

The Gimli Breakwater

By Evelyn Ward, 2013 (written prior to the redesigning of Viking Park)

One of the unique parts of Gimli is its breakwater. We're not talking here about the main pier. We're talking about the path near the Viking Statue to South Beach, one of the treasures we locals love. Its history is stitched with layers of municipal politics and weather events.



2013 Section from Colville Dr (formerly 4 Street S) looking North (photo E Ward.)

It has been a fixture formally since 1956.



Furthest southern portion (photo E Ward.)

It follows the curve of the shoreline along the south basin of the Gimli harbour.



Gimli Harbour, facing southwest (photo Dorothy Keizer.)

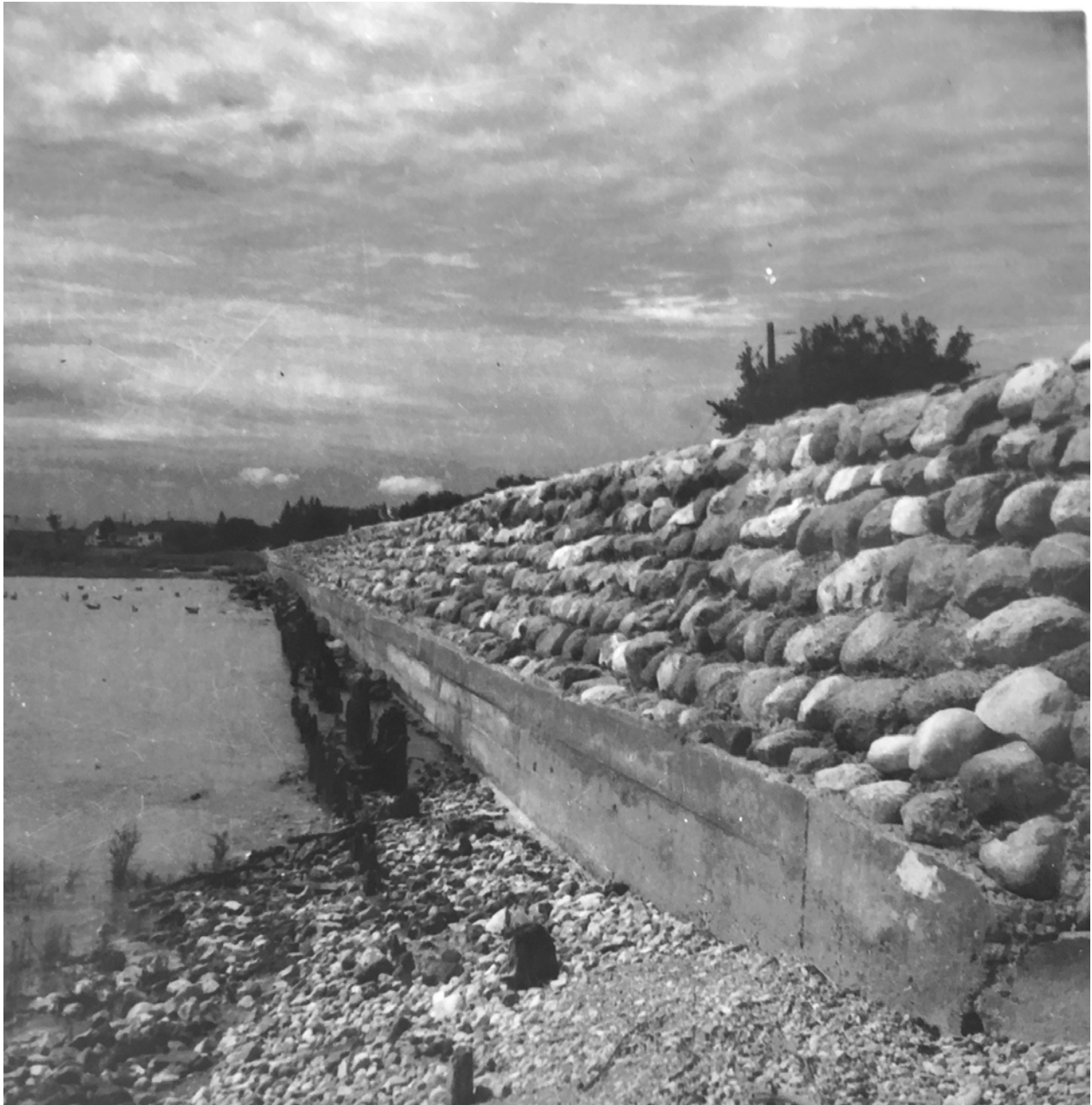
The breakwater and the Viking statue seem to go hand in hand, inextricably tied.

