

with a handsome, morocco-bound Family Bible, by Mr. James Brown, on behalf of the Trustees of the church."

Both were life-long residents of Acton. T. Albert Moore had gone to Georgetown College. He was to rise to become the head of the United Church of Canada.

In 1880 the paper had the only fire in its hundred-year history. The upstairs section of the shop was ignited from an overheated stove pipe. Through the energetic efforts of citizens and a bucket brigade, the plant was saved. But it took weeks to get the place back in order.

The new "sanctum of the Free Press is modern and up-to-the minute in every detail!" wrote a visitor in 1906. The same person also praised the new station, the immense new buildings at the Tanneries, and the new Macadam streets.

### Influence felt in all spheres

Stately, portly, distinguished H. P. Moore was likely the most prominent and influential man in town. His obituary, the

plant, one of them still in use. There are no buyers for these fine machines, now virtually obsolete.)

G. A. Dills became a partner with H. P. Moore in 1919 and sole owner in 1927. The two of them collaborated on a column, The Old Man of the Big Clock Tower. The sketches began in 1919 and ran off and on for 20 years. These delightful reminiscences, full of gossip as well as facts, were put together in a book in 1939. Acton's Early Days is now a collectors' item — the only book of Acton history ever written.

### Milton paper bought in 1943

In 1943, despite all the problems the war years brought, Mr. Dills purchased the Canadian Champion in Milton. The work load was now even heavier, and son David hurried home on leaves from the Royal Canadian Navy to help work. Daughter Frances was also in the Navy then, and son Jim at school. Mrs. Dills was a regular staffer filling in in many ways to maintain the flow of commercial printing and the weekly issues.

It was Mrs. Dills who presided in the office of The Canadian Champion, Milton, when it was taken over November 4, 1943 — her birthday.

When the war was over, Dave came back to stay.

Another veteran who returned was Dora Wood, now an ex-WRCNS and a champion linotype operator. She has retired after over 30 years; husband Don Ryder is a former Free Press editor and is now advertising manager of the Free Press and Georgetown Independent, a newcomer publications of the present firm.

### "The boys" took over

David and James Dills became partners with their father in 1954, Jim returning to the business in 1951 after journalism training at Ryerson Institute. After G. A. Dills' death in January, 1960 David became publisher. Jim lives in Milton, Dave in Acton. Editors following Mr. Dills' death were John Black, Don Ryder and Hartley Coles.

Mrs. G. A. Dills, who died in 1972, had helped in countless ways over the years. Her aid included coming to the plant to fill in when she was needed, stirring up the freshly made paste for sealing wrappers for out-of-town papers on mailing days, and drying damp printing jobs in her oven, or folding them on the dining room table. She was always cheery despite the pressures and her husband's long illness.

Another newspaper was published by the family, when The Georgetown Independent was born in October 1973.

Hartley Coles, who began at the Free Press at the age of 17 as a printing apprentice,

assumed editorship of the new paper as well as the Acton Free Press. Most recently Kay Dills, David's wife, is Free Press editor.

That's not all of the family. Jim's wife, Shirley works in the Milton office. Steven Dills, a Ryerson journalism student, spends holidays on staff, and others who help when needed are Kathy Dills of Acton, Mark and Paul Dills of Milton. Catherine Dills in Milton has a Champion paper route.

Nephew Rod Prosser worked in the plant during summer holidays until university graduation this spring.

### Growing pains bring changes

In March 1949 another new section doubled the size of the newspaper building on Mill St. and gave much-needed room for the automatic presses and two linotypes that were necessary as the business grew with the community.

It had been terribly crowded, one difficulty being the fact the two linotype operators couldn't stand up at the same time — no room.

