

continued 2 pages



Intel  
May 21/05  
p. D 2

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In they'd go — the blondes, the brunettes and those in-between — in the early part of each workday and emerge with red streaks highlighting their hair at the end of the day.

It was once a common occurrence with plant workers in the polishing division at the American Optical Company of Canada Ltd., recalled Belleville-resident Mary Townsend.

"Somewhere in the process of making these pieces of glass into lens for glasses that we wear — and I don't remember why we had to do that — but we used to apply wet, red rouge to the lenses at least for a few minutes. In the process, the wet rouge would get in our fingernails and somehow in our hair, which we would have to wait to wash out when we get home," said Townsend chuckling lightly as she reminisced on the years when she used to work at the company located at the corner of Bridge Street West and Sidney Street.

The saga of this American-owned manufacturing plant began in Belleville in 1922 when it began operating inside the second floor of a Front Street building. Two years later, the plant relocated to Coleman Street, just north of Bridge Street West, where it was housed inside the Lanning building for 25 years before moving on to its last site in the city in 1949.

Plans for the 87,000 sq. ft. building on Bridge Street West location began as early as July of 1947 when the first sod was turned in the presence of a large audience of employees, company officials and city dignitaries. Among the latter was Frank Follwell, then mayor of Belleville, who, as reported in the local newspaper, noted in his speech:

"... we are particularly proud to have the American Optical Company of Canada Ltd., here in Belleville because for the past 25 years it has not only given gainful employment to many of our citizens, but has contributed in a great measure to Belleville's advancement and progress."

Gilbert B. Scott, then manager of the local plant, followed it up with his own:

"This plant will have the most modern machinery, designed after years of research carried out in Canada, the United States and England. No effort is being spared to make this plant not only the most up-to-date and efficient in the world from a manufacturing point of view, but also we, the employees in this plant, will be working under the most healthful, comfortable and pleasant conditions possible..."

So, began the new phase of the com-

Continued

Intelligencer

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