

# Sports

## Cobourg Horse Shows

### *Rivalling Even Toronto*

Nowadays we like to think that Cobourg can hold its own among Canadian towns in a variety of sports: hockey, softball, lawn bowling... But there was a time when **Cobourg rivalled even the biggest cities** - with its Horse Shows. In 1914, for instance, over 10,000 spectators crowded Horse Show Park for the four day event - over 1,000 coming by ferry from Rochester, N.Y.

These big shows of the twentieth century had a long history. **As early as 1833** visitors came to exhibit and, if possible, sell their horses at the Cobourg Horse Show. It was the agricultural economy rather than sports and entertainment that was the impetus for these early shows.

But by the turn of the century visiting Americans brought with them a new attitude that received an enthusiastic response from their northern hosts. In the late 1800s wealthy industrialists from Pittsburgh and other U.S. cities began to claim Cobourg as their summer home, build hotels and then their own mansions. **Some even brought their own stables of horses** with them, and soon the idea of a horse show to be held in the empty fields on D'Arcy Street emerged.

The first of these shows, in 1905, was not big, with only twelve classes offered *“including jumping, saddle, and a visitors’ livery class open to horses hired for the season by Cobourg residents and visitors.”* But the event was a great success and grew every year from then until 1914.



3rd Place Cup 1922 - “Bombardier”

#### Highlights from the boom years include:

**1905** - The first Cobourg Horse Show held on Monday, August 14 is *“surprisingly successful!”*

**1906** - Show expands to 3 days, 60 entries. Cobourg World calls it *“the greatest event of its time ever held east of Toronto.”*

**1908** - now 4 days and draws attendance over 6,000.

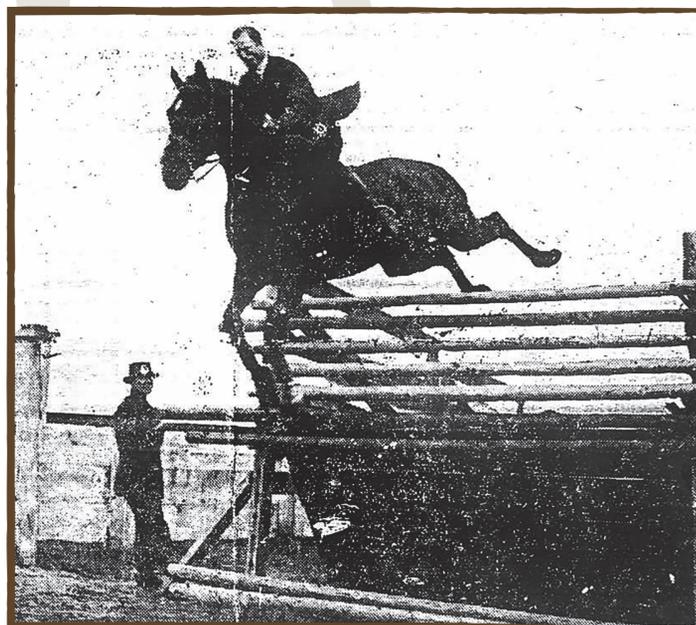
**1909** - a new stable to house 65 horses is built in the park.

**1912** - *Confidence*, owned by the Hon. Clifford Sifton, sets a **world high jump record of 7’10”**

**1914** - there are 600 entries - but with war declared this is the last show until 1919.



Horse Show at Horse Show Park



“Confidence”

Photos courtesy of the Cobourg Public Library

# Sports

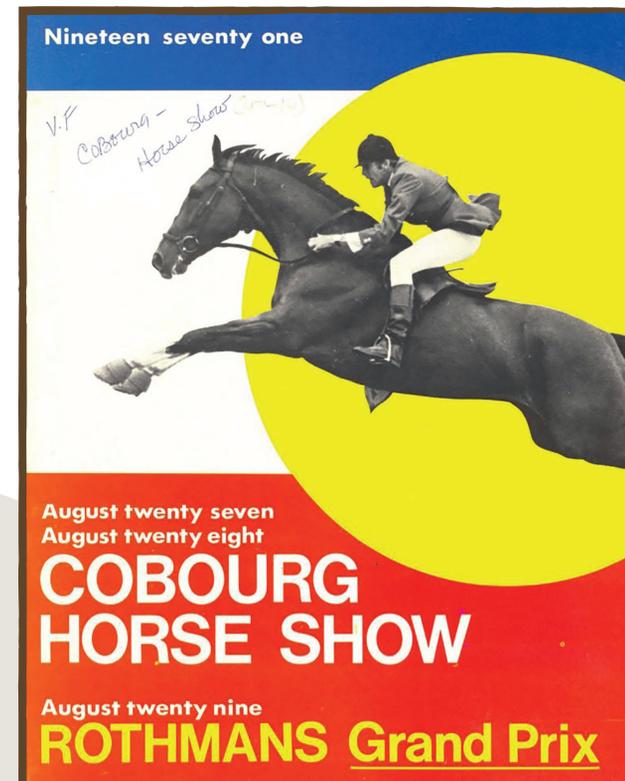
## Cobourg Horse Shows

From its humble beginnings, the event developed into much more than a horse show. "Horse Show Week" became **an opportunity for socializing on a grand scale**, with balls and garden parties, picnics, excursions and band concerts rivalling the show itself.

However, in 1915, with the Great War underway, the Show was put on hold and remained so until 1919. But by then the world was again a different place with the role of the horse very much in decline. The Great War had done much to discourage the high living of just a few years earlier. Many of the American socialites would not return. Nevertheless, the show did resume in 1919 but with much less fanfare.

By 1922 the Show warranted a full page report with pictures in the Evening Telegram of Toronto. But by 1926, according to the 1971 program, "**a small group of horsemen exhibited before a handful of spectators. The show could only be held in the evening after the now very popular polo matches. The Cobourg Horse Show years were over.**" Well, if not exactly over, then certainly in mothballs again- this time for forty-three years!

Under the leadership of Gordon Wright of Grafton's Wyvern Farms, and with the support of the Chamber of Commerce, the **Cobourg Horse Show was reborn on September 28, 1969.**



The last Cobourg Horse Show was held in 1976. **Cobourg was gradually losing its connection with its agricultural and social past**, and even the Shows as sporting events were unable to last. On the other hand, in 2016 **neighbouring Port Hope will be holding its 165th Agricultural Fair.**

**1969** - 5,000 attend a one day show with both English and Western divisions

**1970** - an Arabian division is added, the 33 acre grounds at the Army Depot are made available, and the show expands to three days including the Eastern Ontario Grand Prix highlighted by the Canadian Equestrian Team.

**1971** - the 26-page program lists **254 horses entered in the three divisions**, some competing in as many as nine classes

**1972** - 2,000 attend. "*There is no doubt about the future of the show... Everyone is enthusiastic about next year.*" Bill Gadd, Director.

**1973** - "Hundreds of horse lovers were in attendance" but the *Cobourg Star* concentrates on the visit of the Baltimore Hills Riding Club and the St. John's Ambulance Corps.



Buggies Ready and Waiting



Photos courtesy of the Cobourg Public Library