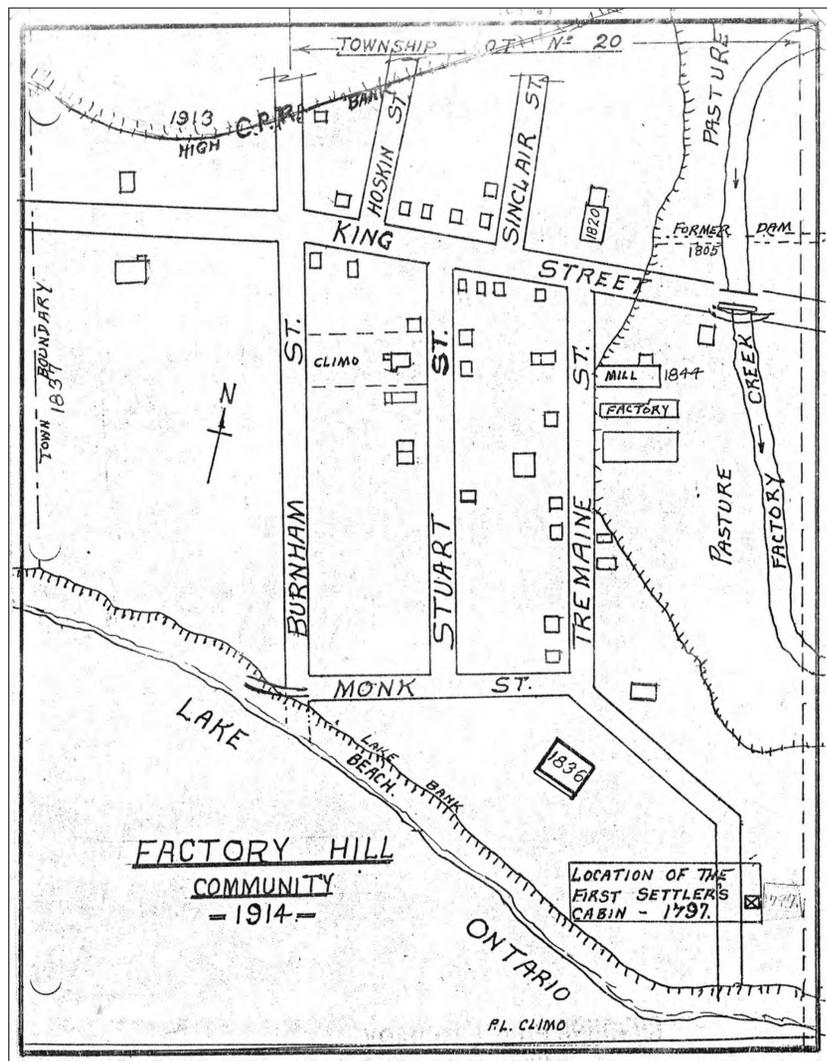


FACTORIES ON FACTORY CREEK

ONTARIO WOOLEN MILLS



Percy Climo, one of the area's prolific historians, tells us that **as early as 1797 there was settlement at the Tremaine Street area of Factory Creek.** "From later deeds and other information we know that our settler (Elias Jones) located his house to the west of the creek estuary, on rising ground and a short distance from the lake bank...His overland lane, northward to the Indian Trail, now King Street, later became Tremaine Street."

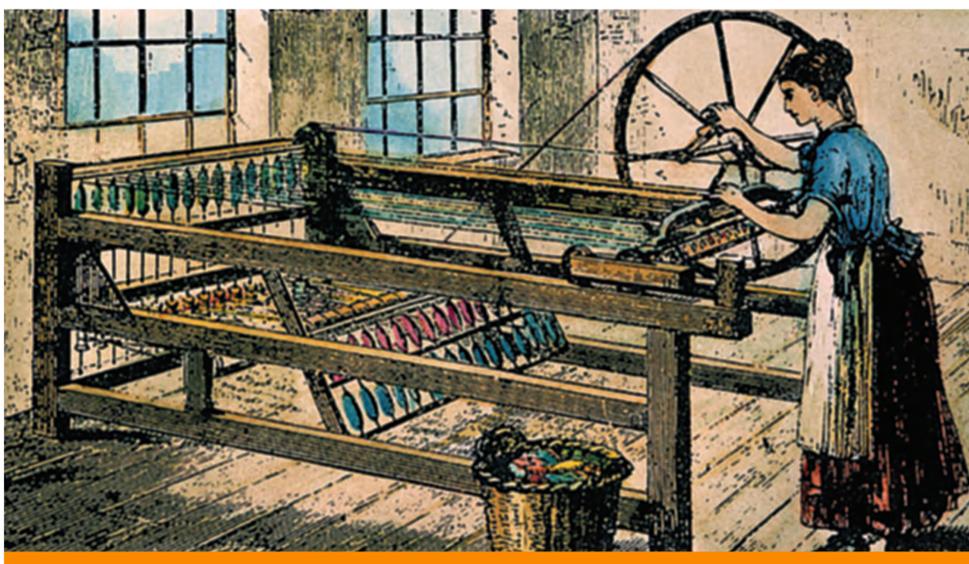
Factory Creek, also known as Cobourg Creek, has claimed other names too: Jones Creek, Harris Creek, Henry's Creek. Each name referred to a land owner, or his mill which used the flow of the creek's water to turn the wheels that powered the saws and millstones.

