

# Quaker Oats in Peterborough

115 years

Heritage Gazette of the Trent Valley

Volume 21, Number 3, November 2016 Special Issue

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Cover photo: *Quaker Oats Mill, 2016 (Elwood H. Jones)*



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## Editor's Corner

This special issue devoted to Quaker Oats has been planned for some time. When the Heritage Gazette began in 1997, thanks to David Morton, then president of Quaker Oats, the new magazine had its first sponsor. This special issue is partly possible because of the generous support of Patricia and David Morton and of James Stuart. While it is 100 years since the second serious fire at Quaker Oats, our hope was to draw attention to the remarkable links between Quaker Oats and Peterborough. For 115 years, Quaker Oats has been a major employer in the city, and attracted people from miles around to move to Peterborough. There were jobs of every description, and the appeal to male and female was equally felt.

Quaker came to town because of an amazing combination of factors as Ken Brown so ably explains. Quaker stayed because of outstanding entrepreneurial leadership and local commitments to improving the fire department and building an outstanding bridge that was and remains an architectural and engineering marvel.

The fire of December 11, 1916 was a tragedy that cost the lives of 22 people and seriously affected the health of countless others. Gina Martin captured the story in earlier issues of the Heritage Gazette and so we reprinted them.

It was particularly great to get insightful commentaries from Marjorie Shephard and Vi Lee about their years working in the Head Office. We learn quite a bit about the different cultures at Quaker, and the way tasks were assigned. The Trent Valley Archives welcomes memoirs and commentaries for our holdings.

Ken Brown made effective use of the land records of the Dickson Company which Mike Bishop, then working for Peterborough Lumber, deposited in the Peterborough Museum and Archives. There are several small collections connected to individuals at Quaker Oats. However, so far as I know, there are no company archives that are described and accessible to researchers. There is no substantial business history either. We hope that a special issue such as this will inspire people to realize that they have valuable insights into past times. Just contact Trent Valley Archives, and we will be at your side.

On October 15, there was a great celebration of the careers of the Hon. J. J. Duffus, Senator. I wrote a special Souvenir for the occasion, assisted by the support of RBC Insurance, David Morton, James Stuart and a host of others, including members of the Trent Valley Archives, which was a major sponsor of the event. The booklet is available for free (plus postage) simply by requesting it from the Trent Valley Archives. Over the next few months we want to explore ways to use the J. J. Duffus in schools throughout Ontario. If you can help with this goal, please let me know. Thanks.

*Elwood H. Jones*

# Quaker Oats Comes To Peterborough: The Business Story

Ken Brown

George Cox was the most important Peterborough citizen in terms of building the town's infrastructure, manufacturing, and other institutions in its first 100 years. Luring the American Cereal Company here in 1900, "the work of one man" according to David Dumble, was one of Cox's most conspicuous accomplishments. Cox had many working labels during his 30-year stint in Peterborough. He was either a man of diverse talents and ambitions or a lost soul who took a long time figuring out what he might be good at. The list includes telegraph operator, photographer, retailer of books and furniture, express agent, insurance salesman, real estate developer, investment banker, and railway manager, not to mention that he was seven times mayor and a church builder and philanthropist. George Cox left many eclectic and accomplished footprints here from the evening of May 13, 1858, when he disembarked from the Cobourg train and strode across the wooden bridge over the Otonabee. That night, in his first local steps, he walked by the heartland of local industry, the R.D. Rogers mills and industrial park on the east bank of the Otonabee and the then Harmon & Dickson mills and industrial park on the west. Now, in 1900, he planned to help turn those lands into a massive new industrial enterprise.

In 1888, Cox's business interests took him to Toronto. Now he was president of the Bank of Commerce and president and controlling shareholder of both Canada Life and the Central Canada Savings and Loan Company. In the early 1900s, he and his Sherbourne Street friend and neighbour, Frederic Nicholls (who controlled CGE), topped the Canadian business establishment, holding 20-something corporate directorships each. Cox's numbers peaked in 1908 at 28. He was very rich and very busy. His life was his constant work, his church, philanthropy (much of it private), his family, and business for his family. He was a man with tireless work habits, great business acumen, and lifetime loyalties. If the phrase "keeping his cool" at all times had been invented one hundred plus years ago, it might have been for George Cox.

Like all great achievers, he was not

universally loved. He could not get himself elected federally. He raised hackles over his temperance obsessiveness— and when his Midland railway put new rail crossings several inches above street level and when that company chose not to pay interest due on its debentures then held by the town. Peterborough's most honoured female citizen, Charlotte Nicholls, had no use for him. In her will, she directed that none of her money could be invested in any financial institution that Cox was associated with. Her antipathy for him bled from the pages. This surely was not just the fact that her late husband was Bank of Montreal and Cox was the Commerce. There was an unknown something else. But when it



came to his contributions to bringing the American Cereal Company to Peterborough, there appears to be a consensus that Cox was "the man." George Cox had one hobby. His recreational diversion, both before and after leaving Peterborough in 1888, was selling the business world on Peterborough. When he left town, he had kept his Belmont Street Peterborough home, now occupied by his daughter Emma Davis and family. He told townspeople that he always planned to return here. After all, he owned a plot in the local cemetery. He was still highly connected with managing Peterborough real estate and business holdings. His son-in-law had just finished two terms as mayor the year before. Cox, who thrived on connections and their exploitation (although that is far too harsh a word), had observed from his Toronto base the goings on related to consolidation and expansion of the American milling industry, and decided that there was a role he could play in bringing a part of that to his old town.

Friday, November 30, 1900: A special directors' meeting had been called of the Dickson Company, which owned the lands where Quaker Oats, previously the American Cereal Company, now stands. Four of the surviving daughters of the company patriarch, Samuel Dickson, sat around the

table, along with two of his sons-in-law, two grandchildren, and the then-esteemed banker, Charles McGill.

First those around the table reviewed and approved the new lease of their water power to the Peterborough Light and Power Company. The company minutes record that

The proposition to give an option to the American Cereal Company was then discussed. Hon. Senator Cox being present, was requested to state the nature of the proposition. This he fully explained. The proposed option agreement was then read, providing for the option of the property to Mr. Robert Stuart, treasurer of the American Cereal Company at \$100,000, payable \$10,000 down and the balance one month from the date of acceptance.

The agreement provided that the Dickson Company could have use of two sawmills and related piling grounds for two years and required the purchaser to honour the few remaining leases in the Dickson industrial parks, those to McAllister for the old Rogers grist mill and to Ernest Mann, William Wand, and Peterborough Light and Power.



*George A. Cox (Trent Valley Archives)*

The Dicksons looked at Cox. He was clearly pitching the American Cereal Company but, as always, was really pitching Peterborough progress. And although he was a Methodist not a Presbyterian, he was still one of them. He had been their business partner in the attempt to salvage a pulp mill operation on the Dickson race in 1883. He had been their

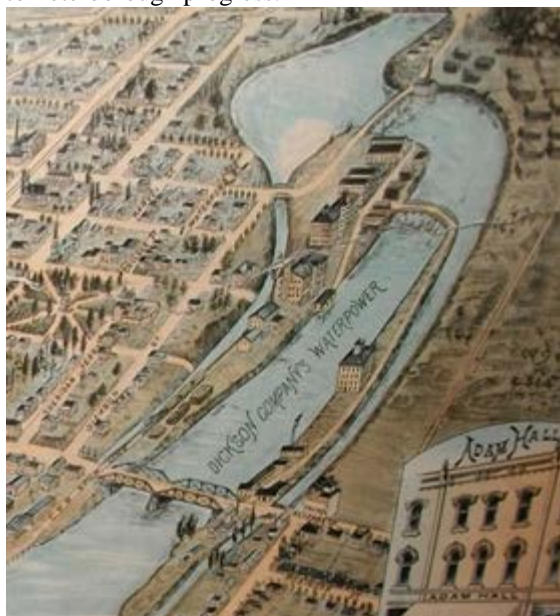
partner and company president in the newly incorporated Dickson Company from 1885–90. Richard Hall, a Sam Dickson son-in-law and current Dickson Company president, who also sat at the table, served as vice-president and on the board of Cox's Central Canada Loan and Savings Company. They all knew and trusted George Cox and acknowledged his passionate pride in his own integrity. He was, in his own eyes and in those of most citizens, "honourable," quite apart from Laurier having appointed him to the Senate four years earlier. The deal must be all right. The board members didn't turn for counsel from their accountant or lawyer. Without delay, there was a motion to execute the option as read. It passed. The first step to push into history 70 years of milling and related industrial activity by two generations of three families on the banks of the Otonabee River in downtown Peterborough had been taken. The next day, the option agreement was signed.

