

John Dunlop's Greenhouse Roses Turned December Into June



JOHN H. DUNLOP ADMIRING THE PINK ROSE WHICH HE NAMED AFTER HIS UNCLE, FRANK W. DUNLOP

By DORIS M. FITZGERALD

In 1877 when John H. Dunlop took over the news stand and telegraph office in the Queen's Hotel, Toronto, "you couldn't buy fresh flowers during the winter months for love or money". Often he was asked to wire orders to Buffalo, New York and Boston, and sometimes the eagerly awaited bouquets and corsages arrived in wilted or frozen condition. After pondering the matter for some time young Dunlop decided to act upon his "hunch" that there was a good market for Canadian-grown hothouse roses. In 1883, without benefit of capital or training in floriculture, he built a small greenhouse, measuring 6x12 feet, on the north side of Grange Ave., and planted a handful of rose cuttings obtained for \$1.00 from West Grove, Pennsylvania. This proved the modest beginning of a very successful career as a wholesale and retail florist, during which he became an acknowledged authority on rose growing, and one of the founders, and first presidents of the Canadian Horticultural Society, and of the Toronto Gardeners' and Florists' Association. He also opened the door for many other commercial greenhousemen, and when he eventually established his home and business in Richmond Hill, he helped to make the village famous as a centre of rose growing.

roots from Europe, because, due to longer cultivation in an artificial environment, they were harder than those available here.

By 1888 his sideline was becoming so profitable that he felt justified in selling the news stand and devoting full time to his flowers. He bought land on Mackenzie Ave. (now Lansdowne) and built a greenhouse 21x100 feet, and again there was head shaking among friends who feared he had grandiose ideas. In 1892 he opened Toronto's first retail florist shop on King St., and year by year built more greenhouses until in 1907 he had six acres under glass, a huge heating plant with miles of steam piping, and 25 to 30 employees. But the city was pushing westward and taxes were steadily rising. It was time to think of moving again. After considering several sites Mr. Dunlop finally decided upon a farm in Richmond Hill. The soil was suitable, there was access to the railway line for shipping and there was a big, comfortable house on the property which Mrs. Dunlop named "Dufferin Park". Here he set up another large complex of hot houses to shelter his thousands of budded, grafted, and blooming plants, chiefly roses, and was soon sending more beautiful flowers than ever across Canada. Two other firms, the Lawrence Greenhouses, (later Richmond

them the Rose of Toronto which took highest honors at the Madison Square Chrysanthemum Show in 1911, and the dark red "Mrs. Henry Winnett" rose which was awarded first prize at the gardeners' and florists' club show in Boston in 1917.

He was a member of the American Rose Society, president of the American Carnation Society, and state vice-president of the Society of American Florists. At home in Toronto he helped to organize the Canadian Horticultural Society, the Toronto Gardeners' and Florists' Association and the Northwest Toronto Retirees' Association. He was an elder of Bonar Presbyterian Church and belonged to a number of fraternal societies, among them the Masonic Order, the IOF, the AOUW and the Canadian Order of Chosen Friends. Surely a fine record for an orphaned lad who began to fend for himself at an early age.

Born in New York City in 1855 John Hickman Dunlop was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Jackson Dunlop, who were of Scotch and French descent, but had immigrated to the United States from Ireland. After 29 years old Jackson Dunlop died in 1859 his widow brought her two small children to Toronto, and opened a millinery store on Richmond St. West. John attended Louisa St. Public



MRS. JOHN H. DUNLOP, HER DAUGHTERS DOROTHY AND LORRAINE, AND "LONIE" GRAHAM, ON HIS LAWN AT DUFFERIN PARK, CHURCH AND DUFFERIN STREETS.

John Dunlop's first greenhouse was so low that he had to crawl in, and out, on his hands and knees. During the cold weather he often crouched inside all night, tending a small box stove, to keep his precious bushes safe from frost. Much to the surprise of skeptical friends the roses flourished and sold well. In need of larger premises, he moved in 1885 to pasture land on what is now Markham St., and erected the first residence in that area, and a greenhouse 8x50 feet. This was heated by a large boiler enabling him to use, for the first time in Canada, the new Bench system of forcing plants to bloom in winter in an atmosphere of controlled heat, moisture, and ventilation, his specialties being lilies of the valley and roses. He also began to import base

Roses) and the Mills Greenhouses, (now H. J. Mills & Son) had already been established in the village for a couple of years, and during the First World War the three florists shared carloads of rationed coal, and when fuel ran out, burnt fence rails and all available odds and ends of lumber to keep their flowers, so extra important in times of stress, alive.

After giving up his work at the Queen's Hotel, Mr. Dunlop began to enter competitive flower shows, mainly in the United States. Besides winning many awards, and favorable recognition for Canada, he did much to foster good will between the two countries. In Boston in 1890 he extended the first official invitation from Canada, to the American Florists Society to hold its annual meeting in Toronto. This very successful convention was followed by many others and it is interesting now to read that the American Carnation Society held a convention in the unfinished portion of the new city hall in 1897.

