

A Markham institution for 130 years

By ROBERT DONNELLY

In 1856, partisan newspapers abounded in an era when there were two Canadas — Upper and Lower — weakened and divided along cultural lines.

Local Liberals, or Whigs as they were called in those days, called for abandoning equal representation for the controversial "rep by pop", which would clearly subordinate French speaking Canada to their Anglophone neighbors in the east.

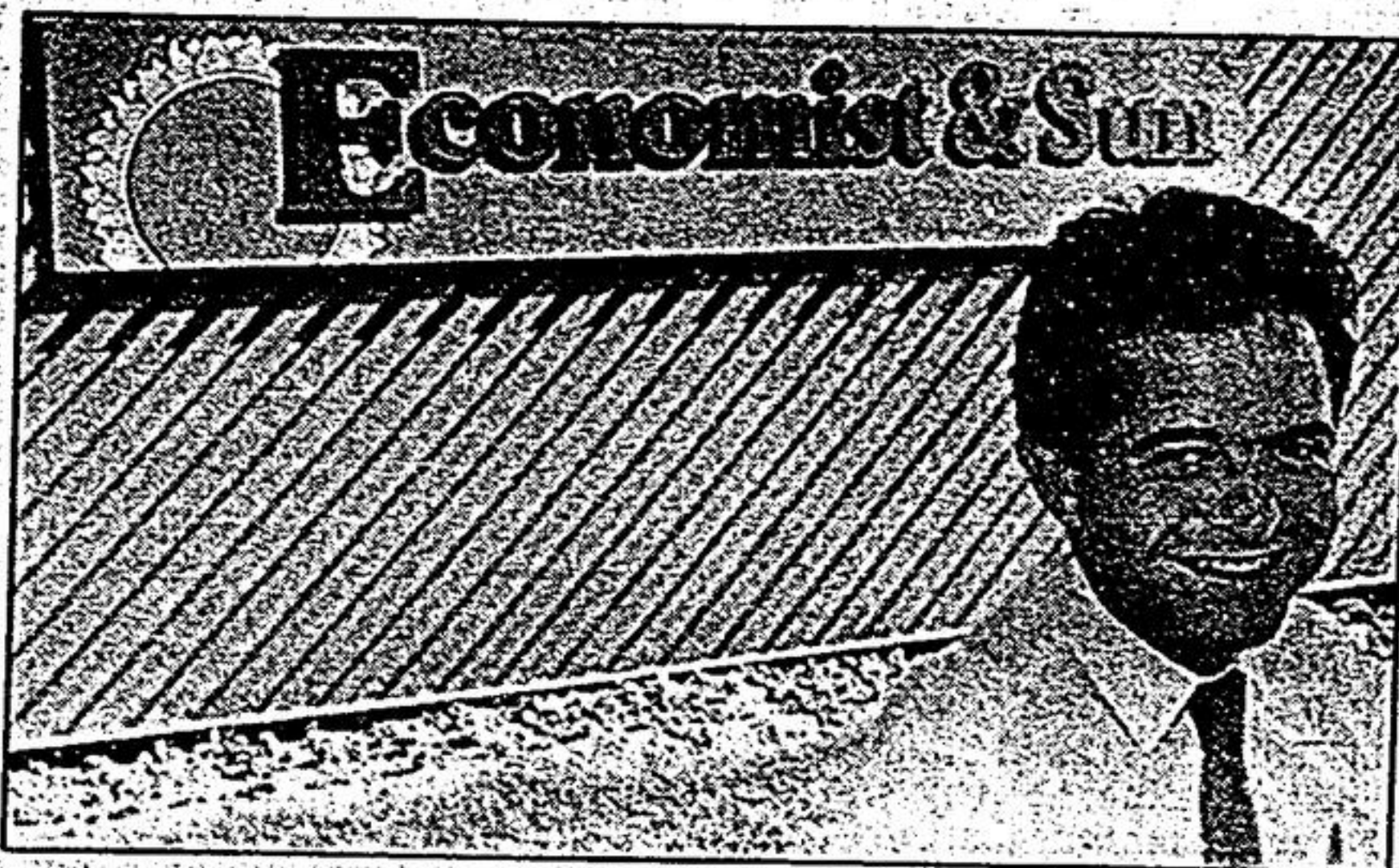
One of these staunch Liberals was a Markham native named David Reesor, who on July 3, 1856, established one of the first newspapers in this primarily rural area — The Economist.

Today, 130 years after the first edition rolled off the presses, the Economist and Sun qualifies as one of the oldest established businesses in the region.

The nascent journal reflected Mr. Reesor's Liberal tendencies, and a strong loyalty to the community in which he grew up.