A few weeks later, the Dickson family was taken to court by its lawyer, A.P. Poussette, over failing to execute earlier that year a sale through him of this and other properties that the family had previously authorized him to negotiate. He wanted his commission, which he reckoned to be \$169,000. In his testimony, Poussette claimed that the family had, in the deal with the American Cereal Company (colloquially referred to then as "the Cereal Company"), sold for far less than the true value. He declared, "The sale to the Cereal Company can be considered a sacrifice." In his dealings with potential purchaser Starr of Cornwall (who was also suing), a value of \$160,000 had been on the table for the Peterborough mills portion. Further, in the current year alone, the Dicksons had spent \$31,532 for improvements to the raceway and construction of a new powerhouse to rent to Peterborough Light and Power. Newspaper accounts from late 1898 reference improvements with a value of \$75,000, including doubling the width of the London Street raceway and that new powerhouse. How, then, could the Dickson land assembly be worth only \$100,000? Maybe the sale price was a "sacrifice." If so, Cox, a skilled real estate investor on his own account, would have known. And he undoubtedly would have informed the Dickson family because that would be his character.

Cox may not have had a modern-day sensitivity for issues of conflict of interest and independence. But his sense was that transparency trumped those matters. His view would be, "It's good for you, it's good for me, it's good for all of us," so what matter is it that I am a player on both sides of a deal? Based on his record, we can credibly guess that Cox might well have unashamedly pressed the



Dickson family on the importance of getting this deal done for Peterborough at less than full price. And the five surviving Dickson sisters who controlled the company might well have quite purposefully made their version of a Charlotte Nicholls-like contribution to Peterborough progress.



*The Dickson Raceway and former Rogers Raceway as shown on the 1895 Bird's Eye View map. (Trent Valley Archives.)*

Certainly the Dicksons were motivated vendors who wanted to get a deal done. The old sawmills, designed to dump refuse directly into the river, were obsolete. It had taken a long time, but government authorities had finally proven to be serious about enforcing regulations prohibiting this dumping. In September 1892, company president T.G. Hazlitt had reported to the directors on "the necessity for closing down the Peterborough mill in consequence of the harassing threats of prosecution for alleged pollution of the river by sawdust... the Peterborough mill cannot in future be used to advantage without very large expenditure as well for the purpose of erecting a Burner." Also, much of the industry built on the Dickson raceway had burned and had not yet been rebuilt. From 1886 to 1898, the company had collected over \$42,000 in insurance proceeds from various destructive fires—Hall's mill, Wilson's woollen mill, Donnel and Green, the flour mill, the Lindsay-Seldon Furniture Company—the Dickson race was at that time referred to as a water power site "so long idle" and "the riverbank, so long vacant."

To the extent the company still wanted to be in the lumber business, it could use its Lakefield mills to process timber drawn from the Anstruther and Cavendish timber limits. In 1893, the Dickson

Company sold those timber limits to J.W. Howry and Sons of Saginaw, Michigan, taking back mortgage security. Dicksons unhappily had to foreclose in 1897. In October 1899, T.G. Hazlitt, the company manager since Sam Dickson's death in 1870, died. The company had lost its leader. Two other Dickson sons-in-law, Richard Hall and William Davidson, were pressed into unwanted service to manage the business. They both had previous milling experience but had many other interests. They wanted out. When the American Cereal Company deal was signed, they resigned, and the women of the Dickson family took charge. Further, the whole concept of an industrial park powered by water wheels directly running machinery was obsolete. The dawn of electric power, which allowed for the consumption of energy at a distance from where it was produced, had long since arrived.

In the 1880s and 1890s, electrical production began at dams of the lower mills in town. First, Peterborough Light and Power, owned by the Dickson family with Hazlitt as president, began operating off the Dickson dam. A "dynamo" was placed under the dam under the direction of Royal Engineering of Montreal, and power to service 25 nearby customers, each with an electric light bulb, was the pioneering start before the first power station was set up in the old pulp mill. And then Auburn Power established itself upstream. The turn of the century would see one additional business, Otonabee Power, build at "Trent Canal dam number 5" north of Nassau and two proprietary power stations established, that of the Peterborough Hydraulic Company (owned by and used for the American Cereal Company) and the CGE station at Nassau (whose first transmission to the plant was March 6, 1902). The power of the Otonabee River was now being harnessed and transported. The water power generated and used on site at the races of the old Dickson Company was yesterday's story. And the owners knew it.



*Municipal Building, Simcoe and Water (TVA, Soden booklet)*

Monday December 3 1900: The town council of Peterborough assembled in the chambers. Routine business was set aside. The Honourable George Cox was invited to speak. He explained to council that he had been planning to have the American Cereal Company locate in Peterborough. The company was interested in the Dickson property, a land assembly with water privileges running from below Hunter Street to north of Inverlea Park. For four or five years, the company had been considering the extension of its business in Canada, and Cox had kept in touch with its chief officers and its Canadian financiers, the Bank of Commerce. This would not have been difficult. Cox was president of that bank. In the last few months, the Cereal Company had come to view Canada as the desirable point from which to export goods in view of the country's large export trade to Great Britain. Cox had met with company officers to press the case for Peterborough as opposed to Toronto, Hamilton, or Ottawa, which were also being considered. The company wanted to locate where it could obtain the largest quantity of coarse grains. Statistics of the yield of this district were secured, and it was shown that large quantities of oats, peas, wheat, and other desirable cereals could be had in close proximity to Peterborough.

Two weeks earlier, Cox had been on to the Grand Trunk Railway (GTR) for information and to ensure that this company would commit to a favourable shipping climate. The manager of the GTR told him that, within a radius of 100 miles of the town, 35 million bushels were grown annually, and the GTR could handle this volume. The rates the GTR submitted were quite satisfactory. Cox, a long-time railway man who, 15 years before, had resuscitated and sold the Midland Railway to the GTR, made sure that was the case.

But Peterborough had meaningful competition. Toronto offered 6 acres of free land and a free rail siding with a wharf and elevator beside it. Ottawa offered a free site and free power.

The previous Friday, Cox had brought some of the American Cereal Company committee members to Peterborough. They had examined the Dickson property and were "quite satisfied." But there were concerns. Was Peterborough a big enough town to handle the scope of the proposed investment? Could a sufficient number of hands be secured? The company would need 600–800 workers. So later that day, Cox took company people down the road to visit the CGE shops. He was a shareholder and director of that company and, at least metaphorically, had the keys. The appearance of so large a number of first-class skilled workers made a very favourable impression. All routine economic concerns seemed to have been addressed. But what would the company's

demands be of Peterborough?

