



LUMBER, BACON, NAILS, AIRPLANE PARTS, PLYWOOD AND FINE FURNITURE

H. David Vuckson

The land adjacent to the shore in the north-west corner of Collingwood's harbour and north of Black Ash Creek, now host to residential developments, a resort and marinas, was, from the late 19th Century until, in one instance, 2005, the site of a number of important industries with products as diverse as lumber, bacon, nails and wire, airplane parts, knock-down plywood furniture for England and fine furniture for the domestic market. Our story begins in the 1890's.

The Collingwood Packing Co. Ltd., established 1894

At the end of Harbour St. East, out behind and to the north of the former site of Kaufman Furniture and the Kaufman House Showroom, was the site of the Collingwood Packing Co. Ltd., about where the Living Shore Spa/Lakeside Seafood And Grill

and Southwinds Marina are today. It was a slaughter house that processed hogs into bacon. A Grand Trunk Railway siding facilitated the delivery of an average of thirty carloads of hogs a week via the railway branch line that came into town along Walnut St. from Beeton Junction, the train delivering the hogs being referred to by locals as “The Hog Special” and the area surrounding the plant referred to as “Hog Town”. Collingwood bacon was so highly regarded that it was exported to England. The Collingwood Packing Company was active from about 1894 to 1913. They had massive brick buildings and their own wharf out into the harbour. In 1912 they exhibited their products at the Great Northern Exhibition but shortly after, on October 12th, the plant was the victim of a fire. Months later in 1913 the firm went bankrupt. The buildings remained vacant until they burned down on August 6, 1916 as confirmed by David Williams in the Huron Institute Papers, Vol. III.

The Charlton Sawmill, established 1900 (closed and buildings demolished by June 1917)

On the north side of Harbour St. East, beyond the Collingwood Meat Packing plant and stretching to White’s Bay, stood the Charlton Sawmill Company, Ltd., owned by John and Thomas Charlton. This mill was serviced by four Grand Trunk Railway sidings. The company owned stands of timber on the north shore of Georgian Bay and in the Algoma district, the log booms

being towed to Collingwood by their own tugs. This mill was originally operated by Christie, Kerr & Co., then by Kennedy & Co. (also spelled Kanady) in the 1870's and, after Charltons, by Robert Emerson. John Charlton died in February 1910 at his home in the village of Lynedoch, Norfolk County, Ontario. The firm carried on for a few more years but was gone by 1917. A 1911 issue of *Canada Lumberman And Woodworker* had this to say about Charlton's sawmill:

The Charlton Sawmill Company, Limited, Collingwood, Ont., were rather late this year in getting their logs to the mill, and only started sawing early in July. The company have a very up-to-date mill, the equipment of which includes two single cutting band saws, and the capacity of which is from 75,000 to 100,000 feet per day. They have an excellent system of yards, so planned as to be specially adapted for dry lumber without staining. Their equipment includes two large lake tugs with boom equipment. This year they are sawing a large amount of lumber for A. Tait, of Orillia, Ont. Mr. F. R. Roginson is manager and secretary-treasurer of the company, and Mr. E. J. Ryan, mill manager.

Imperial Steel & Wire Co., established 1905

This business existed in two different locations, the first of which was on Harbour St. West adjacent to the Grand Trunk

Railway tracks going to Meaford (now the Georgian Trail) and now the site of the Cranberry Golf Course. This was a vast series of buildings that produced nails, wire, staples, fencing and poultry netting and the wooden kegs and boxes to ship them in. A railway siding brought in raw material and shipped out finished product. The buildings covering several acres burned down on Sunday, May 25, 1919. Fire protection was grossly inadequate with the nearest fire hydrant being 3000 feet away. The loss was said to be “well over a quarter of a million dollars” but the company vowed to rebuild. This site later became home to the town dump, Harbour St. West being the dirt road access to the dump.

We now return to the east side of High/Balsam Street/Highway 26. In 1920 the Imperial Steel and Wire Co. hired local architect Philip Coles Palin to design a new factory which would stand until 2005 and be occupied by three very different businesses for the next 85 years. David Williams recorded that his father William Williams (of C.C.I. fame) in his capacity of Deputy Reeve of Collingwood Town Council, turned the first sod for the new nail factory on September 15, 1920. The new facility opened in November 1921 but it was too little, too late. Despite the firm’s reputation and the quality of its products, the business closed in 1925. The building would sit vacant and derelict for 15 years until 1940 when the Second World War brought it to life again.