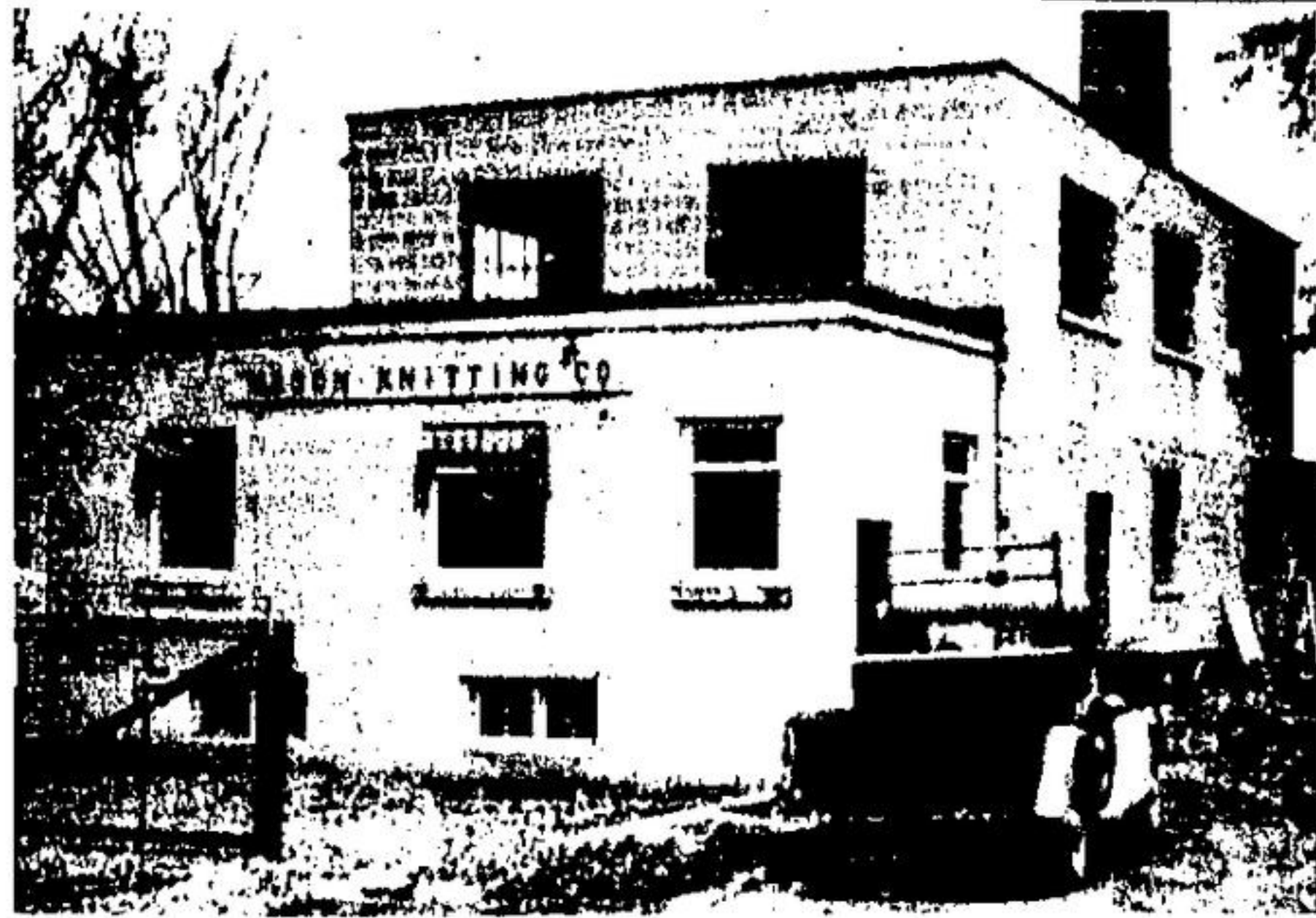
Another addition was built in 1957 to accommodate the new Goss Cox-o-Type press. This completely built up the Mill St. lot to which The Free Press had moved more than 75 years before.

### Stationery store next on site

Again, the whole plant became jammed, people jostling with paper for elbow room. Another move was made, and the old location became Dills Stationery store operated by R. H. Elliott, assisted by Mrs. Jo Whitham. Simpsons-Sears was another tenant.

The stationery store closed on Mr. Elliott's retirement, and Simpsons-Sears have moved next door this summer. A new tenant is due in soon.

It was in 1959 that the company bought the deserted and deteriorating Baxter Laboratories plant on Willow St. lot by the school creek.



The present building housing Dills Printing and Publishing and The Free Press offices was formerly the village's power plant, Mason Knitting Company and Baxter Laboratories.