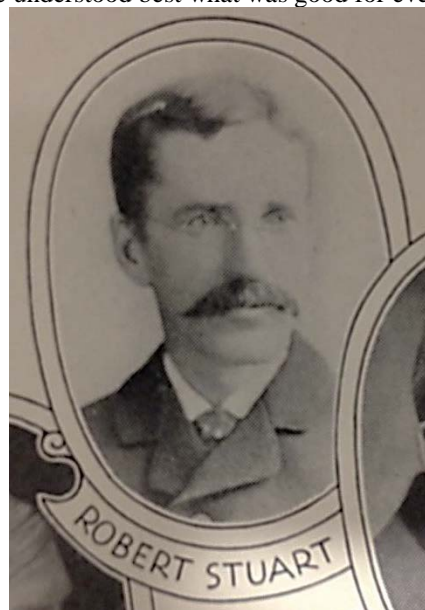
The practice of "bonusing," or bribing, manufacturing industry with invitational concessions had been in place in Peterborough since 1872, the year that 32-year-old businessman George Cox, who had no previous political experience, first became mayor. It was well understood and accepted. Businesses that undertook appropriate plans for manufacturing capital investment and prospective employment requested some benefits: perhaps free land, a fixed tax assessment or holiday, a railway siding or two. Sometimes something less obvious was wanted, such as the Edison Company's requirement of a 10-inch pipe into the plant from the Otonabee River to supply water and a 16-inch discharge pipe back out to the Otonabee for waste water and, it would seem by the pipe's diameter, other things. Once the bonuses were negotiated, town council then passed a bylaw approving the package. The bylaw was then submitted to a vote by the "ratepayers," men of property of a certain age. If that passed, the bylaw had to be submitted to the Ontario legislature for ratification. Most, but not all bonus bylaws submitted to a vote were approved. Building the town's manufacturing base was viewed as a sacred cause.

What were the American Cereal Company's demands of Peterborough? There was just one. A 42-year fixed property tax assessment. Based on long precedent, the request was more than reasonable. The company had clearly been persuaded to come here for other reasons, with the public subsidy being icing on the cake. All the Peterborough councillors had to do was say "yes," and the second most significant industrial town builder in the town's history would be in place. It so happened that town solicitor Burritt Edwards had a draft bylaw in hand. Edwards had served as town solicitor when Cox was last mayor and was therefore part of Cox's portfolio of most prized possessions—a working lifetime of useful contacts, relationships, and associates. The bylaw Edwards presented "was such a one as the senator [Cox] had suggested." Its preamble lamented that a considerable portion of the Dickson properties had "for a number of years lain idle and unproductive." The American Cereal Company would soon address that. Everything had been attended to. The politicians could not possibly screw things up. The bylaw to fix tax assessment at \$58,700 for 42 years (Ashburnham committed to \$45,000) received three readings on the spot, and was passed. Peterborough would gain a massive number of new jobs, would inevitably develop into *the* market town for the surrounding farming community, and would put in place a huge customer for local suppliers.

What was the American Cereal Company,

and what brought it to Canada and Peterborough? The company was formed in 1888 by the merger of seven major oat millers based in and around Chicago, Akron, and Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The players included first President Ferdinand Schumacher but also a group of capable Scottish immigrants by way of Canada named Douglas, Crowell, and two generations of Stuarts. John Stuart was oatmeal milling in Ingersoll and Woodstock before moving to the States in 1873 with his family, including 26-year-old son Robert. Accounts suggest that it was Robert, who, having visited America many times before the age of 20, urged the migration to Cedar Rapids, Iowa. As this new company grew, it constantly sought out new and expanded markets. As Cox had explained to the Peterborough town council, Canada, due to favourable tariff trade arrangements with Great Britain, was clearly a desirable location from which to service that massive market. All other considerations were relevant only in terms of where to locate in Canada. The Quaker Oats 1933 history states that Peterborough was selected because of its strategic location on the line of the flow of grain from the American West and the Canadian Northwest through to Montreal. Robert Stuart, in an October 1902 letter to the *Examiner* stated: "Our company came here because of the natural advantages of Peterborough, which are its geographical location, railways, the water power, and the Trent Canal, which we were assured would shortly be completed, and which, when finished and in operation, will, in our opinion, secure to Peterborough all the industries that your city can take care of." The American Cereal Company considered its Peterborough plant location to be on the Trent canal. It foresaw flotillas of boats and barges travelling up and down the Otonabee directly to and from its mills. The fixed Maria Street railway bridge would swing, as it should have from the beginning. The west bank of the river to the west of the rail spur would be filled in and would have extensive docks to accommodate the shipping. On April 10, 1902, Stuart advised town council that he had received the assurance that the Trent Valley Canal would be completed through to Georgian Bay within 12 months, and pointed out the importance of having the river dredged up as far as London Street for canal purposes. Seventeen acres of otherwise useless water lots the town had recently acquired could be filled to establish useful west bank shoreline. The company itself was prepared to put money into the project and manage it. In May 1902, a town and company contingent went to Ottawa to enlist federal funding for this work. Cox had arranged an audience with Tarte, the minister of public works. In due course, the federal government committed to funding half of the estimated \$60,000 cost of

deepening the river, cribbing, and filling in the west shoreline from Little Lake to London Street. Tellingly, when pleading with council in June 1902 to get on with this work, Cox was quoted as saying, "I appear here apparently in the interests of the cereal company, but you will all understand, I am sure, that I am a great deal more interested in the town than the cereal company." Cox usually believed, arguably with a touch of arrogance accompanying accuracy, that he understood best what was good for everyone.



Robert Stuart was anxious for the Trent Valley Canal to be built, not just for his company's use but so as to exert pressure on the railway companies to bring down shipping rates. The Dickson and Rogers mills he had purchased already had the requisite service from two competing railways—the Grand Trunk from the north and CP from the south, but a third shipping option was desired. His concerns in this regard were well founded. In June 1905, he chose to actually close the Peterborough operations for a time in protest against what he viewed as discriminatory freight rates, only reopening when the great fire at the American Cereal Company's Cedar Rapids mills made Peterborough production critical.

Other businessmen were similarly obsessed with the prospective prosperity the Trent Valley Canal would bring. They were all believers. Late in 1901, Mayor Denne stated that Cox had told him that if he could secure a pledge from the minister of railways and canals that the upper section of the Trent Valley Canal could be finished next year, he could procure for Peterborough "the largest manufactory in the Dominion."

Clearly, the rail service, location, the

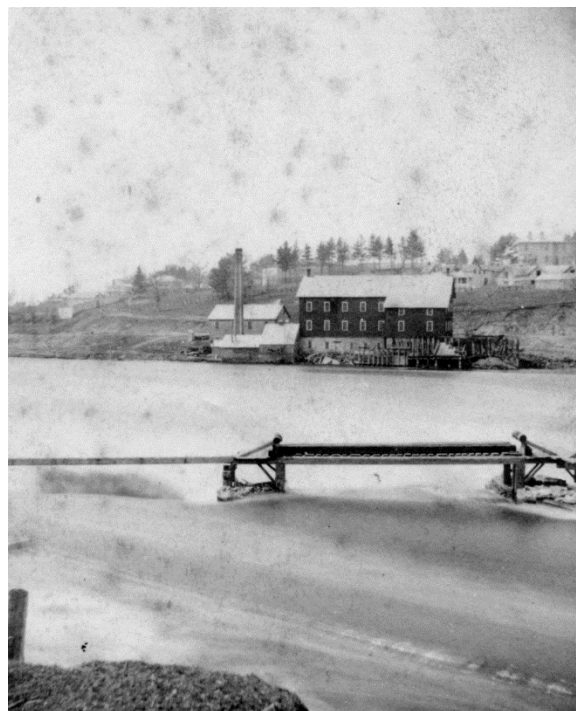


prospective waterway, and the site itself were significant motivators for the Cereal Company to select Peterborough as its first Canadian location. But there was a group of local outdoorsmen who might, with straight faces, explain that Stuart also had another incentive. Robert Stuart was born and raised in this country and was now, in David Dumble's words, "a repatriated Canadian." He was an avid outdoorsman, and Peterborough offered him related fulfilments. From 1902 to 1923, he had necessary fall business meetings that brought him from Chicago to Peterborough. The "business" included the annual deer hunt of the Ketchicum Hunt Club, where he had the opportunity to share the esteemed company of locals Winch, Hall, Fitzgerald, Dennistoun, Stevenson, Morrow, Bradburn, and other members of the Peterborough establishment. It seems plausible that George Cox, a full-service facilitator if there ever was one, enlisted his nephew and employee, W.G. Morrow, to tend to the invitation and arrangements for Cox's new friend, Robert Stuart, to find a hunting home. If Peterborough's approval of a fixed tax assessment was the "icing on the cake" in attracting Stuart and the Cereal Company, the prospective pleasures of crisp November mornings at Catchacoma Lake were surely the candle on top of that.

