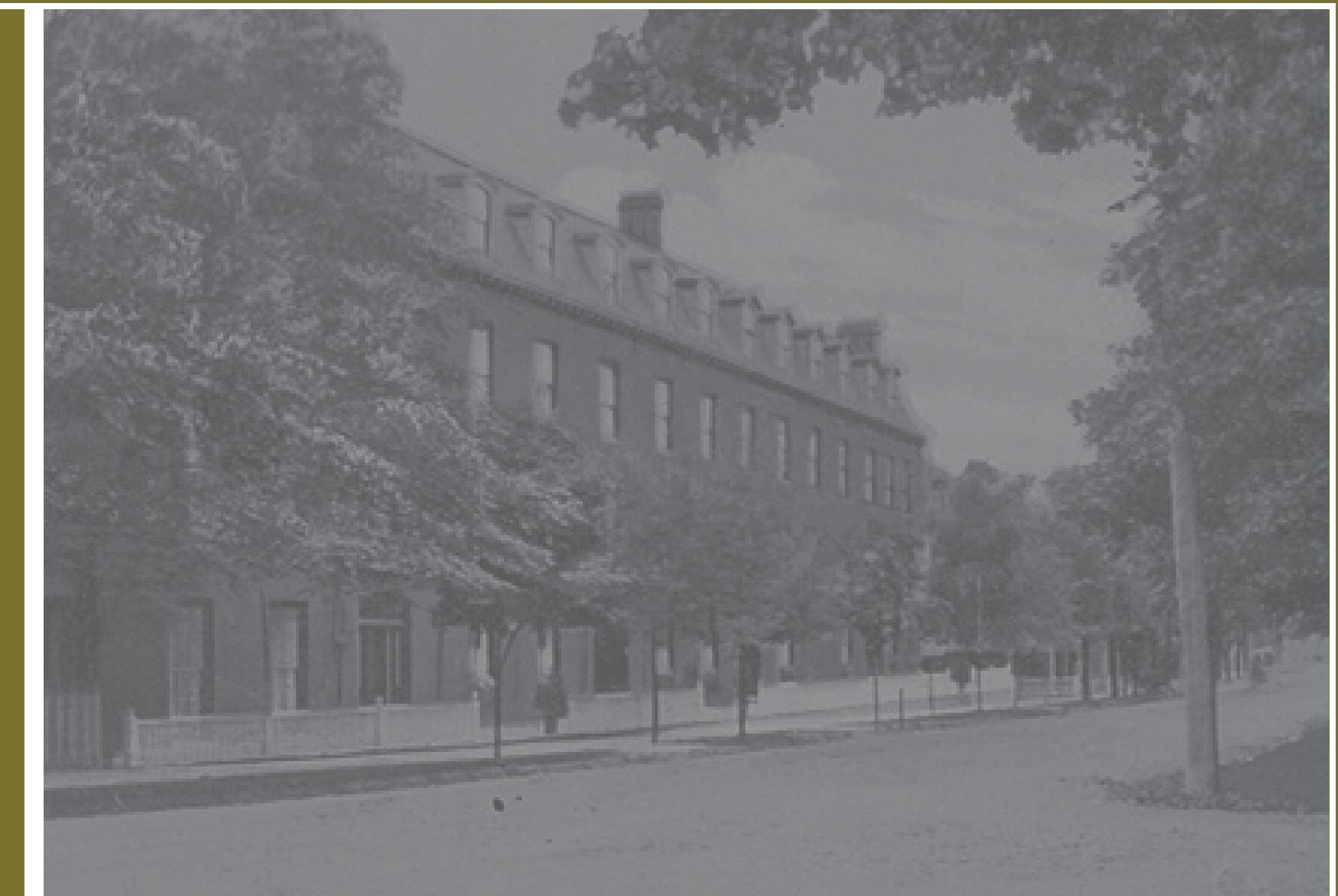


*"Cobourg is situated on a broad level valley, having Lake Ontario on its front, with green hills and fruitful orchards in the background. The summer climate of this region is unexcelled for its evenness of temperature and cool, bracing air, and is famous for the ozone, the quantity of sunshine, and freedom from fog, dampness or winds."*

*Souvenir of Cobourg, Ontario, Canada, 1910*

It was that sort of marketing which drew our neighbours from the south. Who could resist? Certainly, not the wealthy American visitors, who flocked to the Arlington Hotel upon its opening in 1874. They heralded the beginnings of...