### Deserted plant came with resident

The Free Press staff couldn't possibly fill all that space, so some was rented. Long-time tenants were Frank Heller and Company who recently moved out to the former Mason Knitting plant; strangely enough, Mason Knitting was once in the present Dills plant, and Hellers followed its route.

The vacant, three-storey building came complete with its resident caretaker Jimmy Robertson. He continued here for a while, but found it too noisy, and moved to the hotel. But strange creaks in the night are still cheerfully attributed to friend Jimmy.

For the last two years, The Free Press has managed to fill the whole plant. Part of this is due to the constant need for more and more rolls of newsprint, which are stacked high in every available corner and the changing technology which requires special accommodation for temperamental computers.

This plot of land also bears its part of local history.

### From factories to power plant

First on the site was T. Ebbage's planing mill, which required a stream for power. Next came the glove leather tannery of councillor Francis.

Then the site was part of the property of the Acton Plow Company.

When William Stephenson and fellow shareholders prepared to build their big plow factory, they tore down the old mill here, discarded the race and flume which had carried the water from the dam, and dug a new tall race, changing the course of the stream 20 feet or more.

The digging of the race proved a difficult piece of work. The bed of quicksand along the course was hard to overcome, according to G. A. Dills in Acton's Early Days. Some days the workmen would excavate all day and when they returned the next morning they would find most of the earth and sand had run back into the ditch. The work was finally completed, the factory finished, the machinery installed, the power turned on and the manufacture of the famed Stephenson plows began.

They sold well for a time, and the heyday came at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, when the plow won first prize. But not much more than a year later the company went into receivership.



Make-up area was different when all metal type was used. Today, paper has taken over. This photograph shows Hartley Coles and George Ware.

The blacksmith for the plow company, Anthony Stephenson, continued a blacksmith business until his retirement, by the creek near Willow and Main St. The plow factory was completely burned in a terrible fire.

"There Shall Be Light! So said the people at the ballot boxes," reported the paper November 10, 1898. There were 135 votes cast on the subject of electric power for the village, "over a dozen cast by lady

property owners." And 94 favored power. The site chosen for the municipal power plant was that where the present Free Press is at the corner of Willow and River Streets.

### Thick walls still visible

Mr. W. A. Storey, the village's first reeve owned the lots and negotiated with council for their purchase for the construction of the municipal power plant, "for all the time adventure."

The building constructed was 24 by 50 feet with 13 foot walls, built of stone 18 inches thick. Stone beds were laid for the engine and dynamo. These stone walls still form strong barriers in the present Free Press plant.

(Soon there were complaints in the weekly paper about workmen trimming trees to make room for the new wires — the first of many such complaints over the years!)

Ontario Hydro took over the production of power for municipalities, and the power plant was sold, becoming Mason Knitting Company.

Its owner, Amos Mason, was the first mayor when Acton became a town. The Mason family drained Corporation Pond behind the plant, allowing for more expansion to the back. Homes had also been planned for this site, but it remains vacant land.

Mason Knitting Company moved on and Baxter Laboratories took over and enlarged the building. The company moved to Alliston about 18 years ago.

### Staff grew over decades

In 1950 staff at the Free Press was G. A. Dills, editor; J. Robert MacArthur, who had already been with the business for 23 years as general foreman and in charge of newspaper production. David Dills was in charge of commercial printing, job presses and other mechanical work and also Free Press photography; Hartley Coles in operating and care of linotypes; Wilfred Duval, linotype operator and compositor; Roy Kirkness, hand compositor and press feeder; Lawrence Hensley, apprentice; Mrs. D. Ryder, linotype operator; Miss Eveleen Braida in charge of the business office and Mrs. G. A. Dills who assisted in the bindery operations and office work. James Dills, who was attending the jour-

nalism course at Ryerson Institute of Technology was on the staff in holiday periods and every week-end.

"In addition to their regular duties nearly all members of the staff assume reportorial duties, such as sports and other writing and news gathering", Mr. Dills wrote in 1950.

Many people have been employed by the Acton Free Press over the years, and Bob MacArthur has seen a lot of them come and go.

