



PHOTOS SUBMITTED

The interior of Leslie Shoe Store at Christmas, 1949.

That little extra service

loan at no charge. Word got around that umbrellas and strollers could be borrowed at no cost from Leslie's Shoe Store. This word-of-mouth advertising brought new customers to the store."

Early on, Leslie adopted a record system whereby every child customer who got a pair of shoes had a card on file detailing that child's needs and purchases — a service much appreciated by local parents anxious to get well-fitting shoes for their children. "Children were treated as the best customers of Leslie's. Each child who entered the store received a give-away and each young customer was sent a birthday card every year."

Aside from shoes, the store carried shoe-repair supplies, wholesale shoe polish, laces and work boots. It also had a harness section, Donald added.

"He'd buy say five sets of harnesses and the staff would assemble them. I recall the Western steer hides - approximately 12 feet long and 4.5 feet wide. With his pistol grip knife, he'd cut strips of leather to the specifications of customers.

This department drew many buyers who often bought work boots as well as harnesses and accessories."

The employees received training in the 'store's course' as well as the 'shoe-fitting course' offered by the Canadian Footwear Institution. The training resulted in a quality of service in the store.

"The ill and the handicapped who couldn't make it to the store were never ignored. Employees at Leslie's made hospital calls and some house calls to customers who were disabled and completely unable to come to the store for fittings."

William Leslie died in 1952 at the age of 73.

"In fact, his way of doing business would not likely lead to business success today when loyalty and trust are long gone. But for him, these virtues were part of his make-up and he applied them diligently in business dealings as well as in his relations with family, church and wider community," Donald concluded.

His sons, Bryson and Donald Leslie, became owners of the store between 1952-53 and made it into a limited company. In the following years, they opened stores in Picton and Lindsay. The former was sold a few years while the latter was struck by lightning and was destroyed in 1969. Bryson Leslie died in 1991 and his son, Bob Leslie took over the management of the store when Donald retired in the mid-80s. The saga of the 78-year-old family business downtown ended with its closure just five years ago.

You can reach Benzie Sangma at bsangma@cogeco.ca with comments on story ideas for Remember When.