

SAD TIMES FOR THE TORONTO WATERFRONT

For a few years after the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, Toronto Harbour enjoyed some of its busiest seasons ever. But although the Seaway permitted large salt-water ships to trade into the lakes, it eliminated Toronto's position as a trans-shipment port, and a gradual decline set in. Then along came the Harbourfront Park development, and the decline was greatly accelerated.

The original concept of Harbourfront was admirable indeed, in that it would open up the industrial areas of the port to the public and let people see what was going on around the water. Lighted pathways were placed around the docks, and people could wander around the grain elevator and break-bulk areas to see ships at work. Other unused areas were reconstituted as attractive park settings or as activity centres.

But before long, Harbourfront became dedicated to anything but the blending of recreational and industrial use of one of the Great Lakes' best natural harbours. Businesses found their lands expropriated by the authorities, and the entire western port area along Queen's Quay West became a playground, interspersed with expensive hotels and shops, marinas for people with huge yachts, and the whole shootin' match "fenced off" from the city core by a row of high-rise condominium buildings for the rich and famous (the only folk who could afford such surroundings).

Gone is the old Toronto Elevators plant at Rees Street, and the former Canada Malting Company Ltd. elevator at the foot of Bathurst Street is long vacant, and still extant only because Harbourfront has been searching desperately for a use for the building which would avoid the cost of tearing it down. (The demolition of the Toronto Elevators complex bankrupted its scrappers.) Indeed, the only commercial marine facility operating on the waterfront west of Parliament Street in recent years has been the Redpath Sugar plant at the foot of Jarvis Street.

Only the eastern end of the port has remained active, and even there things do not look good. The old National Iron plant is long closed and was demolished last year. Molasses is no longer shipped into the port because the Gooderham & Worts distillery is closed. Most of the tank farms along the Ship Channel either have been closed and torn down, or else no longer ship by water. Even the nose-assaulting "glue factory" (rendering plant) is out of business now.

Then comes word that the last two active grain elevators on the waterfront are closing. Located on the east side of the Parliament Street slip since its construction during World War Two has been the Victory Soya Mills Ltd. complex, with its two massive sets of silos and bean-crushing plant. For many years, ship after ship would come to Victory Mills to unload soya beans brought primarily from Michigan and Ohio. In latter years, more of the beans came in trucks from Ontario farms, and on many a morning there would be soybean trucks lined up along Queen's Quay as far west as York Street, all waiting their turn to unload.

As time passed, the "back elevator" at Victory was taken over by Canada Malting, which shipped barley and malt by water for a while but latterly used the elevator only for storage. The last load of soybeans to arrive at Victory Mills by water came in WILLOWGLEN in the last week of May, 1990.

A report appearing on March 16, 1991, in "The Globe and Mail", Toronto, indicated that Canada Malting had sold its plant to developers, that the laboratory facilities would be closed before the end of March, and that the elevator would be shut down within a year. As well, Victory Mills is closing, and although the plant has not yet been sold, the last beans will be processed about the end of April.

In latter years, Victory Soya Mills has been owned by Central Soya Inc., of