

# The Acton Free Press

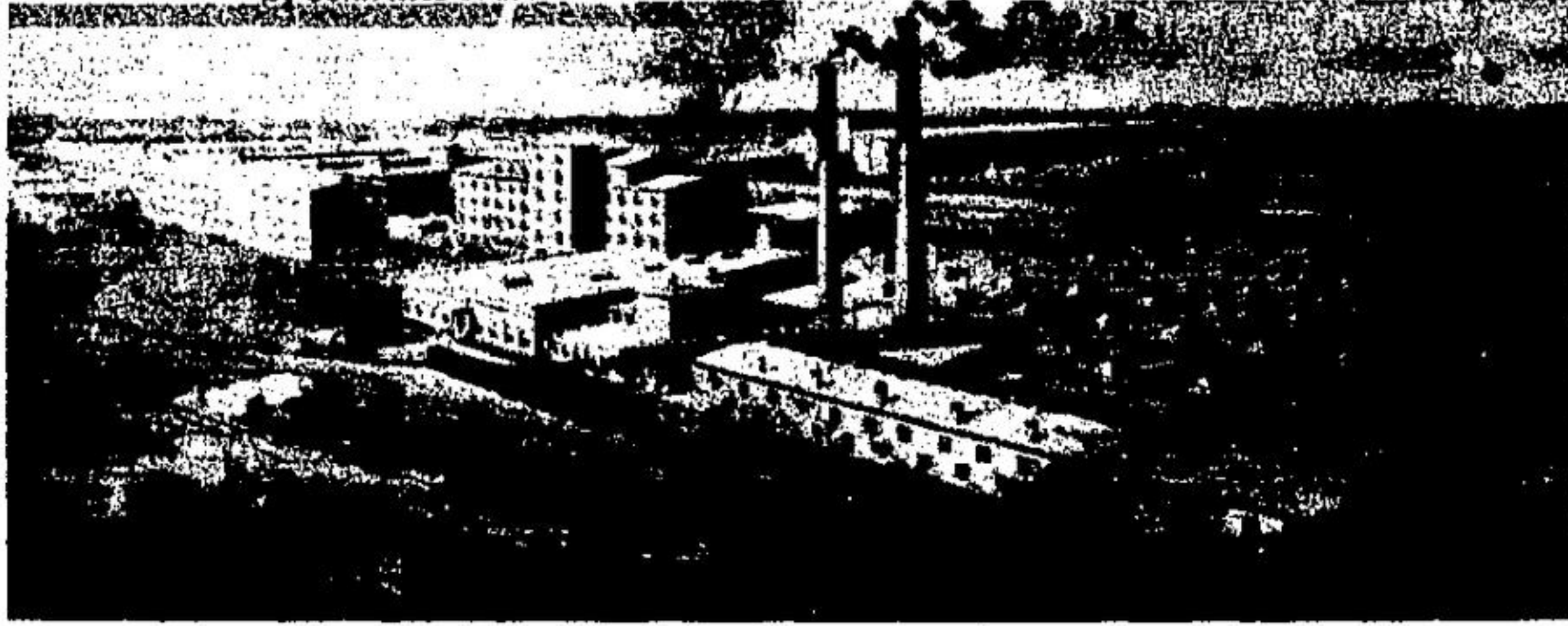
One Hundredth Year No. 23

ACTON, ONTARIO, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1974

SECOND SECTION

## Halton sketches Beardmore, founded 1844, major industry

by John McDonald



THE ACTON harness, strap, bag and belting leather tannery at Acton is shown in its heyday. Upper and chrome sole leathers were also

tanned here. The building on the left is now the Acton Industrial building housing various industries. Not all these structures remain

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OLD CARD identified the staff of Beardmore many years ago.

**Maybe 1976**  
Mayor Tom Hill, a resident of Glen Williams, told council there was need of a crossing guard or crosswalk at Glen Williams school. "The kids don't even cross at the school," he remarked.  
Councillor Mike Armstrong said Glen Williams is still under the jurisdiction of the O.P.P. "We are given to understand it will be Halton Regional Police territory after January, 1975."  
"Or maybe 1976," commented Councillor Ernie Sykes.

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Beardmore and Co., which has always been Acton's major industry, was founded in 1844 at Hamilton by George L. Beardmore and his younger brother Joseph. Both men learned the tanning business in England, in a plant near Liverpool. In partnership they built the first stone tannery in Canada at Hamilton in 1844. A few years later Joseph Beardmore died, and after a serious fire in the tannery in 1854, in which all stock was lost, elder brother George moved to Toronto where he engaged in business as a leather merchant. He did not undertake production only on a small scale in a little plant on the Grand River, until he acquired a plant in Guelph. He continued production operations in Guelph until 1865 when he purchased a tannery in Acton.

