

Big Snow Storm Recalls Invention 40 Years Ago

(This item, reprinted from the March 27 issue of the Hanover Post, will be of interest to district residents. Mr. Bowman is a brother of Mrs. Bridgen St. and an uncle of Gordon Bridgen of Horsey—Ed.)

We suppose citizens in this district are more snow conscious this winter than they have ever been before.

The big snow storm which tied up traffic and transportation for a week on main highways, and for longer, in many localities has made us realize that with demands of present day living standards, we are dependent on our means of combatting the elements. No matter what type of highway we build or vehicles to travel them.

And history seems to prove that our Canadian winters have always been

the same — entirely different — because forty years ago, an Elmwood citizen and inventor, Mr. Elizabeth Bowman, inspired by the severe winter of 1904, set about to invent a snow plough, and constructed a small hand model, which he operated by hand, and used about his own property.

The unusual machine attracted a great deal of attention, and railway officials became interested and made several visits to see the small model demonstrated at Elmwood. Motor traffic at that time was non-existent, but occasional intense winter storms often tied up the railways for days at a time, until men could, working in crews, shovel the tracks clear.

Several Elmwood and Hanover men realized the possibilities of Mr. Bowman's invention, and assisted him to secure patents, by forming a small company in which each had a 20 per cent interest.

About 1905, outside capital was in-

terested and Mr. E. D. Weber of Toronto (who had formerly been in partnership with the firm of Kaufman and Widfang, general merchants in Elmwood), promoted a company and sold sufficient stock to have a snow-plough built from the model for actual demonstrating purposes.

The plow was built by Hunter Bros., who conducted a foundry at Kincairdine and who had built many steel bridges in the district, including the iron bridge just west of Hanover.

At this time, the Canadian Pacific Railway were in process of constructing the branch line across from Sturgeon Junction to Walkerton, and the steel had been laid as far as Hanover, in the preceding fall, but the branch was not completed or in operation.

Consequently, the accumulation of the winter's snow was all lying on the road bed, and it was felt there could be no better field in which to demonstrate the snowplough than right here.

So the plough was taken down country from Kincairdine, and across to Sturgeon Junction, late in March of 1907, to prove what it would accomplish in opening up the line between Sturgeon Junction and Priceville which consisted of a deep cut in which the winter's harvest lay in a solid mass of frozen snow and ice.

A great number of C.P.R. and C.N.R. officials, as well as those interested in the new company, gathered at Sturgeon Junction to witness this demonstration which certainly made history, as the first snow plough to operate in this part of the country, and in which there is such a tie-up of local interest.

Mr. William Roloff and Mr. E. H. Lorenz drove from Hanover to Sturgeon and the photos from which the illustrations in this paper were made, were taken by Mr. Roloff on that memorable occasion.

We can imagine the tense interest with which the spectators watched the dramatic scene, enacted in the cold March sunshine, surrounded by the snow banked hills and winter scenery, with only a little group of people gathered at a railway siding, to give a send-off to this new idea which was conceived among the snow banks of the little village of Elmwood, and which the future would develop into a powerful agent in the life of our whole country.

The plough successfully cleared the cut, throwing out solid blocks of snow, weighing hundreds of pounds, and cleared the track so successfully

that a most astounding and favorable impression was made upon all who witnessed it.

The object of the promoters of what was now called the Ideal Snowplough Co., was to have the railways build the ploughs on a royalty basis, but due to the fact that after several severe winters, we had a series of very moderate ones, during which the railway companies had no difficulty in coping with the snow with their regular wedge instruments, the companies simply stood pat on the proposition.

Unfortunately Mr. Weber, the promoter of the new venture died very suddenly from a heart attack, and as he had assumed much of the responsibility, which no one else seemed sufficiently interested to take over, the entire venture gradually just petered away.

The famous plough stood on the Grand Trunk siding at Palmerston for a number of years, and the last the shareholders heard of it, was that it had been taken out, to Western Canada.

The plough was operated by an engine enclosed in the van. It consisted of a large horizontal revolving cylinder across the front. The latter had deep spirals around it worked on the principle of an auger, which ate into the snow and threw it out on either side, after the system of the present Rotary ploughs.

The old plough did not depend upon the pressure exerted by the engines pushing it, as it did not push the snow ahead, but sideways, and threw it out over the cuts into the fields.

The entire personnel associated with Mr. Bowman in the promotion of his invention felt very confident that Mr. Bowman had something of real merit in his plough, and it was unfortunate that it never had the opportunity of really demonstrating what it could accomplish in general all round performance.

Possibly, like all inventions the first model built would have revealed some mechanical weakness, which could have been adjusted and perfected after extensive tests. The materialization of the project was a big proposition requiring large capital expenditure, in sums that were not available to Mr. Bowman or his associates.

Had Mr. Bowman invented some small gadget, with wider demand, which could have been manufactured for a small sum, he and his confederates might and probably would have made a fortune.

Another factor that had an important bearing on the financing of the project, was the almost bankrupt position of the old Grand Trunk, which was taken over by the government a few years later.

Had this company been in sound financial standing at the time, they might have been more inclined to build the ploughs on the suggested royalty basis.

One cannot but feel some regret that Mr. Bowman with his mechanical genius and unusual foresight, and loyal friends could not have reaped some financial benefit from a vision of 40 years ago, that has become such a successful reality today.

Mr. Bowman, who still resides at Elmwood, has not confined his inventive talent to snowploughs. He experimented with sound transmission in its early stages, and with an alarm clock, equipped in such a manner that it would light his fires in the morning, and countless other ideas, which have become more than possibilities, when money accompanied them, and developed them into industrial realities.

There seems, indeed, "To be a tide which taken at the flood leads into fortune." May Mr. Bowman, who met not a flood but a snow storm, more or less successfully, some day stride the tide which will bring him fortune as well.

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