



ESQUESING HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 51, Georgetown, Ontario, Canada L7G 4T1
www.esquesinghistoricalsociety.ca

Vol. 41 No. 4

November- December 2016

HALTON BOYS OFF FOR SOUTH AFRICA

Eight Soldierly Young Fellows Gone to Fight for Queen and Country.

1st and 2nd Contingents

The trim little County of Halton has always been remarked for its loyalty and in the Canadian contingents for South Africa has sent a very creditable quota. We have now six well drilled and competent soldiers on the field and en route to South Africa, as follows:

Sergt R. J. Cunningham, of Campbellville, on the 1st Contingent.

Color Sergt. W. J. Moore, Acton

Color Sergt. W. J. Gould, Acton

Lieut. Jas. Ballantyne, Georgetown, with D Battery, Guelph Division, 2nd Contingent.

Lieut. R. S. Hope, Trafalgar

Pte. W. J. Williamson, Burlington with Hamilton Field Battery, 2nd Contingent

Bugler W. H. Greenwood, Oakville, with Toronto Dragoons, 2nd Contingent.



The boys were all given a loyal send off by their respective communities.

In addition to the presentations to Col. Sergrts. Moore and Gould at the town hall, before their departure, referred to in last issue of the *Free Press*, Dr. John M. Macdonald presented each of them with one of the latest military surgical kits, and Mr. Neil Keith, who was home from Winnipeg, handed them each a \$5 bill.

GEORGETOWN: The council at the first meeting granted \$25 as a testimonial to Lieut. Ballantyne, who is in the 2nd contingent for South Africa.

-*Acton Free Press*, 11 January 1900

Unidentified boy in uniform -EHS564

FAREWELL TO OUR BOYS - Presentation and goodbye to Sergeants Moore and Gould Tuesday Evening. A hastily called meeting of citizens was held in the town hall on Tuesday evening to afford an opportunity of saying good-bye to sergeants W.J. Moore and W.J. Gould, on the eve of their departure for South Africa as artillery-men in the Second Canadian Contingent.

W.J. Moore is son of Principal T.T. Moore of Acton Public School. It is 21 years ago this week that he arrived in Acton with his fathers' family. He has since travelled through Australia, New Zealand, the East Indies, Borneo, Siam and a number of the coast cities of China and India. He has been a member of the Fusiliers at Montreal and put in a long term with Halton Battalion.

Mr. W. J. Gould is a native of Hanover. Both his parents are dead, and he has made his home at Acton for several years.

-Acton Free Press, 4 January 1900

Local Support for the War Effort

Red Cross Benefit Concert at Town Hall on Feb. 5th - a grand scenic reproduction of the South African War, portraying the various battles and stirring incidents since last October...

-ACTON FREE PRESS: 25 January 1900

LADYSMITH RELIEVED Kimberley siege raised and Lord Roberts in Pursuit of the retreating Boer Forces. 19 CANADIANS KILLED, AND 65 WOUNDED.

A PATRIOTIC concert under the auspices of the Sons of Scotland will be given in the Town hall on Monday 5th March.

-ACTON FREE PRESS: 22 February, 1900

GEN. CRONJE HAS SURRENDERED WITH 4000 TROOPS

The flag has been flying on the town hall since Tuesday in honour of the capture of Cronje. Interesting lectures on South Africa - given in Methodist Church on Sunday, Mon and Tues evenings by ex-Sergt-Major G. H. Schoof, late of Bechuanaland Mounted Patrol.

GEORGETOWN: Ex-Sergt.-Major Schoof, late of the Bechuanaland Mounted Border Police gave an interesting address on missions in South Africa in the Methodist Church on Sunday morning.

-ACTON FREE PRESS: 1 March, 1900

CREWSON'S CORNERS: Patriotism is very strong in these parts. there is talk of purchasing a flag and a pole to erect in our square.