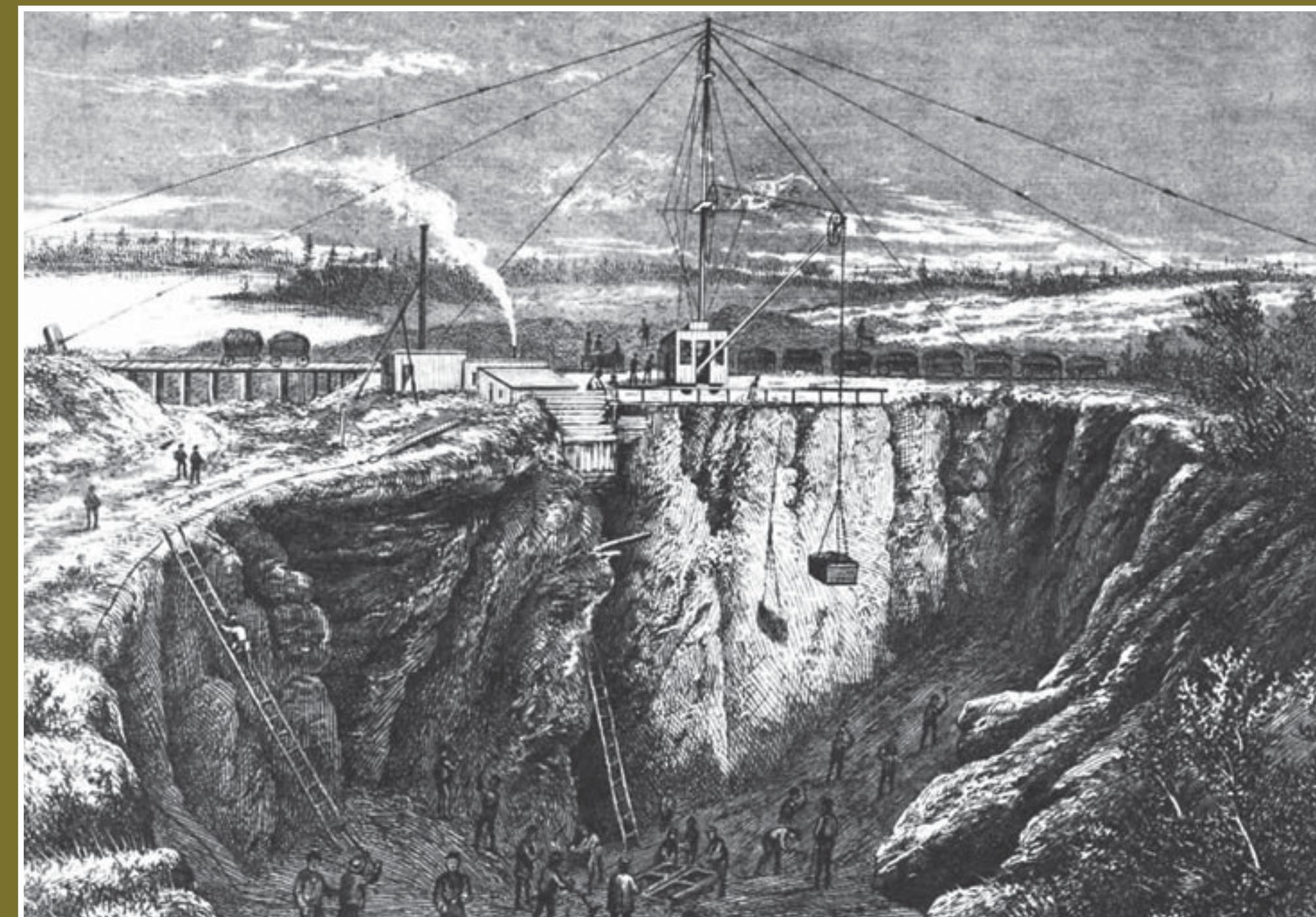


# Cobourg's American Summer Colony

## Who were these Americans?

Initially, they were wealthy **steel barons** from places like Pittsburgh and Cincinnati, who had made their money during the American Civil War and continued to accumulate wealth during the post war industrial revolution. One of the principals, George K. Schoenberger, was originally attracted to the area because of **the iron mines at Marmora and Blairton** about 50 miles north of Cobourg.

