

Ed Footitt recalls the Beardmore family and their handsome home on Church St.

By Maggie Petrushevsky

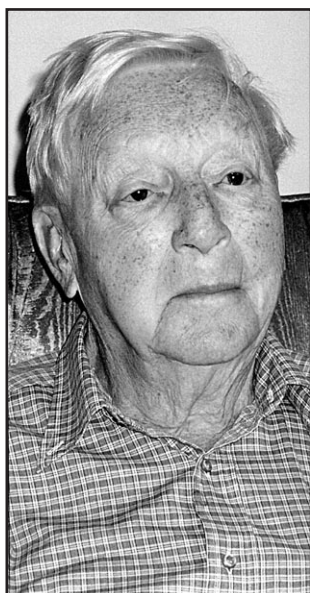
It may be 20 years since Acton's Beardmore Tannery closed its doors one final time, but Ed Footitt remembers the place well.

The 89-year-old Acton native spent most of his working life within its walls, starting in 1935 and ending in 1981. He made a short excursion into mining in 1936-38 when he was laid off from the tannery during the Depression, and a second hiatus during World War II when he served with the Lorne Scots. He worked in various departments all over the tannery and wound up as assistant to Haigez Assadourian, the tannery superintendent.

Among Footitt's earliest memories are those of Gordon Beardmore and his wife and children living in Beverly House. The big house "must have had 30 rooms" and a number of servants. The three Beardmore children Martin, Alfred and Joan, were tutored at home until they were ready to attend Appleby College.

The Beardmores kept their horses on the tannery property and Footitt recalls how Mrs. Beardmore used to ride sidesaddle up York Street to their house.

The Beardmore tannery was really two tanneries, Footitt says. Gordon Beardmore ran the harness leather tannery and it closed down during the Depression.



Ed Footitt

Colonel Beardmore ran the sole leather tannery and it remained although it was purchased by Canada Packers.

Although the two tanneries appeared to be one business, they were separated by a roadway between the buildings and had separate offices and their own engine rooms, Footitt says. He never worked in the harness tannery.

His first job at the tannery was bringing in the raw hides and salting them to preserve them until they were ready to go into the actual leather production process.

He clearly remembers sitting in his home on the Crescent in 1928 or '29 watching as the sole leather part of the tannery burned.

"The vats and the wet part of the tannery were okay," he says, "but the building around them pretty well burned down."

When the place was rebuilt, sprinklers were included so that couldn't happen again.

While no one ever proved what caused the fire, speculation is that it resulted from a train since the tracks into the tannery ran right over the building that burned.

"They figured the watchmen, who should have been doing their rounds were asleep so they didn't find it until it was too late," Footitt says.

The building now known as the olde Hide House was actually the warehouse where finished leather was stored for shipment to customers, he says, and Ted Tyler Senior – "your Ted's grandfather (New Tanner publisher Ted Tyler)" – was the tan yard foreman.

He also remembers how Tyler Transport hauled away the "fleshings" (flesh & bone bits) removed from the hides in the initial stages of preparing the hides for tanning.

One day one of the trucks was heading out of town with a load bound for the glue factory in Brantford when a back gate came open and spilled the load onto the highway.

"We had to get a front end loader out there real quick to scrape it all up and



BEVERLY HOUSE, the large handsome home the Beardmore family built and lived in at the corner of Church and Maria St. was the social centre of Acton, alluded to by famous author Mazo de la Roche in one of her novels. The site is now occupied by two apartment buildings. The home was torn down in 1935 during the Great Depression. Many of its expensive fixtures, sold by auction, adorn some Acton homes.

get it back into the truck. The smell was awful," he recalls with a twinkle.

He also remembers the clatter of vehicles passing over the wooden bridge into the Crescent. That bridge was built as an overpass to the spur line which brought hides to the tannery.

Every time the bridge needed repair Beardmore would do the job "under protest." They claimed it was Acton's responsibility

but Acton refused because Beardmore owned the bridge. Finally in 1956 the town assumed the bridge and replaced the old structure with the present one.

He also remembers Gordon Beardmore's boat.

"They brought the hull in on a flatcar from Toronto and the men in the tannery shop fitted it up," he says. "Then when it was ready, they took it up to Georgian Bay and tried it out."



Walter D. Beardmore moved to Acton from Toronto when he married. He lived at the corners of Mill and Frederick Sts. He is responsible for bringing Beardmore tannery into the modern age.

Today we celebrate our history and the significant steps we have taken through the years to ensure the continued progress of Acton.

We are truly proud of these accomplishments and will continue to strive for, and surpass, our commitment to achieve excellence in our town.

Mayor Rick Bonnette & Council Members

DOWNTOWN ACTON

As our community grows so does our pride in our rich history.

Congratulations Acton on maintaining our wonderful leather heritage which is world renowned.

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