

On the waterfront; a look back at the history of Cobourg's waterfront

Cobourg harbour's early days had booms and busts –

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by Vince Versace – Northumberland News

COBOURG- Stand at the end of the Division Street pier, close your eyes and listen closely. The serene waterfront sounds of today are a far cry from the rumble of rolling coal cars, ship whistle shrieks and train engine roars which once defined golden ages of activity in Cobourg's waterfront.

"It was always a busy place down there. You had the trains going back and forth, the ferries and ships blowing their whistles, as they came and went and the fog horn also," recalls Bud Barr, 83, a lifelong Cobourg resident whose great-grandfather settled in Cobourg in 1844. Mr. Barr is a former member of Cobourg's historical society and architectural advisory committee.

Another common sound in the waterfront during the summers of Mr. Barr's youth were the screams of children hurtling down a wooden slide in a toboggan on wheels. The slide stretched out over the water and into the harbour.

"The slide was in the area between the east pier and where the beach ended," says Mr. Barr. "It was run by the Lavis family who had fishing boats and a fish house on the east pier."

The slide is now a thing of the past, as are some other waterfront features which helped popularize Cobourg's harbour. However, one of today's most prized waterfront features was also popular as far back as the early 1800s. Cobourg's main beach was used as a stopover location for travellers along the Lake Ontario's north shore well before Cobourg's incorporation in 1837, reports Percy Climo in his book 'I Cover the Waterfront'.

"The beach was a place of stopover and encampment, especially at the west end of the beach where the large stream entered the lake," wrote Mr. Climo. "The estuary provided a harbour for small boats and good supply of fresh water fish."

After 1837, immigrants to the Newcastle District, which included the areas of Oshawa, Peterborough and Belleville, used Cobourg's main beach as a camping and recreation location, added Mr. Climo. Before Cobourg's first harbour was built, Midtown Creek, which is now covered south of University Street and runs through the centre of town, was large enough to allow boats to float as far north as James Street. Lake Ontario's shoreline was further north than it is now and it created a bay where it met Midtown Creek. This bay stretched south of Albert Street from Division to George streets, notes Rob Mikel, local historian.

In the late 1820s schooners with cargo and passengers had to anchor well off shore because Cobourg's harbour was nothing more than a landing wharf, note various Cobourg historical texts. Passengers and freights could only be transported to shore after being transferred to smaller boats. To eliminate this problem and capitalize on commercial activity in the harbour, the Cobourg Harbour Company was established by a group of prominent Cobourg businessmen on March 20, 1829.

"The early settlers in the area were zealous in their ambitions," says Mr. Mikel "In 1830 they had the main pier built, which was a remarkable feat."

The harbour company's earliest accomplishment was building the wooden Eastern Pier, at the foot of Division Street, which stretched 500 feet into the lake and was 30-feet wide. The pier was completed in 1832 and a storehouse, which extended across Division Street soon followed, notes Mr. Mikel. Cobourg's harbour now had two options for vessels because it still had the old George Street wharf where steamboats like the Frontenac and Niagara docked.

To pay for all these harbour improvements and future upgrades, the harbour company charged tolls for use of the harbour. Pot and pearl ash carried a toll of nine pence per barrel, flour four pence per barrel, wheat and grain one cent for 60 lbs. and any boat under 12 tonnes was charged one shilling and three pence.

Cobourg's population by 1832 was over 1,350 and the harbour was a continuous centre of import and exports. Some directors of the harbour company formed a new company in 1833 to build the steamship 'Cobourg' which was to be used specifically for Cobourg trade. However, according to Charles Taws in 'The Harbours of Cobourg and Port Hope,' the harbour company's directors had begun to mispend harbour revenues and both control of the harbour and the steamship Cobourg went to "Toronto speculators." The harbour began to deteriorate because it was managed by people over 100 kilometres away. The 'Cobourg' never operated from her home port but did make a weekly stop during its Prescott to Niagara run. The trade boat was sold in 1841.