In 1841, the first tannery on the site of the present Beardmore facilities was built in 1842 by Abraham Nelles who was succeeded by Edward and Henry Smith, who increased the capacity of the tannery. Addition  
This concern was bought in 1852 by Coleman and McIntyre of Dundas, who built a large stone addition to the old building, and confined their operations exclusively to the manufacture of sole leather from Spanish hides. During their ownership the building was burned down, and re-built.

It afterwards became the property of McGloshen and Atchison who carried on business for several years, then sold it to Sessions, Toby and Co.  
After lying idle a considerable length of time, the entire property was purchased by George L. Beardmore in June 1865. Mr. Beardmore placed the buildings in a thorough state of repair and equipped them with the most modern tanning machinery of the time.

Destroyed in fire  
In 1872 the buildings were razed by fire and through Beardmore's determination were re-built and business was as usual within one year. The insurance of \$17,000 covered only a small portion of the loss. This time the buildings were of stone. An expansion to the Beardmore firm was made in the 1880's when a small wooden plant was purchased, also in Acton, which had previously been used for producing cordovan leather. The purpose of this addition was to turn it over to the manufacture of harness leather.

In the "nineties", Beardmore and Company saw an opening for further development and branched out into the production of belting leather in the same plant.  
Carried on  
In 1893, George L. Beardmore died and the business was carried on by his four sons. The eldest son W. D. Beardmore, entered the business with his father at the early age of 16 years and worked his way up until, in 1870, he was admitted into partnership still a young man. In May 1915 he died and brother George W. Beardmore became the senior partner.  
Hemlock bark which was an essential ingredient in the tanning business was becoming harder to secure each year in the Acton area. Substitutes for the hemlock

bark that we know today were unheard of.  
Many miles  
This was the period when farmers were still clearing the land and virtually every hemlock tree cut down in the area furnished bark for the Acton tannery. Farmers came from Esqueness and Nassagaweya, then Erin and Framosa, until finally bark was carted to Acton from as far away as Garafraxa township, just below Owen Sound. It was not an uncommon sight during the winter in Acton to see 25 or 30 sled loads of hemlock bark coming into

town in one long procession, headed for the Beardmore tannery.  
In the course of time the growing Beardmore tannery had used up all the hemlock bark available in the surrounding townships. Bringing bark in by train was found to double the price being paid to farmers. So, about 1879, Beardmore's built a tannery at Bracebridge, in the midst of the hemlock region.  
After a few years' operation at Bracebridge the bark in the surrounding area was all used up and the tannery was under the same

handicap as at Acton.  
About 1906 the Bracebridge tannery was closed and many employees came to Acton.  
The Beardmore interests included at one time three subsidiaries of Beardmore and Co., Ltd., the Muskoka Leather Co. Ltd., and the Beardmore and Co., the Acton Tanning Co. Ltd., the Muskoka Leather Co. Ltd., and the Beardmore Belting Co., Ltd. The plant operating under the name Beardmore and Co., was devoted to the production of sole leather; the Muskoka tannery at

Bracebridge manufactured hemlock sole leather exclusively, while in the plant of the Acton Tanning Company harness and belting leathers were tanned, in addition to chrome sole, upper, case, bag, strap, sandal and other light leathers.  
The Beardmore Belting Company in Toronto manufactured belts from the product supplied by the Acton Tanning Company.  
The main tanneries at Acton have a combined floor space of nearly a million square feet. The Company's farm and employees' houses covered an area of over 500 acres. Due to the depression and the need to end any duplication of costly services, the Toronto offices of Beardmore and Company on Front Street were consolidated with the Acton offices in November, 1936. A small sales office remained in the city.

Community conscious  
Beardmore and Co. have always been very community conscious and always made provision for the welfare of their employees. This relationship has always been a company tradition, but I cannot help note that a strike 1900 was held for two weeks after wages were reduced from \$1.25 per day to \$1.10 due to poor economic conditions.  
At one period Acton could certainly have been considered a Beardmore "Company town". As one scheme to reduce employees' living expenses, Beardmore and Co. built homes for their workers and rented them for \$6 to \$8 per month. Sixty houses were built and rented by Beardmore's during the early 1900's.  
The Beardmore private residence known as Beverly House was located at the corner of Church and Maria Streets and is now the site of Diplomat apartments.

