



Beardmore & Co. Ltd. Acton, Ont. employees and families
at Edgewood Park, Eden Mills - July 1922

Teenage boys cut their working teeth at Beardmore

Like a lot of other young Acton boys, I earned my keep by working a part-time job at Beardmore & Co. while attending high school. I was introduced to the job one bright Monday morning at 7 a.m. when an office employee took me over to the beamhouse and introduced me to the foreman, the late "Dutchie" Veldhuis.

Curious beamhouse employees watched as I was escorted past piles of hides in various states of the process. They no doubt wondered how long I'd last. Some boys never lasted a day, some took it for a few days and then high-tailed it to jobs which were drier and didn't reek of smells which only a tannery can produce. The beamhouse, for those unfamiliar with the tanning process, is where the hides were washed, dehaired, defatted, and cut into butts, shoulders and bellies; then softened in vats before going to the tan yard.

Coles' Slaw

with
Hartley Coles



Nothing was wasted. The hair was saved, washed, dried and baled, then sent to hat factories. The fleshings, those jiggly pieces of hide unfit for tanning were shipped out to glue factories, to make glue of course. My introduction to the

job included wearing a long plastic apron, rubber gloves and a pair of rubber boots. Then I was given a scraper and instructed by a fellow schoolmate to take all the white hair off the hides before they were picked up and put through the "hairing machine." From there they were sent to the "fleshing machine" which trimmed the hides of fat and loose flesh.

The fleshings were dropped into a huge bucket. It was my job to empty them into a large bin crawling with huge maggots getting fat off them. I retched the bucket and several times after. However, within a week or two I could have eaten my lunch standing on the pile.

There were strong men running those machines, guys like Gord Cunningham and Bill Brennan, their muscles glistening as they lifted those heavy hides into the machines before they were sent to the trimming tables. After the hides were divided up, they were selected for sole leather, belting, and other leather products.

It was wartime and the beamhouse production workers earned a flat 42 cents an hour plus a production bonus which could amount to another 10 to 15 cents an hour. Everyone in the beamhouse received that bonus which in those post-depression days kept many toiling in that wet, smelly department instead of in a drier, cleaner job, myself included, although my stipend was a boy's wage, 29 cents an hour plus the bonus.

I gained a lot of respect for the men who toiled there. When they had met the production quota of so many packs they could go home which often meant at 3 or 4 p.m. unlike those who worked from 7 till 12 noon

and then from 1 to 6 p.m. - a 10 hour day and five hours Saturday morning.

As time elapsed and confidence in my work increased, I was dispatched on Saturday mornings to wake up those employees who failed to report for work. It was wartime, Beardmore was classed as a war industry. Failure to show up for the job except for sickness was a blow to the war effort. It could be enforced by the town constable, the inimitable Chief E.E. Harrop, who could show up at your door and arrest you.

Of course, Friday was pay day, and the tendency to head straight for the hotel after work was real. Sometimes, believe it or not, one or two of the beamhouse stalwarts got inebriated. Efforts to wake them up for work on Saturdays was futile. I can still hear them yelling their defiance as I knocked on the door in a perfunctory manner knowing

there was as much chance as getting them to the job that morning as the filter beds to freeze over in July.

One morning, dispatched to wake up Alex Currie who operated the washing, drying and baling of hair dept., I hammered on the door of a home in the Beardmore Crescent and got no reply. It was about 7:30 a.m. Finally, after repeated knocks a voice said, "waddya want?" I replied, "They want you in the beamhouse. You're late."

"I work at The Acton Free Press. You got the wrong address," came the reply. I had woken up Cam Currie at his home instead of Alex, wherever he lived. Later in the war when I apprenticed at The Free Press, Cam Currie was gone and I never did get any repercussions. From that point on however, I was very careful about whose door I was pounding on in the A.M.

Continued on page 5



The Beardmore water tower stood like a sentinel over the huge complex until it was taken down in 1999.

Teenage boys cut teeth...

Continued from page 4

I could go on and on about some of my experiences at Beardmore's before and after classes at the school, and through the summer holidays. How I was the interpreter in high school French for the French Canadian lumberjacks the company brought down from Kapuskasing and points north. They spoke a kind of jargon, I spoke a halting kind of French taken literally out of text books. Somehow

with lots of expressive arm waving we managed to get some of what we said understood.

I never regretted my time at Beardmore's. It was a learning experience and an introduction to how hard people had to work to get by, especially in wartime. Later after finishing school and reluctant to go to university, I apprenticed at The Free Press and was taught the printing trade.

To leave Beardmore's

employ - even though I was just part-time - was no easy task. Selective Service decided where you could work in those war days. Leaving was next to impossible. Fortunately, the publisher and owner of The Free Press, the late G.A. Dills, knew the political ropes and Beardmore's reluctance to let me go was tempered by the need for a printer's devil at the newspaper.

That was decades ago but the memories linger.



The Beardmore boat house which was located at the end of what is now Cameron St. was also a club house for boaters on Fairy Lake.

To the Beardmore family
& all of its employees,
Thanks for the memories.



Lorne "Minute" Walters
First employee of Tyler Transport



Ted Tyler Senior
Founder of Tyler Transport c.1929

Tyler Transport Limited. 519-853-1550

96 Years and Counting...

Proud to be part of Acton since 1910.

Superior Glove Works, has its headquarters in Acton, and has a history here in town since 1910. First under the name of Acton Glove, and then as the company grew, the name was changed to Superior Glove in 1961. From our humble beginnings as a two person shop on Main Street, today the company has 3 manufacturing plants worldwide, exports to 26 countries, and protects millions of working hands around the globe. From our Acton manufacturing plant we produce such famous glove brandname lines as Dexterity and Suregrip. From our 100,000 square foot Acton warehouse we ship 400,000 pairs of gloves daily. These gloves protect workers in a myriad of industries and professions. From surgeons to foundry workers, from lumber-mills to construction sites, we protect hands at work. But as we grow and expand, we are always mindful and proud of our Acton roots.



Superior Quality. Superior Service. Superior Glove



36 Vimy Street, Acton ON
Phone (519) 853-1920
www.superiorglove.com

