

Seldon's drugstore

Dispensing cures at Seldon's counter

*Pharmacists were
almost like doctors
in those days*

When Harold Seldon came to Belleville in 1934 he purchased the Don Bleeker drugstore on Front Street and soon became a familiar face in the community.

Seldon's store would take its place among the half-dozen pharmacies downtown and although it did not have a soda bar like Lattimer's or a library like Doyle's (during the Depression), it was frequented just as often by loyal customers.

Harold Seldon was born in 1904 and after graduating from pharmacy college in 1927, he worked in Peterborough and Toronto (the latter for Owls Drugstores) before moving to Belleville.

The small shop at 328 Front St., across from the Crystal Hotel and north of Moore's confectionery business, had the familiar glass and wooden display cases of the time and a wooden floor, says Seldon's daughter, Campbellford resident Betty Taylor.

According to articles published in The Daily Intelligencer, the business had opened under the proprietorship of Alex Ray. By coincidence, it was the same year Seldon was born (1904).

Those were the days when a pharmacist's job sometimes

overlapped the family doctor's duties. Taylor relates the story of a customer coming to Seldon's and complaining of a skin condition her physician couldn't cure. Seldon suffered a similar problem but had concocted a mixture that worked for him. He gave it to the woman and her woes ended.

Seldon's business was the most northern pharmacy on Front Street and consequently it was popular with men of the railroad, being close to Station Street. Seldon enjoyed talking with the men and heard many a tale.

"He saw very many interesting things and of course he'd come home and tell us about some of the heart-breaking stuff," says Taylor. For example, she recalls being told about a woman with a baby carriage appearing outside the hotel across the street, pleading with her husband, presumably in his cups, to go home with her.

Seldon was also handy with tools and made pieces of furniture for some of his customers in his spare time. Taylor believes, but isn't sure, that her father once built a small boat for someone (Seldon was an avid sailor).

The store was open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and closed on Wednesday afternoon and Sunday, except when it was Seldon's turn to keep vigil. The downtown drugstores took turns staying open on Wednesday and Sunday so no one would be without access to medication.

Taylor remembers Doris Hill worked part-time at the store and that a second lady with the first name Irene worked there full-time for years. Maurice Rollins began an apprenticeship at Seldon's but changed his mind before completing it. Paul Kelly also took an apprenticeship there but stayed with the trade and later opened Kelly's Guardian Drugs on Bridge Street East.

Although this didn't bother Seldon, the arrival of the Tam-blyn's drugstore chain did frighten local pharmacists, says Taylor. "It was the first chain drugstore and it was

scary," she says. But the privately owned stores persevered.

Along with his work behind the counter, Seldon took an active role in the community. He was chairman of the Retail Merchants Committee of the Chamber of Commerce in the 1940s and, beginning in 1945, served on the board of education. Seldon also was president of the chamber of commerce, was the first president of the Bay of Quinte District High School Board of Education, in 1952, and led the Ontario Retail Pharmacists Association in 1955.

Seldon ran his business until 1962 when he sold the store

and went to work at Westgate Pharmacy. Later he became an assistant pharmacist at Belleville General Hospital. He retired from that position in 1971 but continued working part-time at the hospital and as a relief pharmacist at various drugstores in Belleville and Chatham, where his daughter lived.

He retired completely in 1982 and moved to Chatham in 1983. He then followed his daughter when she moved to Campbellford in 1986.

He died April 7, 1987, but his record of public service and many years on Front Street ensured him a measure of posterity within the community.

*Remember when
Jan 16, 1994*