



FROM NORTH-WEST TO SOUTH-EAST AND BEYOND

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Last month we looked at the heavy industries that were located in the north-west corner of Collingwood's harbour in the area stretching from Black Ash Creek north to White's Bay. Now, using the 1875 *Bird's Eye View Of Collingwood* drawing (not to scale) by H. Brosius, the 1875 *Poetical Directory of Collingwood* and the 1893 *Board of Trade Report*, our focus switches to the south-east corner of the harbour taking in the area east of the rail yard (which was located between St. Paul and Minnesota Streets) and all the way over to Raglan St. in the east end of town. It was a time in the 19th Century when the shoreline reached almost to the corner of Simcoe and Wellington (now Niagara) Streets. Rodney St. runs off of Huron St. at what seems to be an odd angle of about 45 degrees and this is explained by the fact that in Collingwood's early days, Rodney St. pretty much paralleled the shore line down to near the intersection of today's Simcoe and Niagara Streets. There is not the extensive information on most of the industries shown in that 1875 drawing as in last month's story. While this is not an exhaustive list of industries on the side of town east of the railway tracks in the

19th Century and into the first half of the 20th Century, still it gives a fascinating look at the pioneer years in Collingwood when multiple tall brick chimneys and metal smokestacks belching clouds of smoke into the air signified the running of machinery, the production of goods, jobs, prosperity and growth.

Huron Street, as we know it, did not originally go all the way through to Niagara St. but came to an abrupt end at the water's edge not far past the corner of Minnesota St. about where Sobey's is today. It would take until 1913 before Huron St. went all the way through to Niagara St. and this was accomplished by landfill and by part of the area between Huron/Rodney/Simcoe/Niagara Streets, originally nearly all water, being used as the Town Dump for many years up to at least the 1920's (see my November 2020 story *Disposing of Collingwood's Waste*).

Fred T. Hodgson, that indefatigable optimist and promoter of Collingwood made this statement about the town's industries in the *1893 Board of Trade Report*,

Collingwood has her industries, and they are ever on the increase and from the nature of things, must increase. Here on the highway between the great North-West, and the East, a "getting off place" as it were for travel both ways, it must eventually become a manufacturing district of considerable magnitude, and already the foundation is firmly laid on which an industrial structure of gigantic proportions is sure to be erected. We have a number of factories, foundries, tanneries and workshops that steadily employ a large number of men and women year round and more are being added every year.

The first industry in our story was located less than a block east of where the water terminated in that south-east corner of the harbour.

The **Georgian Bay Tannery**, more commonly known as **Tobey's Tannery**, was located at Simcoe and Albert Streets. Fred T. Hodgson said,

This establishment is nearly as old as the town itself, having been built in the fifties...Mr. Chas. Tobey, in connection with his father Mr. Warren Tobey, employs from 30 to 50 men in and about their works, and some of the finest leather in Ontario is produced at this manufactory.

Tobey's tannery suffered several fires followed by rebuilding until it was demolished in the 1930's. During Collingwood's Great Fire of September 25, 1881, the south-westerly wind blew sparks and flaming debris from the blazing inferno on Hurontario St. more than half a mile east to the tannery where there were massive amounts of cordwood and tanbark which caught fire as Mr. Tobey and his employees tried to save the tannery buildings. In later years the tannery burned down twice and was rebuilt, the first fire being on April 20, 1885, the second one on October 13, 1896. Tobey's Tannery was still listed at Simcoe and Albert Streets in the *Vernon's Directory* for 1923 (the Thomas Foley family also operated Collingwood's other tannery on the west side of Walnut St. near 2nd St. at this time).

Seward Herrington (1917-1988) who grew up in Collingwood's east end, shared his reminiscences of those days in the local history book *Reflections*. He told of the tannery pond (on the north-west corner of Simcoe and Albert Streets) where he and his friends skated and played hockey in the winter even though they were told not to. The effluent from that pond drained into a wooden pipeline that emptied into the harbour water, the brown colour from the vats giving the name "Tea Lake" to that harbour inlet. Over many years that area of water south

of Huron St. was filled in with a combination of fill and garbage until, in 1913, Huron St. was opened right through to Niagara St. David Williams recorded in the *Huron Institute Papers & Records, Vol. III*, “Eastern extension of Huron Street, opened May 13, 1913”.