-ACTON FREE PRESS: 15 March 1900

BALLINAFAD: The patriotic concert last Wed eve was a great success. Mr. Hugh Guthrie of Guelph, was the principal speaker...

LIMEHOUSE made a very generous contribution to the patriotic fund last week.

-ACTON FREE PRESS: 22 March 1900

GEORGETOWN: An interesting stereoptican exhibition of South African views was given in the Disciples Church on Sat evening. CREWSON'S CORNERS: The corner has now received

its flag. The flag-pole has been erected and we can now show our loyalty with the most loyal in the land.

-ACTON FREE PRESS: 5 April, 1900

Corp. Cunningham Welcomed -The village of Campbellville, Nassagaweya, was all astir Monday evening on account of the return of corp. Cunningham from South Africa... The following military men went over from here to take part in the reception: Col. Goodwillie, Major Moore, Major Grant and Lieut. Bradley. Mr. A.D. Thomson and Mr. S. H. McGibbon were also present to represent Georgetown... - *GEORGETOWN HERALD* 29 August 1900

In 1900 when the nation called for volunteers, 8 of the 20th Battalion offered and went to South Africa. One of the number, Sergt. "Stanley" Moore, (a brother of our Editor) paid the price and was buried in Africa. We did not forget him as a fine monument was erected by his friends and comrades in the cemetery in Acton.

-Major Lachlin Grant, *Georgetown Herald* 4 June 1924

Fairview Cemetery, Acton memorial to Gunner W.J. Moore. Front panel inscription reads *This monument was erected by the citizens of Acton, comrades and other friends in memory of Gunner W.J. Moore, "D" Battery, R.C.A., late Color Sergeant, Co. No. 6 20th Lorne Rifles, who died at No. 2 Military Hospital, Pretoria, South Africa, while in active service, November 9th, 1900. Aged 35 years.* EHS17900

The photo on the right shows the back of the stone with a gun and carriage and it reads "Our Soldier Hero". EHS17903





ESQUERING HISTORICAL SOCIETY

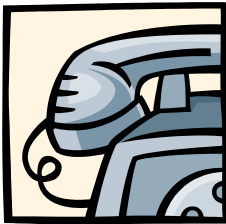
SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

2016 - 2017

- Wed. 9th
Nov. 2016 **CANADIANS AND THE WAR IN SOUTH AFRICA**
Former teacher and historian Doug Wigglesworth will join us to show images and tell us about the role of Canada in the Boer War. He will drop names familiar to many -like Arthur Conon Doyle, Sam Steele, Lord Strathcona and Robert Baden Powell!
KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, Main Street, Georgetown, 7:30 p.m.
- Dec. 2016 The Society does not hold a public meeting in December.
- Wed. 11th
Jan. 2017 **CANADA'S CENTENNIAL YEAR**
Travel back 50 years and enjoy pictures from the EHS collection from 1967, Canada's centennial year. As Centennial projects, Georgetown opened Cedarvale Park and Acton opened a brand new Library. We have images of them all!
KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, Main Street, Georgetown, 7:30 p.m.
- Wed. 8th
Feb. 2017 **BOMBERS, FLYING SAUCERS AND THE AVRO ARROW**
Dave Cook, who worked as a radio news announcer, reporter and Mississauga councillor will be presenting a variety of stories of historical interest. The exciting title of his talk alludes to the range of topics he will cover. He will have his books available for purchase.
KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, Main Street, Georgetown, 7:30 p.m.
- March
Wed. 12th
April 2017 **THE RESULT OF REBELLION: North American Political Prisoners in Van Diemen's Land**
Dr. John Carter will investigate the 1837-1838 Upper Canadian Rebellion/Patriot War, and their consequences and aftermath. He will reflect upon the 92 English speaking rebels who were transported to Van Diemen's Land as political prisoners, and speak about their lives in this far away penal colony.

INVITE YOUR NEIGHBOUR TO BECOME A MEMBER!