John Dunlop developed several new roses, among

School until he was twelve when he started work in the Wesleyan Book Room. Three years later his mother also died, and he and his sister Martha returned to New York where he was employed for one year by Lord and Taylor, and then spent about three years learning the carpentry and building trade with his uncle David Dunlop who was a contractor. Bereaved again by the death of his sister he came back to Toronto and took over the news stand and telegraph office in the Queen's Hotel which had lately been bought by his cousin Henry Winnett, in partnership with Thomas McGaw. That same year, 1877, he married Alice Emma Montgomery, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Montgomery. They had a family of six children: Martha (Mrs. E. W. Goulding), Mabel (Mrs. A. K. Butchart), Jessie (Mrs. H. L. Graham), Alice (Mrs. Fred Riggs), Margaret (Mrs. Irving Farley) and Frank Montgomery who was in business with his father. Mrs. Dunlop died in 1901 and in 1903 Mr. Dunlop married Mrs. Eleanor Frances Farley, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Pierce of Nashua, New Hampshire and they had two daughters, Dorothy, (Mrs. George D. Billerman) and Lorraine (Mrs. Lambert Atkinson).

Mr. Dunlop always took a keen interest in village affairs but declined to accept public office. He was however an elder of Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church and a member of the choir. Greatly respected and beloved he died suddenly in Richmond Hill on September 16, 1930 and was buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery. The greenhouses were sold to H. J. Mills Ltd. and the shop in Toronto was carried on by his son for a time.

Mrs. Dunlop died about six years ago. Today the three living Dunlop children are Mrs. Fred Riggs, Markham, Mrs. George D. Billerman, Thornhill, and Mrs. Lambert Atkinson, Richmond Hill. There are also a number of grandchildren but no male descendants to continue the family name. Would it not be fitting to call a park, or street, in Richmond Hill after John Hickman Dunlop, Canada's pioneer professional rose grower, whose ability to see and seize upon an opportunity, has given millions of people the untold pleasure of having beautiful flowers at every season of the year?

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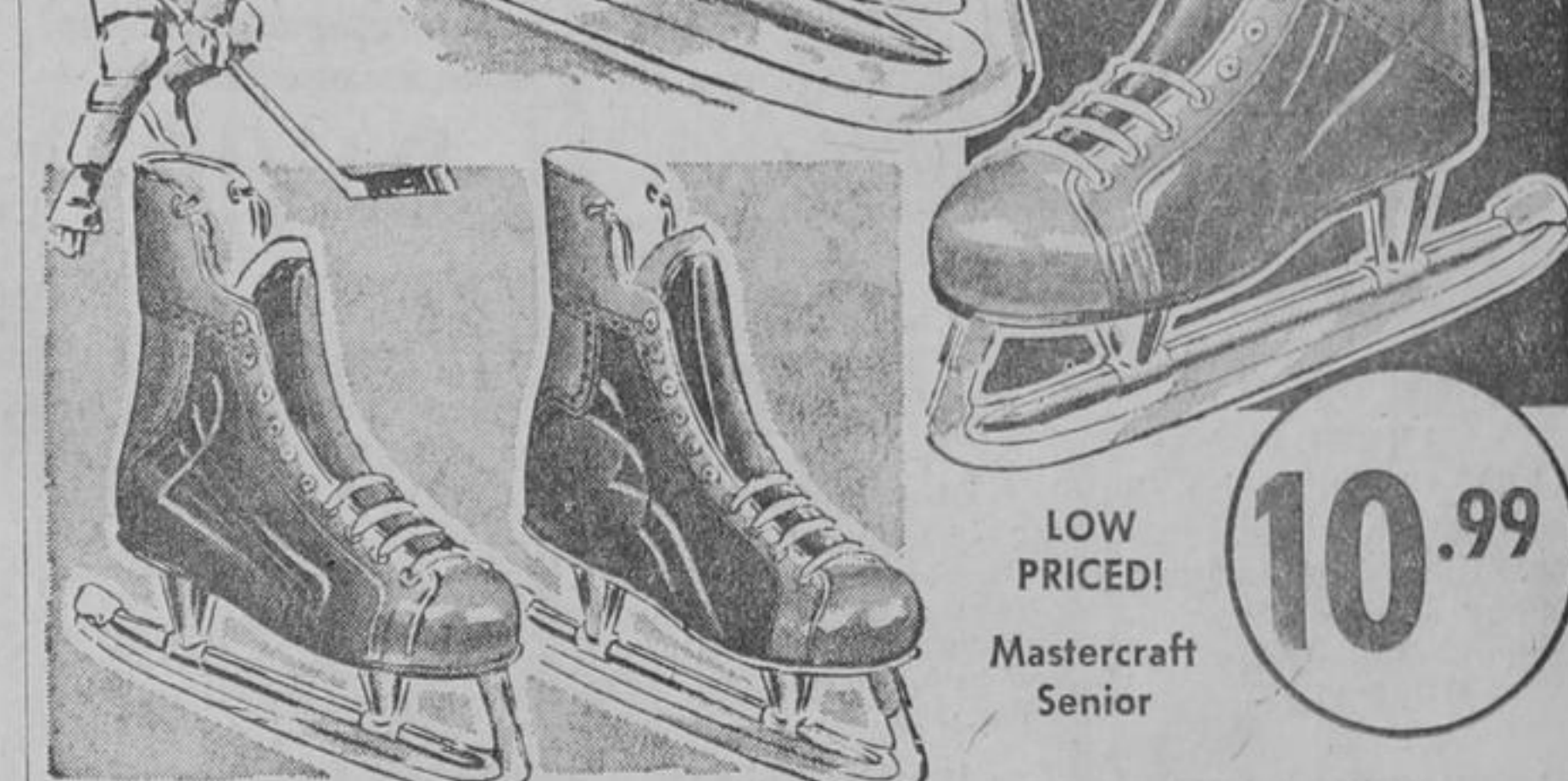
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