During this early period of growth in Cobourg, immigrants from Europe and the United States first touched land in Cobourg at its waterfront. As early as 1824, Irishman Peter Robinson brought immigrants to the Peterborough area through Cobourg. The immigrants disembarked in Cobourg and made their way through the wilderness to their new homes north of Rice Lake, writes Mr. Taws.

The waterfront also proved to be the stage for early Cobourg citizen benevolence and generosity. As cholera ravaged Europe in 1847, 25,000 Irish immigrants died of cholera en route to America or after their arrival. In 1847, 5,393 immigrants landed in Cobourg in poor health. Approximately half of them moved northward to Peterborough but over 500 remained in and around Cobourg. Local citizens sent 300 pounds in financial relief to Ireland that year.

"Apparently the people of Cobourg really took them in, giving them food and caring for them," says Mr. Mikel

Steamers running between Kingston and Toronto dropped off many sick immigrants at Cobourg's wharf in July 1849, even though they had cities like Toronto and Hamilton listed as their destination.

Earlier Irish settlers in Cobourg eventually called Corktown and Kerrytown home. Corktown was in the east end of Cobourg, from Victoria Park over to Darcy Street and Kerrytown was located near Fourth Street, notes Mr. Mikel.



Cobourg council purchased control of the harbour in 1850 and began repairs to the existing piers and enlarged the harbour mouth. This widening of the shipping channel allowed larger ships to dock at the Eastern Pier. A new breakwater was built as was a new warehouse and lighthouse in the harbour. The harbour could now support 100 vessels and four steamships and several schooners arrived in town daily, note Peter Greathead and Don Dawson in the 'Cobourg and District Historical Society Historical Review' of 1980 to 1982. Cobourg had 5,000 citizens by 1850 and its waterfront was the catalyst for the town's economic boom.

The Cobourg and Peterborough Railway helped ship massive quantities of lumber and grain through the harbour after opening in 1854. In 1856, 14 million feet of lumber and 200,000 baskets of wheat were shipped from Cobourg's waterfront thanks to the railway. However, in 1861, the railway's bridge, which spanned over Rice Lake, collapsed during the winter. A competing railway line from Port Hope to Peterborough soon opened and Cobourg lost a lot of its freight and passenger business.

"By the early 1860s, Cobourg's harbour was not of much importance," says Mr. Mikel.

In 1874 the Canadian government built the Langevin Pier, a long breakwater which extends from the foot of Hibernia Street, to help control the problem of sand filling the harbour. The breakwater would be the last pier added to the harbour, giving it the shape it still has today.

The founding of the Cobourg, Peterborough and Marmora Railway and Mining Corporation in 1866 helped revitalize commercial activity in the waterfront. The railway had steamships on Rice Lake which carried iron ore from Marmora across the lake to connect with trains on Rice Lake's south shore. The trains then ran their route south, through what is today Hamilton Township, into Cobourg along Spring Street and to the waterfront. The ore was then transferred to ships and sent to Rochester.

The railway attracted American industrialists and eventually led to a new chapter in the Town's history known as the American Summer Colony because of the large number of tourists from the United States. The summer visitors created a wave of new grand hotels to be built in the areas just north of the shoreline and around Victoria Park. Hotels like the Arlington, on King Street at the top of Victoria Park, the Columbian, on McGill Street and the Cedamere Hotel, at the south end of Ontario Street, were examples of Cobourg trying to meet the demands of its newest boom industry, tourism.

"The Arlington was right at the top of Victoria Park and was a perfect setting. The park then was just one long lawn which belonged to the hotel," says Mr. Mikel. "The grass just eventually connected to the beach."

What is now Victoria Park and considered "the crown jewel" of Cobourg, along with Victoria Hall, by Mayor Peter Delanty, was actually privately owned in 1874 but still accessible to the public.

"It is amazing that what is the park has remained as open space for as long as it has," notes Mr. Mikel. "It is right in the middle of town and was never developed."

A proposed project for the summer colony era, which never was developed, was a boulevard which stretched along Cobourg's shoreline from west to east.