Refreshments served from 7:00 p.m.



Stephen Blake	905 877-8251	President
Karen Hunter	905 877-7363	Treasurer
Dawn Livingstone	905 877-6506	Secretary
J. Mark Rowe	905 877-9510	Archivist
Jan Raymond	905 877-9172	Social
David Borrett	905 702-0737	Membership
Ray Denny	905 877-3890	Publications

Society Notes

INTERNET CONNECTIONS

<www.esquesinghistoricalsociety.ca>

Send your e-mail to mrowe6@sympatico.ca

EHS NEWSLETTER

John Mark Rowe prepared this newsletter with assistance from Karen Hunter and Dawn Livingstone. Submissions welcome. Please consider an electronic newsletter sent to your e-mail address. Not only will you save the Society postage, you get to see the colour pictures!

MEMBERSHIP

We have 85 members for 2016. Encourage your friends and family to join the Society. The individual membership rate is \$20. The family or institution rate is \$25. Cheques payable to the Society can be mailed to our post box or payable by cash or cheque to our membership secretary, David Borrett at a public meeting. Renewals are now being accepted for 2017.

ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO

www.archives.gov.on.ca

EHS ARCHIVES

We've been busily processing photographs new and old, to add to our photo collection. Some recent donations of interest are an original Kennedy family bible, photos of the Brown family cemetery on the 9th Line, a file concerning the McNab family history and boxes of photos taken by Georgetown free-lance photographer Peter Jones. Many of his photos appeared in the *Georgetown Herald* in the 1960s.

WEBMASTER WANTED

The EHS needs a webmaster to replace the late Ron Raffan. Our site is hosted on the Halinet system which also supports our libraries, Halton Images and Halton Hills newspapers. Speak to Mark Rowe.

EHS HISTORY PRIZE

Our 2016 donations of \$200 and a history book to graduates is complete. The winners of the EHS prize were Jake Hirst, Christ The King CSS; Natalie Ifrimov, Georgetown

High School; Georgia Dilworth, Acton High School. Thank you to Jan Raymond for her diligent efforts to deliver everything to each high school.

OPERATING GRANT RECEIVED

The Esquesing Historical Society has received an operating grant of \$739 and wishes to acknowledge the support of the Government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

HALTON-PEEL OGS

Nov. 27 – Steve Fulton, "Preserving the Analog Past for a Solid Digital Future", Brampton Public Library, 65 Queen Street, East.

DEVEREAUX HOUSE

Open Thursdays 1-6 p.m. at 11494 Trafalgar Road, Georgetown.

STREETSVILLE HIST. SOCIETY

Archives are open Sundays and Wednesdays from 1 to 4 p.m. at 4415 Mississauga Road, Streetsville.

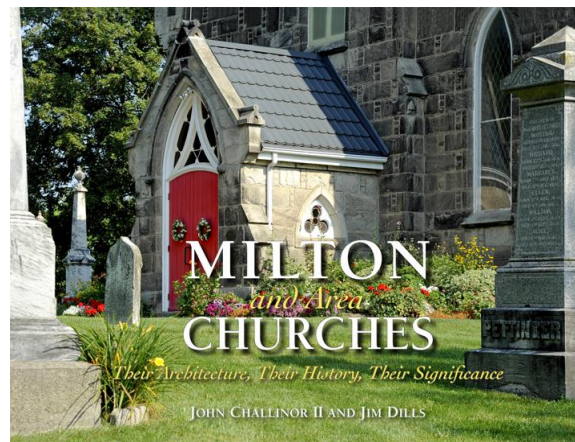
BRAMPTON HIST. SOCIETY

Heart Lake Presbyterian Church at 7:15.

Unfortunately, the website is not currently available since the death of Ron Raffan.

MILTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MHS has released their latest book, *Milton and Area Churches*. The book includes churches in southern Esquesing township. It was compiled by John Chaillnor II and Jim Dills. It is available from their HQ at 16 James Street, Milton.