On the south side of Rodney Street just past the corner of Minnesota St. in 1875 stood the **Collingwood Foundry And Machine Works**, R. Simpson, Manager. By the time of the 1893 *Board of Trade Report* (published in 1894), Fred T. Hodgson described the foundry as,

Georgian Bay Foundry. *Another old establishment is the Georgian Bay Foundry and Machine Works on Rodney St. This is owned and run by Mr. McEwen, who not only manufactures all sorts of machines, marine engines, and agricultural implements, but steam boilers also, for both marine and stationary engines. Mr. McEwen employs on an average some 35 men and boys.*

On the water (north) side of Rodney St. stood **Robert Kirk's Sash And Planing Mill** where Fred T. Hodgson was the Foreman. In 1879 Robert Kirk died of consumption at the age of 56 and his business was continued by his widow with Thomas Moore as Manager. At the north end of Minnesota St. on the water side of Huron St. stood the **Melville, Fair & Co. Stave Factory** originally built and operated by George Buck with Messrs. Melville and Fair as principal investors. As in a number of other locations in Collingwood's harbour, log booms were towed in adjacent to this operation to feed the saws. This factory made the narrow pieces of wood that form barrels and occupied space that, years later, would be shared side-by-side by **D. G. Cooper's Saw Mill** and **Bryan Manufacturing**, the land that is now occupied by the homes on Waterside Lane and by Sobey's, respectively. The *Gazetteer for 1884-5*

advertised, “Geo. Buck/Melville & Fair—staves, headings, cooperage—Minnesota St.” This mill was owned by D. G. Cooper from at least 1894; it burned down in June 1907 but in the 1950’s the Cooper firm was still selling lumber and coal at this location, the coal arriving in railway hopper cars on a siding that entered the property. A sign for the coal proclaimed “Anthracite Is Best” [i.e. for heating].

The Bryan brothers started their business in 1885 to make interior woodwork such as doors, trim, mouldings, etc. Up until the time George Bryan closed his business, the old boiler/engine house building with a tall brick chimney remained standing near the rear of the property on Huron St., the original factory having succumbed to fire in April 1915 and being rebuilt and expanded a number of times. This was the location I fancied in my public school days for my fictitious *Vuckson & Wessenger* piano factory (see my March 2016 story *Collingwood Never Had A Piano Factory*). Ironically, in the 1970’s I bought George Bryan’s Heintzman grand piano. It is known that Jack Royal (1911-1970) used the old boiler/engine house at Bryan Lumber in the 1950’s as a foundry and welding shop.

Before the arrival of the railway and the carving of the site of downtown Collingwood out of the cedar swamp, the town’s original settlement referred to as “The Old Village” or “Hurontario Village” or “Hurontario Mills” was on Raglan St. because of the availability of water power that could be harnessed from the Pretty River to run a mill. The earliest account of a mill states that it was built circa 1845-6. The *Jubilee History And Business Directory of The Town Of Collingwood* published in 1887 by the *Enterprise-Messenger* and therefore likely written by John or William Hogg states,

The Town proper was first settled in 1854, but Hurontario Village had been in existence several years. In the Village, a sawmill, grist mill, a couple of stores, a tavern, and a blacksmith shop already existed. The mills were erected and first owned by Mr. James Connell and Mr. McGlashan; and subsequently were owned and worked by Mr. J. D. Stephens, more familiarly known as "Tally Ho!" Mr. Andrew Melville rented the grist mill for some years. The mills became very dilapidated and were in ruins by 1855. One of them was subsequently repaired and used as a distillery by Mr. Lynch, but it was burned in 1856...A brewery was afterwards erected near the old site and its foundations are still in existence [1887].

Another account found in the book *Reflections from the reminiscences of Fred T. Hodgson* states,

The mill was built pretty close to the water's edge [i.e. Sunset Point], and the water to drive the machinery was carried from the dam, overhead in a long wooden flume or mill-race. This was built on high trestle work and crossed the only road in the place. Teams of all kinds had to pass under it to reach the mill. In the winter, the great icicles resulting from leakages in the flume gave the place the appearance of a beautiful grotto lined with burnished silver. The mill was built in 1845-6, and when I came here was controlled by Tally Ho Stephens (J. D. Stephens) and did little grinding other than making chopped stuff and gristing for the few settlers, and perhaps cutting small batches of lumber on shares.