Cox's sales pitch to Stuart to locate in Peterborough had these many useful tools, but perhaps the most important was the quality of the land assembly that had been put together by the Hall and Dickson families, with a touch of support from Cox himself. In 1900, the Dickson Company controlled both sides of the river from Hunter Street to north of Inverlea Park by either owning the land or having the right to back up water against someone else's. The company had even extended the raceway south by pipes under Hunter Street in the early 1880s to service the three-story woollen mill it built there for E.B. Wilson on the west riverbank below the old bridge.

The land assembly began in 1826–27, when the government built a mill and sold it by auction to John Hall and Moore Lee. The mill reserve consisted of 20 acres on the west bank of the river, more or less from Brock Street north to London, along with a further 66 acres on the east bank north of Douro Street. Hall's mortgagor or his solicitor failed to be competent enough to register the Otonabee side acreage as security. So Hall chopped it up and sold pieces to anyone and everyone: Brown, Ferguson and Bethune, Alexander Shairp, his brother George Hall, Zacheus Burnham, even his mortgagor's lawyer, George Boulton. Hall was an ambitious real estate investor/speculator. One of his early (1829) purchases was the south-east 200 acres of Smith

Township, being the area to the north-west of the current corner of Parkhill Road and the river. He sold off the attractive 13-acre plot in the corner, which in due course became Judge Dennistoun's estate. After Dennistoun's death, a real estate syndicate subdivided house lots on Water Street and created Inverlea and Dennistoun avenues, before the remaining six acres became West Nicholls (now Inverlea) Park.



*The Peterborough mill operated by Lee and Hall.(TVA)*

Hall actually wanted the land immediately to the north of the current park, where a second mill was built. When he and partner Moore Lee went their separate ways, Hall kept the mill and related lands in town (Hall's mill) and "Lee's mill," owned by Moore Lee, carried on at the 187 acres upstream. Both Hall's mill and Lee's mill were "lost" for a time to creditors. Lee's son-in-law, J.R. Benson bought Lee's back at the sheriff's auction. And Hall's son George eventually acquired the downtown mill reserve and related properties from the mortgagor. George (Barker) Hall was forced to dispose of the major part of the mill reserve to his creditors. Samuel Dickson, a long-time tenant of the Halls as both a distiller and miller, acquired a quarter interest in the mill reserve from Hall in 1856, and the final three-quarters from Samuel Harmon in early 1860. George Barker Hall and Samuel Dickson bought many small parcels of land to extend the mill property down below Hunter Street and north above London. But the Hall family made two unfortunate property sales.

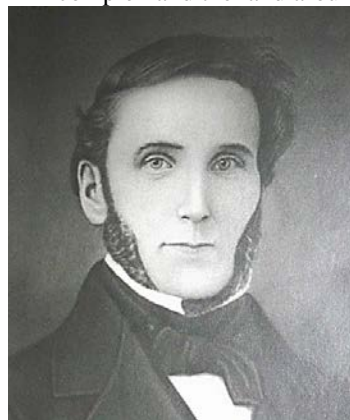


One Zacheus Burnham had purchased the core of what became Ashburnham, the 200-acre plot running from the river east to Armour Road and extending from Little Lake at the south to Douro Street at the north. Burnham bought this land in 1821 from Richard Ferguson, son of a fellow Hamilton Township UE settler. The most obvious business investment to start in a prospective town like the future Ashburnham was a mill. His 200-acre "Ashburnham" site had much river frontage but, being at the foot of the long Otonabee River rapids below Lakefield, not enough for a quality mill.

The Hall family owned across the river, an island in the middle, and the land to the north of Burnham's. The Halls and Burnham made a good match. Burnham had money and the Halls, ever ambitious in their real estate acquisitions, had too much debt and needed money. So on two occasions, in 1834 and 1851, first John Hall and later his son George sold to Burnham riverfront land sufficient to allow construction of a reasonable dam for a mill. The 1834 purchase was of 6 riverfront acres in Otonabee bordering Burnham's 200 acres; and in 1851, Burnham bought Hall land on both sides of the river to build a higher dam. The second agreement provided that Hall and Burnham would each be entitled to half the water flow of the Otonabee. The new dam near Douro Street supported a 9-foot head of water, running through a 1000-foot raceway to Hunter Street and a tailrace re-entering the east side of the Otonabee near the top of the present Engleburn Avenue.

The river was an intermittent battleground for neighbouring mill owners, steamboat operators, and timber drivers, and this area was no exception. Not long after Sam Dickson gained full control of the Hall's mill properties, he was in court. Burnham's grandson-in-law, Robert Rogers, who then owned and operated the east bank mill was complaining about its works being fouled by refuse from the Dickson mill. Part of Dickson's defence was that this was Rogers's own fault. Of course Dickson's mill refuse went straight into the Otonabee. That's what the river was for. Why was the Rogers mill not properly constructed with sufficient waste gates to ensure that all refuse was directed further downstream? So Sam Dickson was blessed with dealing with a neighbouring mill that likely would not have existed but for what he would have said were two ill-advised property dispositions by the Hall family. The Rogers mill remained an annoyance until that land was reclaimed by Dickson's heirs in 1885. In 1829, John Hall had in place most of the land assembly Quaker wanted 70 years later. But the north end was lost to his estranged partner and the south-east corner to Burnham. The two most meaningful

parts of the Dickson land assembly then, were the reacquisition of these holdings: the Burnham/Rogers mill complex and the land around the Benson dam.



*Thomas Benson, Peterborough's first mayor, was connected with Benson's mill, operated by his brother. TVA*

Clearly, there is more to this (and every other) story than meets the eye, but the Benson acquisition has a deliciously circular twist. For many years, Martin Martyn operated the gristmill at the Benson dam. In winter, the machinery was often fouled by the presence of "anchor ice" below the mill. Mother nature could not be sued, so it was clear that this ice must have developed because of the Dickson dam below backing up the water inappropriately. So Martyn sued the Dicksons. At this time, Sam Dickson was dead, and the business was managed by his son-in-law, T.G. Hazlitt. But the legal owner was "the estate" of Sam Dickson, —and the trustees of the estate were initially merchants Robert Nicholls and William Hall. So Martyn's suit was filed against Robert Nicholls. Sometimes when Martyn couldn't run his mill because of the anchor ice, which must have been Nicholls's fault, he had insufficient money to pay rent to the Bensons. When this happened, they, in turn, sometimes had insufficient cash to pay their mortgage. In 1876, the mortgagor, the one and same Robert Nicholls, foreclosed. For \$22,000, the new owner of the Benson/Martyn dam and mill then became William Hall's nephew, Richard Hall. Richard, as we have read, married into the Dickson family and was, after his brother-in-law Hazlitt's death, president and manager of the business. So in due course, Richard Hall sold the Benson/Martyn property to the Dickson Company. Hazlitt unsuccessfully tried to peddle it to the Edison Electric Company. It was one of the first properties that company looked at. But it remained in Dickson hands until the American Cereal Company came along.

The other major part of the Dickson land assembly happened in 1885 with the acquisition of the Rogers mills on the east bank of the river north of

Hunter. This in turn resulted from a tragic death in 1883. Mill owner, 29-year-old George Rogers, third son of the retired Robert, drowned in the river at the mill. This was an occupational hazard. William Whitlaw, whose mill was on Whitlaw's creek near the current navy club, went through the ice to meet death in the winter of 1837. Sam Dickson died from injuries related to a tumble into the river in the 1870 spring floods. Dickson had capable sons-in-law to carry on his enterprise. George Rogers left his widow and three daughters, the oldest of whom was two years and ten months old. His older brother Richard had never worked any of the family mills and was fully occupied as a land surveyor and engineer. His oldest brother James had, just weeks before, embarked on establishing the Ontario Canoe Company. There was no family successor. So the Rogers family milling operations, which anchored the Ashburnham business community, were up for sale.

