

Centennial scrapbook Playfair's 'the' place to shop

An elegant ghost of the past stands on the corner of King and Bay Streets in Midland. Today the venerable old building, erected in 1882, houses a taxi stand, a bowling alley and a barber shop.

At the turn of the century it was the Preston-Playfair Store - the place to shop in Midland. It was a complete department store, full of all the things that Midland's growing population needed for a gracious life.

W.E. Preston came to Midland with his parents from Port Hope in 1881. As a boy, he clerked in James Freeborn's grocery store and later in F.W. Jeffery's General Store. In 1889, he launched his own business on King Street, just south of Hugel.

It was in 1893 that he went into partnership with James Playfair in the magnificent building known as the Burton Block near the waterfront. A handsome building, it stood three stories high and the roof was decorated with fanciful gables. Elaborate stone work decorated the front door. The display windows on Bay Street are empty now, but one may still admire the decorative leaded glass panels that enhanced them.

Behind the store (where the Canadian Tire store now stands) were the stables where the delivery rigs and horses were housed.

In the summertime, Preston-Playfair operated a floating store aboard the "Midland Queen." The growing summer population up the shore found Preston's a reliable place to purchase groceries and other cottage furnishings. The lower floor on the northern side was where groceries were sold - everything in bulk. Old timers marvel at the huge rounds of cheese, from which the clerks would expertly carve one pound wedges. Large canopies shaded the sidewalk outside, where fresh produce, bought from local farmers, was offered for sale.

Elsewhere in the store one could buy

fashionable women's clothing, furniture, carpets, and warm woollens for the children.

Preston's toy department was a particular delight - especially at Christmas. Mary Smith, a long time Midland resident, remembers the year the toy department floor caved in.

"Santa came down the chimney and there was such a rush of people, crowding over to see him, that the floor collapsed. And there was I, standing on the brink of an enormous hole. I can remember the mothers running down King Street, their aprons still on - to see if their wee ones were safe. Mercifully, no one was seriously hurt."

Preston's delivered, and if the housewife wasn't home the bill was added to the family account. On payday, accounts were settled up in the store's office.

Everyone shopped at Preston's. It was, after all, a day's journey to Toronto. And there was another reason. Those men who worked at Playfair's Mills got part of their pay packet in scrip which was redeemable at the Preston-Playfair store.

There were two fires at the store, and eventually the top storey was removed. Later, Canadian Department Stores (Eaton's) took over part of the building, but Preston's Marketaria continued to do a lively business on the lower floor.

In the late forties, the fine old store closed. W.E. Preston the founder was dead, and his son Alec who had carried on the business was getting on in years.

What is left of the handsome old building has been changed and altered almost beyond recognition, but on a back wall on the bay side of the building a ghost from the past still lingers. Painted on the brick wall is "Preston's" - the only place to shop in Midland at the turn of the century.



Police investigate three major accidents

Midland police investigated three major motor vehicle accidents over the weekend, the first of which occurred Friday, February 17 at intersection of King Street and Yonge Street East.

The two vehicle mishap occurred at 4:45 in the afternoon and involved cars driven by Elizabeth Smith of Port McNicoll, and Arnuff Beutler, Midland.

According to police, the Beutler vehicle was stopped on Yonge Street East, preparing to turn on to King. The driver of an unidentified truck waved the Beutler car on to King Street, and it was subsequently sideswiped by the Smith vehicle, which was travelling north on King Street.

No charges have been laid in connection with the accident. The Beutler car sustained \$100 damage,

and the Smith car, \$400 damage.

Failing to Stop
An RR1 Midland woman has been charged by Midland police with failing to stop at a stop sign following a two car accident which occurred at 12:15 a.m. Saturday at the intersection of Fourth and Bay streets.

Police say that a car driven by Theresa Wright collided with a vehicle

driven by William Edmonds of Midland. The Wright car was proceeding along Bay Street, and the Edmonds car was travelling southbound on Fourth Street when the accident occurred.

The Wright vehicle sustained \$800 damage in the mishap, and the Edmonds car received

\$300 damage. There were no injuries.

Icy Roads
Icy roads have been blamed for a two car accident which occurred Saturday afternoon on Yonge Street, opposite Third Street.

According to police, a car driven by Michael W h e l a n o f Penetanguishene was

travelling westbound on Yonge Street and was turning into a private drive when it was hit from behind by an auto driven by William MagLoughlin of Victoria Harbour.

No charges have been laid in connection with the accident.

Both cars sustained \$400 damage in the mishap.

Vasey news

Sympathy is extended to the family of the late Mr. Graham Jones who passed away suddenly last week. Mr. Jones was a member of this community in his early years.

Birthday wishes to Mrs. Ted Vasey who celebrates her birthday this month on the day that isn't.

Just a reminder to reserve June 3 for the annual Vasey United Church auction sale. Already quilts are being pieced and many plans being made.

Bob Jones of Guelph spent the weekend with Mr. and Mrs. Brian Jones and family.

Visitors during the weekend with Mr. and Mrs. Alvah Stewart were Mr. and Mrs. Craig Stewart and Amanda, Janet and Madeline Stewart all of Toronto.

Mr. and Mrs. Ted Vasey visited on Sunday

by Eleanor Edwards and Mrs. Harold Graham

with Mr. and Mrs. Bill Drury and family of Crown Hill.

Mr. and Mrs. Wilfred Faint of Scarborough were weekend guests of Mr. and Mrs. Ken Robinson.

Mr. and Mrs. Peter Dunn and family visited with Mr. and Mrs. Roy Edwards for the weekend.

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