall purchasing their school slates, scribblers and textbooks at Mrs. Healey's store. The next store west of the book shop was a grocery run by Dan Gordon. It was said of Dan that he drank vinegar and became so thin that his shadow was invisible. He finally blew his cork and died.

Crozier's Grocery Store, Webster's Meat Shop, a Chinese laundry and Climo Bros tin shop were the remaining stores in this block. The Cobourg Library was adjacent to the Climo store (later under Quinn ownership), and students of early years were familiar with the Library.

A clothing repair shop was operated by Mrs. Hayes and later a tailor shop by Jimmie Styles. The Ed. Duncan Coal & Feed business occupied the three storey brick building and next was Mrs. Forrest's Candy Shop and "Barnum" Forrest's Harness Shop. Coming west of this was Greer's Livery Barns, the Delanty Tombstone memorials and, finally, on the corner of King & Spring, lived "Chucky" Wood and his two sisters in a frame house set in from the street.

Across the front of this frame house was a ground level veranda and a bit of lawn in front. Two very large and old elm trees stood in front of the Wood's house.

C.C.I. students of the 1910 - 1920 era would remember these familiar places on King Street. The street was then a dirt road, with deep mud of spring, the dust of summer laid low by a water cart, and the snow of winter polluted with horse droppings.

The old shunter engine hauling cars of coal from the waterfront was another familiar sight. Such are the reminiscences of my childhood years.

I was the youngest in our family and my older brothers attended C.C.I. several years before me. Their school activities would be related at home, and this too added to my impressions of C.C.I. before I entered the school portals.

My first day in C.C.I. was in late June of 1921. All pupils of the Senior grade of primary school had to attend the collegiate to write what was termed Entrance Examinations. These exams were all important and their outcome decided our learning and ability to cope with secondary school education. For three or more days, morning and afternoon, we nervously worked at these examinations written in a new environment and in the company of a lot of strange students from other schools. It was a trying time and a relief when these exams were over. In a few weeks we knew the results and I, having passed, was permitted to attend collegiate in September.

Finally, on September 6th of 1921, following Labour Day, C.C.I. opened its doors for enrollment. In addition to the classmates of public school days, a lot of new faces appeared at the school - pupils from the Roman Catholic School and pupils from surrounding country schools. It was an entirely new environment. Another change was that in the classroom we were addressed by our surname; the girls addressed as Miss before the surname. We were supposed to be young adults and no longer children. Another change was a different teacher for the various subjects. The classes were called Form and each form was assigned to its own room. The teachers rotated from class to class.

In our first year the Matriculation course students were grouped in Form IA. Commercial course students were assembled in Form IB. Our new subjects of study were Latin, French, Algebra, Geography, History, English Literature, Art, English Composition. The girls had a course in Domestic Science and the boys studied Agriculture. Physical Training was part of the curriculum and a school field day held in the early fall, usually around the first of October. Cadet training came later and Cadet inspection took place in the spring. I found my first year interesting. Another change was the form of discipline followed. In place of scolding and strapping, detention was prescribed and for misdemeanors, half an hour after 4:00 o'clock was put in doing some special work or some special assignment. Detentions were handed down quite frequently in the first grades.

As I recall, our teachers were generally good instructors, and those who paid attention, performed the requirements of the course, studied and prepared their work, usually moved along regularly through school. Two or three times a year there would be a school party and dance. These affairs terminated by 11:00 p.m.

Our first form Latin teacher was an older lady, Miss McConnell. I recall one incident in Latin class. Tucker Davidson of Corktown was very short in stature. One day Miss McConnell asked Davidson to translate "Homo sumus". Davidson stood up and repeated "Homo sumus - I am a man" then sat down. Miss McConnell then remarked "pretty short" and had a good laugh with the class.

We finished the first form of collegiate in late June, 1922. That summer the Town had King Street paved from Ontario Street to the eastern town limits - over a mile and a quarter of streets. For the summer I had employment as a helper for the field Engineer on this paving project. It was a busy summer walking up and down King Street, measuring, assisting with levels and miscellaneous chores. It was an interesting and instructive summer.

The second form year was a successful term for me. I had good health, took active part in various things, paid good attention in class and finished the term quite successfully. At home I followed up in a practical way some of the information learned in the Agricultural class. I applied this information to the home garden, with success. In October, the school ran a five mile race. I was just sixteen but qualified for the junior category. I ran this race, came first, and won a bronze medal which I still have. My name is engraved on the medal. That winter I spent much time at the Cobourg rink on University Avenue and kept in good physical condition through skating. In our second year we were introduced to the subject of Geometry which appealed to me. Miss Timm was the teacher of this subject.

My third year at C.C.I. was also interesting. Mr. C. C. Arthur (Mahogany) was a teacher in the subject of Physics. He was a good teacher and could relate his subject without textbook reference. He made the course very interesting to me and I was able to finish with very high marks. However, in Chemistry my progress was not so good. Algebra and Geometry were strong in my favour but languages, particularly French, were my weakness. Each year there were some changes in Staff.

At some time in the early 1920's the School Board acquired the property to the east, and ultimately owned the four terrace houses. Gradually the school enrollment became larger and additional space had to be found. The houses were in time converted into class rooms. I believe Domestic Science classes met in this building.
(note - Domestic Science classes were held upstairs in the Library) .

The manuscript ends here.