His long and distinguished career began as a local magistrate in 1849 and culminated in 1867 when — after having met the requirements of being at least 30 years old and owning property valued at \$4,000 — he was appointed to the first Canadian senate.

His local contributions included a position as secretary-treasurer for the Markham Agricultural Society and as a member of the school board responsible for establishing a Markham Grammar School. He also served as a



Publisher Bruce Annan in front of the Economist and Sun office.

member of the York County and township councils.

Warden of York

During the 1860's he became warden of the united York and Peel counties and a notary public. It was at this time that the founder of The Economist relinquished its ownership to his brother-in-law, Henry R. Corson.

While he shared his predecessor's Liberal ideology and pioneering spirit, Mr. Corson was also a daring and innovative entrepreneur.

A gold rush, sparked by the 1858 discovery of the elusive metal in the Fraser River, saw the impetuous young man lured to the West Coast by the prospect of quick profits only to return to Markham industry weather-beaten, with a mere \$35 in gold

dust and nugget to show for his efforts.

Mr. Corson would remain editor and publisher of The Economist until his death in 1909.

Some of the highlights of his career included his close friendship with Tory Sir John A. Macdonald, and promoting the Whitby-Markham telegraph line which was to be one of the first in Canada.

He was also a shareholder with the Markham & Scarborough Plank Company, a director in the Speight Manufacturing Company, and a village clerk for several years.

Improved printing

In 1873, the era of the hand press was superseded by the introduction of the Wharfedale Power Press, which was a capable and

reliable piece of equipment that printed about 900 sheets per hour and continued to serve the needs of the paper until 1930.

Robert J. Corson took control of the reigns of the newspaper following his father's death and in 1915 expanded the paper's market share by buying the rival Markham Sun, and henceforth the paper became known as the Markham Economist and Sun.

The Markham Sun, in contrast to the Liberal bias of The Economist, was Tory paper which originated in 1881 under George Chauncey. In 1887, a fire destroyed the printing facilities in Toronto and the paper moved to Markham.

Paper bought out

In 1893, the paper was bought by Hamilton Hall Jr. prior to being sold to Mr. Corson and The Economist. The Economist moved into The Sun office before relocating to 112 Main St.

The Economist and Sun was run by the Corson family until 1940. It was then sold to two former employees, John Whetter and D.F. Williams during which time they undertook another move, this time to a former livery stable (built in 1906) at 11 Joseph St.

D.F. William's son, Mel, eventually took over the newspaper business and saw a dramatic increase in circulation from 900 in 1940 to more than 4,000 in the early 1970's.

Harry Stemp, Bill Keyzers, and the then-editor Edith Weber purchased the Economist and Sun in 1972. However, the alliance was short-lived as Mr. Stemp and Mr. Keyzers bought out Mrs. Weber's shares in 1973 and by June 1974 they also sold their interest in the company to Inland Printing and Publishing.

Again, the paper was on the move, as its new owners decided that a higher profile was needed. With the corporate dollars flowing, the Markham Economist and Sun found itself at 72B Main St. in the Village Shoppes Plaza.

In February 1981, Inland and its

media rival in printing and publishing, Metrospan, merged to form Metroland and in the process caught many employees by surprise.

Modern facility

The Markham Economist and Sun, has occupied its present home — a modern facility with computerized editorial, advertising, and distribution departments — at 9 Heritage Rd. since July, 1984.

Bruce Annan, a Markham boy, became the publisher of the Markham Economist and Sun in 1983. Before his arrival on the scene, however, he dropped out of Markham District High School after Grade 11, and like his predecessor Henry R. Corson, he took his chances and ventured west.

In 1971, after failing to land jobs at a car wash and a restaurant, he finally landed a job at the Edmonton Journal by arriving at 6:30 a.m. for the interview, giving new meaning to the cliché 'the early bird catches the worm'. He eventually worked his way up from copy boy to sports writer.

Return to Markham

"I was fortunate to get that job," wryly adding, "...or else I could still be washing cars today."

Four years later he moved on to the Metroland paper, Oshawa This Week, and during an eight-year stint, rose from sports editor to news editor to editor there before returning to his home town in 1983 as the publisher of The Economist.

The growth of the paper has been reflected in the ever increasing press runs of the two editions. Wednesday's broadsheet has ballooned from the 4,000 mark set in the early 70's to 21,000 copies today.

The Weekender tabloid's rise has been even more impressive. Since its inception a little more than one year ago on June 15, 1985, the circulation of the free Saturday paper has soared from an initial 23,000 copies, to 25,000, and now sits at 30,000...and counting.

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