Others were **Civil War veterans from both sides** of the conflict. The confederates were attracted by the fact that it was an escape from the stifling heat of the south and they were not spending their money in the northern states. It has often been said that **many a Civil War battle was re-fought in the watering holes of Cobourg.** (*Cobourg: Early Days and Modern Times*, John R. Spilsbury (Ed.) 1981)



The Blairton Mine in Marmora in 1873

Courtesy of www.cobourghistory.ca

## Why Did They Come Here?

The Pittsburgh families' commercial interests gave them insight into the area's many attractions. Their clever marketing plan, focusing on **the area's fine attributes and the quality of the ozone, drew friends and acquaintances.** Gradually, through word of mouth, visitors from Buffalo, New York, Maryland and other points in the United States were drawn to Cobourg.

Hotel brochures also highlighted the benefit of Cobourg's excellent ozone as second only to that of the Alps of Switzerland. Although the beneficial effects of ozone were never proven, it certainly worked as a marketing tool in the late 19th century.

Gradually **Canadian families, from Montreal and Toronto also started to arrive** for the summer season, with Canadian and Americans intermingling, eventually leading to marriages between locals and the visitors.

# Where they Stayed

The summer visitors originally stayed at the new hotels that were built to accommodate the growing influx of tourists. These are just a few examples:



**The Arlington Hotel**, on the south side of King near the current Victoria Park, was the first and largest hotel built specifically to accommodate the US visitors. It contained 150 rooms of which 120 were bedrooms with private parlours. These were located on the top three floors. On the ground floor was a dining room, bar, games room, parlour, commercial rooms and barber shop along with the kitchens. **For over 40 years it was the centre of the summer colony.** After WWI its popularity declined and the hotel closed in the late 1920s. Following a small fire it was demolished in 1937.

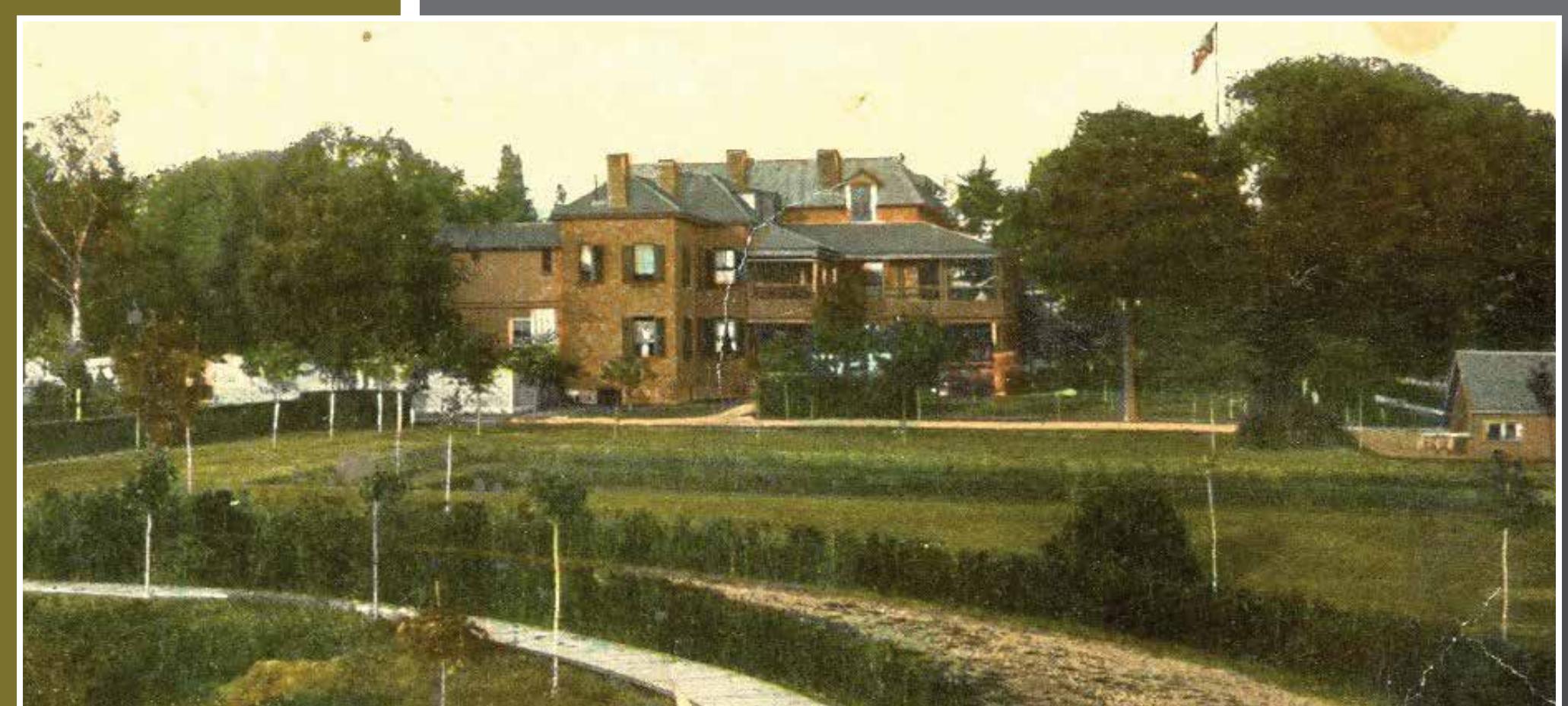
**Cedarmere** was on the lake shore at the foot of Love Lane (now Ontario Street). It was originally built by Arthur McBean, and later occupied by the Castle family. Mrs. Castle was a sister of the Hon. James Cockburn, Cobourg's Father of Confederation. James Crowther turned the home into a hotel which **was popular with both the wealthy American summer colony and the regular Cobourg society.** He owned the hotel for many years and hired someone to manage it. Cedarmere was demolished in 1933.