"The summer colony brought in tremendous amounts of money into Cobourg. They wanted a boulevard so they could have carriages rolling along the waterfront," explains Mr. Mikel. "It never happened because too many parts of the harbour were owned privately."

Cobourg became reknown for its sailing regattas and yachting as the summer colony grew in popularity.

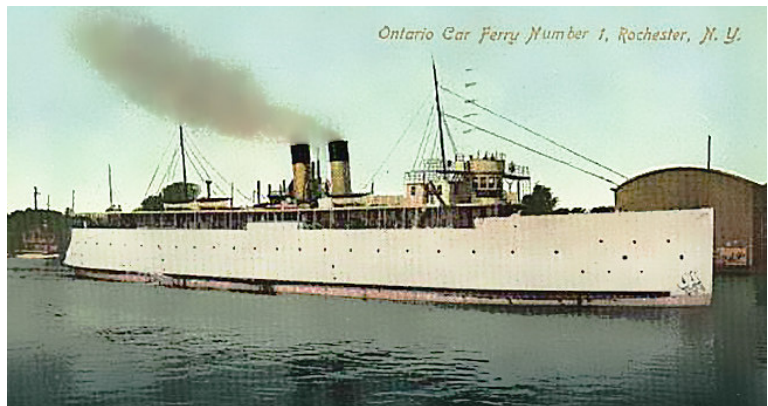
"Cobourg was always the third point in a race between Toronto, Rochester and Cobourg, it (yachting) has quite the history on this area," says Mr. Mikel.

One of Cobourg's most famous yachts which cruised the waterfront was the Gorilla, described as, "ugly as sin and swift as Satan," a three-time winner of the Prince of Wales Cup, notes Mr. Taws.

The Countess of Dufferin was the other notable yacht because it was built in Cobourg and competed in the America's Cup.

By the early 1900s it was not only steamships and yachts which captured the imaginations of harbour onlookers. The Ontario Car Ferry Company era dominated activity in Cobourg's waterfront after it was formed in 1905 as a joint venture between the Grand Trunk Railway (GTR) and the Buffalo, Rochester and Pennsylvania Railroad. The company was formed for the primary purpose of transporting coal from Pennsylvania to Ontario to be ultimately used to power GTR trains.

Two ferries were built; the Ontario No.1 (right) was launched in 1907 and Ontario No.2 was launched in 1915. The ferries could hold between 28-32 cars of coal, automobiles and approximately 1,000 people per trip. The Rochester to Cobourg run took five hours to complete from port to port. Unloading a ferry took two hours and passengers used to stroll into downtown Cobourg to shop and spend the day, recalls Mr. Barr.



"As a kid we used to go stand on the pier and watch the ferries," says Mr. Barr. "The Americans would throw money into the water and we would dive in it after it."

Five sets of railway tracks used to cut through the heart of what are now public waterfront lands. The ferries would back up to the dock and the coal cars would roll off them on to a set of tracks, explains Mr. Barr. The ferries moved 70,000 passengers and 12,800 railroad cars of coal yearly.

Once the depression and the Second World War hit, business slowed. In 1945 the ferries transported over 43,000 passengers and almost 855,000 tonnes of cargo but by 1949 they only transported 22,000 passengers and just over 425,000 tons of cargo, notes Mr. Greathead and Mr. Dawson. Ontario No.1 set sail for the last time in 1949 and Ontario No.2 in 1950 and both ferries were scrapped by 1952.

Commercial activity would never be the same again in Cobourg's waterfront. A majority of activity which was to come in the waterfront area would be from trains and deep sea ships. Land-based industry, with the famed oil drums and massive coal piles, would slowly begin to take hold of the waterfront, silencing ferry and steamship whistles forever.

Part 2:

Soot, sea and slime, Cobourg harbour 1950-1980

Aug 9, 2005

by Vince Versace staff writer

COBOURG - There are now no reminders of the coal piles and oil drums which made Cobourg's waterfront a utilitarian place from 1950 to the early 1980s but not all industrial day memories are dull and dreary.