NASAGIWEYA HIST. SOCIETY

info@nasagiweyahistoricalsociety.com

Meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the 2nd Tuesday of March, April (Annual Meeting), May, June, July, August (BBQ), September, October, November (Remembrance Day), December (Christmas Potluck).

TRAFALGAR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

All events at former Palermo Schoolhouse, 2431 Dundas Street West, Oakville.

<http://www.tths.ca/events.html>

HALTON HILLS SPORTS MUSEUM

OPEN: Sat. 7-9 p.m. & Sunday 1-4:30 p.m. at Mold-Masters Sportsplex.

TERRA COTTA HALL

Terra Cotta Community Hall rentals:

Contact Jen Lusby at 905-702-1056.

EXECUTIVE MEMBERS NEEDED

Please consider running for election to the executive of the EHS. We need a webmaster, and a couple of extra members. Let any executive member listed on page 4, know your intentions before our February meeting.

ORO AFRICAN CHURCH

The Oro African Settlement was established by the government of Upper Canada in 1819. The site is one of the oldest African Canadian settlements in Upper Canada. The first settlers were veterans of Runchey's Coloured Corps, who fought in every major battle along the Niagara Frontier. The restored church was re-opened on 19 August 2016. -*OHS Bulletin*, Sept. 2016

RON RAFFAN MISSED BY OHS

Ontario Historical Society executive director Rob Levery attended the funeral of EHS director Ron Raffan and wrote about his contributions to history, particularly in Brampton, through Bovaird House.

-*OHS Bulletin*, Sept. 2016

REMEMBRANCE DAY PARADES

A reminder about local parades -Acton on Sat. Nov. 5th at 10:30; Sunday Nov. 6th at 12:30 in Glen Williams and 2:30 at Georgetown.

The long, final goodbye of the VCR

Jonah Engel Bromwich

Waterloo Region Record | Jul 21, 2016

The last-known company still manufacturing the technology, the Funai Corp. of Japan, said in a statement Thursday that it would stop making VCRs at the end of this month, mainly because of "difficulty acquiring parts."

The news represented the death rattle of a technology that was introduced in the 1950s. It took several decades for VCRs to make their way into consumers' homes, but in its heyday it was ubiquitous and dominant. According to the company statement, 750,000 units were sold worldwide in 2015, down from millions decades earlier.

In 1956, Ampex Electric and Manufacturing Co. introduced what its website calls "the first practical videotape recorder." At the time, the machines cost \$50,000 apiece. But that did not stop orders from being placed for 100 of them in the week they debuted, according to Pfof.

The first VCRs for homes were released in the 1960s, and they became widely available to consumers in the 1970s, when Sony's Betamax and JVC's VHS formats began to compete. VHS gained the upper hand the following decade, but Sony stopped producing Betamax cassette tapes only in 2016.

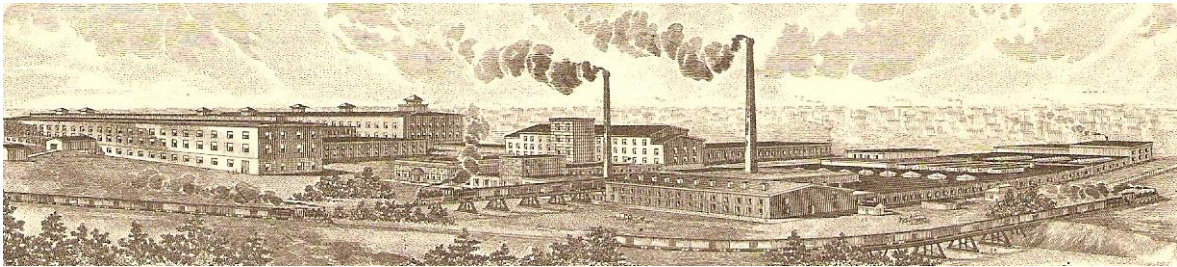
By the 1980s, the VCR was catching on with ordinary citizens. In June 1984, The New York Times wrote that analysts expected 15 million homes to have the machines by the end of the year, up from 5 million in 1982.