**The Columbian Hotel**, popularly known as "Cobourg's cosy summer resort",

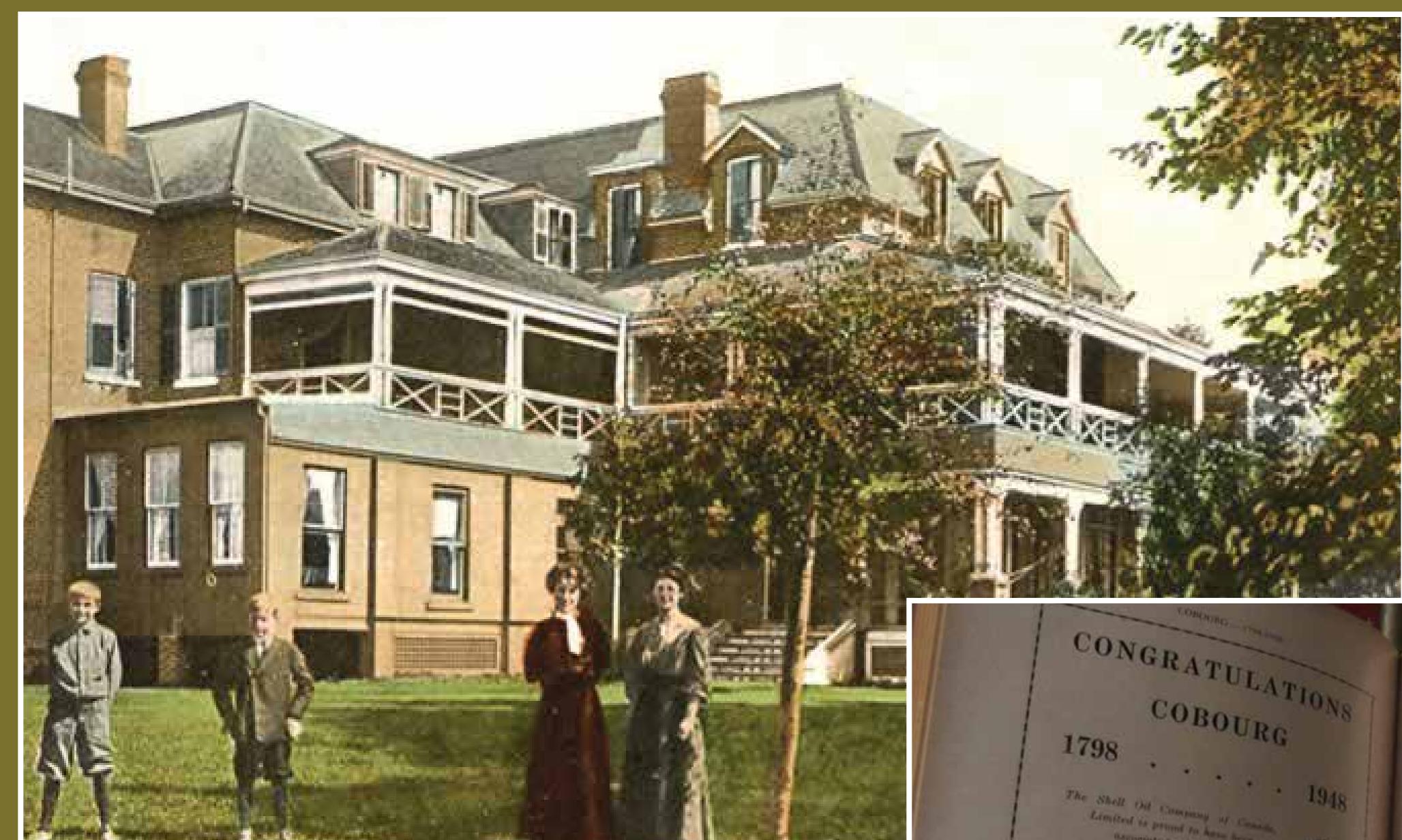
*was established in 1893, and the trade has so increased that it was necessary to add a large addition with excellent new dining rooms. The Columbian has two annexes, Lake View Lawn and the Baltimore. On Lake View Lawn are two first-class cottages containing, in both cottages about thirty rooms. The Baltimore is near the lake and has about twenty-five excellent sleeping rooms. All guests take their meals at the Columbian.*