"We used to ride our bikes up the coal piles to see who could ride up them the highest," says Bill Fraser, Victoria Hall building maintenance supervisor. "Boy, you would get so dirty after playing in them and you would hear it from your mom when you got home."



The grounding of the Ontario Ferry Car service by 1950 ended the shipping of coal across Lake Ontario and the Canadian National Railway began looking to Canadian coal sources to power its trains. Ontario No.1 set sail for the last time in 1949 and Ontario No.2 in 1950 and both ferries were scrapped by 1952. the book 'Cobourg Early Days and Modern Times' notes the termination of the ferry service meant 50 Cobourg citizens lost their jobs.

The little used ferry docks would be a source of fun for teenagers in the 1960s and 1970s, says Mr. Fraser

"We used to dive off them into the harbour, they were at least 20 feet high," says Mr. Fraser. "We used to try swimming the mouth of the harbour. The water was always warmer in there than at the beach."

Mayor Peter Delanty also recalls diving off the ferry dock and trying to swim from the centre pier to the west pier.

"Diving off that dock was a rite of passage," says Mayor Delanty, flashing a boyish grin.

Evelyn Ribble, the wife of Murray Ribble, Cobourg's last lighthouse keeper, recalls her husband scolding local teenagers who played around in the harbour diving off the docks and piers. She also remembers her son, Larry Ribble Jr., racing around the coal piles on his scooter. From April 1, 1964 to May 1, 1980, all marine activities occurred under the watchful eye of Mr. Ribble.

"It was quite the life we had living there. It was really drab in the winter but in the summer we seemed to be the summer cottage in our family," explains Ms. Ribble. "The pier was quite narrow then and the wind was horrible in the winter. Our friends used to say we lived in the coldest place in Canada during the winter."

Mr. Ribble was responsible for maintenance of the lighthouse at the end of the pier, operation of the fog horn, recording weather conditions and ensuring the long range light and Peter's Rock Light, positioned between Cobourg and Port Hope, were operational. The rock light does not exist anymore but a buoy floats in its place. A lighthouse keeper's job was a 24-hour duty, notes Ms. Ribble.

"Murray would work in 12-hour shifts with his assistant John MacIntyre. Murray would sometimes have to head to Peter's Rock in his boat, in fog and bad weather, to make sure it was operational," explained Ms. Ribble. "Murray had to do a lot of rescues and dealt with a few drownings too."

She recalls the train freight sheds which lined the north harbour wall and the coal piles. The pier was a small community unto itself and the Ribble family never felt isolated because of the activity in the harbour. During their first year in Cobourg, the Ribbles lived in a house out on the pier. The house spanned the entire width of the then narrow pier, from one edge to the other, which meant a very close eye had to be kept on the Ribble children at all times, notes Ms. Ribble. The lighthouse keeper family moved to a new home, today's Coast Guard building, after that first year and remained there for 15 years.

The only pleasure craft in the harbour the Ribbles ever encountered were usually one's in distress. Deep-sea ships from Norway and Germany were a more common sight than a small yacht.

"There would still be coal coming in too for the 'Old Depot' (Cobourg's military ordinance depot now Northam Industrial Park)," says Ms. Ribble. "It was just such an industrial place."

Steam and ferry ships may have ended their run of the harbour by 1950 but larger ships carrying industrial related products did rule Cobourg's harbour waters. By 1964, Cobourg would begin to lease the harbour from the federal government and collect revenue from the marina shipping activities, notes Bryan Baxter, former Town Chief Administrative Officer.

"There were ships of wire for General Wire and Cable and the ships with oil for the oil tank farms," says Mr. Baxter. "Between Third Street and Division Street, it was all coal piles."

The massive oil tank drums stretched east of Third Street to Hibernia Street, where Legion Village now stands, and belonged to companies like Imperial Oil, Shell and Sunoco. Del Dillon, of Cobourg, worked in the "oil tank fields", from 1950 to 1954, helping load oil tanker rail cars and eventually driving oil rigs.

