

Former insurance man Fred Alsop saw Stouffville grow up

By BRUCE STAPLEY

As Fred Alsop takes his daily walk up and down Stouffville's Main Street, he is surrounded by the ongoing story of growth of the business community of which he was once a part.

The 70-year-old Main St. W. resident made his name in general insurance. His son Den-

nis now operates the business Fred founded in 1945. While Fred still drops into the office now and then, he's happy to leave today's computerized insurance troubles to Dennis and the staff.

But Fred remembers starting out in the insurance business in a home office after he and his wife

Georgina moved to Stouffville from Altona.

Farmers cleared snow

"They were just starting to keep the back roads open in winter back then," he recalls. "They would hire the farmers at 20 cents an hour to clear the snow."

Fred operated the business for five years from a bungalow on Main Street East.

"Georgina would answer the phone while I was out making calls."

He remembers doing a total of \$1,200 in business his first half-year. But ever the entrepreneur, he acquired a taxi licence, and supplemented his income chauffeuring local residents from place to place.

"I remember taking (Tribune editor) Jim Thomas, who was with the old Toronto Telegram, and Ted Cadieux, who was with the Star, to cover the same events."

Fares have changed

Prices were a fraction of what they are today, and Fred's fares reflected the times.

"I would take them to Hogs Hollow for \$5, and into downtown Toronto for \$7.50," he recalls.

His first new car, a Dodge, cost him \$2,000 in 1947, and he managed to trade a 1949 Dodge for a 1950 Ford for only \$285. His first Stouffville house, on Victoria Street, was bought for \$1,500 in the early '40s.

Fred also remembers when he started out in business, and there were two other insurance agents in town, Birkett Insurance and Harry Klinck.

"Reg Stover was running the hardware store in the centre of town and the Rexall drugstore was Bowdway's Drugs."

Fred recalls that just after the Second World War, it was hard to buy a new car.

"There were few new ones available then and you had to wait," he explains. "I insured one client whose car came in to the dealership with no tires, and he had to go hunt up his own."

It cost around \$13 to insure a car back then. And it wasn't until 1952 that he had established the business enough so that he could sell his taxi license and stick to full-time insurance.

"I went 11 years without a holiday at first," he admits. "And while you weren't working every minute, you were there from eight in the morning until 10 at night, especially when I had the taxi business."

Downtown Stouffville businesses were open Saturday nights in the '40s, he says, and the town was always packed with

people at the time. The crowds started to dwindle when Friday became the night for staying open late.

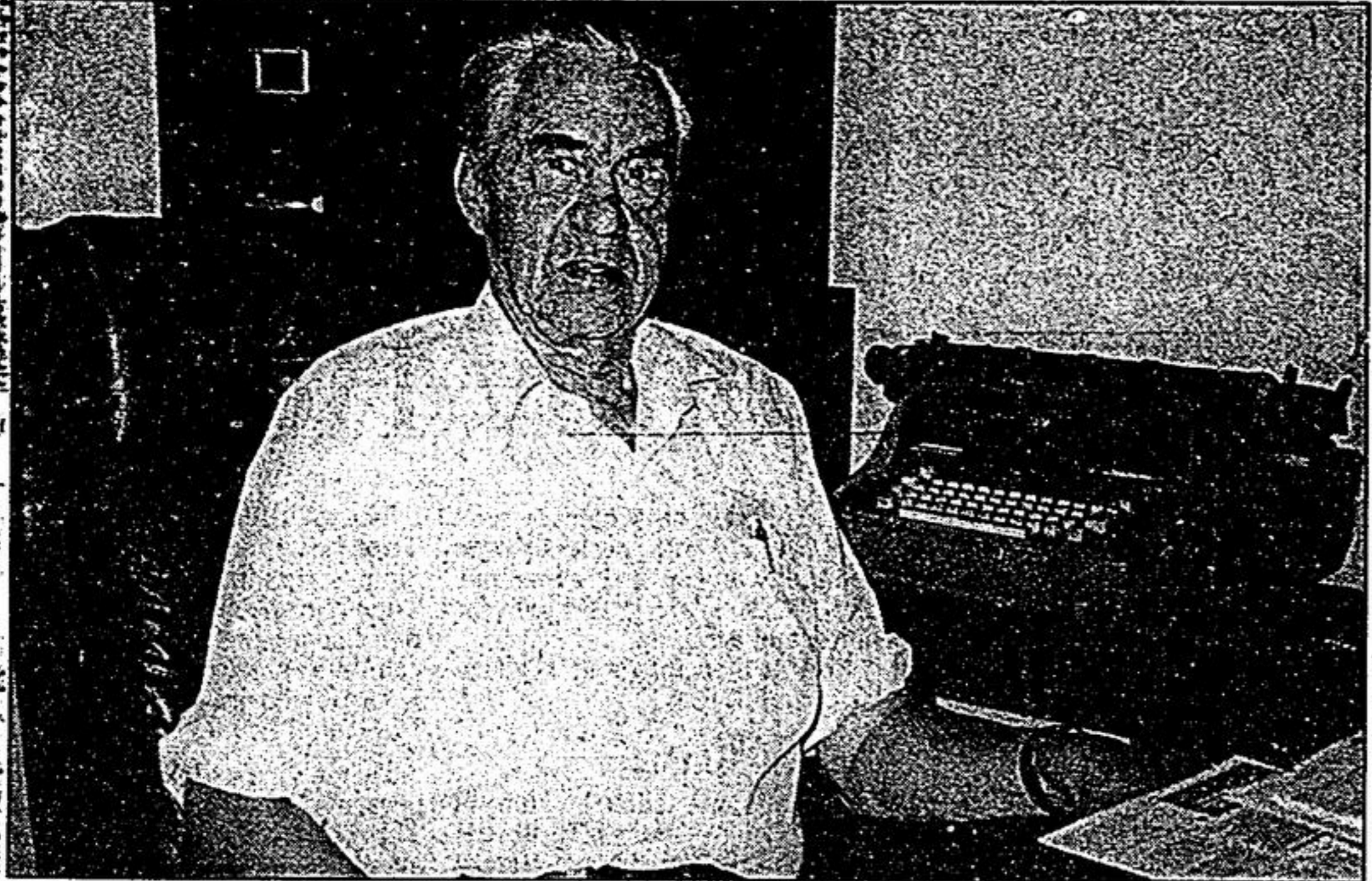
Fred points to current businesses such as Les Wilson's Esso and Schell Lumber as examples of operations still running according to their old tradition.

And he still feels Stouffville is a good place to run a business. "Mind you," he says, "You used to know everyone in town, and that made it a little different than it is now."

He points out there were only 1,200 residents in Stouffville when he moved in.

Now that he is retired, Fred and Georgina head for warmer climes in Florida for five months each winter.

After establishing a successful Stouffville business, you might say he's earned his day in the sun.



Fred Alsop's earned his day in the sun. After starting a still-thriving business in 1945, he and his wife Georgina spend several months in Florida and the rest of the year in an apartment on Main St. W. —Bruce Stapley

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