It stands to reason that the original mill was powered by water traveling in a long overhead wooden flume all the way from the dam to the distant mill considering that the wood supply in the area appeared

inexhaustible at the time when most of Simcoe County was covered with primeval forests. The mill pond adjacent to Barnhart and Macdonell's mill in the 1860's (see below) would have been a later creation.

The mill near the water's edge at Sunset Point was replaced by a mill about half way between today's Ontario and Erie Streets on the east side of Raglan St. adjacent to the mill pond created by a dam on the Pretty River at about the spot where the river turned east—this was somewhere near the present location of the bridge over the Pretty River Parkway. Unlike most water-powered mills that were located where you would expect them to be—right at the dam with the dam holding back a “head” of water to turn the machinery—in this case the mill was a considerable distance north of the dam at the opposite end of the mill pond. The 1875 drawing shows the mill as a multi-storey building with a tall smokestack and is identified as **Collingwood Steam Mills (Barnhart & Macdonell)**, established about 1866-67 as N. Barnhart & Co. Charles Macdonell, the later partner, was, in 1869, a “Commission Merchant”. In the 1871 *Lovell's Directory*, Macdonell was an agent of the Hudson Bay Company, a business partner with John McMaster in the firm Macdonell & McMaster, insurance, shipping, commission agents, express agents and brokers as well as a partner with Noah Barnhart in the flour mill. Mr. Barnhart died in 1883. The 1887 *Jubilee Directory* said that Mr. Macdonell was “carrying on a large flouring mill which does an immense business”, his display ad reading,

PURE GOLD FLOUR—FULL ROLLER PROCESS MILL. High Grade Patent, and Strong Bakers Flour, GRITZ. For Porridge, Superior to Oatmeal and Cracked Wheat. ASK YOUR GROCER FOR THEM.

C. MACDONELL, COLLINGWOOD FLOUR MILLS.

Under a separate listing in the same document we read:

CHAS. MACDONELL—Proprietor of the Collingwood Flouring Mills has already been referred to in these pages. He has been in the milling business for twenty years, and has one of the best equipped mills in the Province. The machinery is all new, of the most modern make, and the flour put out from the Mill has large sales all over the country. Wherever it is once tried, no other kind is used. Mr. Macdonell is just now paying particular attention to the manufacture of “Gritz” for porridge, and his brand has acquired great popularity. It is sold all over the country, and the demand is rapidly increasing. It is an article of diet highly recommended by physicians.

Unfortunately for Mr. Macdonell and the customers who loved his porridge, his mill burned down in 1890 taking the new machinery with it. In the 1891 Census he is listed as a “Commission Merchant”, reverting to one of his several other career pursuits. This explains why, in the *Board of Trade Report* for the year 1893, Fred T. Hodgson detailed a list of “Collingwood Wants” including the following:

We want a flouring mill in our midst...There is a splendid site for a mill at the mouth of Pretty River—plenty of water and ample fall with excellent roads leading to it.

This want was answered eight years later when a new flour mill (now Kelseys) was established, not on the Pretty River, but on First St. using steam and, later, electric power. The Pretty River mill site later became the home of a sawmill and “chopping mill” operated in the 1910-13 period by **Stoutenburg & Son** according to the *Vernon’s*

Directory for those years. By the time of the 1921 Census it was known as **Leggatt's Saw Mill**, operated by the Leggatt Brothers, William and Lyle. In 1967 at the time of Canada's Centennial, Oscar A. Burnside (1902-1980) published an article in the *Enterprise-Bulletin* titled *East Of The Tracks* in which he described life in the Old Village. He listed the various people who operated the sawmill over a long period of time as "Tally-Ho Stephens...later Stoutenburgs, Elliotts, Leggatts and now Fisks manufacturing baskets".