### Bob MacArthur started at 15

On January 10, 1927, 15-year-old Bob was first hired to be a "printer's devil". He swept floors, washed the press etc. Now 48 years later he is linotype operator, press operator and compositor.

He has experience in handset and hot type, and the more recent cold type system of printing.

In 1963, Bob left the Free Press for Little Current. On his way back to this neck of the woods, he stopped over in Georgetown for two years where he was a linotype operator. In 1963, he returned and has been with this paper ever since.

Charles Matthews of Toronto recalls how often the old Prouty press would be too much for the gas engine and two of the staff, or four, would flex their muscles by pulling and pushing on the rocker arms, to produce less than 250 impressions an hour!

He and Arlof Dills often teamed up for this chore, and he also worked with Bill Kenny, Vic Coleman, Johnnie Moore, Cliff Ramshaw, Percy Griffith and Philip Holmes, who were at the Free Press during his seven year stint.

"One side of the paper was printed on Saturday and the other side on Wednesday, often by working long into the night, and no overtime. Of course the total payroll for four only amounted to \$12 a week, of over 60 hours, or 240 hours for the four of us. It works out to an average of slightly under six cents per man hour.

"We never felt ourselves underpaid, as we were learning a trade and I for one have never regretted it."

Mr. Matthews went on to become a partner in the successful Sampson Matthews printing firm in Toronto.

### Hey, I remember ... all but Mike

Many staff members have been here a long time.

Twenty-Five Year certificates have been presented at staff parties to Dave Dills, Mrs. G. A. Dills, Wilf Duval, Dora Ryder and Hartley Coles.

Eveleen (Braida) Timmings was girl-of-all-trades in the office for quite a few years; she led to raise a family of six children but died in 1965 at the age of 39.

Richard Harris was the reigning "dean of correspondents" from Rockwood often bicycling to Acton with his weekly news report of activities in Rockwood. Gwendolyn P. Clark wrote Chronicles of Ginger Farm from her home just outside of Milton for many years.

Employees over the century have included Norm Hinton, Charles Matthews, Ern Brown, Dr. W. G. C. Kenney, Victor Coleman, John Moore who was killed in World War I, Bob Stewart, Michael Cobban, Earl Vincent, Lloyd Forbes, Campbell Currie, Jim McGeachie, Alex Wright, Roy Kirkness, John and Charles Moore, Clara Moore, Arthur Moore, Harvey McCutcheon, Sabra MacArthur, Don Van Fleet, Laura Dennis, Violet Crossman, Anne How, Kay Pfaff, Lawrence Hensley, Albert Schupp, John Wright, Dave Elliott, Lorne Welck, Gord Taylor, Murray Scoyne, Doris Scoyne, Art Cooper, George Richardson, Dorothy Ryan, Richard Ellerbeck, John Musselle, John Black, Derek Milnes, Allan Hartley, Glen Butterworth, Bill Whitbed, Jim Greer, John Masales, Art Hawes, Audrey Lawrence, Jim Piehl, George Cook, Dave Pink, Corrie Fisher, Dorothy Rognevald, R. H. Elliott, Jo Whitham, Henry Devau and Dora Ryder.

Who was that fellow called Mike? He was Irish. Well, he only worked here a week anyway. And Squirt Stroud. What was his real name?

Who have we missed? Forgive us, You know reporters. We started this whole thing far too late, and that last-minute deadline rush is here already!

People here are more than friends — they're relatives! Combinations include three-people operations, Hartley and Irma Coles and son Tim as well as uncle Colin MacColi and cousin Bill Stuckey; Wilf and Laura McCutcheon and daughter Rhona Thornhill; Wilf and JoAnn Duval with daughter Carolyn; sister Pat South and niece Janet (Braida) Marshall; Bob and Lil Marshall who also claim Janet as their daughter-in-law, and his sister Charlotte Holmes; couples Don and Dora Ryder (until she retired last Christmas), Don and Lynda McDonald and their cousins, brothers Don and Cal McIntyre; sisters Oral Norton and Audrey Grischow, June Jansen and Pat Kentner; Vi Henders (John Cunningham's mother-in-law, and Madeleine Lee; Thelma Jordan and Dolores Jordan and Thelma's daughter Dolores Rowsell.