"It was a dirty and smelly area but I did not mind," says Mr. Dillon who recalls oil ships docking at Cobourg's main pier, connecting into oil lines which then transferred oil to the various oil tanks. There were also lines from the tanks which ran to the railroad area for filling oil tanker cars, noted Mr. Dillon.

"I had worked those lines, it was a good job which helped me save money for university," says Mr. Dillon. "It was a place for work but those coal piles were ugly."

Rick Stinson, Town legislative services director, remembers fondly the noise and power of the trains down Spring Street in 1976. During Victoria Hall's major restoration, Cobourg council and municipal staff were relocated to today's Cobourg police station from 1972 to 1977. A crossing guard at the corner of Spring and King streets would halt traffic at the intersection to allow the trains through.

"When those trains used to shunt and come down Spring Street, to get to the harbour, I remember the walls shaking and you could not talk to anyone because it was so loud. You just had to wait for them to go by," says Mr. Stinson.

Perolin Bird Archer, an industrial water treatment company, which would eventually become the Diversey Water Treatment Technologies, called the harbour area home as well. The little railway activity which did occur until the late 1970s was for this plant, notes Mr. Baxter.

The CN Rail freight shed on Division Street, across from today's ice cream shop, would house the Town's parks equipment once rail activity disappeared.

In 1967, the first Cobourg Yacht Club clubhouse was erected. With no official coast guard stationed in Cobourg's harbour, until the late 1970s, the yacht club and its members performed numerous rescues as did Mr. Ribble. The club purchased the Red Barren in 1969 to assist with rescues, notes Councillor Dean McCaughey, Town planning coordinator.

"If one of us saw there was a problem, we just went out and helped," explains Coun. McCaughey.

As reliance on coal diminished, the coal piles disappeared by the mid 1970s and Coun. McCaughey says they are still a popular memory among long-time returning visitors to Cobourg.

"I remember the ground was still black from the coal piles even though they were gone," says Coun. McCaughey. "I still have people say to me they remember when there would be coal dust on their boats when they used to visit."

Victoria Park and Victoria Beach were still the recreational heartbeat of waterfront recreation despite the coal piles and industry west of the Division Street pier. Mrs. Ribble remembers Victoria Park's original pavilion as a bustling place with dances and big band music. Mr. Baxter also remembers the pavilion as being the place to be during the summer.

"The pavilion was an extremely active place. I remember Saturday nights being dance night for the adults," adds Mr. Baxter. "The main beach was used by locals but back then people would even use the west beach."

Victoria Park's former tennis courts were also heavily used, recall Mr. Baxter and Mr. Dillon.

"We used to play a lot of tennis at Victoria Park until Hurricane Hazel hit in 1954. The wind brought down so many trees on the courts that they were wiped out and not repaired," says Mr. Dillon.

Mr. Baxter worked for the Town of Cobourg from 1972 to 2001 and says the main waterfront area was generally viewed as an industrial location as were most harbours located on the shores of Lake Ontario.

"It was not until the early 1980s that a vision began to develop for the waterfront, particularly between Third Street and Division Street," says Mr. Baxter. "Ultimately the idea of open space began to take shape."

Mr. Baxter remembers former Mayor Mac Lees as the one who succeeded in covering the former coal pile locations with sod to official bury this part of Cobourg's sooty past. Mayor Lees would also turn the sod for the construction of the yacht club's new clubhouse in 1985.

In 1982 the harbour received its small craft designation, officially moving it away from any future deep-sea harbour activities. The change marked the official end of Cobourg's industrial harbour and set the table for today's parade of yachts from around the lake to Cobourg's marina. Mr. Baxter recalls former councillor Bob Wilson as a councillor who helped spearhead the classification change.

"I just happened to be the public works chairman, that is all," says Mr. Wilson. "When we were elected, our council were a group of businessmen so we looked at things a certain way."

The Town received a letter in 1981, from Department of Oceans and Fisheries, which suggested Cobourg look at changing its harbour designation to a small-craft harbour. Mr. Wilson and Town staff went to Hamilton to watch a simulation of what would need to be done to convert Cobourg's harbour designation.

