



From the private collection of Herb Hall

Passengers disembark from the Missouri, a passenger ship built for the Northern Michigan Transportation Co. and launched in the Chicago shipyards in 1904. During Collingwood's early growth it was expected that passenger and trade traffic between the settlement and major U.S. ports would transform the tiny community into a bustling commercial metropolis. The Reciprocity Treaty of 1855, however, permitted free trade between the U.S. and Canada. Slowed trade for Canadian goods, forced to compete with cheaper U.S. counterparts, tempered Collingwood's predicted boom.

CHAPTER 1

Hen and Chickens Harbour Grows Up

*I had a little hen, the prettiest ever seen;
She washed me the dishes, and kept the house clean;
She went to the mill to fetch me some flour,
And brought it home in less than an hour;
She baked me my bread, she brew'd me my ale,
She sat by the fire and told a fine tale. ¹*

MOTHER GOOSE NURSERY RHYME

EARLY HISTORY

Between the opening scenes of Collingwood's entry onto the stage of Canadian history and this century-and-a-half birthday, a great bounty of drama, passion and adventure awaits the willing reader. Collingwood's past is a rich repository of fine heritage waiting to be unearthed, or rediscovered, in the tales about to be told.

Only five generations measure Collingwood's journey from wilderness to modern society. The arrival of Europeans to the territory surrounding Georgian Bay in the early 1600s contributed to half a century of fierce warfare between aboriginal nations, ending with the dispersal of the resident Petuns.

Toward the end of the 18th century, the northern reaches of Upper Canada remained largely the domain of nomadic First Nations people and fur traders, descendants of the earliest colonists. Following the American War of Independence, the War of 1812 awakened the governing British administration in the colonies to the risk of invasion from the south; a sense of urgency arose over the protection of Britain's vast unpopulated holdings in Upper Canada. Settlement was seen as the most expedient solution. A plan was set in motion to promote colonization.

Land grants without settlers, however, did nothing to secure Dominion territory against attack. But the vast wilderness of the north, with its daunting portages and

crude pathways through thick bush, remained inaccessible without routes capable of handling the traffic of goods and people required to establish new encampments.

More than a decade earlier, Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe had foreseen the need to establish a route north from York (Toronto) that would ease access to the untamed lands beyond. Though his success in establishing Yonge Street initially encouraged settlement, the swampy terrain through which the roadway dipped and curved soon began to reclaim the road and despite continuous repairs and improvements, it fell into disuse.

Simcoe persisted. A generation later, his vision of a thriving colony emerging from the bush was finally realized: a surge of new settlers reached the tip of Yonge Street at Holland Landing around 1819.²

From there, Lake Simcoe offered the relative ease of travel by boat to the farther reaches around the lake, where pristine land awaited families eager to resettle. But the challenges of carving homes and communities out of the wilderness made progress slow.