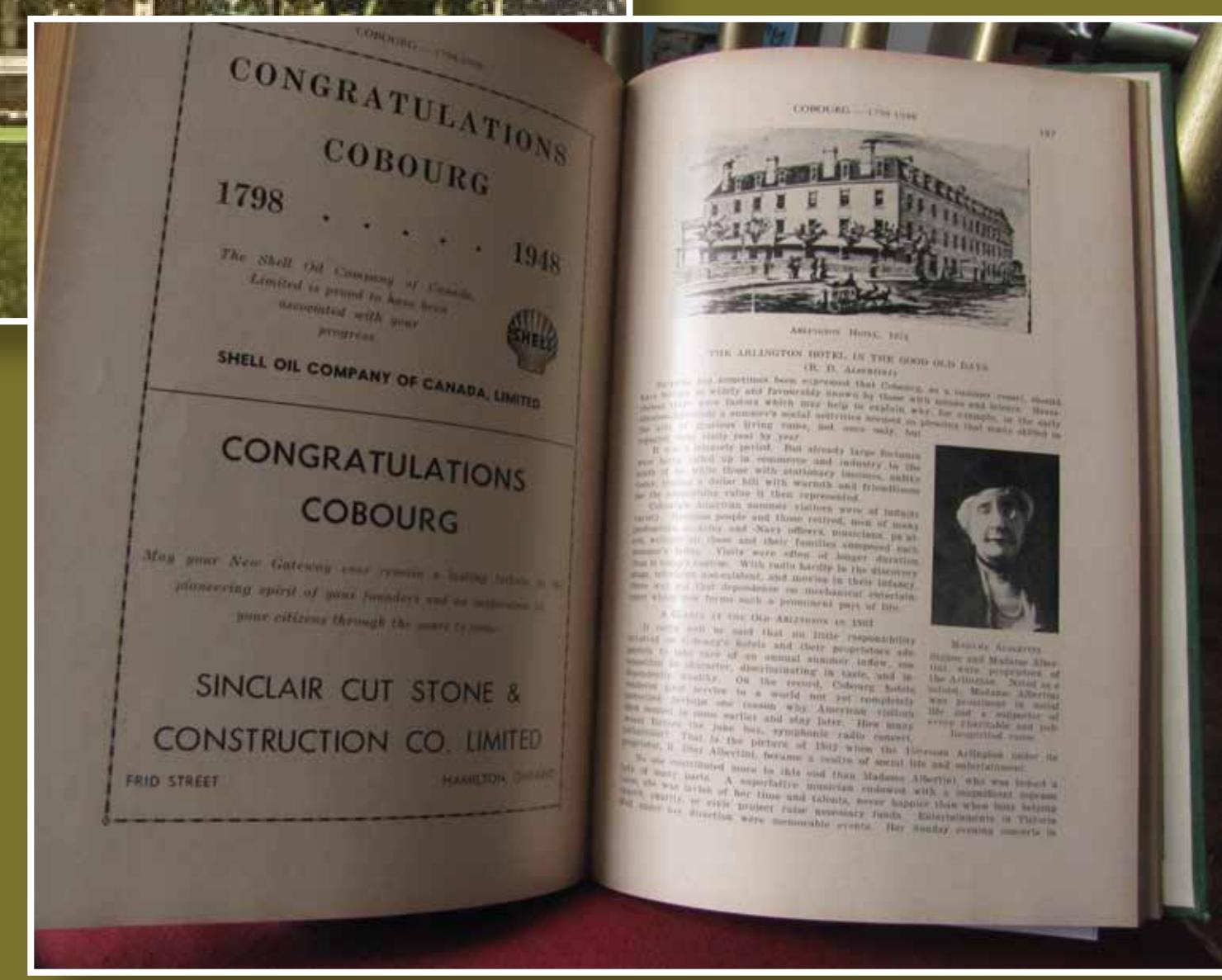
The Arlington Hotel



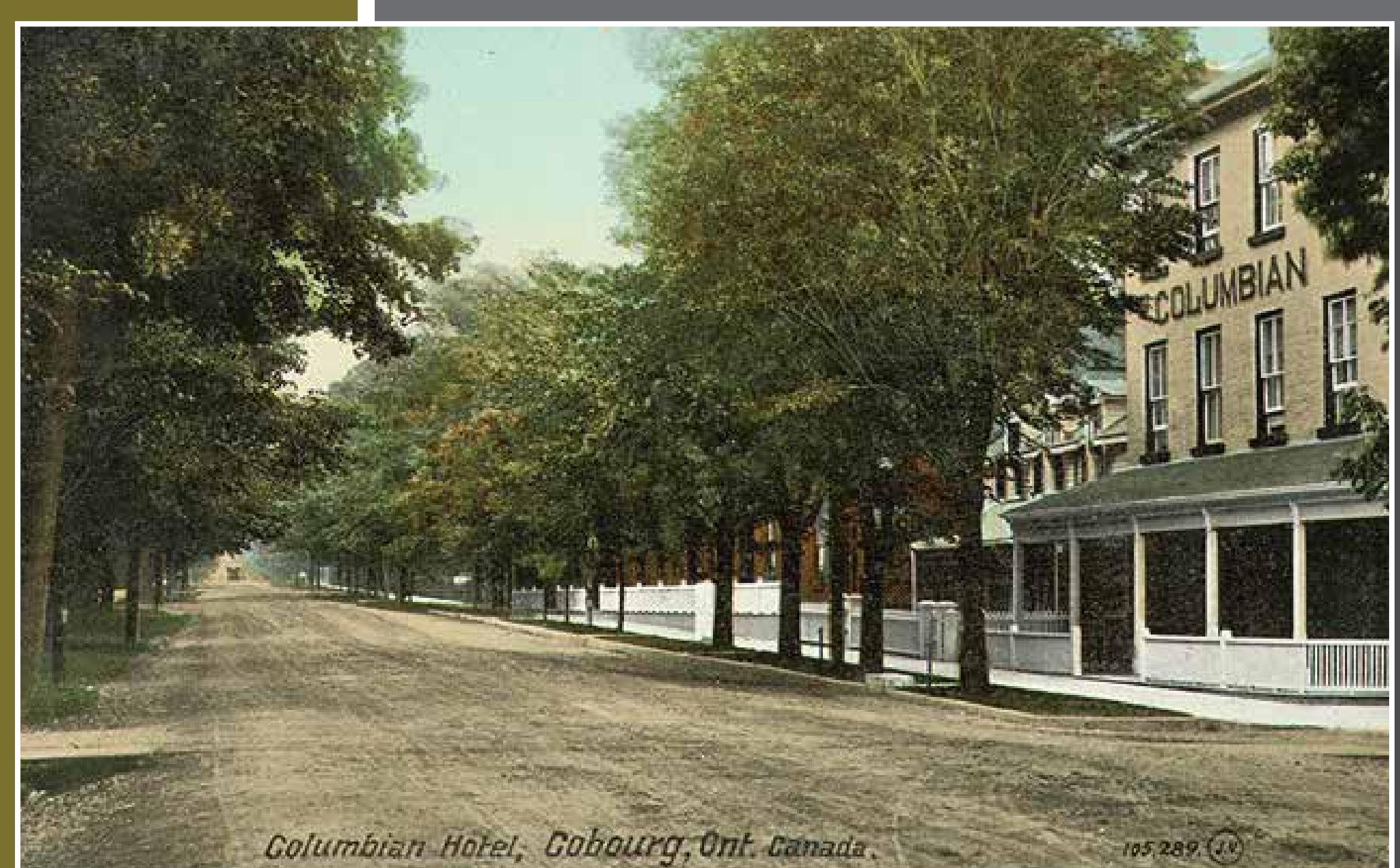
The Cedarmere Hotel



The Cedarmere Hotel



The Arlington Hotel - Cobourg: 1798 - 1948



The Columbian Hotel

# The Grand Homes

Around 1890 a change in style took place among the Americans. They started to rent summer residences and eventually bought or built their own grand residences. Some examples include:

