Hamilton Harbour: Creatures from the Black Lagoon
Hamilton Waterfront

- Urban environmental contamination & landscape change
- The role of politics and power in shaping the urban environment
How Hamilton grew

Where and when significant residential development took place

The bulk of development occurred between 1911 and 1930.

Source: City of Hamilton Planning Department and Spectator staff; SPECTATOR GRAPHIC, Baldwin
Hamilton waterfront
Changes in Waterfront

Hamilton Harbour Shoreline

Shaded areas show where the shoreline has been filled in.
ArcelorMittal-Dofasco
Burlington Beach Strip
Shipping Channels
The Lax Landfill
Dramatis Personae, 1970
Rocco Perri

- Headed the Hamilton Mafia 1920s-1940s
- Al Capone’s top man in Canada
- Ran liquor through Toronto waterfront in 1920s
- His “moll”, Bessie, assassinated August 1930
- Rocco disappears 24 April 1944
  - Sleeping with the fishes?
Johnny “Pops” Papalia

- Family worked for Perri
- Rose through the mafia ranks in 1940s in Ontario
- Involved in Heroin trafficking and gambling in 1950s with New York & Montreal interests
  - Inspired the 1971 movie *The French Connection*
Johnny ‘Pops’ Papalia

• Facilitated cigarette smuggling with chain of cigarette vending machines
  – Monarch Vending, Galaxy Vending on Hamilton’s Railway Street.

• Completed his takeover of bookmaking by beating of Maxie Bluestein in Toronto’s Town Tavern, 1961
Johnny ‘Pops’ Papalia

• Spent most of 1960s in Jail
• 1970s-80s kept low profile
  – Organized a few mafia hits: Paul Volpe and two others
  – Hamilton Mafia enters money laundering, real estate ventures
  – Johnny too brash, sidelined
Meanwhile, off PEI

- Wreck of the *Irving Whale* 1970
  - 4200 tonnes Bunker C crude oil
- Rigged salvage contracts
Events in Hamilton

• Big Steel drawing criticism c.1970
  – Air & water pollution
  – Engaging in fresh rounds of lake filling
Hamilton Lake Filling

- Harbour Commission allows major new lake filling Nov 1971
  - Big 900 acre land swap STELCO & DOFASCO get 328 acres more
  - Requires new shipping channel
Hamilton Lake Filling

• George Kerr MPP advises to delay announcement until after 1971 provincial election

• Conservation Authority Opposes but MOE overrules Conservation Authority
  – George Kerr is Minister of Environment
Elliot Ousted

• Summer 1972 Barfnecht allegations
  – Ken Elliott ousted

• Spring 1973 RCMP investigation begins in Hamilton

• May 1974
  – RCMP arrests Elliott & 4 others
RCMP Finds

• Dredging companies bid rigging
Harbour Commissioners have been

- accepting kickbacks (15 cents/cu yard)
- falsifying records
- Money being laundered through bank accounts and dummy companies in Switzerland & Florida
- Creating unnecessary work
  - Strathearn Channel not needed: $1.2m price tag, with $180000 in kickbacks to Harbour Commissioners
RCMP investigation

• Del Hickey threatens to get Paul Hellyer MP and Paul Martin Sr to demote RCMP investigators

• Hickey & Elliott friends with a Hamilton judge who hangs out in mafia-owned bars
  – RCMP try to eavesdrop with a shoe microphone, but fail
RCMP Found Elliott

- Laundering kickback money through offshore bank accounts
- Said he paid kickbacks to politicians:
  - John Munro MP
  - George Kerr MPP Minister of Environment
  - Bill Davis, Ontario Premier
- Elliott jailed for 6 years in 1975
  - Also charged with income tax evasion
- Others fined
John Munro

- Labour minister in the Trudeau government
- MP for Hamilton East
- RCMP wiretaps seem to connect him to kickbacks
- Constituency offices raided by RCMP in 1974
  - Nothing really incriminating found
- Trudeau & Turner try to shield Munro from parliamentary investigation
- Munro goes into seclusion and takes sedatives
RCMP wiretap extract, 1974:

