

From early beginnings Free Press marks 100 years

It was on July 2, 1875, that the first issue of The Acton Free Press was bravely printed on a small hand-fed press, and sold in this village of 700 souls.

The place: Mathews Hall, now the vacant rooms above Hotchen's Bakery.

The time: Friday morning.

The price: \$1 per annum in advance.

Editor and publisher: Joseph Hacking, an ambitious businessman who also operated the Guelph Daily Advertiser.

Canada abounded in spirited little papers well over a century ago. Cities had far more news sheets than nowadays and small towns might have two or three competing weeklies.

Acton received one paper, and there hasn't been another since. And for most of that hundred years, the town's only newspaper has been in the somewhat inky hands of two families, the Moores and the Dills.

But back to the beginning.

Acton ready for a paper

Mr. Hacking had made enquiries and he decided the village of Acton was ready for him. He assembled the equipment he would need - hand set type in narrow drawers and a hand-fed press.

He arranged to rent quarters upstairs in Mathews Hall, at the bustling dusty corner of Mill and Willow. (This building has been moved back down Willow, and now houses Hotchen's Bakery.) Council meetings were held there before the town hall was built.

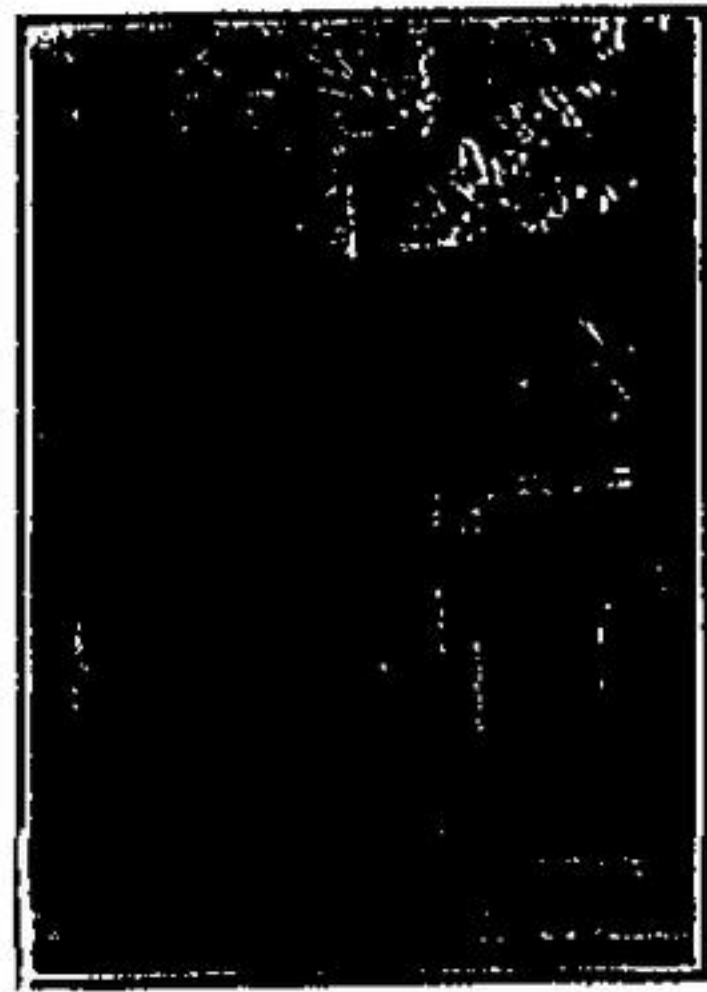
The first issue is completely reprinted for this centennial edition, including his less-than-immortal words: "We launch our little craft into the big ocean, and christen her the Free Press... sail on, good ship!"

He reasoned "For a number of years this village exhibited but comparatively slow progress in growth, and its business was done in an easy-going, jog-trot sort of style. Of late, however, a decided improvement in every way has been perceptible... It has continued to grow and prosper in a ratio more in keeping with the modernized ideas of younger mushroom villages... We have faith to believe that the impetus which has recently been given will continue to exert an influence that will carry it forward with very rapid strides."
Surprisingly, there were carrier boys then, a practice soon abandoned in favor of mail delivery and store purchases. House-to-house delivery by eager youngsters was resumed in the summer of 1974 with the introduction of home mail delivery service in Acton.

New building later post office

After two years of printing upstairs, Mr. Hacking persuaded his landlord, a long-time merchant James Matthews, to build a one-storey frame building next door to his thriving store and post office on Mill St. to house The Free Press.

Here the newspaper was produced for another two years, next door to its original site.



This little building then became the village's first separate post office with James Matthews postmaster over 50 years; later a recruiting station, then the home of the once-famous Acton Checker Club, the Acton Public Utilities office and then Evans meat shop. It no longer exists. The Toronto-Dominion bank sits on the location now.