**Sidbrook** was built in 1857 by Kivas Tully, the architect of Victoria Hall. Major David Campbell remodeled it in 1860 and in 1901 William Abbott enlarged and further remodeled it. Later it became the summer home of the Haas family of Toronto. It is a fine example of the style known as Beaux Arts Classical a popular style in the US at the close of the 19th century. It became a private hospital in 1952 and closed in 2002. It remains as a deteriorating relic of a storied past.

**Interlaken**, built by William Graveley in 1854, and originally known as the Maple Grove, was adjacent to Colonel Chambliss' home. In 1893 Signor Albertini and his wife, Madame Albertini, purchased Maple Grove and renamed it Interlaken. Mme. Albertini was a professional singer, and the couple became the very successful proprietors of the Arlington Hotel. In 1922 the house was sold, and in the late 1960s demolished to make way for the Roma Apartments

**East House**: General Charles Lane Fitzhugh was the youngest civil war general in the Union Army. The Fitzhughs were an old Virginia family of great wealth who spent much time in Cobourg. Charles built a pair of houses in 1902. Ravensworth he built for himself and his wife Emma Shoenberger, one of the wealthiest steel heiresses in the US. East House he built for his newly married son, Carroll. The Fitzhugh family owned the East House until it was destroyed by a fire on Christmas Day in 1976. Ravensworth, however, remains as a beautiful family home, now 115 years old.



Sidbrook



Interlaken



Easthouse



The Cobourg Horse Show



Tennis on Cornell lawn - c1905



Cornell/Pringle Wedding

# Entertainment

During the first fifteen years, **activities centered around the hotels**. Dances, "hops" and soirees included prominent local families, who in turn hosted their American friends. By 1900, the American colony was well established and the lifestyle became more elaborate. The entertainment included **large dinner parties as well as masquerade and book parties**. Garden parties were popular with some of the estates being able to accommodate up to 200 guests in lavish surroundings, including oriental rugs spread among the lawns. When the Arlington hotel held its formal ball, known as the "Grand Hop", local children gathered to watch the guest arrive in their carriages and to peer in the windows at the grand spectacle. Dinner parties were sometimes followed by poker or bridge games.

**Amateur theatre was popular**, with productions of music, comedy and burlesque takes on popular operas. These productions were held at Victoria Hall or St. Peter's Church and were frequently in support of charitable causes. Madame Albertini was a trained opera singer and therefore a frequent performer at these events.

# Sporting Activities

Sports, too, were very popular during this time. The **Cobourg Golf Club** was established in 1898 with the help of the American visitors. In addition to the actual game of golf, the club held exclusive dances and parties in the Club House where local dignitaries mingled with the American visitors. **Tennis** was played on the lawns of the great estates. Starting in 1905, the **Cobourg Horse Show** was the highlight of the season and ran for two weeks in August. It was an annual affair from 1905 to 1914 and from 1919 well into the 1920s. It attracted competitors from some of the finest stables and was considered **one of the best in North America**.

# How did they get here?

Since the arrival of the early settlers, Lake Ontario was a major transportation hub.

In 1830, the Cobourg Harbour Company was formed and by 1832 the Eastern Pier stretched 500 feet into Lake Ontario, providing a landing area for ships of all sizes. Boats of all shapes and sizes traversed the lake bringing goods and ferrying passenger.

At the height of the American Summer colony, the Ontario Car Ferry Company **operated two large ferries on Lake Ontario known as Ontario No. 1 and Ontario No. 2**. The primary purpose of these vessels was the transportation of goods, particularly coal from Pennsylvania to power the Grand Trunk Railway. But the ferries were also capable of carrying up to 1,000 passengers, so **many of the permanent summer visitors arrived that way**. As well, thousands of "day trippers" took the return trip between Cobourg and Rochester.



