

# Remembering former Acton newspaper publisher David Dills

By Jim Dills  
SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

A quiet contributor to Acton and its progress for many years, David R. Dills, former publisher of *The Acton Free Press* and President of Dills Printing & Publishing Co. Ltd., died June 9, 2017, two days shy of his 91st birthday at the Bennett Centre in Georgetown.

David, who played an important role in the development of the *Milton Canadian Champion*, spent most of his life in Acton, leaving only for service during the Second World War in the Royal Canadian Navy and in retirement years to care for his wife Kay's parents in Toronto.

During his active years in Acton he was a Scout Master, Blue Springs Ranger, and District Commissioner in the Scouting movement. When the Scout Hall was built in the school grounds in 1949 he was an active participant.

As a King Scout he was one of few to earn the coveted Bushman's Thong. He was on the committee that organized the first Ontario Scout Jamboree at Milton's Kelso Conservation Area in 1968.

Joining his father in the printing business and publishing the *Acton Free Press* after serving in the Navy (1944-45), David installed the first automatic presses. In 1954 at the formation of Dills Printing & Publishing Co. Ltd. with his father and brother Jim, he worked to develop the printing capability of the Acton and Milton newspapers, later adding the first edition of the *Georgetown Independent*.

The plant, first located on Mill Street in Acton,

was moved to the former Baxter Laboratories Plant, also located in Acton, in 1958, greatly expanding the company facilities.

It was a time of dramatically changing technology in the newspaper business including the transition to offset printing and optical character reading equipment.

David led the company through those dramatically changing times and the staff grew to 100 local people, who were trained in the new technology. In addition to the newspapers, the

plant produced a wide range of commercial printing.

The long-time Acton resident was a member of the small committee that successfully raised the money for restoration of the old arena and installation of artificial ice. It was Dave who selected the site for the centennial library. He was a member of the Rotary Club and the Royal Canadian Legion, Acton Branch. In 1967 he received the Masonic Scottish Rite 32nd degree and that same year was awarded one of the country's Centennial Medals.

When he was named Acton's Citizen of the Year in 1972, it was the first time two members of the same family were so honored as he followed in his father's footsteps.

Within the community newspaper industry David served as president of the Ontario Weekly Newspapers Association in 1965 and was a member of the Executive Committee of the Canadian Weekly Newspapers Association. He was named an Honorary Life Member of CCNA in 1979 and received the OCNA's President's Award in 1982.



David Dills, who played an important part in the development of this community newspaper, died June 9. *Supplied photo*

Following the sale of the newspapers in 1978 he worked on a volunteer project basis for the national association.

A member of the Canadian branch of the International Military Music Society, he was membership chairman and Newsletter editor for several years.

David and Kay were married in 1951 and were partners in all of their work and projects with Kay serving as Editor of the *Acton Free Press* for a number of years. She predeceased David

after 64 years of marriage.

Daughter Kathleen worked with her parents in every stage of the printing and publishing operation. She and husband Steven Hartnagle, with sons Joseph David (JD) and Matthew Dean survive as well as brother James (Jim) and Shirley and their family and the families of his sister, the late Frances Prosser and her husband Clare.

A celebration of David's life will be held in the summer.



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