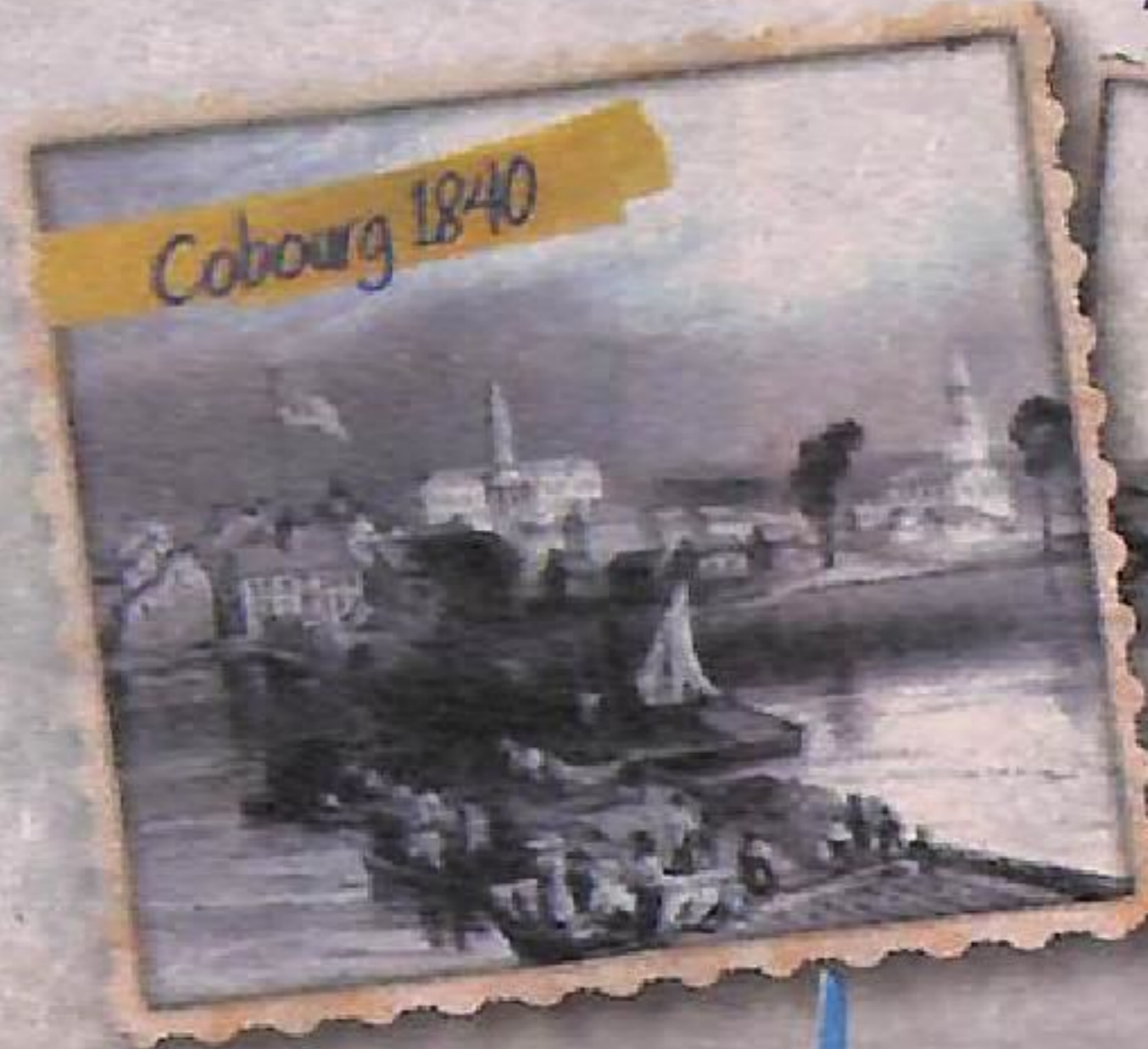


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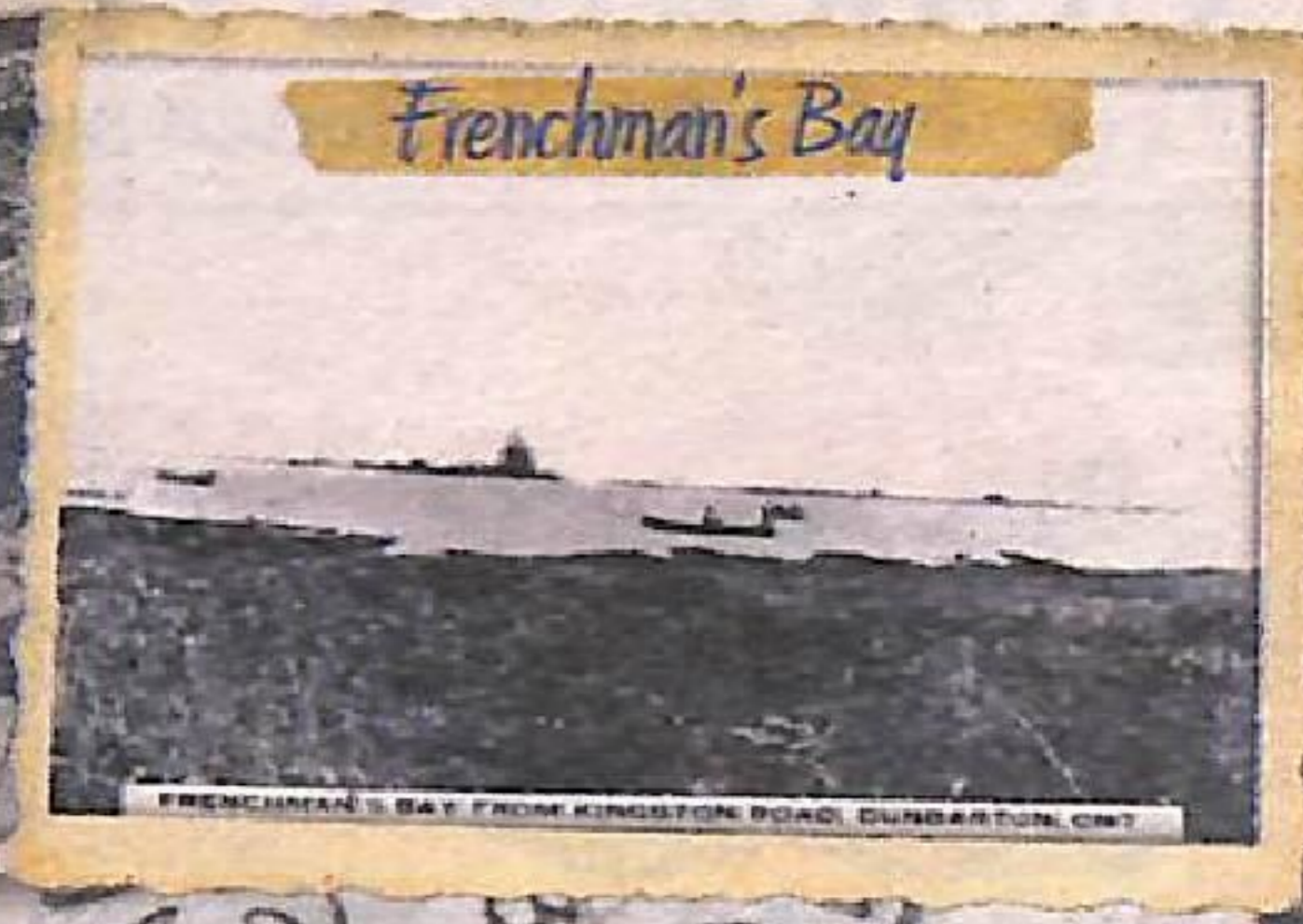
Cobourg 1840



Pickering Beach



Cobourg 1914



Frenchman's Bay

Lake Ontario:

The Hwy. 401 of the past

The lakes used to be bustling with shipping, activities



The Great Lakes contain roughly one fifth of the world's fresh surface water and their combined shoreline is equal to almost half the Earth's circumference. Supporting 40 million people and eight of Canada's 20 largest cities, the Great Lakes Basin is home to 90 per cent of Ontario's population and 40 per cent of Canada's economic activity. With water levels dropping in the Great Lakes and climate change-induced extreme weather events increasing, this three-part series will look at the past, present and possible future of the Great Lakes and the challenges and experiences of the communities along them. This is part 1, looking at the past.

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DURHAM/NORTHUMBERLAND — In the very early days, there was no Hwy. 401 that passed through the areas now known as Durham Region and Northumberland County.

Instead, there was a large body of fresh water, with a name that comes from the Huron language, meaning "lake of shining waters." It was originally called Lake Iroquois.

Lake Ontario, as it's known today, was the result of glacial shifting and melting at the end of the most recent Ice Age, more than 10,000 years ago.

From the time the first settlers came to the area, people have been drawn toward the lake. Hundreds of years and generations later, the role of the lake in the communities along its shoreline has shifted; species of fish have died off and water levels have fluctuated along with the health of the environment and global warming. But the importance of the lake to today's society and future generations remains critical.

"You drink fresh water. You can grow food with fresh water. We recreate in it," says Mark Mattson, president of Lake Ontario Waterkeeper, a charity



organization dedicated to keeping Lake Ontario and the Great Lakes healthy.

The First Nations were the first to live in the watershed of Lake Ontario, fishing and hunting for thousands of years.