The first apprentice was T. Albert Moore. He washed inky rollers, carried the papers to homes of subscribers, rain or shine, and learned to set type.

It's recorded foreman Bob Simpson once declared it was impossible to get out a weekly edition without a pitcher of Bob Dickie's beer.

Moore, Galbraith are new owners

On November 28, 1877, Joseph Hacking wrote "The present editor and proprietor of the Free Press, finding after a fair trial of two and a half years, that managing two separate establishments at a distance of fourteen miles apart, was neither profitable nor satisfactory, has concluded to dispose of the Free Press and confine himself to his business in Guelph... In future the Free Press will be conducted by Messrs. Moore

and Galbraith, two enterprising practical printers, sufficiently experienced in newspaper life to warrant the hope that the change will be beneficial to our patrons and all concerned."

By the next week the masthead read T. A. Moore, manager and S. W. Galbraith, editor, but the four-page paper looked just the same—the front page filled with a short story, witticisms and anecdotes as well as a few ads, especially for patent medicines, the back page solid advertising, and the middle two pages a melange of local and world news with more local and Guelph ads.

Something had been amiss that wasn't reported in the Free Press.

The new owners set out by saying "We do not hold ourselves responsible for the past history of the paper, nor the course it has pursued. Mr. Hacking, we are sure, tried to do his duty, and act in an impartial manner to both political parties... We are responsible for the future alone. We dislike making promises and therefore we will not make them. But if practical energy, careful business management, pluck and perseverance will make it the best paper in the county, it will be so. We do not intend to make it a political paper—to take either the Grit or Tory side of the fence—but wish to make it a good family newspaper."

"We have just added to the mechanical department of the establishment a card press and other requisites to a well-conducted printing office, and being both practical printers, we are prepared to turn out work equal (if not better) to any other office in the County. In a word, to be brief, our aim will be to make the Free Press a welcome visitor to every intelligent and well-ordered home throughout this section of the country."

However they went on to record in the same issue for their readers in well-ordered homes almost two complete columns of the confessions of a man who murdered his wife, all from the Guelph Mercury. Complete and horrid details of the execution followed including the fact his daughters "uttered lamentations painful to hear."

Two Moores now take over

T. Albert Moore soon styled himself Publisher and Proprietor, and S. W. Galbraith, Editor. They said frankly in January, 1878, "Compliments go a great way in encouraging an editor, but it will not support him. It is a well-known fact that it takes a great deal of money to run a newspaper and we would like if those who are in arrears would come and settle at once."

Another change in management was duly recorded on July 18, 1878. Editor Galbraith had accepted a situation with the Montreal Evening Post.

"Mr. T. Albert Moore", says the editorial that week, "the former publisher, at the solicitation of many of his friends, as all his time would be taken up in editing the paper, resolved to take into partnership his



Free Press staffers are shown here in the early 1900's. In the window is H. P. Moore, in the group are an unidentified boy, G. A. Dills, Charles Matthews, and Ern Brown.

brother, Mr. H. P. Moore, as manager, thus allowing himself a much longer time to collect local news, and other interesting matter, that the Free Press may attain even a much higher standard than heretofore."

"Particular attention will be given to local affairs", say the brothers.

That week's local affairs: a threshing machine passed through town; the wheat looks well; the hand was out screwing Dr. McGarvin Monday and was invited in for ice cream and cakes; Mr. Wm. Grant stepped on a needle but is able to be about again; the Congregational Sabbath School picnic was held in Mr. Armstrong's grove; complaints are being made some boys are in the habit of bathing in Morrow's pond in the daylight; business is dull in town.

World news was less routine—there were threats of fights during the 12th of July parades in Montreal; there were between 40 and 50 deaths from sunstroke at St. Louis last week; the billiard room attached to the Royal Hotel in Guelph went up in flames and one fire engine exploded; natives are revolting at New Caledonia; Hanlan damaged his boat; the promised reforms on Cuba have begun.

Adams, William Glass and Mary Glass, his wife; Charlotte Adams, Wilbur F. Adams, Joseph F. Adams, Lucinda B. Adams, Harriet E. Adams, Agnes M. Adams and Abigail E. Adams.

In 1868 Emily Scott, widow of John Scott, bought the land. Six years later William Grant, a wagon maker and Acton's first constable after incorporation, bought the property.

In 1874 Mr. Grant sold to Robert Fisher of Erin. Mr. Fisher moved Mr. Grant's shop from the John St. side of the lot to the Mill St. frontage. Here he opened a tinware and stove shop. After two or three years he sold the business to Thomas Stewart and James Hill.

The business was moved in the winter of 1879 further down Mill, and the Free Press moved in.

Publication date changes

By now the paper came out Thursdays, rather than Fridays, and this day prevailed until about 15 years ago.