Collingwood author Ruth Carmichael Bryan (1923-1975), sister to Ted and Scotty Carmichael, saw the derelict building first-hand during the 1930's Depression as a girl when on an outing with her father to explore Black Ash Creek adjacent to the nail factory property. In her collection of stories *Tales Of Collingwood*, published by the *Enterprise-Bulletin* in 1967, she recalled,

*Just by the old nail works, dad steered the bike to the side of the road and dismounted. He lifted me from the seat and dropped the bike against the side of the ditch. The startled grasshoppers whirred into flight. He took my hand and we leaped the ditch together. The nail works had been closed for many years. It was a shell of a building, the skylights broken, the frames rusted. Dad held me up to look through a window. It was a moment of thrilling horror for I expected to see at least one violently murdered corpse. But there were only the weeds and the soft witch grass growing through the cracks in the concrete floor, the tinkling sound of a sparrow running across the broken glass, and the breeze sighing amid the wreckage. (From the story *Glory InThe Flower*)*

It is remarkable that this building survived as an abandoned shell for so many years without succumbing to fire, although I'm sure that local boys used the windows and the saw tooth roofline skylights for target practice with stones. It is also very

fortunate that the building survived because it came back to life in a very important way during the Second World War. Because of the Depression, no one had bothered to pay property taxes on the site and by the early 1940's, the Town was happy to sell it off for the back taxes. The derelict building soon became a beehive of activity for the war effort known as Clyde Aircraft Manufacturing Company Limited which, at its peak, would have 575 employees, making it the second largest employer in Collingwood after the Shipyard.

Clyde Aircraft Manufacturing Company Limited, established 1940

Clyde was founded by Julian Harcourt Ferguson (1895-1965), a World War I Veteran, who entered the insurance business after that war. During the Second World War years 1942, 1943 and 1944 he served on the Town Council as Deputy Reeve and Councillor. He would later serve as Progressive Conservative Member Of Parliament for Simcoe North (1945-1957). Later still, he would convert his insurance office building on Hurontario St. into the Dorchester Hotel in 1960 when the Global Insurance business was transferred to Toronto.

At the time of Clyde's founding in 1940, the Collingwood Shipyard was working around the clock to build Corvettes, Minesweepers, Tankers, and other ships for the war effort

while Clyde Aircraft, with 65,000 square feet of floor space on one level, was making parts for airplanes as well as other war materiel in the old nail factory. George A. C. Bear, from Toronto, was brought in as President and General Manager and he lived in the building that, years later, became the Kaufman House Showroom.

The company had a newsletter called *Clyde News—For The Employees—About The Employees—By The Employees*, the masthead showing a twin engine plane. With many young women working at Clyde, some under age 20, there was a “Collingwood War Worker Queen” beauty contest in 1942, the winner Miss Mary Helen Lawrence and two other finalists showing lots of leg.

During this time, the Victory Village “wartime houses” were built as rental accommodation for the influx of wartime workers who came to town to work at Clyde and at the Shipyard. During the winter months when my father was not sailing, he helped to build those houses. With the end of wartime manufacturing in late 1945, the Clyde operation ended but soon the building reinvented itself to become Globe Plywood Ltd.

Globe Plywood Limited, established 1946

This business was a joint collaboration between the Government of Ontario and the British Board of Trade to

produce pre-fabricated plywood (“laminated”) furniture in the form of bedroom suites for the post-war rebuilding of Britain after the devastation of the German air raids. The furniture was shipped to England in dis-assembled form and then assembled and finished at its destination. Production began in July 1946 with the first shipment dispatched in August. The operation was managed by A. R. Kaufman (1885-1979) of Kitchener, whose Kaufman Rubber Company Limited, established in 1907 in Berlin, Ontario (renamed Kitchener during World War I), manufactured rubber footwear (including Kaufman “Foamtreads” slippers from 1953 onward—the brand that I still wear). A. R. Kaufman was succeeded by his son William H. Kaufman (1920-2005). In the early post-war era circa 1948, the Kaufman Rubber Co. also had a factory in Collingwood on Pine St. located in the 1898 building that was originally home to the Collingwood Curling Club, followed by the Collingwood Skating Rink. About 1956, and for a few years after, the building hosted the Martin-Baker Aircraft Co. Ltd. and, later, Blue Mountain Pottery, and later still, it became a parking lot.