"Obviously they used it for transportation and water," Oshawa Community Museum archivist Jennifer Weymark said of the very early uses of Lake Ontario.

According to oral history, in the late 1700s, they set up fur trading posts right at the Oshawa harbour, said Ms. Weymark.

This was the case in other areas conveniently located on the shores of Lake Ontario.

Frenchman's Bay in Pickering provided an excellent spot for hunters and gatherers. They lived off the birds, especially waterfowl, fish and game, berries, nuts and wild rice, according to a paper called *A History of Frenchman's Bay, Pickering* by Tom Mohr, a member of the Pickering Township Historical Society at the time.

The proximity to the water, a great passageway and natural harbour that was abundant with fish, was no coincidence.

"Most of the early settlers all along the lakeshore in all of these townships basically, the first settlers, did live along the lakeshore," explained John Sabean, a historian and member of the Pickering Public Library Board.

When the Europeans came to the area, they partook in activities such as farming and, of course, fishing.

Mr. Sabean, who wrote the book *Time Present and Time Past: A Pictorial History of Pickering*, explained the first industry on the lake and one of the reasons England especially was interested in the area now known as Durham, was mining of the white pines. These grand trees were needed to make ship masts. Mr. Mohr wrote that by 1845, three million feet of lumber was being shipped out of the bay each year.

Ice houses were located on Front Road between Annland Street and Wharf Street into the early 1900s.

"They extracted the ice in the winter time," said Mr. Sabean. "Before they built the ice houses, they would load the ice on boats, put sawdust about them, take them into Toronto and would be used for ice boxes and things like that throughout the summer."

Stonehooking was also prominent in Pickering and other local municipalities such as Whitby.

"They got the stone which was offshore under the water and would extract that stone and take it to Toronto," said Mr. Sabean. "That was a big industry until someone realized ... it was removing stone that protected the shore."

Even in the early part of the 20th century, people boated recreationally on Lake Ontario, in places like Frenchman's Bay.