### Carriers start summer of '74

The Acton Free Press has seen many changes over the years. One of these changes which reflected the growth of the whole town was the introduction of the carrier system.

These young boys and girls were first hired just last September to deliver the Free Press to subscribing homes in town. Acton had just been introduced to the mail carrier system.

The town was split up into 21 different routes with one carrier per route. As the months have past, new carriers have been hired, and some have quit making the list ever-changing.

Right now the carriers are Linda Shad-bolt, Jill Morris, Ronny Jackson, Tom Feenstra, Morley Ellis, Merle McNabb, Mike Waites, Debbie Thornhill, Janice Thornhill, Bill McKenzie, Brent Holmes, Paul Gorjup, Debbie Murchison, Ricky Turkosz, Karen Coats, Simon Ager, Bill Humenluk, Gordie MacArthur, and Robert Rowe. Charlie Payne and Peter Turkosz delivered their last paper last week. Karen Coats started July 1.



The Free Press office was often the butt of Hallowe'en pranksters and the results are shown after escapades in the 1890's.

### Size doubled facade "handsome"

In 1904 the Free Press moved for a few months while a complete facelift changed the old building into an impressively decorated modern one. The present facade is all the same (and an artist-historian recently deemed it one of the few buildings in Acton worth preserving.)

The Baptists had opened their new church in 1900, and the Free Press moved into their old church building on Elgin St. temporarily. This building was later used for storage in World War II but is now torn down.

In December 8, 1904, the paper announced: "Since the first of April the home of Acton's popular local journal has been in the hands of the builders. Architects, masons, bricklayers, carpenters, plasterers, metal workers, tin smiths, engineers, steam fitters, electricians and painters have in turn been in charge of the premises, and the result is certainly a complete transformation. The office has been practically rebuilt, and every vestige of the original building where the Free Press was housed for twenty-five years has been entirely obliterated.

The constantly growing business of the Free Press necessitated accommodation and the new office has more than doubled the capacity of the old building — the premises now being 28x58 on two storeys. The exterior now presents a very handsome appearance. The design, which represents a massive cut stone front, with pilaster columns between the three plate glass windows in the main office and heavy cornices and pediment, and rock-faced sides, was prepared by Mr. J. A. Ellis, Architect, Toronto, and worked out by the Metal Shingle and Siding Co. of Preston. Mr. J. B. MacKenzie had the contract for the carpenter work and roofing and the appearance of both exterior and interior reflect credit upon his skill and workmanship. The fittings for the editorial and business office, which are fitted in hardwood, are especially handsome. The painting was executed by Mr. W. HoWalker, and this also adds materially to the general attractiveness. The interior walls are covered with burlap, and with the neatly contrasting colors, maroon and terra cotta, worked out by Mr. Walker, and with the chair rails and mouldings, the effect is stonice, clean, cosy and restful.

The stone, cement and brickwork were done by Mr. N. Forbes, the thoroughness of whose work is everywhere appreciated. The new boiler room and coal room are models of safety and convenience. During the progress of improvements Messrs. Speight and Bray, Georgetown, installed a new six h.p. steam boiler for heating and one of their splendid gasoline engines of good capacity for motive power. The new premises are thoroughly modern in all appointments and the Free Press is now comfortably housed in one of the most attractive and complete printing offices for a journal of its class in the province. We are now at home to our thousands of patrons and will welcome a call from any of them any time."

The walls of the original old tin shop can still be seen inside the larger old building.

longest and most poetic in the paper's history, is reprinted in this special issue and shows the range of his spheres.