It may seem obvious that the Dicksons would be the purchasers, but they were slow off the mark. The properties were unsuccessfully marketed both by auction and by tender solicitation. Subsequently Cox entered into an agreement with the George Rogers estate to purchase the mill properties by private sale. Cox's vision included the obvious. Cox persuaded T.G. Hazlitt to join with him. In due course, a new corporation was formed, the Dickson Company, which took over the related Dickson estate property and, somewhat later, the Rogers family's mill properties. Cox owned 15 per cent of the new company and was president until he sold out to the Dickson family in 1890. It was at a price that gave him 6 per cent interest on his invested capital and no more. His real "interest" was to push for development of the water power, to help make the Peterborough business world unfold as he thought it should. The Dicksons were so satisfied with his efforts in consolidating and reorganizing the business in 1885 that they allowed Cox a \$7,160 reduction of his required cash contribution for shares as a bonus.

The Dickson Company now controlled the core of Peterborough's industrial downtown. The east and west riverside mill races around Hunter Street at various times were the location of saw and grist mills but also of planing and shingle mills, distilleries, woollen mills, a tannery, ax and hand-tool factories, a wagon factory, a foundry, pump and windmill factories, furniture factories, a carding mill, and an agricultural implement factory. The first "Peterborough" canoe was built there by John Stephenson in the mid 1850s by the Craigie and Stephenson shop (later Wand's). There had been oatmeal mills on both races long before Quaker. Burning and bankruptcy created a steady turnover. Jackson Creek fed a string of water-powered

industrial sites often supported by steam, and steam engines powered other meaningful manufacturers downtown. But water power was thought to be half the cost of steam. So the mills of Dickson and Rogers, truly water-powered industrial parks supported by the mill dams, were the focal point of downtown industry in their day.

Major land assemblies are not simple matters. After acquisition of the Rogers Mill, there was still more to do. By the late 1880s, the Dickson Company owned its old west riverbank mills, the Rogers property on the east, and the old Benson Mill to the north. Although it had served tenants such as Martin Martyn well for years, this mill had only a 7-foot head of water and, realistically, did not have a promising future. A reasonable strategy was to merge that 7-foot head of water with the 20-foot head at the Dickson dam below, to create an extraordinary water power.

A matter of great importance to any mill operation is control of the upstream waters. A mill requires a dam to back up the water. So you either need to own the riverbank upstream of the dam or execute agreements with those that did. The Dicksons did not own all of the land between their two sites. In George Barker Hall's day, he paid Judge Dennistoun for the right to maintain his dam at the existing level with respect to the upstream property that is now known as Inverlea Park. He paid Sam Dickson for a similar right with respect to the waterfront beside the present Nicholls Oval, which Dickson owned from 1851. When Sam Dickson sold land along the shoreline beside Nicholls Oval to the Cobourg and Peterborough Railway, he maintained the right to back up the water beside it to a higher level. When his son-in-law, T.G. Hazlitt, peddled the rest of that property to the Charlotte Nicholls Trust to be used for a park, the vendors similarly kept the ability to increase the head of water by a further four feet. And in that deal, they did more. The Nicholls Trust had already acquired West Nicholls (Inverlea) Park. When they acquired East Nicholls Park from the Dicksons, part of the consideration was to allow the Dicksons to back up water a further four feet beside Inverlea Park. You might have wondered how this was arranged. Negotiations were not difficult. The two trustees of the Nicholls Trust were Richard Hall and Charles McGill. They were also directors of the Dickson Company.

So from all this complicated land assembly and reassembly of what the Hall family let get away, Cox had in place the necessary "magnificent water power" in the heart of Peterborough to support a sale. This was a critical consideration for the Cereal Company. The Benson/Martyn dam would disappear, and the new company dam, built to support an

electric power station serving its mills, would be raised well over the height of the old Dickson dam to provide a 27-foot head of water. This was so attractive a business asset that now, 115 years later, the power generation at this site is being expanded by an expenditure of many millions.

As the transaction unfolded, George Cox continued to be everywhere as its facilitator. He lobbied not only his fellow Liberal, MPP James Stratton, to ensure provincial approval of the Cereal Company bylaw but also the provincial premier directly. When the real estate deal was closed on March 11, 1901, the purchaser was a newly incorporated American Cereal Company operation, the Peterborough Hydraulic Power Company. George Cox signed the closing papers as that company's president. Early on, he was also appointed an American Cereal Company director.



*American Cereal Company 1904*

Although in its initial presentation to Peterborough the American Cereal Company did not ask for much, it had other business issues to attend to. The company wanted to close up Mill Street, which ran north from Hunter Street to the original Hall's mill below London Street just west of the river. The town council agreed. The company also wanted a second rail spur across Hunter Street to the new mills. Peterborough already had a reputation as a town willing to compromise for the benefit of business. A railway up the centre of Bethune Street?

Yes. A CP fixed-rail bridge that brought a critical additional competitive service even though it destroyed boat access to downtown? Yes. The original 1888 railway spur up the middle of the downtown river to both service the Dickson industrial park and impose on the waterfront of unhappy downtown west-bank landowners? Yes. A related free CP right of way over the town's "Island # 1" in the river? Yes. So of course in October 1901 council approved a second rail line across Hunter Street, which was then just a few feet above the level of the river. In May 1902, councillors voted approval of a third line. And why not, related to this new railway, just turn over full ownership of Island # 1 to CP to make things simple? This happened as well. The folly of having level crossings at this location had been recognized at council even when the first rail spur was constructed in the 1880s, but worries were set aside. In February 1906, as traffic at that location

continued to worsen, council again discussed the overhead Otonabee bridge option to allow rail access to the newly named Quaker Oats Company to pass underneath. Plans were ordered to be drawn. Quaker was asked if it would contribute to a new bridge. Stuart, not wanting to pay, disingenuously stated that Quaker did not have any traffic problem, and

declined. That issue was left for another day.

Another business issue that emerged after the purchase concerned the supply of water in the Otonabee needed to power the Cereal Company's electrical generating station. In the following years, Stuart and the other electrical power producers joined with the Trent Canal authorities in pursuing the goal of building reservoir dams on the "back lakes" servicing the Otonabee. The benefit to all of these parties was that a regular water flow could then be maintained throughout the year. The American Cereal Company had analyzed this issue quite scientifically. In 1903, it reported that "the area of this section of country, which drains into the



Otonabee River is 2703 square miles. If we assume that 40 per cent of the rainfall finds its way down the river, 80,162,984,310 cu feet of water passed down in 1902 (when there was 31.98 inches of rain). If this water had been stored and allowed to come down the river at a uniform rate, it would make a flow of 152,157 cu feet per minute, or 2,542 cu feet per second which under a head of 27 feet would develop 7614 effective horsepower." If the water was not released uniformly, the potential electric generation capacity would be considerably less. These calculations clearly show the sophistication of the American enterprise arriving in our town just fifty years after local players had decided to share the water in the river, whatever it was, 50/50 and where one lease that the company had inherited granted the tenant the right to withdraw water power from the race with an egress simply measured in square inches.

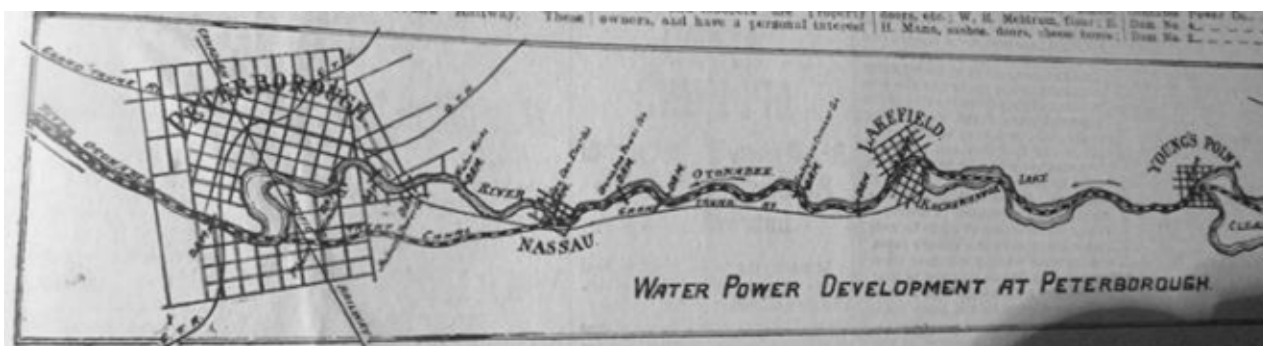
In October 1905, it was reported that 33 old lumberman dams had been transferred to federal government management. News articles proclaimed the benefits of new dams—reduced dredging needs; safer, more economical navigation; less damage from spring freshets; and improved electric power generation. "The progressive spirits of the American Cereal Company would also be encouraged to add to their million dollar investment in buildings, plant and machinery in Peterborough if they were assured of the fact that they would have more horse power at all seasons of the year." Undoubtedly this was true. In October 1906, Stuart toured the back lakes with Willie Boyd of Bobcaygeon to review the prospects for improved steady water flow. The *Examiner* stated, "this is said to be the deciding factor in the question of whether the mills will be enlarged very materially." The remaining history of damming the back lakes before they were populated for this "conservation" is another story for another day. But when one contemplates how the river had always been a battleground for its many competing users, it is interesting to observe the confluence of navigation and electric power interests emerging early in the twentieth century.