Recreation  
Recreation facilities have always been provided not only to Beardmore employees, but to the community. Tennis courts, bowling greens, a large skating rink and a club house were among the recreational contributions to the town.  
The skating club house, which was on the property of Beardmore & Co., at the foot of Frederick Street, was granted lease-free to the Acton branch of the Royal Canadian Legion as their first meeting house in 1931.

This was representative of the kindness of Col. A. O. T. Beardmore who served on Acton Council for a period of time. In 1945 the Legion purchased its former building on Main Street directly across from the Dominion Hotel.  
Centennial  
In 1944 Beardmore & Co. celebrated its centennial year with several functions held throughout that year. A large picnic at Acton Park for all Beardmore employees resulted in a pleasant surprise when each worker was provided a fine new leather coat compliments of Beardmore & Co.  
The highlight of the centennial year was a large dinner at the Royal York Hotel with many Acton citizens in attendance.

Purchased  
It is ironic that on the last day of its one hundredth year Beardmore & Co. was purchased by a large meat packing company. On December 31, 1944, Canada Packers bought the assets of Beardmore & Co.  
During 1959 and 1960 the use of new synthetic materials as a substitute for hemlock bark forced another Canada Packer's holding firm since 1952 to close its operations in Huntsville. Upwards of 50 employees, and their families, from Anglo-Canadian Tanners were relocated to Acton as each department closed.

Head Office  
The former head office of Beardmore & Co. is still standing at 37 Front St. East, Toronto and was sold in 1972 and has transformed into the famous Hayloft Restaurant next to the St. Lawrence Centre. The building still bears the Beardmore name.  
The tannery which has operated in Acton for almost 110 years under the Beardmore name has brought a high recognition to the town. Beardmore & Co. is not only one of the largest tanneries in Canada but is reputed to have been the largest tannery in the British Empire.



ORIGINAL BEARDMORE tannery at Hamilton was built by the late George L. Beardmore. This plant, which was the first stone tannery in Canada, still stands although no longer used for tanning purposes.



George W. Beardmore



A. O. Beardmore



F. N. Beardmore

## Landowner protection promised by Hydro

About 100 Nassagaweya and Esqueness area homeowners were assured Wednesday they would receive all possible protection when Ontario Hydro expropriates or negotiates for their land for a 569 kv hydro line.  
The Ontario cabinet announced its choice for a final route several months ago. The route is subject to minor changes as determined by the land compensation board. It will cross Milton on the north side of Highway 401, cutting south and east on the east side of the built up section.  
Manager of Appraisal Division Bob Holley and Director of Properties for Ontario Hydro Neil McMurtrie outlined what process would be followed to make sure landowners got a fair deal, at a meeting in the Lions Hall, Campbellville.  
Several points  
Among those points of

officials made during the meeting were the following:  
-If a farm is rendered uneconomical by the taking, Hydro will pay for the whole farm and try to sell the balance to the abutting owner.  
-Owners will be entitled to the protections under the expropriation act.  
-It will take until January 1977 before deals are finalized according to a tentative schedule.  
-Landowners will be able to have their own lawyer and their own appraiser act for them and Ontario Hydro will pick up the cost as long as costs are considered reasonable.  
-Hydro does have to prove a need for the land it takes.  
-Hydro will share in costs of maintaining fences separating hydro land from abutting farms.  
-Hydro will discourage building under the line and will pay replacement value for any buildings on land acquired.  
Avoid hardships  
During the meeting officials said hydro will launch a three phase program designed to lead to acquiring

the land. They said the three phases were designated as being information, enquiries to determine necessity and negotiations.  
They claimed there would be no settlements until the third phase was reached unless there were some cases where the situation was working a hardship on an individual.  
It was explained that those who were settled later often feel that their settlements were predicated on the first few. They noted that all settlements would be based on market value at the time of taking.  
One man said he was anxious to settle. He said he was unable to fix or repair buildings or plan for the future. He said he wasn't interested in waiting until 1977 and going through the long arduous process. He wanted to settle now, he said.  
Nothing major  
Many questions were asked about a host of circumstances and what sort of compensation individuals would be entitled to.  
Halton East MPP Jim Snow attended the meeting along with Milton Mayor Anne MacArthur and a number of Milton councillors.  
Snow assisted Ontario Hydro officials in fielding questions from the floor.

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Plowing  
Town workmen have been sanding and plowing this week, working early and late.