According to a Fire Insurance Map of November 1955, the Collingwood Saw Mills used a combination of water and electric power. The tail race, the channel where the water, once through the mill, ran out toward Ontario St. and into the bay is labelled as "covered over" presumably as a safety feature for neighbourhood children. An eyewitness who saw the mill pond in the World War II years told me that it was held back by a wooden dam, the surface of the water was covered in green scum and the perimeter was populated by frogs. The stagnant appearance of the pond is explained by the fact that, unlike other mill ponds, where the surface of the water is always moving and flowing over the dam as well as turning the adjacent mill machinery as it does at the Hamilton Bros. mill in Glen Huron, in this case the mill was at the far opposite end of the pond from the dam and drawing water from well below the surface to power the machinery. I have my own mental image of the Raglan St. mill pond from the early 1950's when one day, riding in the car with my mother going south on Raglan St. past the pond where it came right out to the edge of the road, I had a glimpse of it and saw the stagnant surface. Hydro-electric power was available in Collingwood, first in 1912 from the Big Chute generating station on the Severn River and then, in 1915, also from Eugenia. The

nearby Collingwood Water Works Pumping Station switched from steam boilers to electricity at that latter date; the sawmill could have added electric power as well at that time.

Similar to the old quarry on Ontario St., the site now a children's playground and sports field known as "Old Village (Legion) Park" adjacent to the Royal Canadian Legion and stretching from Ontario St. to Erie St., the mill pond and/or the dam that created the mill pond for the sawmill on Raglan St. was a popular place for young people to go swimming (and skating in the winter). Seward Herrington in his memories of the east end said,

In winter this pond became a good skating place...where the river used to flow, was the Mill Dam. After they changed the course of the river, there was no mill pond or water going over the dam. The water, at the dam, when we were kids, was quite deep and that was our first swimming place in the spring.

Given Mr. Herrington's year of birth of 1917, the expression "when we were kids" would indicate the late 1920's into the 1930's. His statement about the course of the river being changed probably refers to the 1970's when the Pretty River Parkway was built and changes were made to the river for flood control. As for there being no mill pond anymore and no water going over the dam "where the river *used* to flow", it was a case of "they moved the river away". An aerial photo on the website of Ainley & Associates after the river had been freshly diked for flood control in the 70's and before the greenery grew up along the banks, shows the riverbed straight as a ruler in places with an almost 90 degree bend out behind the Bay Haven Care Community which suggests it was altered from its original contours. That same

photo shows an area west of the river—which is all houses now—having a meandering line of trees which suggests that those trees grew along the original river bank where the dam was. Compare this “engineered” river course with a view of the Pretty River in the Nottawa area on Google Maps Satellite View that shows the riverbed twisting and turning like a snake. [And now, in September 2021, comes the news from the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority that the dense vegetation that has grown up along the banks of the Pretty River dykes for the last 50 years needs a major pruning and cleanup because that growth is impeding the flow of water adjacent to the banks and could potentially cause the river to overflow during a major storm. The work is to begin this fall and continue in 2022.]

The way to Leggatt’s dam of long ago was accessed by a path from Raglan St. through the trees to the swimming area. Something more than swimming also took place at the mill pond. Half a century ago when I played piano in the Ladies & Escorts Beverage Room at the Mt. View Hotel, the women of the Wednesday evening Ladies Bowling League would come in for drinks after they finished bowling. They loved to sing and one of their favourite songs was *Blueberry Hill* for which they had their own version of the words. The song, as written, ends with the words, “Though we’re apart, you’re part of me still, for you were my thrill, on Blueberry Hill”. The bowling ladies changed the ending to, “...For you were my thrill, BEHIND LEGGATT’S MILL!” with ear-to-ear grins and great emphasis and volume on the last three words. The song *Blueberry Hill* was introduced in 1940 and I think we can assume that the thrills that occurred behind Leggatt’s Mill may have happened in the 1930’s when these women were in their teenage years. I’ll leave it to the reader to guess what happened.