• Ken Elliott:
  – “the way I busted my ass for all them politicians, the money I got for them over the years, now they all go run and hide, including Munro. That’s the one that irks my ass more than anybody, Munro”

• Joe Rindress (J P Porter)
  – “Well he started this whole thing, didn’t he”

• Elliott
  – “You bet your ass he did”
Other RCMP Findings:

• Kickbacks paid to Elliott being laundered by Scrap dealers
  – Morris Lax launders $2 M, via 15 separate companies, funds going to Ken Elliott
  – 1977 convicted on 5 counts of creating false accounts
  – Lax launders money on Railway St
14 Charged, 1975

- 14 individuals charged, 6 of them prominent industrialists, listed in Who’s Who in Canada
  - Gerard Filion, past president of CMA
  - Jean Simard, Robert Bourassa’s brother-in-law
- 13 companies charged, dredging & construction
- Government defrauded of $4 M 1969-73
- Covered St Lawrence Seaway, Hamilton & Toronto Harbours
Laidlaw and Waste, 1970s

- Laidlaw’s Interflow Systems Ltd subsidiary operates a hazardous liquid treatment facility on Hamilton waterfront, 1970s
  - Thermal treatment
  - Transfer station
  - Licensed to send region’s wastes to dump
- In reality, falsifying documents so that all wastes can be sent to Upper Ottawa St Landfill
Upper Ottawa St Dump

- Wastes hauled to Upper Ottawa St Landfill
  - operated by another Laidlaw company: KD Disposals
  - Some dumpers access the site after hours with spare keys

- Upper Ottawa St Landfill leaks
  - Red Hill Creek contaminated
  - Region recently fined $500,000 for this
As far as measuring the effect of elevated exposure to dioxins on humans, the fire will be the largest, most detailed natural experiment ever conducted.
Plastimet Fire

- Frank Levy’s USARCO
  - Ken Elliott’s old employer
  - Gross contamination

- Bankruptcy 1989
  - Levy retains property, yacht
  - Fire destroys company records
  - Mercury vials left lying around
Plastimet

- On old USARCO site
- Frank Levy is Landlord
- Multiple fires, fire code violations
- Big Fire, July 9 1997
- Levy & Lieberman
  - fined balance of fire insurance policy
  - sentenced to 50 hours of community service
Early reports were conflicting: the cloud was safe or it was carcinogenic. People started coming down to the fire to ask for direction from the firefighters, who were eating doughnuts in the dainty hydrochloric-acid mist.
Sheila Copps

- Daughter of east-end Hamilton politician Vic Copps
  - Vic Copps a booster of Ken Elliott
- As a teenager
  - Sheila worked in Ken Elliott’s East End Dairy Queen
- Elected to Ontario Legislature with Stuart Smith’s Liberals
- Took over John Munro’s East End Federal seat
Philip Services

• Board of Directors once included
  – Sheila Copps’s mother
  – Stuart Smith

• Secured contract to operate Hamilton’s water supply, sewage disposal

• Secured approval for Taro landfill, Stoney Creek
Philip Services

- Taro Landfill accepts illegal plating wastes from US
  - Philip tries to force city to allow Taro leachate in city sewers
- Philip spills sewage into Harbour
- Philip abandons Hamilton’s blue-box collection programme May 2001
  - Leaves City to pick up the pieces
Philip Services

• Eventually collapses, accompanied by multi-million dollar accounting fraud
Murder

• Murder of Morris Lax
  – Beaten to death with a 2 by 4, December 1992
  – Ruth Lax denies it was murder
Murder

• Assassination of Johnny “Pops” Papalia
  – Mafia execution 31 May 1997
  – Catholic church performs funeral but refuses requiem mass at Basilica
  – But Chedoke-McMaster Hospital accepts memorial donation
US Steel

• Harper government approves 2007 sale of STELCo to US Steel
  – But US Steel fails to honour its promises to maintain production capacity in Hamilton

• Company presses for wage and pension concessions from the workers
  – Locks the workers out for 11 months
  – Now closing
Landscape & Power

• Political & economic power shapes environmental history of Hamilton waterfront.

• Enduring texture of corrupt politics, shady deals and industrial power
  – Shapes environment
  – Shapes place