

# AE LePage established real estate rules that are still practiced

As the new millennium draws closer, most Canadians are beginning to review the activities of this century and take stock of the tremendous achievements that have affected every aspect of our lives.

At the turn of the century, Canada was politically and economically related to Britain (yet so far away geographically) and border neighbours with the burgeon-

ing United States. Canadian citizens revealed in creating business opportunities in their new country with enthusiasm and freshness.

With Prime Ministers Wilfred Laurier, Robert Borden, Arthur Meighen and Mackenzie King exuberantly supporting Canada's growth and expansion with progressive economic and social policies, individuals seeking success truly had

many opportunities to achieve that goal in Canada.

Such Canadian-owned companies as Royal Trust (1899), Canadian Tire Corporation Ltd. (1922) and Peoples Jewellers Corp. (1919) were established in the early years of this century and have emerged as some of this country's leading businesses.

Here, on its 85th anniversary, is the story of another innovative Canadian business that helped shape our country and the national real estate industry: Royal LePage Real Estate Services Ltd. It began in 1913 as a one-man shop in Toronto, founded by Albert Edward LePage.

In addition to laying the foundation for Royal LePage's growth and corporate longevity, LePage established the golden rules of real estate, which are still practiced today.

## Snapshot of the real estate industry: 1900 - 1913

During the early part of the century, selling real estate was a seasonal occupation (never during the summer months or from November to January) and attentive client/agent relationships were not regularly practiced.

Most real estate offices contained only one or two phones, which were shared among all brokers and because very few salesmen owned cars.

Clients would place a dollar deposit for a house key (which was kept on a wallboard in the office) of the home they fancied and then went off to view it.

In keeping with the entrepreneurial spirit of the times, LePage saw an opportunity to set a new course for the real estate industry by establishing new standards of customer service.

He transported buyers from house to house by car, pioneered the art of follow-up in an effort to maximize the client satisfaction and was the first realtor to place descriptive ads in the newspaper. His first ad, placed in the Toronto Telegram in 1913, generated 57 inquiries.

## "Bungalow Among Trees - \$5,700"

*Snuggled in among the trees on hillside lot - seven large rooms on two floors, extra large living room with open brick fireplace - quarter cut oak floors throughout, guaranteed heating, built-in ironing board. For other particulars call A.E. LePage - 'Bungalow Specialist'.*

LePage purchased his own car and telephone and began to aggressively pursue clients during the rest periods of the year (summer and Christmas). He drove his clients to and from homes they were

interested in viewing, a truly innovative gesture of the time.

## Growing Population Creates Housing Demand

Two decades later, Canada's population had increased from 7,207,000 in 1911 to 11,507,000 in 1941. Naturally this population growth had a profound impact on real estate markets and created a great demand for housing.

To meet this demand LePage ventured into a new area of real estate: subdivisions. His first venture was the division of Lady Eaton's Ardwood Gate estate near Casa Loma in Toronto into 30 individual lots.

With the second estate he subdivided, Sir Albert Gooderham's in Rosedale, LePage faced construction problems because of woody ravine-like terrain on the property.

Using a strategy similar to one he had seen in California, LePage devised a way to pattern the lots by anchoring homes to the sides of the ravine, thereby using little table land. This development plan was unheard of in Canada at the time, yet the estate's executors accepted LePage's radical layout and the subdivision sold out in record time.

## Development of Industry Associations

As real estate developed, ethics committees and business associations began to form to govern the industry and promote this sector to clients and to potential sales representatives.

LePage was one of the most active promoters for the establishment of the Toronto Real Estate Board, and Ontario Association of Real Estate Boards. He later became President of TREB in 1928.

## Passing the Torch

LePage retired in 1953, selling the firm bearing his name to Brian Magee (the company's top salesman), Ron Sanderson (a business associate), and Jim Collett (LePage's nephew).

## Fast Forward to 1998

This year on the occasion of their 85th anniversary, Royal LePage Real Estate Services Ltd. will reflect on its roots.

From a small one-person shop with a commitment to community and an entrepreneurial spirit, Royal LePage endeavours to remain true to its Canadian legacy: neighbourhood-oriented, innovative and bearers of a proud national identity.

This article was submitted by Anthony Bungaro from Royal LePage.

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