

## Waterfront Recreation



**Swimming among the tall ships, tugs and industrial flotsam ca 1873 DHD**

Toronto was, and is, a waterfront city. From time immemorial, humans have enjoyed the waters, sometimes despite rather than because of their healthful qualities. In pre-European times, native peoples were drawn to the Peninsula (as the Island was then) for health reasons, and exploited the abundant fish and fowl then populating what would later be called Ashbridge's Bay (now filled in as the Port Lands district).

By the 1830s when Gooderham & Worts put down industrial roots near the mouth of the Don River, Europeans had been playing on and by the lake in both summer and winter for forty years. Early paintings and drawings depict skating, sailing, curling, swimming and otherwise frolicking Torontonians. When looking back, however, nostalgia shouldn't fool modern residents into thinking that the lake, the bay, and the shorelines were places of pristine beauty. Beautiful they often were, but pristine they sometimes were not.

As early as 1832, when cholera first devastated the town, local commentators bemoaned the filthy conditions of local waters – referred to as “carrion broth” by one irate writer. Conditions at the eastern end of the bay, where G&W planted its corporate flag, were probably cleaner than the more populated areas to the west. But undoubtedly, the bold – if foolhardy - swimmers depicted in this 1873 painting of the Stone Distillery were awash in industrial waste ... but cool.

Naturally, people of all ages and descriptions could enjoy waterfront recreation. Young Ned Hanlan, son of a Toronto Island fisherman, rowed everywhere ... and ultimately into history when he became a World Champion Sculler in

1880. Tiny skiffs jockeyed for position with great yachts, such as George Gooderham's beloved schooners, the *Oriole I* and *II*. These black beauties, moored off the Distillery District, were frequent winners of Royal Canadian Yacht Club races, and the venue for many an elegant Lake cruise, with guests such as Sir John A. Macdonald being fêted ... and perhaps lobbied.

In the 1893 Bird's-eye View reproduced here, the Bay, the Don River, and the Lake are alive with recreational activity. The two-masted, black schooner leading the pack (on the left) may be the *Oriole II*, perhaps with G&W President George Gooderham at the helm.



**Torontonians enjoy the delights of an 1893 summer's day on the water  
near Gooderham & Worts Distillery TPL**

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