A 2011 headline in The Times made the decline of the hardware explicit, as technology's circle of life continued its churn: "Goodbye, DVD. Hello, Future."

From: *New York Times*

30 Years Later: Beardmore & Co.--Gone but not Forgotten

by Harry Rudolfs



It's been 30 years that the Beardmore Tannery shuttered its doors. The history of Acton, Ont., for about 120 years, is inextricably linked to its most significant and long-standing employer, Beardmore and Co. Tannery (1865-1986). Almost from its inception, the town seems to have had an affinity for the tanning industry. Abraham Nelles built and operated the first tannery soon after the naming of the hamlet in 1844, and that was followed by a consecutive number of tanneries and glove works that chose to locate here, right up to the present-day Superior Glove on Main Street South.

The Beardmore story begins in 1865, when George Lissant Beardmore, a British immigrant and Hamilton tanner came to town and bought the former Nelles Tannery. The location was perfect for the growing business. The Grand Trunk Railway (later CN) ran through town on its way to Guelph, and eastern hemlock, whose bark was essential to the tanning procedure, was initially plentiful and nearby.

The tannery specialized in horse halters and cut soles and expansion was rapid. Located on 80 hectares (200 acres) at the south end of town, it was said to be the biggest tannery in the British Empire at the turn of the 20th Century. It also held title to another 200 acres that included Fairy Lake from where it drew large amounts of water for its thirsty industrial processes. The number of hides that went through the plant over its lifetime must have been astronomical. One statistic from 1920 indicates that over one million "sides" were processed that year alone.

This plant was massive with 37 of its 200 acres were under roof. Two night watchmen each walked 12 miles per shift patrolling the voluminous buildings and grounds. The company even operated its own fire department. At its peak, during the war years, the facility employed over 1,000 people.

The company steam whistle blew at noon and several times per day announcing shift changes. It could be heard all over town and you could set your watch by it. An extensive flower garden was located inside the gates and down the hill to the east of the plant, providing a fragrant juxtaposition to the dreary and odoriferous work stations. At one time several peacocks inhabited the garden and a full-time gardener looked after the flower beds.

In many ways Acton was the quintessential company town. Beardmore originally operated a community store and supplied employees with discounted housing. Some of the homes on Crescent Street were originally barracks buildings from Camp Borden that were reassembled here and rented inexpensively to plant workers.

The Beardmores also gave back to the community. The lawn bowling greens were state-of-art for their time. The family was also credited with the construction of an outdoor arena at the foot of Frederick Street, a golf course, tennis courts and a boathouse. Col. Alfred O. Beardmore

started the tradition of company picnics at Prospect Park and the annual Christmas parties with generous gifts for his employees' children.

The family connection to the business ended when Canada Packers bought the plant in 1944. Col. Beardmore retired after the tannery was sold and died two years later in 1946. Control of Canada Packers eventually passed into the hands of Maple Leaf Mills, a conglomerate owned by a British holding company. The corporate name was later changed to Maple Leaf Foods and eventually purchased by Wallace McCain and the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan in 1995.

The Beardmore tannery was shut down on Sept. 12, 1986. The property remained mothballed for several years before it was razed in 2000. The buildings were flattened and some of the hazardous detritus buried on-site. The property was declared decommissioned by 2006 although some monitoring continues to this day. Maple Leaf Foods remains the owner and hasn't indicated any future plans for its Acton real estate holding.

The land is derelict but verdant now with lots of ground cover. Wild raspberry canes, poplars and Norway maples are making a stand behind the chain link fence hung with "No Trespassing" signs. It's hard to imagine 300 to 500 workers filing through the Elgin Street gates every morning.

