

Boyd Gang's Colborne bank heist recalled

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COLBORNE — The recent 150th birthday of Colborne has turned thoughts to the municipality's history.

Many stories have been shared in recent weeks, but some still remember the time the infamous Edwin Alonzo Boyd — object of the biggest manhunt in Canadian history — pulled a bank heist at the CIBC.

The original CIBC has been replaced with a one-story modern bank near the Becker's store in this little community. But it was a grand two-storey red-brick building in 1951, when Brighton resident Helen Haig — then Helen Kernaghan — was at work that day.

Asked about the experience, Haig displays a number of clippings about the Boyd gang.

"That's Alonzo, that's Leonard Jackson and Norman Boyd — they're all dead now," she says, examining a clipping from 1996 — 30 years after Boyd was released, following 14 years in the Kingston penitentiary.

Haig knows the full story by now, of the former hobo who joined the Canadian Army and came back from the Second World War with a German Luger — which he used in 1949 to pull his first bank robbery in Toronto.

His career was well advanced the day he came to Colborne. Haig was at work with her friends Marg Barnes, Vivian Jones, Cicely Scroggs and Kathy Jud. They enjoyed working together and — most days — had a lot of fun.

"But not that day," she recalled.

"Around two o'clock, Cicely was looking out the window. She said, 'Look at those guys out there. They look so weird. I

hope they don't come in and rob us.'"

Which is precisely what happened at 10 minutes to three.

"It was scary. When they came in through the door, he kept saying, 'Come on, six, come on, six.' It was a code they had," she recalled.

Boyd headed right for the office of manager Bob Virgin. During their trip to the vault, he hit him over the head with his gun.

"The doctor said another quarter-inch that way would have killed him," she said.

"He told Mac Rutherford to get down. He didn't get down fast enough, and he hit him on the head, too.

"Marg Barnes was pregnant, and she was typing at her desk. He pushed her down on her typewriter and said to stay there."

Percy Moore hid behind his desk and they saw it, she added. But as long as he was quiet and out of the way, they were inclined to let it pass.

"We all on the floor, piled on top of each other. We were paralyzed," she said — except one of the ladies who was whimpering.

"Leonard Jackson kept walking back and forth, swinging his gun. He said, 'Shut up, lady, or I'll let you have it.' I put my hand over her mouth, and then she quieted down."

Charles Woods owned the Queen's Hotel in those days. Larry Glasgow, the accountant, got away and ran over there for help — though he couldn't talk for a few minutes. Finally, he gave Woods the news, and Woods called in the alarm.

"The police didn't hurry to get there," Haig commented, but they arrived in time to pursue the gang as they headed north on their getaway.

In the end, they estimated



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Brighton resident Helen Haig shows off the 1951 photo of her gang from work enjoying a soothing cup of tea after a robbery by the infamous Edwin Alonzo Boyd gang. From left, the photo shows Marg Barnes, Cicely Scroggs, Vivian Jones, Kathy Jud and herself, with manager Bob Virgin in the background.

the gang got away with about \$5,000 — a lot of money back then, Haig pointed out.

And in spite of how free they were with their gun butts, no bullets were fired until the getaway. The police turned around after that, she said.

"After it was over, Mr. Woods brought us a pot of tea, and that helped," Haig said.

She still treasures the black-and-white photo of her friends pouring that special pot of tea.

The following year, the gang would count a policeman

among their victims. Jackson was hanged that year, along with gang member Steve Suchan. Boyd lived out his life peacefully after his release, dying in 2002 at the age of 88.

Haig would work at CIBC four years before marrying husband Doug. They had the licence bureau in Brighton for 35 years, and she is grateful she never had to work at a bank again.

Several years ago, Barnes wrote her own poem about the ordeal and mailed it to her

sisters in stress. She called it *Remember, Cicely? Or The Ballad of the Boyd Gang*.

The year was 1951.

The bank's work was nearly done.

We were about to fold our books,

When through the door came four crooks

Armed with guns and pillow cases,

Hostility and hopped-up faces.

We didn't take it very well. In fact, we were all scared as

hell! And as we scurry, fret and fumble,

They get away with quite a bundle.

But the years have blown it all away

And look how brave we are today.

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