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On June 18, 1986 Belleville's downtown business community witnessed a historic three-generation family-owned department store change ownership, bringing to a closure yet again another part of this city's commercial history.

"It was just time for me to retire," said Murray McIntosh, grandson of John McIntosh Sr., who started up a dry goods store on Front Street in 1892. When the latter's brother, William McIntosh, joined him in his venture, their business came to be called McIntosh Bros.

Touting their motto "You don't pay extra for quality because quality pays for itself", the brothers began operating their business establishment with 13 employees.

The brothers' partnership lasted till 1914 when McIntosh Sr. bought out William's interest and the former brother's family retained full ownership of the company that saw only expansion and success for almost a century later. McIntosh Sr. died in 1925 and his son, John McIntosh Jr. took over the business reins, which was eventually taken over by his two sons, Douglas and Murray McIntosh.

In the peak of its success, the company had its branches set up in six other smaller communities including that in Napanee, Campbellford, Kingston, Cobourg and Belleville. The stores in Belleville and Cobourg were the last to close down in the 80s.

Originally, the McIntosh Bros. store carried a variety of dry good products, crockery, china, toys, school books, stationery, tea and coffee and patent medicine and gradually, it included men's and ladies' wear. At one time, the store also operated as a wholesale store to the smaller stores in the area. Decades later until its closure 17 years ago, the store, which had expanded to the fourth floor by that time,

began to focus on carrying clothing, drapery and household furnishings.

The downtown location of the McIntosh Bros. was well-known for the personal service they rendered to their customers. On occasion, the store employees had been

known to go to the home of those who were unable to come in themselves with a choice of the store products for them to buy.

While other high-end ladies' wear shops such as the McNabb's gave the store's clothing department competition, the

McIntosh Bros. held it own with its stock of both casual and formal clothing, said Shirley Morton, McIntosh Jr.'s only daughter.

Describing the layout of the former store, she said the main retail area was on the first floor where the men's wear was sold on the left side of the entrance. Ladies' hosiery and gloves were sold across from this department. The ladies' wear department took up the back portion of the narrow yet deep interiors of the first floor. Those looking to buy draperies or fabrics had to go to the second floor from where they would proceed to the third floor to place their orders with the in-house seamstresses in the sewing room. The fourth floor served as storage facility.

When Morton began working at the store as a teenager in the 40s, the store had discontinued selling drugs and toys. But she recalled the department store being as popular as ever.

"Our customers came not just from this community but areas all around. The store was quite popular," said Morton. "My father was a good merchandiser. He had what it took to run the business just like his father before him. Besides, we had wonderful, hardworking and loyal employees who worked at the store for many, many years."

McIntosh Bros. was one of Belleville's oldest family-owned businesses, which began and ended its operation, 94 years later, at the same downtown location.

Two partners, Bob Leslie and Bud Babcock bought the McIntosh Bros. store and the name was changed to McIntosh-Leslie.

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