Leggatt's mill pond was also the site of an unplanned huge catch of fish. Jack McAllister, whose father was the Collingwood Fire Chief from 1923 to 1962, told me about a fire at the sawmill circa the late 1940's or early 1950's when the fire department pumped water out of the mill pond to fight the fire. They lowered the water level in the mill pond to such an extent that "they were able to catch enough trout to store them in the suction hose [of the fire truck] until they got back to the fire hall. Everyone had enough to have a good feed!" According to a reliable source, there were also water snakes in the mill pond that deterred girls from swimming there.

Even in the 1950's the area along Raglan St. was largely undeveloped. A photograph taken by Jack Saunders from an airplane at that time shows that not far east of Peel St. the land was largely empty. The quarry on Ontario St., about 40 feet deep, had filled with water and the brave ones swam there, many without their parents' knowledge. Erie St. stopped at Niagara St. and did not go all the way through to Raglan St. A map from 1888 that can be found on page 95 of Christine Cowley's book *Butchers, Bakers & Building The Lakers* shows the mill pond was somewhat lengthy and for part of that length south of the mill it came right up to the edge of Raglan St. before veering south-east to beyond where Erie St. would later intersect Raglan. All evidence points to the location of the dam that diverted water from the river into the mill pond being in the general area of where the river turns east near the bridge on the Pretty River Parkway. That area that for over 100 years was the mill pond is now home to the Pretty River Parkway built in 1971 and to the houses on the east side of Raglan St. south of Leggatt's old house (#42) and those on Shannon Court.

The sawmill continued operating through the 1950's as **Collingwood Saw Mills** and I recall seeing a truck lettered with that name driving around town when I was young. I suspect that the sawmill provided the stacks of rough lumber that were used at the Collingwood Terminals for closing off the doors of the railway boxcars used for transshipment of prairie grain. This is detailed in my September 2019 story about the Collingwood Terminals. By the time of the 1962 Voters List, William Leggatt (1877-1969) was listed as "retired" (at age 85), nevertheless, mill employees were still cashing their pay cheques at the Toronto-Dominion bank in the early 60's. Mr. Leggatt had been succeeded by Melvin Fisk up to at least 1967 and Fisk's product was wooden 6 quart fruit baskets. Considering that the Pretty River Parkway was built in 1971, the mill could not have lasted much beyond the late sixties.

I have heard from a couple of people who lived in that part of town 60 years ago before the river was diverted and they tell me that there remained a couple of cement abutments, one on either side of the river, at the site of Leggatt's dam, but there was nothing in between them. Young people also went there to watch not only the trout, but also the suckers running; they were so thick one could almost walk across the river on them. One resident took them to C.C.I. Science class for dissection. The Blue Mountain Watershed Trust states that the Pretty River's base is solid limestone south of the Parkway. When the river was altered for flood control, the riverbed was dug down to rock which eliminated some of the pools where the fish could rest on the trek upstream. After the fact, the river bed was dynamited in places to recreate the pools. One can now watch Rainbow Trout running in the spring and Chinook Salmon running in the fall.

The 1875 *Poetical Directory of Collingwood* includes mention of a **Brick Yard** on Raglan St. (also spelled *Ragland* at the time), **Proprietor, P. Doherty**. If Mr. Doherty's brick yard was still operating in 1881, he would have had many contractors clamouring for his bricks as the rebuilding of the first block of Hurontario St. began following the Great Fire. Another industry on Raglan St. was **William Foster's Cooperage** in the old Village ("near the mill") where blocks of elm wood were fashioned into barrels. Also in the old village was **Alexander Cameron's Brewery**.

Another landmark on Raglan St. beginning in 1889 was the Collingwood **Waterworks Pumping Station** providing another smokestack on the skyline. The pumps were powered by steam boilers until electric power from Eugenia Falls became available circa 1915. The pumping station is still located here in modern times in the form of the **Raymond Barker Water Treatment Plant**.

One place on Raglan St. that will be remembered by many older Collingwood residents was the **Dominion Fish Hatchery** opened in 1912 just where the road at Sunset Point curves around onto Raglan St. The hatchery raised whitefish and closed in 1957. It can be seen from the foregoing that Raglan St. in the "Old Village" hosted a surprising number of industries in Collingwood's early days, all of them just a memory now except for the town's waterworks.

Collingwood once had many pioneer industries located in many different parts of town; now they are replaced with residences, resorts and commercial/retail enterprises.

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