"There we were, in a room 50 ft. by 50 ft. and Cobourg harbour was before us, it was amazing," says Mr. Wilson.

"They had boats in the mock harbour set up. They had currents to show how the sand would move. They did quite a job. We were really impressed."

After the demonstration, council decided to start setting money aside in reserve to help pay for the necessary land side upgrades when Cobourg's turn for harbour improvements would arrive. Mr. Wilson received a call in mid 1981, from the fisheries department, explaining that another municipality could not afford to go through the designation class change. Would Cobourg be interested in going ahead that year? asked the fisheries department.

"I told them yes we were interested. They then asked how soon could we be ready to go," recalls Mr. Wilson. "I said, 'Well, today is Friday, how does Monday sound?'"

Ultimately the Town would not spend any of the money it reserved for the project because land side work had already begun with the installation of a new Town sewer main across the top of the harbour. As this sewer work was done, the necessary land upgrades were also done, all for a \$160,000 price tag. The federal government paid for the water-side harbour and dock improvements.

"They were in there and done in three weeks. We were a proactive council and everything fell into place," adds Mr. Wilson.

Improvements to the harbour were not entirely intended to just improve recreation in the waterfront area, notes Mr. Wilson.

"We all new changes would be a benefit for the Town," says Mr. Wilson. This renewed vision that the downtown's prosperity was linked to a rejuvenated waterfront would take hold in 1982 and carried through to present day Cobourg. Public meetings would soon begin for creating Cobourg's secondary harbour plan.

A year after the change in harbour designation Mr. Wilson was out for a walk along the waterfront, near the new docks, and came across a fellow councillor who had opposed the designation change idea.

"He had said we would never see 50 boats in the marina during our debates," explains Mr. Wilson. "So I said to him, 'You better count them, there are 72'."

Part 3

Cobourg waterfront renaissance

Aug 16, 2005
by vince versacestaff writer

COBOURG - From seafaring ships to leisure yachts and from oil tank fields to upscale condominiums, Cobourg's main harbour is far from the industrial wasteland it once was and the future of its downtown is staked on this renaissance.

"My feeling concerning residential development in the waterfront area is that it will be the saving grace of our downtown," says Dean McCaughey, Town planning coordinator. "What is happening now is exactly what was planned in the (Cobourg harbour) secondary plan."

As the first phase of the Harbourwalk condominiums comes to an end, at the foot of Third Street where oil tanks once stood, the Town is processing other development plans for the waterfront area. There is Esplanade on the Wharf, an 18-unit condominium-commercial project on Division Street, south of Albert Street and a proposal for a convention centre on the former Quigley Pro Hardware site, across the street from Victoria Hall.

"The last thing we want is for the harbour area to become a residential enclave," says Mayor Peter Delanty. "However, the viability of our downtown is important. I think our waterfront is a true 'people place' and it still will be."

In 1987, Cobourg's centre harbour area was a far cry from the 'people place' Mayor Delanty now describes. The Town's harbour's secondary plan was being developed and then-Mayor Angus Read was in negotiations with both Imperial Oil and CN Rail to gain control of the main harbour lands area between Third and Division streets.

"The negotiations with the railway were tough because they kept changing who we were supposed to talk to and who was responsible for it," explains Mr. Read. "My vision was we were going to make that area parkland as far as I was concerned."

The Town's secondary plan calls for commercial links up from the centre harbour lands, along Third and Division streets, to King Street. Former Mayor Joan Chalovich, Cobourg's mayor from 1994 to 2000, says her council was cognizant of the secondary plan's vision.

"We knew the sightlines of Victoria Hall were important. We also realized we had to keep sufficient public access to the waterfront and sufficient buildings to generate tax revenue to cover your costs," says Ms. Chalovich. "The downtown was in a slump and before my time on council, a big issue was getting those oil tanks out of there."

By 1991, two of the last oil tanks closest to the shore were removed by massive cranes and loaded on a barge to be scrapped. There were a couple of oil tanks still left, further away from shore, but that did not deter the dawn of the area's first condominium development which some Town officials refer to as the 'Hoffman Years'.