For dimensional stability in the product, the climate in the plywood factory was kept to a constant humidity of 70% [!] by large humidifiers to match the dampness of the English climate where central heating, as we know it, was not common in that era. What *was* common at the time was for open coal fires

burning in a grate in different rooms in the houses and not every room was heated. Most homes were cold/damp compared to the comfortable temperatures we take for granted and coal dust was everywhere. At this point in time I find it fascinating to watch some elderly British people still shut the door every time they enter or leave a room, a habit they learned when young to keep the heat in the room that was being heated by the lump of coal burning in the fireplace. This manufacturing care taken by Globe Plywood was designed to counteract the English dampness to prevent the finished product from warping.

My father Dan had been a sailor on the Great Lakes on the steamships of the Algoma Central Railway fleet since the mid 1930's first as a Deck Hand, then a Wheelsman on the *Algocen* and, by 1942, a Second Mate on the *Algosteel*. For various reasons—some economic (sailing was a seasonal occupation for about eight months of the year at the time), and some family-related (pressure from family members)—he quit sailing after the war and got a job at Globe Plywood in 1946 earning 55 cents an hour. While there he tangled with a saw blade that took off the tip of an index finger. He was rushed to the G & M Hospital with the severed piece wrapped in a handkerchief to have it sewed back on. He worked at Globe for about a year until there was a layoff when the initial order for England had been filled. He then began working at the Shipyard in June

1947, putting in 33 years of shipbuilding until he retired in 1980. For many years my father had a baseball bat that had the Globe Plywood logo engraved on it, a souvenir from the baseball team sponsored by Globe. When Globe's contract with England ran out in 1948, the old factory re-invented itself once again (and for the last time) to become Kaufman Furniture making furniture for the domestic market. For many years thereafter, people still referred to Kaufman's as "The Plywood". Its steam whistle, a distinctly different sound from the Shipyard whistle could be heard in the south end of town.

Kaufman Furniture, established 1948

Kaufman's was the last business (with extensive modern additions) to operate in the old nail factory. Kaufman Furniture Collingwood Limited was incorporated on November 18, 1948, its Registered Office Address being 410 King St. West, Kitchener. The CNR serviced the factory with two railway sidings for bringing in raw lumber and shipping out product before trucks took over. In 1963 a 2-storey brick house out back of the factory, said to have been the only structure of the old Collingwood Meat Co. plant that did not burn down in 1916, was greatly altered in its appearance and covered with siding to be transformed into "Kaufman House", an elegant showroom for the products of the factory with each room in the house decorated differently. It was so popular that groups of people

came to tour through the house to get decorating ideas for their homes.

Like my father before me, I too worked at the furniture factory. I had a job at Kaufman's following Grade 13 in the summer of 1966 (there were no openings at the Shipyard that summer) before heading off to York University in September. My job was cutting up long sticks of wood that would be made into chair legs. It was a relatively simple procedure except for the fact that many of the sticks had multiple knots within the required length and it was impossible to get an intact chair leg blank out of them. One day I was so exasperated I went to the foreman and said to him, "I'd like to see you make chair legs out of these!" Whereas my father earned 55 cents per hour in 1946 when it was Globe Plywood, twenty years later I earned \$1.10 at Kaufman's, exactly double.

In 1965 two disastrous industrial fires occurred just down the road from Kaufman's. On May 29th, Georgian China was totally destroyed and three days later, Quinlan-Crawford across from Georgian China also suffered a major fire. It had been only two years since Collingwood's beautiful Carnegie Library had been destroyed in an arson fire and speculation was rampant in town that an arsonist was active. Some people at Kaufman's wondered if they were next, especially when it became known that the volume and pressure of the water supply in that part of

town had proved to be woefully inadequate for firefighting during the Georgian China and Quinlan fires. Speculation notwithstanding, the Ontario Fire Marshal's office determined that both fires were not suspicious and just an unfortunate coincidence. Kaufman's worked out a contingency plan to pump water from Black Ash Creek which bordered the south end of their property in the event of a fire. Since the creek emptied into the harbour nearby, there was an unlimited amount of water available if needed.