The Free Press staff in March 1927 was Clara Moore, Earl Vincent, G.A. Dills, Bob MacArthur, Cam Currie and H. P. Moore. It was at the time Arlof Dills assumed the ownership of the paper.

New location was tinshop

On October 31, 1878 the paper reported casually "Remember that the Free Press office has been removed from the old stand, next door to the Post Office, to the building formerly occupied by T. Stewart and Co., as a tin-shop. The latter building has been expressly and tastefully fitted up for us. All our friends are invited to call and see us."

Editor T. Albert Moore gave far more space to the need for a new cemetery to replace "the delapidated burying ground... in so close proximity to the centre of the village"; to the nocturnal actions of "worthless young vagabonds"; a murder attempt in Guelph entitled "Whiskey and Pistols" (35 inches of small type) and the names of Sir John Macdonald's cabinet "as appeared in Monday's Mail".

Editor G. A. Dills reminisced "The Free Press building we recall as a boy had a big wide wooden verandah and the paper cutter was the first piece of machinery as one went in the front door. A steam boiler was fired up every press day and the papers were printed on the old Prouty press."

Adams family owned the site

This new location was at the corner of Mill and John on a lot which was first sold out of the founding fathers, the Adams family, subdivision, by Ruth Adams, widow, to Ann McKenzie, widow.

But this lot (where the old Free Press building still stands) had seen several exchanges of ownership in its course from wheatfield to merchandising.

John Hogate, a merchant in the early days, sold the lot in 1852 to Angus Kennedy, a carpenter. Mr. Kennedy built the white frame house which stood on the corner until the Manning block was built 20 years ago. The house was moved out Highway No. 7, about a mile east of town, and is still there.

In 1857 there was a dispute among members of the Adams family concerning properties. Legal documents list Charles F.

"Particular attention will be given to affairs connected with the village and county to which we belong, and our local columns will always contain correct reports of everything of local importance which may transpire."

"In politics we continue neutral, and shall not be devoted to any political party or faction, but shall at all times and under all circumstances consider ourselves free to discuss matters of public interest on their merits. The field being so efficiently and capably filled by the metropolitan journals, wherein party politics is a specialty and wherein every faculty is afforded for fulfilling their mission, the village paper may well remain content to let them do the heavy work of the craft. It seems to us the village newspaper can devote its energies to better advantage by giving more attention to matters of local import—affairs in which the community can feel an interest."

The affairs Mr. Moore deemed worthy that same week included the item that Henry Clark is back from the Black Hills of Dakota after five years in the American army, during which time he was almost scalped; a fatal sunstroke in Nassau; gawcay; a barn building bee for a burned-out neighbor in Erin; a runaway horse recovered thanks to a postcard from Chinguacousy; broken boards in the sidewalk; strawberries, lemonade and a lecture in the Drill Shed under the auspices of the Congregationalists; ten dollar suits at Fyfe and McNabbs; ice cream by the quart or scoop at Clark and Mathews's parlor; male citizens bathing in Nicklins pond; Mr. W. H. Storey shipping gloves all over Canada; and the crop prospects are good, but the potato bugs have reinforcements arriving daily.

It was a cheery paper, full of advertisements that delight readers today, such as the Indian Panacea for Female Complaints \$1. World news was also carried and Mr. H. P. Moore's first edition as editor reports the Russian authorities changing their dealing with national affairs because "the present policy of repressing is absolutely fostering Communism, Socialism and Nihilism."

Congenial holiday for the editor

One column of the Dec. 4, 1879 issue records: "H.P. Moore resolved a week's holiday would be congenial, so T. Albert as editor pro tem." A better explanation, further along the same page:

"We announce in this issue the union by matrimony of Mr. H.P. Moore, Editor and Proprietor of this journal, and eldest son of the late Edward Moore, Esq., to Miss Hattie I. Speight, second daughter of John Speight, Esq. both of this village. The marriage was consummated last evening at 6 o'clock in the Acton Methodist church, Rev. R. Hobbs conducting the ceremony. A large proportion of the villagers were present and witnessed the ceremony, which was both solemn and interesting. The bride and her maid, Miss Lottie E. Speight, were splendidly attired. Mr. Moore had for groom his brother T. Albert Moore.

"This being the first marriage celebrated in the church, the couple were presented

In 1896 H. P. Moore purchased the property from the estate of the late Robert Fisher.

H.P. Moore states position

Dated at Acton, the 30th day of June, 1879, came a notice of Dissolution of Partnership. The name of T. Albert Moore was replaced by that of H. P. Moore that week, and so it remained for many years.

Mr. Moore wrote a fine editorial entitled "The Change"



Mr. and Mrs. H. P. Moore were married in 1879 and this is their wedding photo.