"Similar to other Great Lakes communities, Cobourg today is literally returning to its waterfront for renewed economic stimulus but now in the form of residential and commercial development and emerging tourism industry," said James Hoffman in a submission at Redeveloping Brownfields, a 1998 international symposium.

Glenn McGlashon, Town planning services manager, says Mr. Hoffman had "guts" to try and develop in the harbour which was basically an industrial wasteland. The collaborative work between the Town, industries and Mr. Hoffman and the soil remediation work done made Cobourg a showcase example of waterfront regeneration, explains Mr. McGlashon.

"Mr. Hoffman was blazing new trail as he worked with us and was able to convince companies like MacAsphalt, CN Rail and Ultramar that their land was more valuable as residential," says Mr. Hoffman. "Everyone bought into the same goal."

Remediating the lands which contained petroleum, hydrocarbons and heavy metals was, "surprisingly the least difficult" thing to do, stated Mr. Hoffman. Land acquisition, meeting with area stakeholders, public disclosure and education of the environmental conditions of the lands and financial support for his project were much more difficult challenges, stated Mr. Hoffman in his symposium submission.

Mr. Read, mayor from 1985 to 1994, says his council was interested in what Mr. Hoffman proposed for the site. Ms. Chalovich and Coun. McCaughey were both impressed by Mr. Hoffman's remediation efforts using bio-remediation which involved tilling the soil with a mixture of fertilizer, moisture and soil. The developer's estimated cleanup costs were \$2 million and Cobourg spent \$3 million over three years, from 1995 to 1998, on roads, changing north-south links and installing imprinted asphalt in the area.

"He actually had one of his first buildings up right across the road from a still functioning Esso transfer station," says Mr. McGlashon. "He developed in phases, which explains why there is not a lot of consistency in the designs, as he worked towards his goal. He wanted to develop the entire harbour."

The size and number of units built by Mr. Hoffman varied because he built based on how much he could sell, resulting in approximately 90 units built. In 1997 Mr. Hoffman received approvals for another phase of development which resulted in the foundation of a building being built before he eventually pulled the plug due to finances.

Coun. McCaughey says Mr. Hoffman was a "bright guy" but a little ahead of his time. Ms. Chalovich says Mr. Hoffman was an intelligent developer, with a great plan but time and the economy conspired against him.

"It was not easy for James at the time. There was no condominium market outside of the direct GTA (Greater Toronto Area) and the economy was not that strong at the time," says Ms. Chalovich. "Financially it proved difficult for him and in the end he got caught. It left us with an empty site which was disappointing."

The Hoffman Years, development wise, may have ended on a disappointing note but they did cause a positive change in Town planning, says Ms. Chalovich.

"Hoffman challenged our building and planning department," says Ms. Chalovich. "He was anxious to move forward and we were not ready to move as quickly. I think we grew a lot at the planning department at that time."

While this first waterfront condominium development slowly came to a halt, improvements to link the centre harbour area to Victoria Park and establish Cobourg's marina as a sailing destination were in the works. In 1989, work started on a new marina building which cost \$526,000 and was covered by a provincial grant. The building was completed in 1991 with its two sets of change-rooms, so one could stay open while the other was cleaned. The new building placed Cobourg's marina on the map, says Wayne Deveau, former Town community services director.

"Boaters started saying it was the cleanest facility they had seen and it became highly touted in the lake boating system," says Mr. DeVeau.

Don Macklin, Cobourg marina manager from 1988 to 1993, says what also helped establish the marina's reputation was its focus on attracting tourists and providing a big welcome to boaters visiting Cobourg. Mr. Macklin had student volunteers dress up in period marine costumes when they worked at the marina during the summer.



"We wanted to make sure everyone loved Cobourg," says Mr. Macklin. "When you are out on that lake you can get pounded around pretty hard and nothing beats docking to a friendly smile and hello."