The tannery wasn't the only employer in town but it was the most significant. The W.H. Storey glove factory on Bower Street at one time employed 250 people. But the Beardmore plant was so integral to the town—it outlasted all the other leather businesses, and created more than its share of spin off jobs.

Working Conditions

Beardmore was also a place of employment for the children of the tannery workers. Pete Miller's father was stationary engineer in the power house. "It paid good money to us as high school kids. Before I finished high school I worked full time on the 4-12 shift as well as attending school those last few weeks. It taught me the value of work. Despite the nature of the work, it was a place where we were proud to say we had worked."

"I worked there for six summers—paid for university. Many others did the same," says Laurence G. Duby, a retired Anglican priest who now lives in Waterdown, Ont. His father Les Duby was the last mayor of Acton before regional government, and was simultaneously employed as personnel manager at the plant.

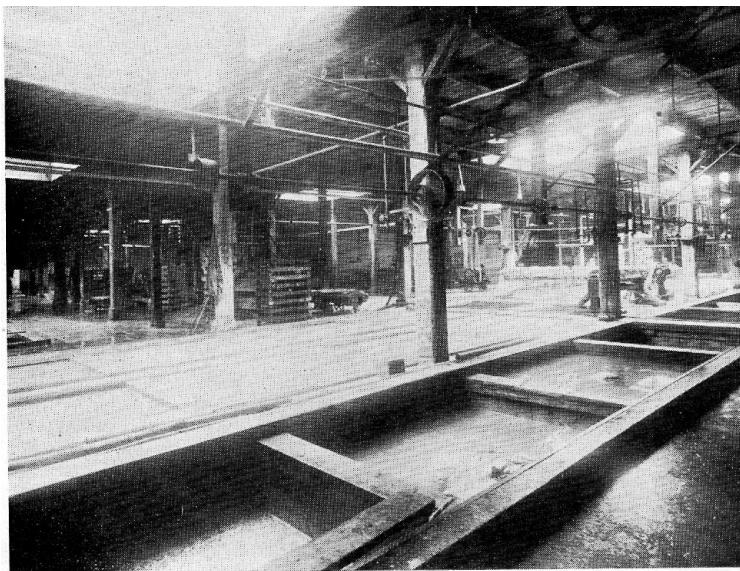
"The unpleasantness depended on the department you worked in. Upper leather steam presses were very hot where I worked, but the beam house work was smelly and wet. Both taught the value of the dollar and teamwork," says Duby.

"The smell of finished leather and products made from it are special to me. It reminds me that Beardmore's was the primary business in town and put food on the table of most families. Newcomers often complained about the smell from the filter beds when the weather was humid, but we knew it meant provisions for most Acton families."

Bill Switzer worked full time at the plant for 13 years until it closed. "There weren't any easy jobs in that place," he says. "The pay was reasonable for the time but not adequate for the kind of work we were doing. Most of the machinery was old and frequently breaking down. But the managers always found some way to keep the process going."

After the flesh was removed in the beam room, the hides were sent either for vegetable tanning or to the chrome line, two different operations depending on the desired product. Many of the jobs involved physically lifting the hides and the work was extremely demanding. The

plant was steam heated and Bill Switzer recalls having to wring out his clothes and underwear, sometimes more than once per shift.



Sole leather tannery beamhouse—Here the hides are first put through the limes in order to loosen the hair. Then they are unhaird (mechanically), fleshed, trimmed, and finally selected in four grades and tripe weighed, preparatory to passing to the tanyards. In the foreground are seen the lime vats.

Working conditions were far from ideal. Laurence Duby's worst memory was the heat of the Sheridan steam presses. He also recalls being asked to work a shift without a hand guard which had broken. "I had remembered Dad talking about a worker who got his hand caught in the press and it came out the size of a snow shovel. Father was unhappy that I did that unsafe shift."