First ledger named readers

The first ledger, handwritten by Joseph Hacking, has been saved carefully these hundred years. According to its yellow pages, the first subscribers in 1875 read like a who's who of the new village incorporated just two years. They were Chas. Cameron, James Switzer, George Hynds, Herbert Jenners, James Wilds, John Kennedy, Morris Sayers, John B. Coats, John Secord, Thos. Watson, John Cameron, Thos. McKinnin, Samuel Laird, John Kenney, Peter S. Armstrong, W.H. Walker, Wm. Trotter, James Goodall, John McDougall, Stafford Zimmerman, Dr. McGarvin, Edward Nicklin, Benjamin Nicklin, John Speight.

Eli Snyder, Charles T. Hill, Wm. Stephenson, James Moore, Fred H. Storey, Edward Lucas, John Ross, Major Wm. Allan, Thos. Edgar, Robert Little, Daniel W. Campbell, Abraham Matthews, Wm. Bowman, George Forbes, James McGuire, Wm. Lundy, Robert Ramshaw, George Ryder, Hugh Cameron, Sydney Smith, Chas. Cameron, Mrs. Swan, Donald McNair, D. Maloney, Thos. Smyth.

Thos. Ramshaw, Robert Dickie, Ransom Adams, Robt. Agnew, G.M. Scott, Thos. Kennedy, John T. Brown, John Gelding, Patrick Kelly, Robt. Galloway, Jos. P. Allan, Thos. H. Campbell, Geo. Stoddard, James Nicklin, Oliver Logier, John Storey, John Walters, Thos. Ebbage, J. M. Mann, Edw. Matthews, Robt. Craine, Henry Dampier, Robt. Creech, Christine Henderson, Robt. Fisher, C. Sydney Smith, John B. Burns, James Matthews, Adam Dickson.

Malcolm Kennedy, James E. Cobban, Isaac Francis, Horace J. Hall, Anthony Stephenson, John Jamieson, Mathew Kennedy, Wm. Beck, Z.A. Hall, R.B. Cook, David T. Smith, Michael Speight, James McLam, D. Williamson, Thos. Moore, Alex Grant, James Ryder, Dr. Lowry, Henry Yeman, Edward Moore, Dr. Morrow, Asa Hall, James Cameron, Samuel Carter, Rev. C. R. Lee, Duncan Kennedy, James Campbell, W. L. Worden.

Wm. Steel, J. Henry Smith, Mrs. Secord, Wm. Vincent, Wm. Watson, Miss Stafford,

H. Hunt, Peter McCann, John McArthur, Rev. Wm. Cameron, Albert Matthews.

Subscriptions in the neighbouring countryside went to Brock Swackhammer, Benjamin Anderson, Wm. McDonald, John Scott Jr., John Arthurs, John Shaw, Thos. Lamb, Wm. Gordon, Duncan Taylor, Benjamin Wallace, Peter Mann, Donald McDonald, Archibald Campbell, Lachlin Currie, Joseph Lasby, Wm. Moore, Alex Cummings, Alex Lasby, John Gamble, Joel Leslie, Thos. Elliot Jr., Leslie Wright, John Stalker, James McDonald.

George Douglass, Wm. Stove, George Wright, John Donaghue, George Agnew, David Casdy, Adam Winlow, Donald McLanty, Walter Robinson, Fife Somerville, Robt. Storey, Thos. Cameron, Arch McEachern, George Tollen, Mathero McCann, Allan McDougall, Samuel Moore, Wm. Waldy, W.P. Brown, Kinard Bros.

Thos. Dockray, James Bell, Jacob Fisher, George Elliot, John Lawson, Paul Kennedy, Andrew C. Scott, David L. Smith, Andrew B. Murray, John Warren, Joseph Fearnley, Robt. Sims, John Waldy, Mrs. Samuel Speight, Alex H. Brown, Wm. Smyth, Malcolm McPherson, Michael Lamb, D. and A. Marr, George Walters, Danfield Swackhammer, James McKenzie, Peter Lee, D.W. Smith, David Black, James Caverhill, Peter Anderson, George Martin.

James Aitken, Daniel Thompson, James McGregor, John Slasser, Robt. Gibbons, Wm. Ismond, John Stewart, George Mulholland, Henry A.B. Grant, James Scott, John Murray, James Gibbons, Robt. Kennedy, Alex Waldy, Duncan McGregor, Daniel Robertson, Joseph Allan, Thos. Gamble, Joseph H. Brown, Daniel Livingston, John A.C. Anderson, John Berton, Thos. Whitey, J. McSpadden, Nicholas Forbes, John McKinnon, Alex Kennedy, John McLaren.

Mary Swackhammer, John Robertson, Thos. Cook, Alexander Smith, Hugh McLoughlin, John Bennett, Lachlin Kennedy, James Shark, Thos. Perryman, Oliver Lasby, John Lamb, Mrs. Ann Russell, Solomon Rozell, J. B. Chisholm