## What caused the demise of the American Summer Colony?

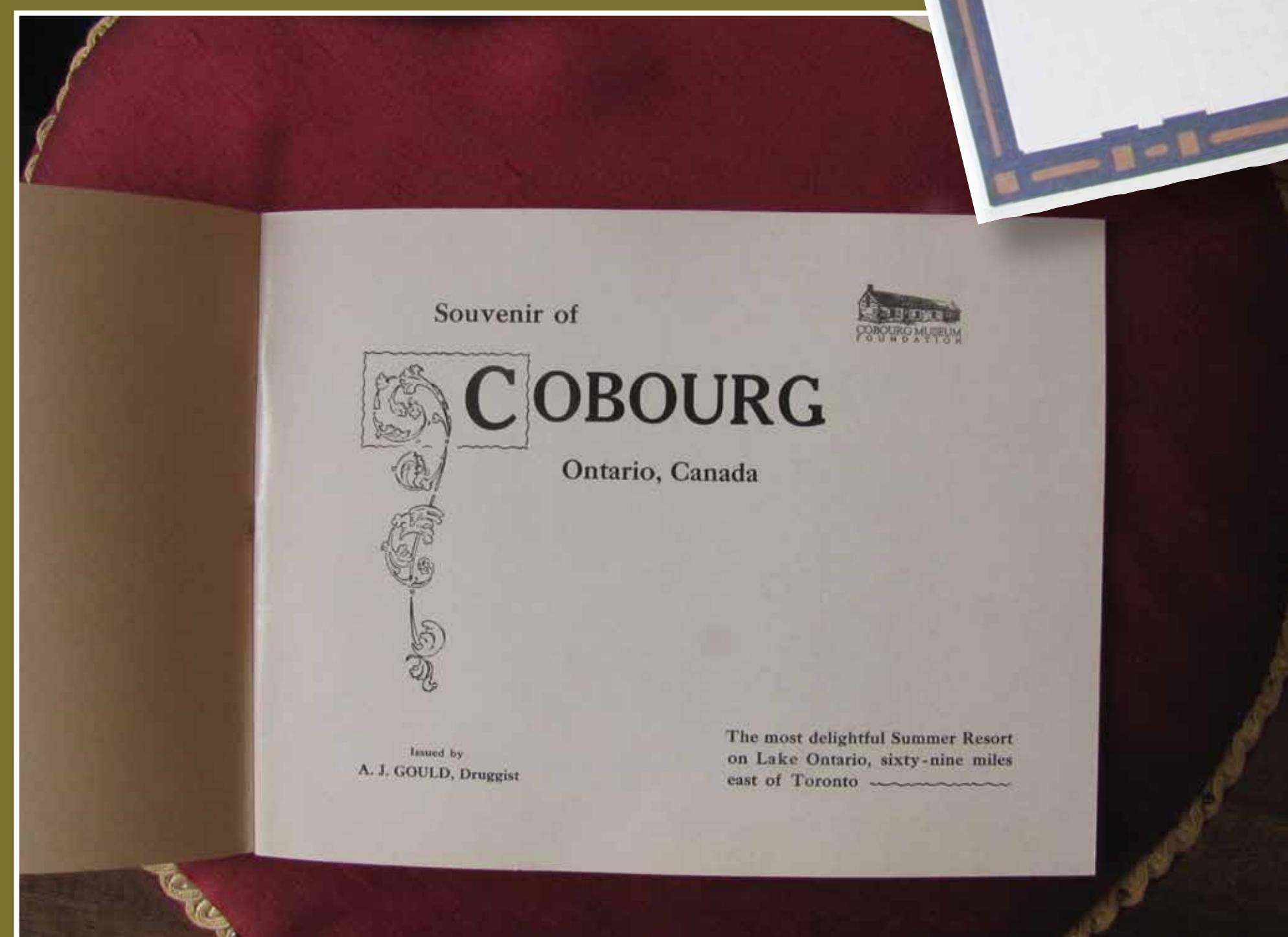
The First World War heralded the gradual decline in the colony. **Business became much more competitive** so the owners could no longer afford to spend three months of the year holidaying. **Changing economic times and new taxation** made it impossible for owners to maintain their grand estates. Finally, **the arrival of the automobile** allowed families to explore new destinations closer to home thus avoiding the long rail and boat journey to Cobourg.

The Lake affords good boating and bathing, and the surrounding country is unsurpassed for driving, riding and motoring. Maskinogee, bass and trout fishing can be had within easy driving distance. This is the best summer resort, and the healthiest and prettiest spot in Canada.

(Souvenir of Cobourg, Ontario, Canada, 1910)



## And Our American Neighbours Are Still Welcome!



Souvenir of Cobourg, Ontario, Canada - c1910