

***Dave Cano's Memories of the Past.....***

***Fort William and Port Arthur (Thunder Bay)  
Ontario, Canada***

***<http://hotrodsandjalopies.blogspot.com/>***

Scroll down to see many many pictures of our fair city,



**THEN & NOW** – The top and bottom right, The Empire "Fort William's leading hotel" a quote from an earlier ad from 1913 had read. I suppose it was the leading hotel then, but as certain areas of the city deteriorate, it's great to see what it once was and sadly what its become. The obvious grandeur showed through in those early years, however it's pretty incredible that these two buildings, the top and bottom of the West Hotel, stood the test of time and without fires as so many Simpson Street and Victoria Ave buildings went. The new photos were taken July 12th 2009. Sorry the b&w photos aren't super crisp. Love those Brass Ford "T" tourings in front of the west, and the expensive rates back then!



These pictures show the corner of Syndicate and Victoria Ave in Fort William (now Thunder Bay) Ontario. This is considered the southern entrance of Victoriaville, remember? where our fair city blocked off a major street intersection to build an unpopular shopping mall!!! The top two photos show the older Chapples Department Store building (once called the Grain Exchange building), and the Chapples home store which was built much later after the older building. This was the major corner of commerce in downtown Fort William. On the lighter side...don't you love all the old shoe-box Fords in the top left postcard photo and one more b&w shot of our wonderful electric powered Brill buses? Oh....for the old days.



These before and after pictures are for those from Port Arthur that feel a bit neglected. The Streetcar photo on the left (an incredibly clear and crisp photo for its time) was taken in July 1941 and the right photo was just taken on July 2009. I never knew until I had seen the left photo that F.W. Woolworth was ever that far down Red River Rd. This is the intersection of Red River Road (formerly Arthur St) and Cumberland Street, in what was known as Port Arthur Ontario (now Thunder Bay). The Pagoda shown in the left photo was slightly higher up the street and more visible, but the new photo barely shows it behind a clump of trees down the street. The Pagoda top read "Tourist Information" in those days. Both photos vividly show the Prince Arthur Hotel which was wonderful in its day and refurbished to nearly its old standards just recently. Off in the distance and out in Lake Superior is the never changing head of the Sleeping Giant, a huge peninsula of land the juts out into Lake Superior to form what is called Thunder Bay, in the shape of a massive sleeping giant. There are many tales of lore about The Sleeping Giant.



Here is a great before and after picture set. The left photo was taken about 1940 and the one on the right taken July 2009. The b&w photo shows the hustle bustle on the S/E corner of May St and Victoria Ave in Fort William (now the south core area of Thunder Bay). Gas buses were already in competition with rail streetcars in 1940 as seen by the bus beside the old Royal Bank building. In the background of both pictures you can see the famous Royal Edward Hotel (now low rental housing called the Royal Edward Arms). Kings and Queens of England stayed in the Royal Suite there. Things don't always get better with time.



Yes, It's the **Canadian Lakehead Exhibition Coliseum** building that has been around for quite some time. It is directly across from the Golf Dome (which would be situated right in the middle of our old dirt track on the fairgrounds), and also puts Silver City pretty much right in the middle of the great old wooden grandstand.

This was considered the gate turn (turn 2) on the track. Behind the race cars is where the gate was opened to let all the cars, pit crew and track officials into the pits (infield).

If you study the pictures you could probably go and stand right where Al Massaro's car was....right in the middle of the parking lot of the Golf Dome.

I am still working on who some of these guys were but in the left b&w photo #79 is unknown, #22 is unknown and #88 was the well known Albert Massaro with a 1937 Ford Coupe. In the right b&w photo is #24 unknown, #88 Albert Massaro with a 1934 Ford Coupe, his brother #87 Tony Massaro with another '33 or '34 Ford Coupe, and finally the D & K Special #10 driven by Don Marsh. This number was also used by Pappy Fowler in those days. These b&w photos are from the mid 1950's.



