

The Acton Free Press.

Seventy Sixth Year No. 1

ONTARIO THURSDAY JULY 29, 1944

Special Anniversary Edition

75TH ANNIVERSARY

Newspaper, Town History Entwined

The history of the community's newspaper is entwined with the history of the community. Over thirty years ago we came back to Acton after having spent four or five years working in printing offices and newspapers in Toronto, New York State, Guelph and Kingston. We hadn't been on the staff but a few months when it became part of our duties to attend and report Council proceedings.

Thirty-three years ago there was no highway through Acton. The automobiles owned here could be counted on one hand and have a thumb left over. Snow laid on the roads as it fell until spring removal it but sidewalks were kept clear. Hydro was under the jurisdiction of Council. One man was municipal officer and did police and other municipal duties.

The problems and work of Council started to multiply about 1919 when the time came to install a waterworks system. There are the first times when we can recall the Council meeting lasting until the early hours of the morning. We have attended most of the sessions of Council for well over thirty years.

During that time we have sat at the Council table with over thirty different councils and five different clerks. It would have been the easy way to have secured from the clerk the proceedings of those meetings but we chose to attend the 300 or so sessions that have been held in that time.

In addition we have attended School Board and Public Utilities Commission and Library Board meetings and have served as a School Trustee and member of the Library Board, Fair Board, Y.M.C.A. etc.

How the town has progressed in that period and how municipal affairs have multiplied. We think Charlie Wilson has the longest record in municipal service and Amos Mason has served in the most offices and contributed the greatest municipal service of any we can recall.

The waterworks which many predicted would never be used by them has grown until there isn't a well left in town. The waterworks debt which it seemed would never end will be paid this year. With its completion the town embarks on the installation of sewers another major undertaking.

Main streets have been paved and the boundaries of the town extended. A high school building was built and has again outgrown its usefulness and the Public School has found itself bursting at the seams for accommodation.

The couple of workmen under Council Commission and Board jurisdiction has increased to about a dozen and the size of Council has gone from five members to nine. About the only thing stationary is the rate of pay of Council members which remains at zero the same as thirty years ago. (There was a brief period during this time, however that Councillors and Reeve drew an honorarium).

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TOP RIGHT, J. H. Hacking, founder and editor from 1875 to 1877. Top left, W. Galbraith, editor from 1877 to 1879. Lower left, Right Rev. Dr. T. Albert Moore, 1879 to 1881. Lower right, H. P. Moore, editor from 1879 to 1897. Center, J. A. Hacking, present editor.

ABOVE ARE THE EDITORS who for seventy five years have been at the helm of the Free Press. For the seventy two of the three quarters of the century there have been two more editors whose names or pictures have never appeared in the masthead of the newspaper. For 49 years, Mrs. J. P. Moore was assistant editor with H. P. Moore for 24 years. Mrs. D. B. has been the active secretary of the present office spending a time at the office both in Acton and Milton and with her car and a piece of the team that go into the Free Press each week. Her own keys at their entrance for the years, but as a foreman made of this newspaper, the Free Press has a number of its own active editors as well as the editors as residence in the town. The anniversary issue will feature a portrait of the best of which was the best wished.

Our Presentation To You An Historical Treasury of Facts

Two years after Acton was incorporated as a village, the Free Press was established. We are told that on Dominion Day, 1875, Joseph Hacking's first copies of Acton newspaper were shown to subscribers and subscriptions were solicited from citizens.

The first containing a copy of each week's issue of the seventy five years make quite a library. Almost 4,000 issues of the local news of Acton and district and fortunately all of them have been preserved.

That some of this local history might be re-read, re-read and enjoyed by our readers we have issued this anniversary section. We might have called for extra advertising from local merchants to participate in the issue but that is not considered a part of our day celebration.

There is a paper, much time and thought put in this anniversary section. There has been a matching of old time, resurrection of old engravings and other work. We trust our readers enjoy it and may think it worthy of preservation. It is a pity it will be 25 years before another historical issue will again be reprinted.

As you peruse the columns you will undoubtedly find many other recollections coming to your mind that you do not find mentioned. We do not maintain the issue is complete. Some will say our sins of omission are great. We have done our best in the time at our disposal.

We start the last quarter century with the same ambition that Joseph Hacking had in 1875—to give Acton and district a newspaper worthy of the community and a growing town.

Joseph Hacking Started All This

It was back in 1875 that Joseph Hacking, a printer from the Guelph Daily Advertiser decided that Acton should have a newspaper and putting his experience and funds into combination he assembled the necessary equipment for printing a newspaper here in a building that was then known as Matthews Hall. This building has since been moved from its site on the corner of Mill and Willow Streets and is now occupied by Holcher's Bakery. The first issue of the Free Press came out on Dominion Day, 1875.

After two years of operation printing Mr. Hacking persuaded the late James Matthews to build a one-story building adjoining the Free Press. Here Acton's newspaper was printed for the next ten years before moving to its present site. Mr. Matthews' building later served as Acton's Police and Public Utilities Office. The fire buildings replaced and were finally torn down from their original site at the Bank of Nova Scotia.

The Free Press building, as recalled by a boy had a top of the wooden structure and the paper was the first piece of machinery sent in the front door. The building was completely filled and made 2x4's with a general front. Up to that time the building was filled up every night and the papers were printed in the old Press room. A gas stove was incorporated as an improvement in 1904. About six months later when another section was added for a new newspaper press, the building didn't arrive until 1909 and incidentally saved space in the new section built for it.

In March 1910 another section was added which doubled the size of the newspaper building and gave much needed room for the business that grew with the community.

The Free Press is the only paper ever published in Acton. There have been but five editors in its 75 years. Joseph Hacking sold the paper in 1877 to Moore and Galbraith and in 1879 the Moore Brothers, T. A. and H. P. formed a partnership to operate the Free Press and the plant and office was moved to its present site.

The partnership was lengthy and T. A. entered the ministry where he rose to be head of the United Church of Canada and H. P. continued to edit and manage the Free Press until he sold his interests to the present editor, Arlof Dells, who for the past 25 three years has been editor and publisher of Acton's newspaper.

Actually it was 43 years ago in May that the present editor became actively associated with the Free Press and a year previous he had spent a summer vacation as printer's devil in the office.

Many the story we have heard regarding earlier years of printing in Acton and many the incident we can recall. Little of the equipment that was used forty years ago in printing is in use today. The Free Press has always made an effort to keep abreast of the times and has been encouraged in this by the patronage of buyers of printing in Acton and district.

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