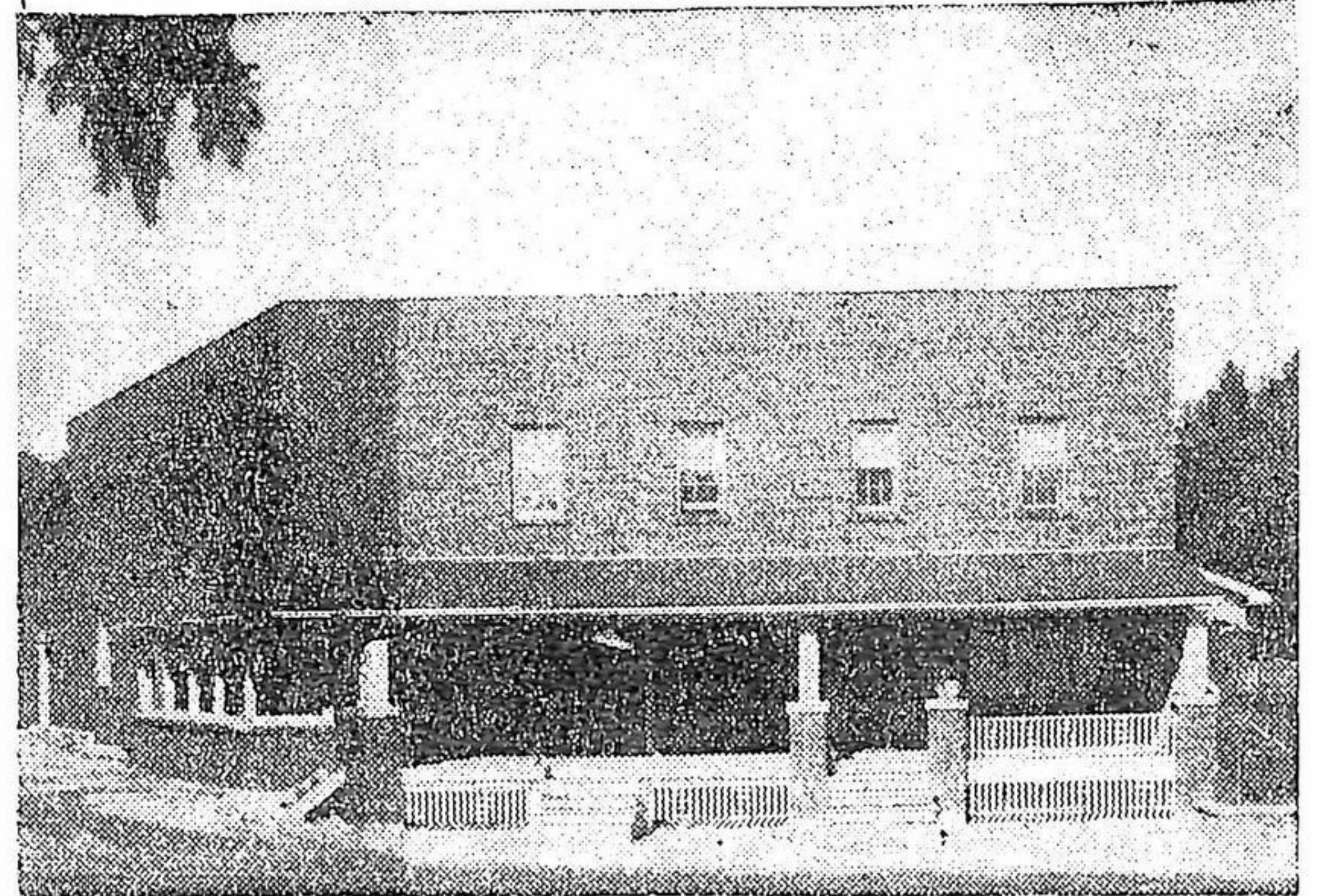


100-Year-Old Store At Birr Is Turned Over To Veteran



A CENTURY'S SERVICE TO BIRR COMMUNITY will not be interrupted for the Birr store pictured here, but will continue "business as usual" when Etheld Harris hands over the reins on July 1 to Capt. Jack Legg, veteran of six years in the service, four of them spent overseas.

AFTER operating his store at Birr for more than 37 years of its century's service to that community, Etheld Harris is to hand over the reins to Capt. Jack Legg on July 1.

Capt. Legg, a veteran of six years' service, four of them overseas, will take over the complete business with the exception of the chopping mill.

Mr. Harris reminisces freely about his years at the store and the joys and sorrows, laughs and tears, and just plain living which have been tied up about those few buildings could make an excellent setting for a John Buchan novel.

The corner building of the group, situated on No. 4 highway at the intersection of the 13th concession of London Township, was once a hotel. The original "Birr Hotel" property was destroyed by fire more than a century ago and the present structure was erected some 50 years ago.

Back in the days when the men did the family's drinking, and liquor was a matter of both quality and quantity, the "liquor cellar" of the store was well stocked and the hotel's bar was highly regarded. Still on view is the "liquor cellar door" where inebriates were "rolled out," long before Mr. Harris' tenure of office, as owner of the building.

The modern dwelling adjoining the main part of the store replaced the outmoded "liquor cellar," which was torn down.

Mr. Harris' immediate predecessor was George Porter, who had operated the store for some three years, and records indicate that the property had previously changed hands often.

Years ago, when Mr. Harris entered the business field, he drove to London once a week to make his purchases and dray his heavy merchandise with a team of horses. As time and transportation evolved the general merchant progressed from teams and lorries, to the use of present-day gasoline-motivated trucks.

Mr. Harris recalls with a chuckle his first car—a one-cylinder 1910 Brush car, which is long since extinct (and forgotten both by modern manufacturers and drivers), with its wooden axels, carbide lights, and chain-drive apparatus.

"Yes," he laughed, "it would do a nice 25 miles an hour on

the level, but a good horse could pass it climbing a hill!"

In "the horse and buggy days," it was not uncommon for the storekeeper to sell 50 or 60 buggies a year, and about the same number of light harness sets.

He saw hand-style metal pumps replace the older style wooden pumps, and recalls the year when 100 of the "new-fangled pumps," were put into operation in the small community.

Less than a week ago George Smibert had repaired a pump which Mr. Harris had sold him more than 30 years ago.

During his first year Mr. Harris ran what was termed in those days "a general store," but he decided to branch out. He took on the implement business.

He purchased the Lumsden property, which at one time held a shoe factory and repair shop, and a locksmith plant operated by a Mr. Lumsden. Some years later he purchased the Birr Hotel property operated by people called Birr. In spite of a desire on the part of some to suggest that the family gave the community its name, this is denied by others who maintain it is named for a village in Ireland.

The hotel was converted into a community hall and was known as "Birr Winter Gardens." It is now used as a storage depot and apartments. The hotel barn was renovated into a chopping and rolling mill, but was destroyed by fire a year later.

In only five weeks the mill was rebuilt and in operation again. Five years later additional elevator space was constructed. Today the mill is Diesel operated, has modern machinery and cleaners, and a 20-ton scale without weights.

Mr. Harris also entered the lumber and builders' supplies business, with more than 600 feet of covered lumber shed rooms.

In 1938 he added a coal-handling sideline to his enterprising establishment, and also provided the community with a convenient planing mill to combine his century-old business and buildings with ultra modern equipment and methods.

To safeguard his substantial investment Mr. Harris provided fire protection with a 35,000 gallon reservoir, a 500-foot line of steel pipe and hose. Pumping equipment is adequate, he claims.