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"He was personable and enjoyed meeting and waiting on people in the store," said Belleville resident Ron Fox of his late father, Wilbur Fox. But he could have been describing himself, as apparent from the way he set about his current job in the paint department at Rona's in Belleville.

It was, then, no coincidence that the hardware business by the name of Walker Hardware operated by two generations of the Fox family was successfully run in downtown Belleville for many decades until it changed hands in 1989.

Established in 1867 by John W. Walker, the business was incorporated in 1923. At the time the business went by the initials of Charles Clifford Walker, one of the company's three partners, and was known as C.C. Walker Hardware Company Ltd. Fox said it was so called to distinguish it from another hardware store by the name — Walker Hardware — located in the east coast around the same time.

The Fox family name came on board with the arrival of Fox's Uncle Herbert W. Fox from Madoc in 1924. His father, Wilbur M. Fox, who already had a hardware retail background in Madoc, joined him in 1933. At the time his uncle was the president and his father became the vice president of the company. Doug Duminie, another Belleville resident, became the third partner and held the position of secretary-treasurer. When his father retired, Fox took over as the president of the company.

Fox recalled himself getting involved in the family business even as a young boy attending school.

"I started working at the store when I was still at school. I'd work after school and on Saturdays, sweeping the floor, carrying out the garbage, putting stock away, unpacking the merchandise and so on. I got paid, but not very much. I did get a token. I always told him that it was not enough," he said, his easy laughter break-

ing out at the memory.

The Walker Hardware was located on 248-250 Front St. in Belleville. The original store was destroyed in a fire in the later part of 1867. It was reopened at the same location in 1868. Those days Belleville was a centre for booming farmers and lumbering operations in the area. Prior to the 1920s, the store was noted to have had the most extensive and best selection of stocks relating to saddlery and carriage hardware.

Through the decades, the stock in the store began to change, reflecting the needs of the time.

"It was one of the largest retail hardware stores in Eastern Ontario," recalled Fox. "When my father joined the company, we had the main hardware business, paint business, houseware and gift items. We sold china at one time and we also had a large toy department. We had a huge assortment of stock such as bulk screws and nails. If someone was looking for a particular item, and we didn't have it, then it probably wasn't available at all. We tried to keep right up with the times," recalled Fox.