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The Old Town Clock in Halifax, N.S.

Urban Profile: Halifax

Containers revitalise a historic port

By Alan Harvey

Halifax is a city of history. It has one of the world's great natural harbours and an unrivalled strategic location. Standing as a sentry at Canada's eastern approaches, astride the Great Circle route to North America, it played key roles in the Seven Years' War with France, the War of American Independence, the war of 1812 and the United States Civil War. Romance and adventure crowd its pages.

It is the oldest English-speaking city in Canada and the capital of Britain's first Canadian colony, Nova Scotia province. It was born of a struggle between England and France for mastery of a continent. Its decision to stay loyal to the English Crown

and not to join America's 13 colonies went far to preserve the British Connection, make possible an independent Canada and keep the Stars and Stripes from flying over the entire continent.

Halifax is closely linked with Britain. Royal Princes played, danced and romanced in the seaboard city, sporting scarlet coat and powdered wig, or lined up for morning levees. Prince Edward the Duke of Kent, father of Queen Victoria and imperious soldier son of King George III, spent six happy years there from 1794 and called it the "best place out of England." His brother Prince William Henry, once rebuked by George III for sailing from

Halifax without orders, recalled his good times in the city even after himself becoming King William IV. Old inhabitants recalled the period as a golden age for Halifax.

Named after the Earl of Halifax — fortunately his title was used rather than his name, which was the rather commonplace George Dunk — the city was first settled on June 21, 1749 by what was described as a "rabble of cockneys," recruited on the streets of London and transported across the Atlantic to counter France's growing influence in the New World. The disoriented cockney pioneers died of disease or drifted away, giving