This is a "business coming to Peterborough" story, not one about real estate building, but some summary comments are in order related to post-acquisition business activities. The company's plans unfolded with great speed and competence. An 18 April 1891 news article reports that "few can comprehend the stupendous outlay . . . a million dollars will be spent." When it became clear that the Dickson Company's lease commitment to Peterborough Light and Power for 20 years from May 1900 would be a distraction, the American Cereal Company proceeded to buy up the shares of that company, including the controlling Dickson and Bradburn family interests in December 1901. On February 13, 1902, the *Examiner* stated, "the great amount of steel work that is being used in the new building is surprising. There will scarcely be anything to burn about the structure." If only that were true.

In October 1902, Mr. A.P. Macdonald, the company manager, reported that "he has never found girls as intelligent, so quick to 'catch on' as the girls of Peterborough." Presumably Macdonald found other things he liked in his new town. He married Robert Stuart's daughter, and settled here.

Mill waste, particularly sawdust, had always been a tolerated nasty side effect of the lumber industry. But now, good news. In October 1902, the *Examiner* described the vast sawdust piles buried on the company site as being "the post-mortem utility of our departed northern forest of pine. Today the Cereal Company find them a mine of fuel, which, it is estimated, will supply them with heating material for six or eight years. Furnaces adapted to burning sawdust and slabs, furnish steam for grain drying and other heating purposes." On October 9, 1902, the American Cereal Company made its first shipment of Quaker Oats to the old country.

Also from October 9, 1902: "With the canal completed to Lake Ontario, we shall be able to have coal, iron and steel and other bulky or heavy freight imports landed at our very doors, within a stone cast of our market square and the business centre of town."



October 30, 1902: Mr. Tarte is true to his word. The dredge "Trent" arrived, was partially dismantled to go under the railway bridge, and set to work dredging the river. The goal was a channel on the west bank from Little Lake to the cereal works, 30 feet wide and 7 feet deep. Three years later, the "Trent" was back doing more dredging, and this time putting the dredgings to the west of the rail tracks to fill in the "frog pond."

December 18, 1902: The cereal works is already a market for 60,000 bushels of oats per day. The rate of 33 cents is at least 3 cent more than could be obtained on the open market. Farmers come to Peterborough now from a radius of 40 miles. They are paid cash and can spend considerably in town.

The American Cereal Company brought to Peterborough not only investment capital for plant and power generation but considerable agricultural know-how. It was always important for the food processors to nurture and educate Canadian farmers as to what their needs were for mutual benefit, whether it was the Mathews Company instructing about hogs for the English market, Houdry for peas for France, or oats for the Cereal Company's international markets. An American Cereal Company circular explained that there would be even higher payments when, with a little care, farmers learned more about what variety of oats to grow, "white Siberian" and "banner" being desirable.

In 1900, Peterborough was poised to renew its industrial relationship with the river. Water-powered lumber mills and the small factories surrounding them were swept away by the arrival of a substantial and sophisticated industry, and by the Electric City's new power generating capabilities. Expansion of the power supply at newly competitive private enterprise rates, along with excellent rail service and a long-skilled industrial work force, brought many more industrial enterprises to town. The first wave of modern industrialization to build a new Peterborough began with the Edison Electric Company in 1890. In 1900, the force that was George Cox, still a passionate Peterborian in his heart, brought his vision and determination to bear so that, the unlikely, the coming of the American Cereal Company to Peterborough, was achieved. By the end of the next decade, Peterborough, building on this twin base, had the highest per capita manufacturing output of any town or city in Canada.

*Ken Brown, author of The Canadian Canoe Company and the Early Peterborough Canoe Factories, is presently writing a book about the early manufacturing history of Peterborough. The major sources of material for this article are the contemporary newspaper and real estate records and the Peterborough Lumber and Quaker Oats fonds at the Peterborough Museum and Archives.*



Quaker Oats Co. Mills, Peterboro, Ont.

# **CEREAL CO'S MILL DAMAGED BY FIRE**

**Fortunately It was Controlled and Confined to Part of Top Storey**

**MILLS TO BE OPERATED IN A SHORT TIME**

**Fire Started in Department Where the Dust Collectors Are Located – The Sprinkler System Practically Saved the Day by Preventing the Fire From Spreading – Firemen Had Difficult Proposition.**

*Peterborough Daily Evening Review, 12 February 1904*

The second serious fire for Peterborough this winter was that which affected one of its principal industries this morning. The American Cereal Company's large mill was the scene of the conflagration and the damage that has resulted is considerable. It was just about seven o'clock this morning when the blaze was discovered – the first to see it being Mr. G. W. Mulligan – and immediately the alarm was sounded, and the system with which the building is thoroughly equipped was put into service. This is the well-known sprinkler system, which forms part of the fire protection equipment of almost every large and up-to-date factory building. It consists of a series of pipes fitted with sprinkler heads four feet apart, which, when released by heat or otherwise removed, frees the water, kept at a constant pressure from a pumping station each head making a flood radius of about eight feet.

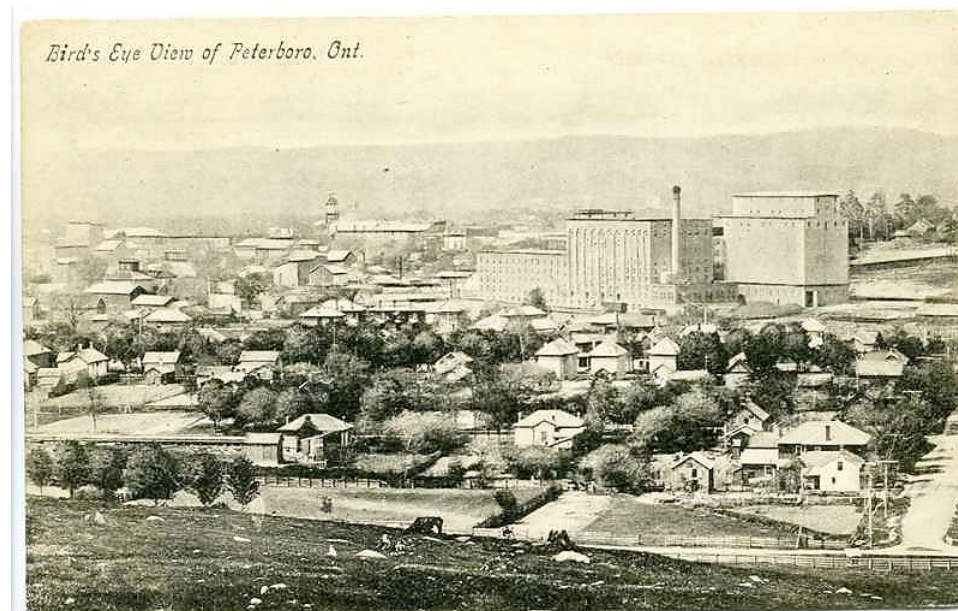
worked from the same hydrant. For a couple of hours nothing but dense clouds of smoke issued from the upper windows for one-half of the length of the building, the other half being shut off by a fire wall. It was a difficult position to tackle, and some time was required in effectively applying available streams. The town service was supplemented by that in connection with the mill, which has a pump kept continuously at 120 pounds pressure. Enquiry at the town pumping station showed that both pumps were working and that there was a pressure of 110 pounds, and that the mains were given all the water they could handle. Immediately the serious nature of the fire was discovered, the fire department telephoned Mr. R. B. Rogers, Superintending Engineer of the Trent Canal, to have the different dams along the river above the pumping station freed to such an extent so as to preclude all

possibility of water shortage. The pumps at the town station were sending out 1,800 gallons a minute, which is a head calculated as sufficient to deal with a fire of any dimension, if properly utilized.

