

Hyde's Departure Ends Close

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Ties with City

By HARRY MULHALL
Staff Reporter

In the mobile society, hometown departures can be a fairly faceless stream.

Occasionally there's a glitter of personality in the flow that catches public attention — like Gerald B. Hyde.

Mr. Hyde this week confirmed he was resigning as city purchasing and personnel director to launch a personnel department for the Western Ontario municipality of St. Thomas.

As a city hall official Mr. Hyde has been obscured from much public attention for some years — a time when his native community itself was emerging into a new economic environment.

Yet, that emergence can be directly linked to his name.

Once, 12 years ago, Belleville fought to annex land from its township neighbors for acreage it claimed was vital for expansion.

Today, much of that hard-won space had disappeared — swallowed in unprecedented colonization by industry, commerce and housing.

Annexation — once so bitterly resented — became a fact through the persistence of the 1958-59 city hall administration.

At the time, Gerald Hyde was in his early thirties, one of the youngest mayors in Belleville's history.

His departure now from the hometown civil service is ending a record of municipal contribution — on school boards, councils and public utilities.

It's also a family tradition. His father, Charles Hyde was a city councillor whose three election campaigns produced 18 aldermanic years. At one time both father and son sat on the same council.

After a political apprenticeship on a city school board Gerald Hyde first sought election to city council in the early 1950s. He served as alderman from 1953-57.

At the end of that time, he made a bid for the mayoralty — and won.

In 1958 he took office — the second - youngest mayor in Belleville's history, a time in politics when youthful leadership was still not fashionable.

He pushed a number of objectives, notably a sewage disposal plant.

But topping them all was annexation. Belleville, at the time still had the dimensions of a large-size country town, its population 20,000.

The city's ambitions were angrily contested, particularly by the suburbs — which the began at College Street in the north, Sidney Street in the west.

"The biggest problem," recalls Mr. Hyde, "was to make the people in those areas feel they were part of Belleville — not outsiders." There were urgent reasons for annexation. "The thought, back then, was we had to get room to expand," he recalls. "This is what happened."

At the end of his one-year term he again sought the mayoralty — and was unopposed. In 1959 he continued as mayor — one of the rare occasions when the city's highest office has been held by acclamation. Simultaneously the new and bigger Belleville came into being — a city of 30,000.

Soon after, Belleville McFarlands went to Czechoslovakia and returned the world's hockey champions.

It was a crowning achievement of community spirit in a city that felt itself entering a new era.

Then came the day when Mayor Hyde called a caucus of council on the hockey team financing. Shortly after he publicly requested a royal

commission to inquire into municipal financing. The investigation reported the city, seemingly unwittingly for some years, had been engaged in deficit financing.

The incident made a shambles of city hall politics, and, although he'd be the last to admit it, the political future most seriously injured belonged to Gerald Hyde.

His personal qualities, ex-

trative abilities, had marked him in many a local observer's mind as a sure candidate for senior government.

Typically, today he shuns revealing any conjectures or a time now past.

The hockey incident he recalls as a "tough period to go through. But that's all history, it was an unhappy set of circumstances."

Then, after four years out of public office, he again returned to the scene — this time running in an election for the city's utilities commission. As always he won — and repeated the victory two years later.

"These two elections made me feel the majority of the people of Belleville had confidence in me," he says.

The elections confirmed a hometown appreciation of the Hyde integrity. It was a quality that showed up in different circumstances later.

In 1966 he successfully sought appointment to the vacant post of city purchasing agent.

After much time spent in public service by way of politics he was continuing the record — this time as a public servant.

Every politician has relied on support. At times, the supporters of former years may seek a return of aid rendered.

Mr. Hyde was a political veteran and — despite his public appointment — found himself in just such a position at times

Lifelong friends and supporters from former days at first sought out the aid of his political experience in their own campaigns.

"I just can't do it as a city employee. I've put that behind me," he says. "But it's darned hard to say to a friend I can't help you — I work at city hall now."

"The world of politics is behind me. I don't intend to revive it either."

But his community activities are still as varied. For seven years he's been treasurer of Bridge Street United Church; he is secretary of the Belleville Sales and Ad Club.

And in recreation, he has for years been one of the city's greatest lawn bowlers — when he's not indulging a passion for bridge.

In fact, one of his first acts when deciding on the Western Ontario move was to check the availability of bowling greens.

The Hydys — including three

children — move to St. Thomas where Mr. Hyde takes up his post April 1.

Dealing strictly with personnel is a job he's anticipating, he says.

Working with people is fascinating," Mr. Hyde says.

He leaves his hometown at a time when it's expanding faster than ever before in its history.

Mr. Hyde notes the number of industrialists and other new residents who have been recent arrivals.

"I'm sure they feel it's a pretty good place to be," he concludes. "I've always felt that way."