Here's an aerial view of our track which was in mid-town (Intercity). It gave way in later years to a huge golf dome and a Cineplex movie theatre. It was a half mile track with turn 2 bordering on a street and turn 3 and 4 along a river. Many jalopies climbed the street side ripping out yards of wooden fences and many others ended up in the drink at the other end. The fence was put up to stop onlookers from saving their 50 cents but the fence was never high enough as people would view the races from roof tops or their pickup trucks for free. Cheapskates or what!!



Here's a new slant on the eastern end of Victoria Ave (Our primary cruising strip in the 50's and 60's here in Fort William (now Thunder Bay). You Port Arthurites will get your chance, as I have some great shots of that end of town as well.

The right photo is Victoria Ave facing east, but in about 1910. The dead giveaway is the Canadian Bank of Commerce building on the left of which just the facade is there today as it totally burned a couple of years ago but some very smart person managed to maintain the facade of the beautiful building to admire to this day. Hopefully someone will build something behind it some time. Also in the left photo further down on the left is the St. Louis Hotel which was totally demolished last year. Also notice the lack of motorized vehicles as there were probably very few if any at the time. Far down to the end of Victoria Ave is the huge Elevator "B". It was long gone by the time I was born. Apparently you can still see some of the old wood

foundation if you are brave enough to cross the tracks there. It's great to go down Victoria Ave today and visualize how it might have been back then and since then as many of the structures did manage to survive urban renewal or what I call urban destruction.



The Pigeon River US/Canadian border crossing about 35 miles southwest of Fort William(now Thunder Bay) was an important part of growing up, because the closest large city to us was and still is Duluth, Minnesota(about 185 miles). My family took hundreds of motoring trips to Grand Marais, Duluth and Minneapolis/St. Paul, through the years, and even though one always told the truth about what you purchased across the line, you always felt intimidated by the border officers on either side.

The border crossing as we know it today is in a totally different spot, still on the Pigeon River but much closer to Lake Superior. The b&w photo on the left shows some great 1930's cars taken in front of the Pigeon River Hotel, and the one on the right shows some wonderful 1950's cars. In the colour picture on the right, the old Pigeon River hotel is shown on the far left of the photo, and the new Pigeon River hotel is just to the right of it. The original bridge is shown to the far right, and the actual building where you talked to the officers as you left or returned is in the center. There were stores and many buildings on both sides of the river and it was a very popular spot to go for a drive and taste some American beer like Fitgers or Hamms or some American candy such as Black Jack chewing gum, Beemans Pepsin gum, or giant suckers. Do you remember??



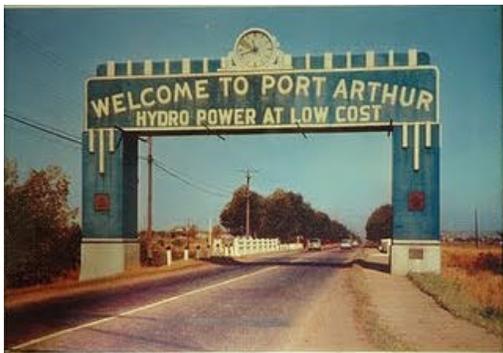
Here are couple more photos taken on our cruising strip a few years before we were actually using it. These two photos were taken in July of 1941. Both photos were taken in a spot we all know as Victoriaville, in downtown Fort William (now Thunder Bay south). The city closed a major intersection and a major portion of two main streets in our downtown core to accommodate a shopping mall which turned out to be a huge misadventure on the part of our city planners!! The photo on the left is taken in front of what was Chapples department store (The Grain Exchange building which still exists inside the mall) and the right photo was taken a little east of the first photo. The whole area shown in these pictures was and still is completely enclosed by this shopping center (the corner of Victoria Ave and Syndicate Ave). The street cars shown here stopped running in both Fort William and Port Arthur in about 1949, and the Brill buses (Still trolley buses but ran on rubber tires) took over about the same time. The city had a tough time digging up all those tracks all over both cities but if they had a little foresight like Toronto did, we would still have the trolleys today.