About ten o'clock the flames began to show in the top storey of the mill, and it was seen that, though confined, they were going to make thorough work to that locality. The men of the Cereal Company and of the fire brigade worked hard to get the upper hand. A couple of lines of hose were got to the top of the building at the rear, the fire escape assisting the men to reach the airy point, another line

on the south and one on the west wrought the best service possible in a handicapped position. Meanwhile the sprinkler system was working, and though the lower storeys of the building were deluged, the fire was held in check. The damage to the second floor by the fire was comparatively light. About noon it was seen that the flames had done their worst in an area which included about one-half of the length of the building. The roof above this fell in, and an examination will show that the fire did pretty thorough work. The actual cause is unknown. The department in which the incipient spark got in its harm is that in which the dust collectors are situated.

Mr. A. P. Macdonald, the superintendent of the works, stated this morning that the fire would not long



*View of Quaker Oats from Armour Hill, c. 1903 (TVA Dorfman fonds)*

The fire was in the top storey, and so situated that the deluge of water did not entirely suppress the flame, although it was instrumental in confining it to the locality in which it had its origin. The Cereal building is 120 feet high, 110 feet wide and 210 feet long, and when the fire brigade, promptly responding to the call, arrived, they found that the proposition confronting them was to get their streams to work in the very topmost part of the mill. There are four hydrants in the vicinity of the building, and a line of hose was attached to the one at the west side, and carried by means of a shaft in the grain elevator to the roof of the latter. The fire engine was brought into service also and



deter the operation of the mill. A few weeks may see it running again with its full staff at work.

The great damage is by water. Farmers arrived at the elevator this morning with oats, and were relieved of their loads. There will be no cessation in receiving the required cereals, and this is an indication of an enterprise that no fire can discourage. Meanwhile the "smile that won't come off" has probably been besmeared, but it is doing business at the same old stand.

#### FIRE DEPARTMENT IMPROVEMENT

The fires which have caused so much damage in Peterborough of late years have impressed the Town Council of the necessity of having one of the best possible

departments. The Fire, Water and Light Committee met on Wednesday last and discussed the question, with the result that the Council will have to consider some recommendations involving a great change. The people will undoubtedly be asked their opinion of a by-law involving expenditure for this purpose. Just what is proposed is not definitely known, but a new fire hall, a brigade of five or six paid men constantly on duty, additional hose, an up-to-date alarm system, are among the necessities which should be dealt with so that any emergency would not be allowed to develop into a disaster for any want of efficiency in the town's service.

#### DAMAGE TO MILL NOT EXTENSIVE

#### CEREAL COMPANY MAY HAVE MILL OPERATING IN FEW WEEKS

**Force of Men will be Set to Work at Once to Restore the Building -- Exaggerated Reports Have Gone Abroad**

*Peterborough Daily Evening Review, 13 February 1904*



*Quaker Oats Mill early (TVA, Dorfman fonds)*

It is a pleasure to note that the damage to the Cereal Company's building by fire is not as serious as was at first thought. Upon the roof being replaced it will take very short time for the concern to be in running shape again. The water has pretty thoroughly soaked everything and considerable overhauling will be necessary in connection with the machinery. Some will have to be replaced in those departments affected by and immediately below the fire. As soon as the insurance has been adjusted – and it understood that the loss is entirely covered – a large force will be immediately set to work in restoring the mill to its former condition. An authoritative statement is that in three or four weeks' time the concern will be running, and part, if not all, of the operatives working again. The material for the renewal of the part destroyed by fire has, it is understood, been already contracted for and the builders will get at the

roof and top storey as soon as possible. A thorough examination of the machinery will be made, and no time lost in having the plant restored to its former usefulness.

It is a pity that exaggerated accounts should be sent out to the world. The loss from the Cereal Co. fire has been reported to several Toronto papers as amounting to \$100,000, when it certainly will not reach half that amount and probably will not exceed \$30,000. It is also said that they cannot resume operations for six months. They will probably be running the same as ever in less than

two months.

The report of the Cereal Co. fire sent to the Toronto Star alluded to the unsuccessful attempt of the Lord's Day Alliance to obtain a conviction for violation of the Sabbath. It concludes: "When seen to-day a member of the Alliance deemed the fire the judgment of God." It is ridiculous as it is blasphemous for a man who is not a Christian to take in vain the name of our Lord.

The report has been circulated that the waterworks department, in dealing with yesterday's fire, was hampered or crippled by the anchor ice in the river. This is not the case. The pumps at the town station were working at 110 pounds pressure or 1800 gallons of water a minute. This should have given the force a very powerful stream through the branches of the hose used. A great deal of criticism has been heard in regard to the way the fire was handled by the department. If there is good reason for this it should be thoroughly investigated by the Town Council.

