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TOWN CRIER

# Masterfeeds Closes Out

By MARK SMITH

Masterfeeds in Thamesford has closed its doors for good.

Last Saturday, a "closeout auction" was held on the premises on highway 2 at the Thames River, to clear out the remaining stock of farm tools and gardening supplies, before the doors were locked, on the well known but visibly aged landmark.

Although losing a well-established retail business is almost always a regrettable development for a small town, the closing of Masterfeeds is not really an unhappy story.

While busily trying to accomplish the feat of vacating an establishment that included a feed mill, grain storage facilities, business offices, and retail display areas, Masterfeeds management has also been moving carefully but deliberately in the public relations department, making sure the public understands what motivated a drastic and somewhat sudden upheaval.

The people at Thamesford's Masterfeeds have, with patient smiles, accepted recent rumours about financial problems, realizing that they're one of the inevitable results of a business closure. Actually, the local Masterfeeds outlet will by no means cease to exist. What it has done, is moved lock, stock, barrel and employees to a new location in the town of Belton. There, it will be grafted onto the big St. Clair Grain & Feed facility, which is owned by the same parent company, Maple Leaf Mills.

The new, larger Belton establishment will be known as "Masterfeeds, Belton."

The reasons for the move do not make very interesting reading for the layman. They're all wrapped up in terms like "consolidation", "amalgamation" and "corporate house-cleaning" and the move from Thamesford was just one of several within a very large company.

Explained briefly, Maple Leaf Mills recently underwent a change of ownership. It had been owned by Norin Corp. of Florida, and was in turn controlled by the Norris family of Chicago Black Hawks fame. Profits made in Canada were being "bled" to the United States to pay off debts incurred in operations there. This left the company's ambitions in Canada stifled and under-financed.

A wealthy firm known as Canadian Pacific Enterprises now owns Maple Leaf Mills, and it's anxious to consolidate in the areas where the company is making the biggest profits. This means closing down ten relatively small and outdated feed mills and stores throughout Ontario. Besides

Thamesford, there have been (or will be) closings in Woodstock, Lindsay, Peterborough, Port Perry, Wellington, Chatham and Georgetown.

The old white mill at the bank of the Thames is indisputably Thamesford's best known landmark. A gift shop in town carries souvenirs of Thamesford such as pen holders, post cards and spoons, all of which bear colour pictures of the mill.

It was 1845 when the original mill was completed on the site. The all-wooden structure was hit by lightning in 1900, and it burned to the ground. That was the year the present brick building was erected. It operated as a flour mill until 1970, when the milling equipment was removed. Feed milling has been carried on right up to the present. The original flour mill was owned by Mr. Finkle, then later by Mr. Cawthrope who sold it to George Hogg & Son in 1917. The Hogg family operated the mill until February 1971, at which time it was purchased by Maple Leaf Mills Ltd.