Here are a few more photos taken in 1949 showing the Brill buses when they first took over from the rail trolleys which ended the same year. The top left photo would be right inside the most eastern end of Victoriaville, Brodie and Victoria Ave. The bottom is the actual corner of Syndicate and Victoria Avenues near the original Chapples Ltd. (grain exchange building). The top right photo is further down towards the most eastern end of Victoria Avenue. The top left and right photos show an English Thames panel truck (Beacon's Bread and Cakes), a new '49 Studebaker (the cars you couldn't tell the front from the back), and a number of Fords, Chrysler and GM vehicles. The hustle and bustle of our downtown is long gone with most buildings for rent or lease. The rare sight of any vehicles down there are the ones crossing Victoria Avenue at May Street.



Here's a bit fuzzy but great photo of a special event at Current River park next to the Boulevard Lake dam. The black & white picture showing many future stock car and hot rod projects was taken in about 1934. The city of Port Arthur (now Thunder Bay) used this park for many holiday picnics such as Labor Day and May 24th the queen mother's birthday etc. The picture on the right was taken June 1st 2009 in almost the exact same place. The "United Grain Growers" elevator building is pretty much the same symmetrical shape now as it was in 1934 except it is now called "Viterra". The building on the left of the B&W photo was called "The Casino Dance Hall" and was located just adjacent to Current River and the Dam on Cumberland Street. Both my mother and father frequented this hall for many years until it burned down, I believe in the mid or late '50's. Many dance halls and not just in this area for some reason were called "The Casino", and had no particular connection to gambling...who knows why?





Long ago, our fair cities of Fort William and Port Arthur, Ontario (now Thunder Bay), had some very cool things to catch your attention, that have long been replaced by basically nothing....somewhat like our Memorial Avenue which was dotted on both sides by beautiful trees and a wonderful plaque "memorializing" our fallen soldiers from the first world war. Firstly the city got rid of all the trees along "Memorial" avenue to make way for BIG business and four laneing, but sadly no one knows where the wonderful plaque is that used to be in a predominant spot on Memorial Ave.

Well, they got rid of our welcome signs too after our wonderful twin cities became one (for the betterment of our populace). Do you remember where they were and how they were upgraded through time?

The very first photo (b&w) shows the first arch on the boundary line between Fort William and Port Arthur, welcoming you to the latter. It was erected just south of the McIntyre river as you travel north just past the present day Silver City Theatre. The present day colour picture beside it shows pretty much the exact spot where it used to be. The third picture (a very rare backside photo) shows the arch from the Port Arthur side, beckoning you to return to Port Arthur. In this photo you can see the bridge and the fairgrounds would be on the left side past the river.

The fourth (colour) photo shows where it was from the other side again and Silver City Theatre is on the left.

The fifth photo shows how it would have looked in colour (facing north).

The sixth one shows the widened arch (still blue) for the 4 laning of Memorial Ave. I guess Hydro power wasn't cheap anymore so the slogan became The Friendly City.

The seventh and eighth pictures show the repaint to orange. You can pretty much guess the era by the cars passing under it. In the eighth picture however they still hadn't cut all the Memorial Ave. trees down....but if you look up at the present day photo...Oh My...no trees....had to make room for BIG business at the cost of greenery.

Our fair city is still doing that to this day.....progress is good but not at the cost of nature!

The second last photo is the Welcome to Fort William arch which was erected on the Fort William mission property on old highway 61 just east of the old Fort William ski club turn off.

The final photo which I just found is of the Memorial Avenue commemorative plaque which has totally disappeared into oblivion. Does anyone know where it is now?