As early as 1820 one Robert Henry had built a grist mill on the southeast corner of King and Tremaine Streets. Various owners took over until 1843 when Captain Patrick Wallace and his nephews, the Mackechnie brothers, built a woolen mill there. At that time the Ontario Woolen Mills was the **largest woolen mill in British North America.**



The *Cobourg Star* of January 21, 1846 was **swept away with enthusiasm** for the new mill.

Altogether the Ontario Mills Woolen Factory is a most pleasant spectacle to look upon for all who feel an interest in the progressing advancement of Canada as a dependency of the British Crown, and... we entertain no doubt of its future and rapid prosperity.



The reporter goes on to describe the layout of the 4 1/2 story brick building in detail.

Ground Floor: *the magnificent water wheel*, pronounced by all scientific men who have seen it to be the finest ever constructed in this Province, also the fulling machinery, finishing room, and dye house.

Second Floor: *the weaving department*, a noble room running the whole length of the building, with that great invention of modern times, the Power Loom.

Third Floor: *the carding room*, with delicate and complicated machinery by which the wool is prepared from its rough state, and fitted for being spun into yarn.

Fourth Floor: *the spinning room*, also the whole length of the building, where Sir Richard Arkwright's wonderful invention, the Spinning Jenny, excites the admiration of the beholder.

Attic: *appropriated for drying the wool after it having been washed and dyed.*

In addition to the mill itself, **in the tradition of 19th century industrial England**, the Mackechnies subdivided neighbouring land for workers' cottages. Some still remain along King Street and Tremaine.

In 1847 the mill produced over 64,000 yards of cloth ranging from coarse cloth blankets to tweed, salinet and flannel. In 1848, the mill **won 12 prizes at the Provincial Agricultural Exhibition**. In 1850, 225,000 pounds of wool were consumed.



The *Cobourg Star* notwithstanding, not all went according to plan. Due to financial setbacks, in 1856 the mill was sold to Alexander Fraser.

As time passed, due in large part to the deforestation along the creek, water level and water flow fluctuated with the seasons. In 1864, after heavy spring rains, the banks broke at the Perry's Mill dam, Ontario & Elgin Streets. The waters rushed down the creek towards the lake, knocking out one bridge and dam after another.



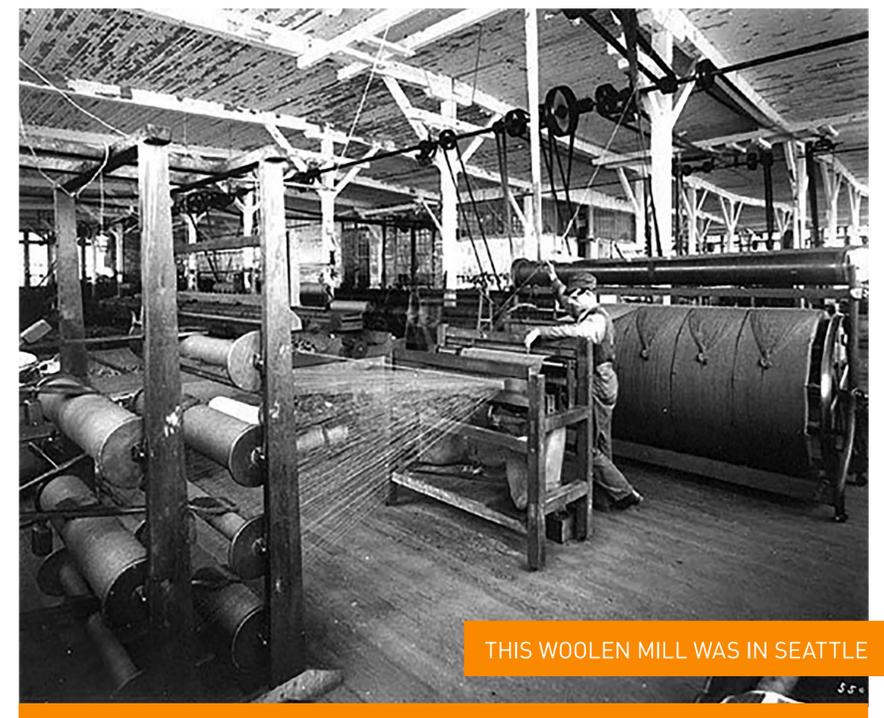
FACTORY CREEK JUST BEFORE IT ENTERS LAKE ONTARIO

Three Cobourg citizens, including one employed for seventeen years at the Woolen Mills, were swept to their deaths.

