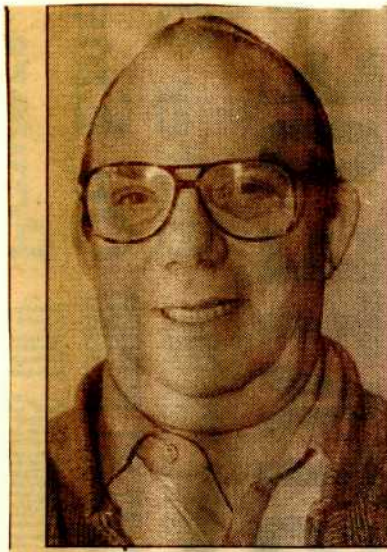


Oliphant Electric



Doug Werden

earning 35 cents an hour (after a brief period at 25 cents an hour) working with an electrician. He later received his electrician's licence. Fellow workers in '54 included owner W.H. (Bill) Oliphant, Ruth Lowther, Muriel Ackerman, Walt Westfall, Bob Cummings, Gerald Moore and Jim Thompson. Ruth says Carman Lowther joined the business in 1957. He later took over from his father-in-law and today Bill Lowther, the son of Carman and Ruth, operates the business.

During his early years with the company Werden worked on a lot of farm houses that had never had electricity. That meant doing everything, including putting in the hydro poles from the road to the house. The company worked on jobs as far north as Bancroft and south into Prince Edward County.

Even in the city and sur-

rounding communities, says Werden, there were a significant number of houses without electricity. Prior to electricity, residents used Tiffany gas lamps for lighting. Werden remembers putting in an oil fired furnace at Corby Distilleries Ltd. which had previously used coal. The company also did a lot of work on electrical signs on Front Street, which were then allowed to hang at 90 degree angles from buildings. Canning factories were wide spread in the 1950s and Oliphant's men worked on many of them. Nearly all are gone now.

In 1957 the company moved to Coleman Street, where Canadian Tire had been. At that point Oliphant got out of the retail business and concentrated on wholesale. The company had already been selling to contractors and management decided that was a better business. Bill Oliphant had to lay off two electricians but work was plentiful then and he found them jobs at other companies before they were even finished with Oliphant, says Werden.

On Halloween night of 1967 a fire destroyed the Oliphant store and the operation was moved to Dundas Street in the former Elliott Motors building.

In the 1960s there was a housing boon and Oliphant was selling items "by the truck loads," says Werden. "Through the '60s you could work 80 hours a week and still never be caught up." In the 1970s the emphasis shifted from houses to cottages.

Bill Oliphant died 1988 and Carman Lowther in 1991.

In 1990 Oliphant Electric Wholesale moved to 345 College St. E. in the east industrial park.

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