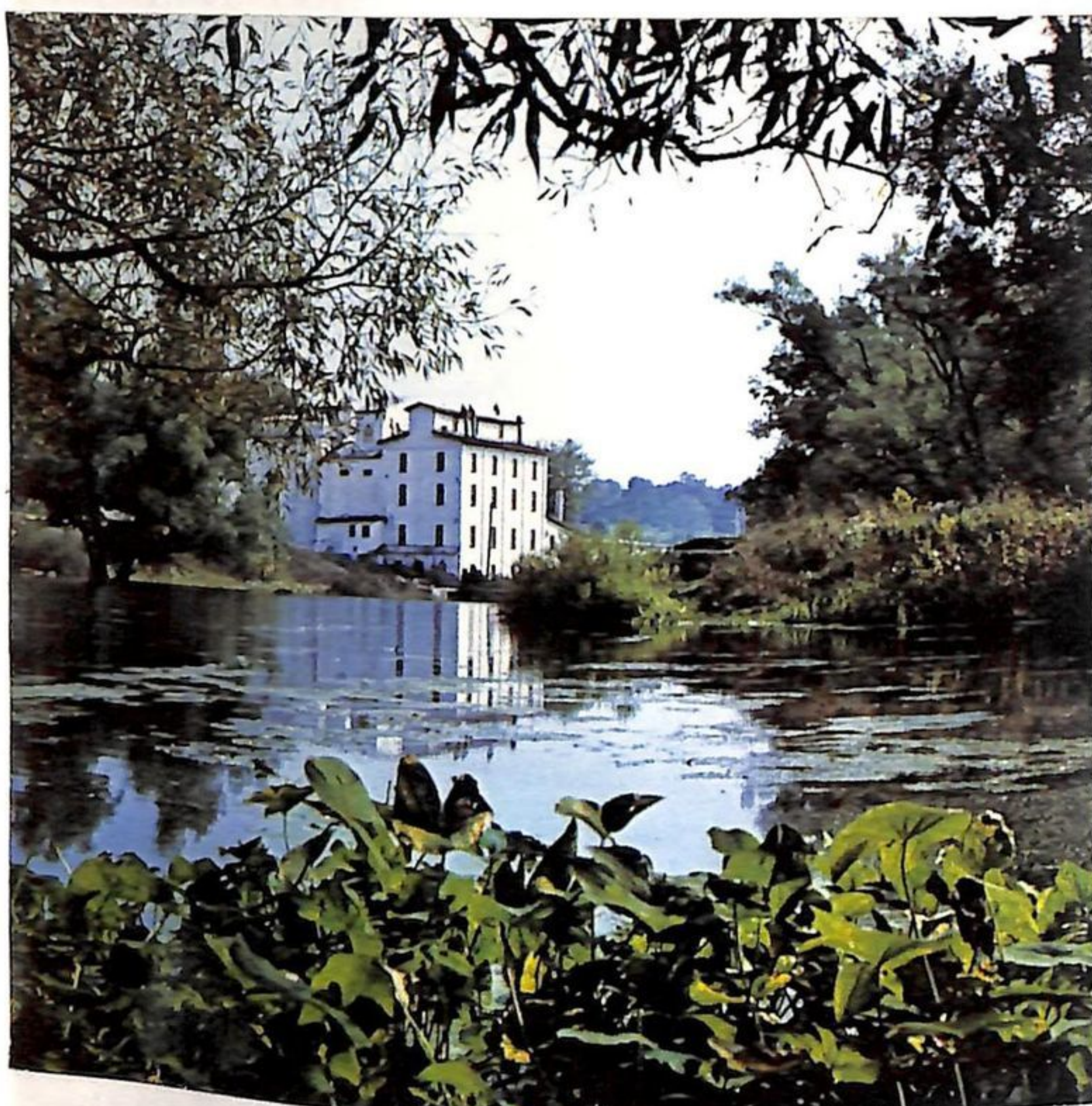
At present, the Masterfeeds facility is up for sale,

listed with Thamesford real estate broker Ron Hogg. The price tag is \$115,000. While he's reluctant to release specific details, Ron Hogg has indicated that there are several parties interested in the property, which includes three acres of land, zoned "commercial".

Jack W. Hutchison, manager of Masterfeeds in Thamesford, sent out letters to customers prior to the move, to keep them informed and to state this objective: "Our goal is to be competitive with our pricing, quality, and services in our new location, and it is hoped that we can continue to be of service to you, following our move."

Jack says that one of the first priorities at the new Belton location will be to establish delivery routes on a scheduled basis, serving this area twice weekly (Tuesdays and Fridays). Facilities at Belton include an alfalfa dehydration plant, grain handling and storage facilities, and bulk fertilizer blending.

More warehousing space is being added to accommodate the move; construction is expected to be completed by December 15th.



**THERE'S AN EERIE STILLNESS** — pervading the once busy Masterfeeds Farm & Garden Centre in Thamesford, where flood lights still illuminate its time and weather beaten walls at night, on the bank of the Thames River. (photo by Mark)