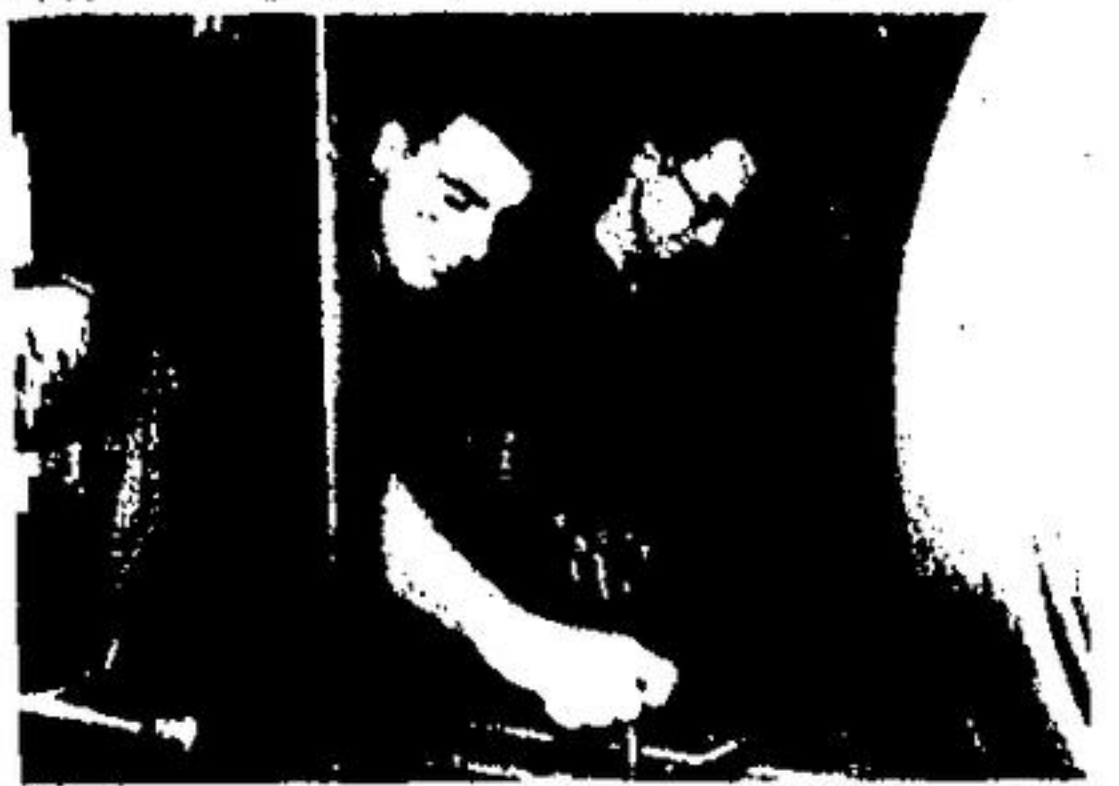
He was firm in his convictions, and a strong Methodist. (His warnings hang on; The Free Press still doesn't accept liquor advertising!)

White-haired Actonians can remember the unhappy day he refused to let them scamper up out of the Sunday School room to watch a parade go by. Another person remembers the time Magistrate Moore happened to look at his speedometer and was alarmed to notice he was going over the speed limit — likely 15 miles an hour. H. P. Moore meticulously fined himself, paid the fine promptly, and recorded the transaction in the next week's paper!

He was memorable all right. Tales about him abound. And he was deeply respected, too.

His lovely home on Church St. is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Beatty.

The Moores had one son, Edward J., who often came back to town to visit. His home was in Washington D.C. for many years.



Jim Greer and Murray Scoyne prepare a page of type for printing on the Babcock press.

### G. A. Dills started in 1909

H. P. Moore improved The Free Press continually, until selling his interest to his associate, George Arlof Dills.

It was in 1909, at the princely salary of \$1.50 a week, that Arlof Dills began to learn the printing trade, with the traditional title of "devil." He signed a demanding agreement of requirements that is reproduced in this issue, for the privilege of learning the printing trade.

Before long he left his home town and broadened his knowledge of printing work in Toronto, New York State, Guelph and Kingston. He returned to Acton in 1917. He not only brought knowledge with him, but the determination that The Free Press should have a marvellous innovation — a linotype! It could set type with amazing speed. On it an operator could set a column of newspaper type in a single hour, compared with picking the individual letters from tiny boxes to hand set two or three columns after a whole day's work — and some of the letters upside down or sideways, at that.

(There are still two Linotypes in the



Eveleen Braida and Kay Dills are shown reading proofs at the desk in the Mill St. location. Ev. was responsible for the accounting, proof reading and even at times some of the press feeding operations. Kay Dills joined the staff in 1950 and is currently the paper's editor.