Fortunately, Fraser was able to bring the mill back to being Cobourg's most important industry, and in 1875 he sold it to the Rosamond family of Almonte. In 1882, they built a large addition together with a new building to the south at 180 Tremaine Street, both built with an infusion of capital from new partner John Routh.

About the turn of the century John Dick of Toronto bought both the Cobourg Woolen Mills and the Matting Factory, located up Factory Creek on Ontario Street. Shortly after, Dick **made a double switch, moving the matting factory to 180 Tremaine and moving the Woolen Mill Dye Works**, which by now made up more than one third of the mill, to the Ontario Street site.

Over the next few years, while the Cobourg Matting Factory flourished, the Ontario Woolen Mills gradually declined.



THIS WOOLEN MILL WAS IN SEATTLE

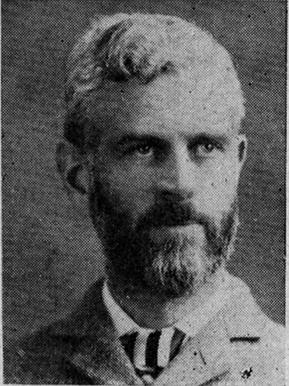
Historian Rob Mikel describes the Ontario Woolen Mills as "*pivotal in Cobourg's early economic, social, religious and cultural prosperity.*" It attracted many prominent people to the town and was significant not just locally but in the wider context of Upper Canada and later Ontario.

THE MATTING FACTORY

The **Cobourg Carpet, Mat, Matting and Manufacturing Company** was officially incorporated in July 1876. In February of that year a Provincial Act was passed "to enable the Corporation of the Town of Cobourg to aid a certain Manufacturing Company Known as the 'Cobourg Carpet, Matting and Manufacturing Company'". The business was originally **located on the west side of Ontario Street, beside Factory Creek**. In Cobourg's early days the Wallace family had operated a brewery there, and in 1985 **it became home to General Wire & Cable**.

Apparently the new company struggled at first but turned a corner after being bought by Toronto businessman William Mitchell in 1884. Cocoa matting made from cocoanut fibre was its chief product, and Cobourg was the only place in Canada where this product was made. W. Cochrane in *The Canadian Album (1891)* reports:

The cocoa matting which carpets the corridors of the Parliament Buildings at Ottawa and Toronto, and also nearly every other public building in Canada, was manufactured at the Cobourg matting factory... Here may be seen the manufacture of cocoa matting of all designs and in all stages, from the unpacking of the immense bales of cocoa and jute yarn, imported directly from India, and from the threading of the shuttle to the rolling of the finished fabric into webs ready for shipment.



**COBOURG
MATTING & CARPET
CO. LIMITED**

President—MRS. HENRY FULLERTON
*Vice-President and Managing
Director*—E. C. HILLIARD
Directors—J. W. HASTINGS
M. J. REDMOND
Secretary-Treasurer—
MISS C. A. McDONNELL

JOHN DICK
Founder

In addition to cocoa mats, the factory turned out rugs, presscloths, stockinettes and webbing.

As with most factories of the day, accidents happened at the Cobourg Matting factory. The *1888 Annual Report of the Ontario Inspector of Factories* contains the following report:

Young lad (16) supposed to have been trying to swing on small hand belt, 1 1/4 inch, hanging from main shaft when not in use, was carried around the shaft and falling on the ground broke his neck.

Edwin Guillet, in *Cobourg 1798-1948*, reports:

There was good ground for fear, in 1894, that a scheme of the Dominion Government to introduce mat-making into the Kingston Penitentiary would put the Cobourg plant out of business... The Sentinel-Star of February 2nd states that George Guillet, M.P., heard of the plan and used his influence to prevent it, saving the Cobourg industry from prison competition.

In 1905 John Dick bought the Matting Factory and soon after moved it to 180 Tremaine Street and moved the Dye Works to William Street.

Henry Fullerton, John Dick's son-in-law, took over management of the factory and a 1948 advertisement shows Mrs. Henry Fullerton as its President. Henry's son, **Jim, well known as a teacher, military man and Cobourg Town Councillor**, also spent time with the factory.

The Cobourg Matting and Carpet Company was later owned by Fred Wilson, James Redmond and one other partner. Wilson joined the company after returning from WWII and became a partner until he retired in 1983. It was sometime in the 1980s that the company ceased operations.