

Paper mill's long history came to an end in '91

It had been a fixture in the town, a part of the pre-First World War economy, and a job to return to after the war.

It had represented a stable labourer's job during the Depression, and a waiting place of employment for those soldiers who survived the Second World War.

It had bought several homes in 1950s Georgetown, it had sent numerous kids to college and university, and had even boasted a number of two and three generation workers within its walls.

But on March 31, 1991, Abitibi Provincial Paper Mill closed its doors for good.

The story, running in the March 30, 1991 issue of *The Independent & Free Press* told of the 49 workers who lost their jobs, and finding them employment elsewhere was a grave concern, since most weren't able to relocate.

Employing nearly 200 in the 1970s, the mill was one of two local coating mills, the other being Domtar, which closed in 1976.

The mill had an early start in Georgetown's history, being built in shortly after the turn of the century in 1905 by Georgetown entrepreneur John Barber. He sold it to the Provincial Paper Company in 1911.

The mill's main purpose was to coat

paper. The rawstock paper was brought in from the pulp and paper mills, coated with a color, then cut, trimmed or re-rolled to go to the next step, where it would be transformed into writing paper, stamps, or school scribblers.

Although countless Halton Hills residents worked at the mill at one time or another, one employee held the record for the longest employment at the Georgetown plant of Provincial Paper.

The late Trevor Williams walked in the door one February afternoon in 1939, and asked for a job. Little did he know he'd finish his career there 44 years later.

"I wasn't so sure I was going to get a job, since I'd knocked around at a few jobs before," said Williams. "The fellow hiring me expressed some doubt whether I'd stay there very long."

"He asked me what I thought I should be paid, and I said whatever the going rate was. When he told me to start that night, at 33 cents an hour, I couldn't believe someone would want to pay me that much money."

Williams was a dedicated employee ever after.

The mill was a significant part of the hometown identity of post-war Georgetown, with many a mill worker putting in a nine-hour day.

Doug Herrington was another Georgetown boy who began his work-



The late Trevor Williams stands in front of the abandoned Provincial Paper Mill where he worked for 44 years.

Photo by Ted Brown

ing career at Provincial and never looked back.

"I was hired in January of 1947, and it seemed like a pretty good place to work," says Herrington. "The mill had been there for years, so we all figured it was pretty stable."

With the war over, the economy was starting to pick up and the mills were all booming. Production was on the increase, and in time the labor force increased to an all-time high of 175, with more during the summer months when temporary students were hired to cover vacation time.

The plant grew in size as well as its

staff, with numerous additions being added over the years. The significant change came when the glazed coating, or chrome coat operation was added, in 1967, and other additions like the new front office allowed the mill to handle its growing pains.

In 1956, the mill went to continental hours, working seven days a week. It was the beginning of the increased production, and more employees were hired. By the mid '60s, Provincial Paper had reached 175 employees.

As the mill advanced into the '70s, it began to feel its age, with the coating techniques becoming more modernized. Paper wasn't being made then shipped to an off-coating mill like Provincial anymore. Instead, it was being coated at the source, where it was manufactured, an obvious production saving.

In 1983, Abitibi Provincial went through a major layoff, and many of the long-time employees were let go.

But on March 30, 1991 the final closing of the mill, now down to 49 employees, was chronicled in *The Independent*.

With that, the history book on the longtime paper coating business in Georgetown was closed forever, and with it, a change in the lives of many people who had lived and worked in its shadow for so many generations.

—By Ted Brown, staff writer

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