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Arthur Wilson Marks His Diamond Jubilee in the Electrical Business

Arthur Wilson was 14 years old and due to return to school in September when he heard that the Canadian General Electric Co. needed a mail boy. The salary, \$100 a year.
"Without telling my mother," he says, "I took the job instead of going back to school. The \$100 looked good to me, and it sure helped out at home."
That was in 1892 and this month Arthur E. Wilson of Toronto marks his sixtieth year in the electrical industry and his twenty-fourth with Smith & Stone Limited, Georgetown.



ARTHUR WILSON

Coinciding with these anniversaries, Brigadier F. C. Wallace, executive vice president of Smith and Stone, announced that Mr. Wilson has been moved up from Toronto sales manager to vice president of the company's public relations.

Wilson apparently has no regrets about the abrupt end to his schooling. He says it has only one thing to make it memorable; he was the first boy to get the strap at the Duke street school in Toronto.

A real Torontonian — born in Cabbagetown within sight of the Don river — he takes satisfaction from the fact that he could still "shoot a rifle" into the Don from his present home in Toronto.

Art Wilson, as he is known from coast to coast by electrical contractors, jobbers, distributors, engineers and executives was the first man in Canada to sell flashlights.

When he entered the electrical industry, there were no electric irons, toasters, fans, stoves or refrigerators to say nothing of such appliances as radios and television sets. Rubber-covered wire was seldom used, concealed wiring was almost unknown and it was considered quite a step forward when wires were buried in wood moulding in the ceilings of homes.

"One man," he remarks, "got ingenious and made a wood socket. It didn't last long."

Weather-proof wire predominated in homes and actually wasn't a very serious fire hazard because, as Wilson explains, each room had only one light and the load was so small it minimized danger.

He recalls when porcelain began to gain popularity as an insulator. He remembers the first electric iron, a clumsy gadget supposed to make any housewife happy, especially if she could be happy slugging a seven-pound iron at a shirt. This appliance was heated by a cylindrical unit that slid inside.

The smoke and smell of burning toast was first brought to the bride's breakfast table by an appliance that impressed Wilson with its porcelain base and hand-painted pictures.

The first flashlights introduced in Canada were powered by two wet-cell batteries. Water was poured into each battery through a small opening in the bottom and then a piece of match was used to plug the hole.

In the dramatic days of demonstrating these flashlights Wilson attained the awed interest accorded a magician. Unfortunately, however, much of the magic of those moments was lost to Wilson one night on a weed-covered lane when the flashlight failed to pick out a houseless privy.

It was about 63 years ago when Wilson took notice of the ball-arc series of lighting in Toronto stores and the Crompton Corset Co. on York Street will always be important to him for having one of the first plants lit by electricity, using a bi-polar generator.

However, to any one growing up with the belief that "bright lights" have always been synonymous with cities, it comes as a shock to learn from Wilson that small towns and villages had electric lights first.

"These places had their saw mills and flour mills," he explains. "A large number used steam and all they had to do was buy a generator to light their plants. They would soon string a few wires to light the streets. That's how so many private power plants got into operation."

Wilson had personal experience with a number of these plants. From his first job as mail boy, his promotion would be regarded today as meteoric. He went to shipper, assistant superintendent of warehouse, superintendent, into the sales department and was out on the road as an experienced company representative by the time he was 20 years of age.

Recognition of this experience took a peculiar turn when he visited owners of private power stations. Often, they entrusted him with the job of firing boilers. Wilson would fire the boilers all evening while the owners would visit with their families or enjoy a rare night out with the boys. Another of Wilson's observations was made during this period of his career.

"I fired the boilers with shavings, sawdust, coal and corn cobs," he says "and the hottest of the works is corn cobs."

Municipal and domestic lighting at this time was always on a flat rate and it was customary to pull the switches on the entire town or village at twelve or one o'clock at night.

Off-and-on pulls on the switches gave earlier warning that the "lights out" deadline was near. While this had a sobering influence on social activities of the day, Wilson admits he got the occasional bribe of 50 cents or a dollar from a gay, young blade when he "forgot" the switches for an hour or so and permitted a party to continue overtime.

With nostalgic affection, Wilson tells of the days when a traveller could complete a two-week trip from Toronto to Sarnia, Chatham, London and other points and return to Toronto faced with some "padding" if he tried to get his expense account over \$38.

Much of the travelling from town to town was done with horse and buggy, or, in winter, horse and cutter. Highlight of those days include two hotel fires, from which he escaped uninjured, and one horse running away which resulted in a village constable trying to arrest Wilson for driving recklessly.

All of which causes Art Wilson to offer the comment that commercial travelling today is geared too fast. "The average traveller today doesn't really know his customers," he says. "He can't in 15-minute calls, although I'll admit that some men you visit are reluctant to give that much time."

"We used to spend evenings and Sundays with our customers — and not in a hotel room with a bottle. We visited their homes and got to

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know their families. They looked to us for news and views."
With a great deal of professional pride, Wilson recalls a travellers' dinner when Canon Cody, the guest speaker, spoke of them as "ambassadors of Canada."
"That's what a good salesman should be," he declares, "an ambassador for his company and his country."

Wilson has always made service more than a business motto. He was one of the four founders of the Big Brother Movement in Toronto and he resigned from social organizations so he could continue in this work. Since 1910, it is estimated, he has been a Big Brother — a pal—to more than 700 boys who, for various reasons, had got off on the wrong foot in life.

Art Wilson, however, is the last man to regard this as meriting public praise. "It was a great hobby," he says, "and a selfish hobby. I got more out of it than I ever put into it. And I love kids."

Enter Georgetown Team In Avro Hockey League

Georgetown employees at AVRO, Malton, will have an entry in the house league which will play at Brampton Arena. The team, as yet unnamed, will play from one to two o'clock Sunday afternoons in a five team league. Winners of the league will play off with winners of a Woodbridge group.

Doug Wilson will manage the team. Players will include Stenmer Emmerson, Zeke McCandless, Bill McDonald, Jim Cofell, Art Sheppard, Cliff Norton, Jack Hamilton, Charlie Jones, Ev Wilson, Dunc and Blake Baxter, Charlie Hennessey, Bill Barry, Joe Louth, Hoot Wylie, Bruce Gummer, Herb Wright, Bill Muir, Denny Wright, and Mel Jordan of Acton.

BOB ALLEN NAVYMAN TRAINS IN MARITIMES

A Grade 10 student at Georgetown High School last year, Robert Allen has joined the navy and is training at HMCS Cornwallis, Cornwallis, N.S. Bob is the son of Councillor and Mrs. Stan Allen.

Two other Georgetown boys are taking navy training at the same station Roy Henderson and David Cooper.

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