Switzer remembers that several workers fell into the lime vats during his time there. And employees on the chrome line often developed a skin condition called "chrome itch" --a type of rash similar to prickly heat.

It was hot, physical work. One can imagine the hissing pipe fittings, slippery floors, the abiding reek of the hides treated and the pall of the acrid chemicals and salts, aside from the noise of the conveyors and clanging chains. But the difficult conditions helped develop strong character among the tannery workers and an iron bond was forged between them. "My best memory was the camaraderie of the workers on night shift," adds Laurence Duby.

Waiting for Dad and Mom at the Factory Gates

Acton has always had the patina of a hard-working, family oriented town. For some folks, the Beardmore era conjures up an idyllic time. Many of the children waited for their parents at the Elgin Street gates.

Char Hubbell writes via Facebook. "Used to wait at those gates for my dad Charlie to come out...loved my dad and couldn't wait to see him" Connie Taylor-Lewis adds, "Can't remember how many times I waited for my mom at the gates...great memory." And Corinne Andrews-Melanson recalls: "My parents worked there. Can remember sitting in my dad's car waiting for him to come out."

The annual company Christmas party was a high point for workers and their families. Some recall it as a "magical" time. Different foods were available, from pizza to hamburgers and lots of candy. Les Duby performed songs and carols accompanied by his Fender guitar while Bill Nelles assumed the role of Santa for 22 years. "One year we had 650 kids," he says. "We even had indoor pony rides for them."

Ric Ivany recalls those occasions with great affection. "They gave us great Xmas parties. Companies don't do that anymore."

Anita Ferguson posts via FaceBook: "We all have very fond memories of those Christmas parties. My dad, Norm Braida, moved the parties right onto the tannery floor...My

mum, Reta Braida, would travel to Toronto with several other tannery ladies every year and carefully choose the toys for Santa to hand out.

“My dad insisted that all staff and management were to man the different food booths. This was a day for the workers and their families. Debbie Bagby Tillsworth, Kathy Slingerland Meagher, Debbra Streets Goodall and myself ran the ice cream sundae booth. We were such a sticky mess at the end of the day but we had so much fun. My brother, Paul Braida, made many a trip to the Georgetown KFC that day as Acton didn't have one yet.”

Closing Time

Most employees realized that the plant would shut down eventually. Tanneries were closing across North America in the 1970s and 80s, and domestic shoe manufacturers weren't buying leather because they couldn't compete with cheap imports.

But when the end came it was difficult time for some. Char Hubbell remembers that her dad was devastated when he heard the plant was closing. “He was only a year and half from retirement--he actually cried--he put his heart and soul into that company from a boy of 14 (he lied about his age to gain employment). He worked hard and for basically peanuts, but he and my Mom raised us and gave us a good home and provided for us.”

Melanie Hardie has no regrets about working at the tannery. “My Dad Jack Hardie worked there for over 40 years,” she says. “I worked there for 4 years and had some pretty decent bosses. Beardmore put food on the table, clothes on my back and a roof over my head. We were not rich but had all we needed and were happy.”

Bill Switzer adds. “I got a good severance package and my wife and I took a Caribbean vacation. But really it was probably a good thing that it closed. It was time to move on and try something else.”

The last word belongs to Bill Nelles, whose ancestor founded Acton's first tannery and who watched the last hide roll through the system. “The factory was there for so long, we thought it would always be there,” he says. “In all the time I worked there, I never took one picture. And I drove some pretty nice trucks for Beardmore, including a 1957 Diamond T. In 50 years' people will be living in houses on that property and they probably won't care what used to be there.”

Harry Rudolfs is a professional trucker and freelance writer for *The New Tanner*. He's worked as a dishwasher, taxi driver and foreign correspondent. His interests are literature playing harmonica and collecting personal stories. He has been working on a book about the golden era of hitchhiking.

All pictures are from items in the EHS Archives.