Its creation was a Gimli Chamber of Commerce centennial project. Designed by Gissur Eliasson of the University of Manitoba, it was constructed by George Barone, the creator of other Manitoba statues, at a cost of \$15,000. It was unveiled in 1967 by the President of Iceland, Asgeir Asgeirsson. The finished statue was 4.6 meters or 15 feet tall, constructed entirely of fibreglass on a rock plinth.



2009 (E Ward.)

Historically, the breakwater was a dike, paid for by the federal government who bequeathed it to the town to maintain in perpetuity.





Protecting the harbour, looking northeast.

The breakwater appears to have been on the north side of the Main Pier as well.



Facing northwest of main pier, date unknown.



Looking north, finished breakwater in front of Betel Home, pre 1967.



The original 'dike' was so skinny, you would never think of actually walking on it for fear of falling in the lake.



Breakwater wall, original section 2016 (photo E Ward.)

This section, south of Betel Home, looking east, is one of the only remaining parts of the old breakwater.



Breakwater section in front of Betel Home, filled in with grass (2013 photo E Ward.)

Gimli town council wanted to upgrade the waterfront as part of a master plan. With various twists and turns, including land agreements, harbour improvements, street surveying, and preparations to host the Pan American Games the breakwater remained forever intertwined like a thread holding together an old quilt.

When the Betel Home was rebuilt, it necessitated the moving of the Viking Statue. Originally town council was hoping to move the statue to the little jetty of land where the New Iceland Heritage Plaque now sits. But this would have meant rerouting of streets and major public discussion. The Viking was moved instead to a little triangular lot which became town property.



Old section, the 'architectural design' of which was three stones across (photo E Ward.)

In preparation for Gimli to be the Pan Am Games sailing venue in 1999, the harbour twas dredged to a 12 foot depth and subsequently built a hill with the dredgate to the south of Betel. The dredgate was so wet that it took a long time for the hill to settle. Ever since, this hill has affectionately been referred to as “Bill’s Hill” after the then-mayor, William Barlow.



*Section in front of Betel Home, Bill's Hill to the right (east facing) 2013
(photo E Ward.)*

Thankfully the town left the old breakwater exposed. It still shows through the grass and is still used as a path.

It feels like our own little ribbon of Hadrian's Wall.



Facing northeast by the Viking Statue, 2013 prior to the redesigning of Viking Park (photo E Ward.)



Facing southwest, 2013 (photo E Ward.)

During the high water events of 2006-2007 and subsequent Emergency Measures provincial government diking, the breakwater was covered over, backfilled and shorn up against a wooden parapet. It does remain somewhat of a bastion of defence against the day-long autumn storms.



2006 construction (photo E Ward.)



Facing south from statue (photo E Ward.)



Major cracks developed in 2013 making it treacherous for cyclists and pedestrians alike (photo E Ward.)



Ultimate north end of breakwater running into, and probably underneath, the Gimli Yacht Club locker (photo E Ward.)



Finally realizing that the breakwater was a major thoroughfare for both locals and tourists, Gimli council saw fit to repair it in 2013.

Thank you to Bill Barlow for filling in the gaps. All uncredited photos were from the Evergreen Regional Library.