



It could be argued that activities around the lake were in a lot of ways more colourful, more vibrant, than they are today.

Ice cream shops, outdoor dances, camping and swimming were regular activities on Lake Ontario in municipalities such as Cobourg, Oshawa and Pickering.

In the 1880s and 1890s, hotels and cottages were built in Pickering, and vacationers would visit from Rochester, N.Y. There were campgrounds and live entertainment, along with a tavern by Pickering's shore. "Between 1900 and 1920, that was when it was really thriving," said Mr. Sabean.

In 1938, the Frenchman's Bay Yacht Club was formed by 28 sailors.

Shipping was an important activity in Pickering, as it was in many waterfront areas in Ontario following the War of 1812. It became a hub of commerce at the time. This would all change when the railroads were built and became the preferred method to ship goods.

Oshawa too had a thriving port and shipbuilding industry, particularly in the early 1930s. Oshawa Community Archives indicates many ships had either been built in the Oshawa area or were known to have sailed from it.

Ships carried many exported products, including flour, lumber, iron and whisky.

"We're still a pretty big shipping hub but not to the extent it once was," said Ms. Weymark.

Oshawa's waterfront was lively in the early 1900s.

"By the turn of the century you've got a couple different dance halls, the cottages, people would spend the summers here," Ms. Weymark said.

In neighbouring Whitby, grain from the farmland to the north was first shipped out in the early 1830s.

Along the shoreline to the east, Cobourg also bustled with activity.

A railcar ferry would carry up to 28 loaded copper cars of coal each day from Rochester to Cobourg.

"They wanted to avoid going through Buffalo which was a railway bottleneck," said Ted Rafuse, a retired teacher who wrote a book on the ferry called Coal to Canada, A History of the Ontario Car Ferry Company.

The transport of coal was the main financial driver of the ferry, but it wasn't the only one. "This was the only railway train car operation on Lake Ontario," he said.

It carried people, too. In fact, 70,000 people each year would travel on the railcar ferry from the Genesee Dock, north of Rochester, New York to Cobourg.

"Those foreigners would come to Cobourg and they would wander around the beach," Mr. Rafuse said.

The first ferry, called Ontario No. 1, began operating in 1907, and a second ferry was operational in 1915.

Mr. Rafuse quoted the price as \$3.38 one way or \$6.10 for a round trip in 1935.

And people would rent out the ship for large parties in the evenings.

"This was perhaps an early version for some people of The Love Boat," said Mr. Rafuse, who added there are many claims of people being conceived on the ship, which had cabins on board.

When fuels changed to oil and gas, the ferry was no longer economically viable, and so the regular trip from New York to Cobourg

stopped.

"The last sailing was April 28, 1950," said Mr. Rafuse.

By this time, the lakeshore communities had experienced great population growth.

Along with more people, farming, fishing and industry, pollution to Lake Ontario started taking its toll.

"I think the lake has always been healthy of course," said Mr. Mattson. "We started doing things to the lake we didn't think would have much of an impact on it."

The fishing, both commercial and sports fishing, in Lake Ontario was once bountiful.

"The fisheries in Lake Ontario were second to none in the world," said Mr. Mattson.

The decrease in the fish was mostly due to over-fishing in the 1800s and pollution and development in the 1900s, according to a 2013 joint paper, Fish Community Objectives for Lake Ontario by the Ministry of Natural Resources and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Before dams on the St. Lawrence River restricted passage, fish like the eel and the sturgeon used to migrate between the lake and the ocean in enormous numbers.

Lake Ontario Waterkeeper says that because of human activities, at least 10 species of fish have gone extinct and at least 15 exotic species have been introduced in the last 200 years.

"All of our cities and towns were based where the rivers came out because of the fisheries," said Mr. Mattson. "They were amazing places for food. And it had a connection to the ocean."

According to the paper, Fish Community Objectives For Lake Ontario 2013, prior to European colonization, Atlantic salmon, lake trout and burbot were the most abundant top predators in offshore waters.

But by the 1970s, Atlantic salmon, lake trout, burbot, deepwater sculpin, deepwater ciscoes and lake sturgeon had either disappeared or their populations had substantially decreased.

Mr. Mattson says Lake Ontario was once among the best habitat for American eel in the world. The fish once made up half of all biomass in the lake.

"Ninety-nine per cent of eels have disappeared," he said.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, fish were stocked in efforts to rehabilitate the native fish community. To this day, interested parties continue to work to repopulate the fish in Lake Ontario.

Around this time, it became clear that the health of the Great Lakes was in jeopardy. Early evidence of concerns for water levels in Lake Ontario stems back to 1909 when as part of the Boundary Waters Treaty, the International Joint Commission was established to help manage the shared waters along the Canadian-U.S. border.

Levels have generally been on the decline in Lake Ontario since they were first measured in the 19th century.

Part Two next week: The current situation of the Great Lakes.

FACTS & FIGURES
Great Lakes waters replenish slowly, at a rate of less than one per cent per year.
Source: Great Lakes Strategy

FACTS & FIGURES
The Great Lakes were the result of glacial shifting and melting at the end of the most recent Ice Age.

PAST USES

- Stonehooking was a common activity on Lake Ontario in the late 19th century
- Ice houses were also common in the late 19th and early 20th centuries
- Lake Ontario had a rich history of commerce and trade following the War of 1812

FISH IN LAKE ONTARIO

- Prior to European colonization, Atlantic salmon, lake trout and burbot were the most abundant top predators in Lake Ontario's offshore waters.
- But by the 1970s, Atlantic salmon, lake trout, burbot, deepwater sculpin, deepwater ciscoes and lake sturgeon had either disappeared or their populations had substantially decreased.
- Also by the 1970s, the abundance of invasive alewife, white perch and rainbow smelt increased.
- Emerald shiners and spottail shiners were important prey fishes.
- Lake whitefish, lake herring and slimy sculpin were abundant in shallower, offshore waters. Four species of deepwater ciscoes and deepwater sculpin were abundant in deeper, offshore waters. In warmer, nearshore areas, yellow perch, walleye, northern pike, American eel and lake sturgeon were abundant and supported important fisheries.

Source: Ministry of Natural Resources and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

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