*Now our YMCA has bit the dust...*



***On Sept. 5, 2009 @ 2:01pm, another Thunder Bay (formerly Fort William) Ontario landmark is leveled.***

This building made extensive use of brick in its construction, with limestone being used for accents like the frame around the main entrance, and the string course between the first and second floors. The exaggerated keystones in the arches at the corners of the third floor are also of limestone. A large metal cornice across the top of the building is supported by enormous metal brackets sculpted into scroll designs. On April 14, 1911, the board of directors of the Fort William Y.M.C.A. raised the then unheard of sum of \$100,000 in just one week too provide funding for the building.

The Fort William YMCA was formed by a small group of young men from Fort William who were formerly officers of the Young Men's Association. The YMA was considered by some to be elitist and unpopular with the working class. The YMCA in Fort William was perhaps an attempt to overcome that. The prime mover seems to have been Mr. C. R. Sayer who, along with his fellow YMA officers, got representatives from the Protestant churches of Fort William to form an official YMCA branch, adopting a constitution in 1908. Subscriptions were sought from the business community and George H. Williamson was soon hired as general secretary. The first president was Harold E. Copp. The aim of the Association was "to improve the moral, mental, social and physical condition of young men and boys." It adopted from the outset the fundamental principles of "evangelical Christianity" as a basis of its proceedings. Boys 18 or over who were members of an "evangelic church" were eligible to serve as active members. Boys 12-18 could become general members. Only those with the proper religious qualifications were eligible to vote and hold office in the Association. Land was purchased for a building in 1912 on the corner of Archibald and Miles Streets and a large building was erected. It offered rooms for socializing, billiards, games, music, a cafeteria, a gymnasium, running track, laundry room, two bowling alleys, and a 60' x 20' swimming pool. Courses were offered in various educational pursuits such as drafting, arithmetic, manual training, book keeping, etc. As well, religious instruction was offered and considered the "central, fundamental and crowning feature of the association work." The YMCA building also contained 66 bedrooms, 50 of which could be rented for a maximum of ten dollars per month in 1913. The YMCA also acted as an employment bureau and as an organization to help immigrants assimilate into Canadian society. Though talks were underway to form a YWCA in the same building as early as 1930, it was not until much later that this occurred.

As of late, the John Howard Society was using the YMCA building, but now has moved to a newer facility on Syndicate Avenue. The demolition of the YMCA building is to make way for the new courthouse. Most of us baby boomers remember the YMCA dances and many people including myself learned to swim there, even though we went to a Roman Catholic school. Another historic building gone forever, but time marches on....



In the above photos you can make out an old grain elevator on the left and you can still see it today if you look closely. Some of the buildings near the mountain look similar too, otherwise it's pretty barren. There has sure been great progress in the intercity area for sure. This is Mount McKay, on the south side of the city. The street on the right photo is High Street, just before Hillcrest Park.



Here is Cumberland Street looking south/east and Red River Road (was Arthur Street before Amalgamation) in Port Arthur (now of course Thunder Bay, Ontario). The B&W was taken in about 1950. Only two structures are the same, and the rest has changed quite a bit. Atkinson's Jewelers, the tall building, is the only store front in both photos, but just closed this year, 2009.



These three black and white photos show the Lake Superior Regiment leaving Port Arthur(now Thunder Bay) Ontario on Oct. 10, 1940 from the Canadian Pacific Railway station on Water Street. The Canadian Pacific Railway station was on the west side of the tracks and long gone by the 1970's. It is shown on the far left of the first photo. In the second photo here, the Mariaggi (Marina Inn) can be seen in the distance on the right of the photo. All the people here would be standing right in the middle of the Water Street thoroughfare today.



The left photo shows a calmer day at the CP station in about the same era. The photo on the right shows the same station (the very long

narrow building along the tracks and water front). The Canadian National Railway station building that still exists today is at the far left of the downtown Port Arthur photo and the luggage depot (I believe that's what it is called) can still be seen today. It was used for many years for displaying local art. It is the small building at the bottom left, and today it is right beside the blue bridge where you can walk over Water Street.