Improvements to the trailer park and the building of the waterfront walkway, from Division to Green streets, occurred in 1992 and came with a price tag of over \$780,000. The walkway along the north wall of the harbour, heading west from Division Street, was completed soon after with the help of the Town, the Waterfront Regeneration Trust and the Rotary and Lions clubs.

"This year we are going to extend that walkway west and it will have information areas, in the west beach area, which will explain what is there," says Mayor Delanty.

Just north of the harbour wall walkway was the Diversey Water Technologies Plant, formerly known as Perolin Bird Archer. The company was in the process of closing its doors and Ms. Chalovich and her council entered into negotiations with the company to purchase the land.

"The shutting down of Diversey presented another opportunity for us in the centre harbour lands," says Ms. Chalovich.

In 2001 the Town finalized the purchase of the Diversey site for \$2 but the remediation of the site carried a \$1.5 million price tag. The cleaned up area now is home to the new Rotary Harbourfront Park. The rebirth of Cobourg's harbour was gaining notoriety not just among visiting boaters but internationally as well, says Mr. DeVeau.

"Once, after I spoke at world waterfront conference, I had calls from representatives of the Netherlands, England, Germany and Spain who wanted to come and see us. They were very pleased and impressed with the work we had done," says Mr. DeVeau.

The lack of execution of the West Harbour Plan, designed to deepen the west harbour, develop a walkway link to the area and improve its natural features, disappoints Mr. DeVeau.

"The approvals are in place for it. Developing that area by introducing plant and shrubs indigenous to the area would develop it as naturally possible," says Mr. DeVeau. "According to the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, if we ever completed that work we would have the most balanced harbour on Lake Ontario."

Mayor Delanty says the plan has been effectively abandoned because it requires both federal and provincial funding to assist Cobourg in seeing the plan through.

"It is not do-able, financially, on our own," says Mayor Delanty.

What has been a priority for Cobourg is the gradual improvements to Victoria Park entrenching it further as the "jewel" of Cobourg. There was always a focus to "keep the jewel up" says Mr. DeVeau. Ms. Chalovich says the park has made an incredible turnaround since 1993.

"When I was walking through there once I came across a family from Toronto. After a brief conversation they asked me what was wrong with the park since it was so empty. I will always remember that," says Ms. Chalovich.

Subsequent improvements to the mini-golf course, ongoing upgrades to the bandshell, the walkway through the park, installation of the new splash pad and the recently built Lions-Lioness Pavilion in the park have left the jewel shining brighter than ever before, says Mayor Delanty.

"We cannot put anything else in Victoria Park. It is a jewel because we have not jammed everything we can in there," says Mayor Delanty. "I can see a council sometime in the future looking at moving the trailer park so that area can become an extension of the park."

The one constant threat to tarnish Cobourg's jewel is vandalism, which last year accounted for 20 per cent of the parks department budget in Victoria Park maintenance costs. Council this year approved the installation of 131 parking meters around the park and marina area to generate revenue to alleviate this financial pressure. Cobourg spent \$1.3 million on park improvements between 2002 and 2004 and this year another \$50,000 was earmarked for bandshell improvements.

Further condominium development means more people in the waterfront area and the increasing popularity of Victoria Park and its beach result in an added responsibility for the Town, says Mr. Read.

"The question is the controls you put in place after you build something. The park and the harbour are now more accessible but you need to police the area because people will abuse the area," says Mr. Read. "People need to realize we are going to face more growth and development."

A 1982 excavation project for a new sewer main at the lower end of Division Street uncovered the first timber crib placed for the original Division Street pier built in 1829. The find was significant because it demonstrates how far Lake Ontario once advanced into Cobourg before years of sand and low ground in-fill occurred. The find also demonstrates how reliant Cobourg's future was on the waterfront, says Mayor Delanty.

"It is amazing to see the transformation of the harbour and the entire waterfront," says Mayor Delanty. "From its early sailing days, to the romance of the two ferries and then the coal piles and oil drums, the change has been significant. Cobourg has been lucky enough and worked hard to make it a people place. I cannot think of another waterfront like ours on Lake Ontario. It is why people come to Cobourg."