There was an earlier incidence of attempted arson at Kaufman's. On the same day of a serious arson fire at the Imperial Oil Tank Farm just across Black Ash Creek from Kaufman's (Sunday, August 26, 1951), evidence was found of an attempt to burn down Kaufman's factory. A former employee of Kaufman's was charged with arson in these incidents.

As detailed in my December 2020 story about the Georgian China and Quinlan-Crawford fires, the Town of Collingwood made significant improvements to the water supply in the area following these fires and those improvements would be needed in a few more years. In July 1971 Kaufman's had a fire in the finishing rooms that was quickly handled by the Collingwood Fire Department. A much more intense fire broke out at 3:00 a.m. on April 25, 1972, and spread to an adjoining warehouse. This fire was so severe that Stayner and Wasaga Beach Fire

Departments were called in to assist. The following account is from *Ordeal By Fire—A History Of The Collingwood Fire Department 1852-2005* by Douglas G. Skelding:

The fire had started in the finishing department and had spread to an adjoining warehouse. Furniture in various stages of assembly, furniture stored in cartons and stored cardboard and packing material [the same items that fueled the fires at Georgian China and Quinlan-Crawford], fed the fire that eventually burst through the roof of the warehouse. The warehouse sprinkler system was in operation all this time and this plus the water poured into the building by firefighters eventually drowned the fire. The fire was finally brought under control about half-past nine. Stayner firefighters left the scene around eleven-o-clock but Wasaga Beach firefighters remained until half-past twelve. The Collingwood Fire Department stayed on the scene for the rest of the day in case of re-ignition. The origin of the fire was not discovered, however a representative of the Ontario Fire Marshal's office was called in to investigate.

Despite this huge setback, Kaufman Furniture recovered and soldiered on for over 30 more years, their furniture being sold far and wide in Canada and even in the United States. In August 1983, William H. Kaufman embarked on the development of what is known as Mariner's Haven, a residence and marina development out behind where the factory and

Kaufman House were located. Two berms of just under 1050 feet in length were built out from the shore in an east-west direction for residential development. The gap for boats on the east end was closed off temporarily and the enclosed area pumped out in order to excavate the marina basin, all of this accomplished by December 15, 1983. Two wooden rudders from 19th century wooden ships that had burned and sank in this part of the harbour were among the souvenirs that were reclaimed from the bottom of the harbour. The newly made land was allowed to settle and the first homes were constructed with the owners moving in in January 1987.

Kaufman Furniture was sold in 2000 to Krug Inc., a furniture company founded in 1886. Krug had plans to introduce a new line of furniture. The work continued for a few more years and then Krug closed down the factory in 2005 putting 130 people out of work. Harkening back to the demise of the core of this building when it was the nail factory in 1925, the furniture factory sat empty for a few years until the Town ordered it demolished. Demolition of the buildings began in late March 2008; the last item to go was the iconic smokestack which fell to the wrecking ball on May 20, 2008. It was substantially built and looked like it could stand forever, but in one hour it was all rubble. For people driving into town from the west, the Kaufman smokestack was an indicator of “home” as is the view

of the Collingwood Terminals grain elevator in the distance for people driving over the crest of the hill at Duntroon.

William Kaufman died in October 2005. It was merciful that he did not live to see the furniture factory that he and his father before him had presided over demolished, however, his legacy of Mariner's Haven lives on. The area once occupied by the industries in this story from the 1890's to 2005 is nearly all built up with homes and resorts now after being heavily industrial a century ago. The streetscape changes, only the land remains. Next month we will look at more vintage industries that were located both in the south-east area of the harbour (where there is now considerably more land than the original pioneers encountered) and on Raglan St. in Collingwood's "Old Village".

David Vuckson is a great-grandson of pioneer Collingwood merchant R. W. O'Brien. His roots in town go back to 1875. David and his wife Pamela live in Victoria, B.C.