## Fire at Quaker Oats Plant, December 11, 1916

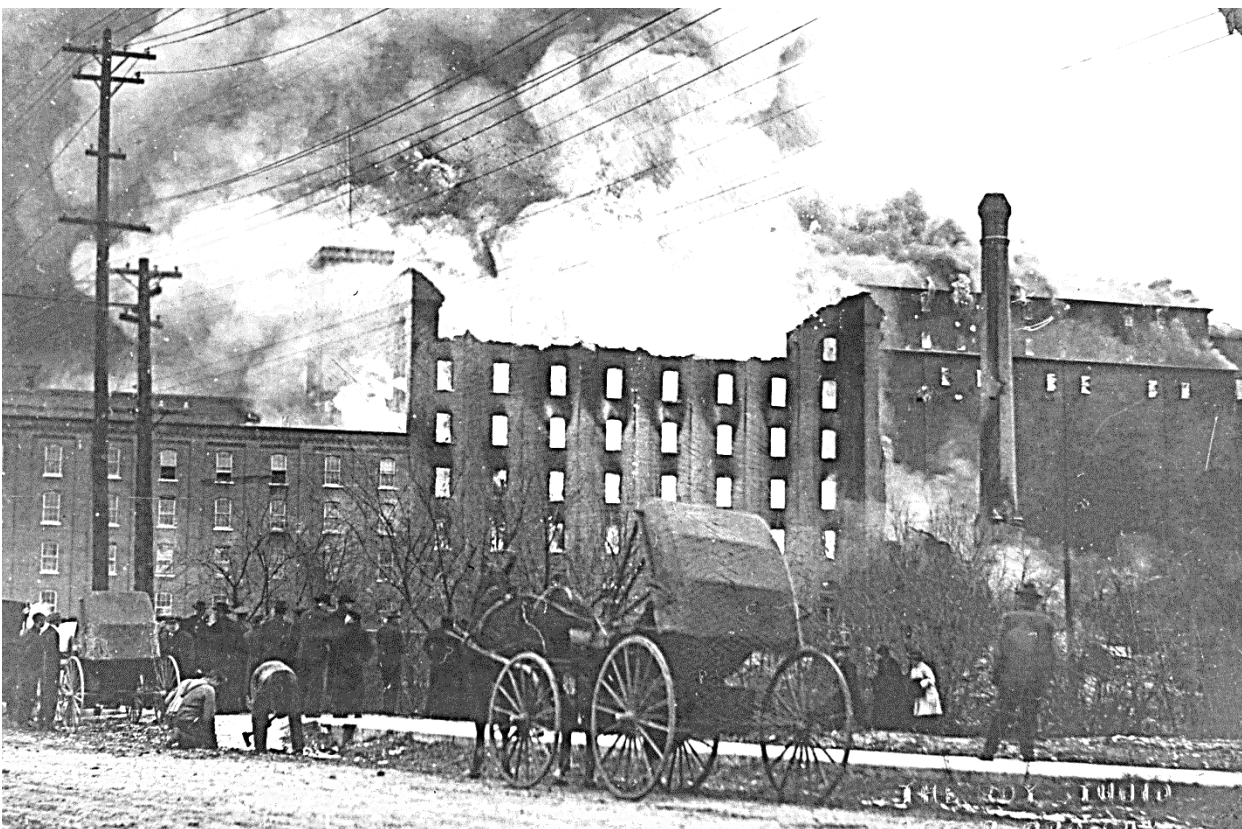
*Gina Martin  
Heritage Gazette 2004*

As someone born and raised in Peterborough I can definitely say that any thought of the Quaker Oats Company reminds me of home. My Italian immigrant grandfather was a Quaker employee more than thirty years and my maternal grandmother worked there as a young girl during World War I. Years later, my sister went to work there as did one of my best high school friends. As a teenager living on Edinburgh Street I remember the smell of oatmeal on a hot summer day wafting across the river into our kitchen. And later, while working as a title searcher at the Land Registry Office, I could see the Quaker outside my office window and every day heard the noon whistle. I guess you could say that the Quaker Oats has always been a "constant" in my life. But even constants suffer their troubles and it seems that the Quaker Oats Company is no exception.

Peterborough's darkest disaster. A total of twenty-two lives were lost and the largest cereal factory in the British Empire, as well as one of Peterborough's largest industries, was destroyed leaving December 11, 1916 an unforgettable date in local history.

The Quaker Oats Company, an American company based in Chicago, was first established in Peterborough in 1901 on the present day site of the northwest side of Hunter Street overlooking the Otonabee River. British tariffs on American goods made the idea of a Canadian mill site very attractive and the Trent Canal system, leading directly to the eastern seaboard, made Peterborough a favourable location. On completion the Peterborough site was the largest within the company and quickly became one of the town's largest employers.

Local population in 1916 stood at 19,816 people



A recent conversation with my mother reminded me of how close we once came to losing the Quaker. She told me that, on December 11, 1916, my grandmother stayed home from work with a bad cold. This meant that the eighteen year old missed the morning explosion that ripped through the Hunter Street East factory, igniting a fire that would burn for the next four days and all but level the local institution. Although obviously thankful that my grandmother was safe I was reminded of the severity of

and between 500 and 600 of them worked at the Quaker Oats. Like my grandmother, about 250 of these employees were young women aiding in the home front for the First World War effort. With war raging in Europe the Peterborough factory produced a huge number of relief boxes containing Quaker products for troops overseas. The destruction of the plant put an abrupt end to this production and initiated some very permanent changes in the community.



At 10:00 AM on Monday morning December 11, there was a freezing gale blowing through Peterborough as Mr. W.H. Denham, superintendent of the Peterborough site of the Quaker Oats Company, sat in his Hunter Street office. He later stated to a Peterborough Examiner reporter that he suddenly felt a heavy shock followed by what he thought might have been an explosion. He ran from the building to the riverside of the plant to see what had happened. The first thing he saw were grain dust tanks tumbling out of the dry house. As he looked toward the top floors he saw that one third of the plant was engulfed in flames and the whole north and east walls were gone. Screams could be heard everywhere.

Meanwhile, at the Public Water Works, Superintendent Ross L. Dobbin watched the pressure gauge at his desk. He saw that at exactly 10:00 AM the pressure for the Hunter Street area suddenly dropped from seventy pounds to forty-five pounds and then almost instantly returned to seventy pounds indicating an explosion and break in the water main. Fire department logs show that at 10:15 a.m. Captain Drummond of the Peterborough Fire Department received an alarm from Mr. Denham. The Quaker Oats plant was on fire.

The fire department arrived at 10:25 AM with sixteen firemen and the brigade's only steam fire engine. At the same time, Mr. Dobbin from the Water Works arrived and shut off the sprinkler connection near the bridge to improve area water pressure. At first he could not locate the connection at the front of the building because of external changes from recent construction but was eventually successful. He then shut off the Hunter Street valve controlling the Quaker water main. The other end of the main was at Murray Street. By this time the other walls of the plant began to fall rendering the entire sprinkler system inoperative. This showed the tremendous force of the explosion as the fire had only thirty minutes to penetrate walls three feet thick.

Almost from the outset there were problems fighting the fire with efficiency. Because of the break in the water main, the pressure in the fire hydrants was very low making the steam engine nearly useless for the first two hours of the fire. The bank of the river was too high to draw from draft and the heavy machine could not be lowered to usefulness. Mother Nature was quite uncooperative as high west winds blowing across the river allowed the fire to spread down Hunter Street toward Sheridan Street at an alarming rate. A shortage of fire hose slowed things considerably allowing the roof of the Court House to catch fire. Many Sheridan Street residents scrambled to keep the flames from their properties with garden hoses.

At 2:00 PM total disaster seemed imminent as sparks from the Quaker fire lit up a lumber yard across the river and members of the fire brigade temporarily left to work on the second fire. Luckily this was extinguished within the hour but showed how fire could easily spread with such an unrelenting wind. Realizing that the engulfed part of the town had to be saved, Chief Drummond turned his brigade to protect the central part of Peterborough. In dire need of assistance he placed a phone call to the Lindsay fire department and Lindsay's only fire engine soon arrived with a small number of firemen.

Inside the building it was utter chaos. It was reported that many girls fainted and had to be carried out. A woman running toward the elevator came across two girls who had fainted in the doorway. A freight car, which she did not see, was passing overhead. She jumped over the two girls and tore her skirt, narrowly escaping collision with the freight car. Chemical tanks were exploding, spreading fire throughout the ground floors. A man's clothing burnt off as he hung from the fifth floor ledge for twelve minutes. Many injuries occurred as workers jumped from factory windows. In the days following the fire, countless such stories of horror and confusion filled the pages of the Peterborough Examiner and dominated many local conversations.

By 6:00 PM the fire was still at full blaze. Sixteen people were listed in critical condition. Eight were known dead while many others remained missing. For the next four days the fire smoldered as firemen were on duty a full twenty-four hours. Many people were taken from the carnage to Nicholls hospital where they were treated for shock, smoke inhalation and a ranging degree of burns.

Within hours of the initial explosion attentions turned to the cause of the blaze and, on December 12<sup>th</sup>, officials from Quaker Oats and the Ontario Fire Brigade began to arrive in the city. Among them was Mr. E.P. Heaton, Ontario Fire Marshall. He announced an investigation to be held at the Court House commencing December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1916 at 11:00 AM into the cause, origin and circumstances of the fire. It would be a public inquiry under the Fire Marshall's Act.

The inquest began at the scheduled time with a number of officials present. They included Mr. Heaton as the Ontario Fire Marshall and Mr. A.H. Dickey who was a special investigator for the Ontario Fire Brigade. Also present was Mr. James S. Costigan, president of T. Pringle and Son Limited of Montreal Hydraulic Mill Engineers and Architects. He attended as an expert on mill construction. Mr. E.A. Peck and Mr. F.D. Kerr acted as lawyers for the Quaker Oats while Mr. E.H.D. Hall attended as solicitor for the Public Utilities Commission. Crown Attorney Mr. G.W. Hatton was present as was Fire Chief Howard and Public Water Works superintendent Ross L. Dobbin. Prior to the beginning of the inquest, statements of compensation and family relief were granted to the families of employees affected by the fire.

As the inquest opened Mr. Denham produced plans for the plant and it was determined that the explosion took place in the dry house, an area where grain was dried and stored. Since the Quaker Oats took such an active role in war relief the theory of enemy sabotage was immediately raised. This however was quickly quelled as Mr. Denham explained that grain dust coming in contact with even a small spark will produce an explosion and that sparks from the ignition in the rolling machine set the dust on fire. The explosion blew two walls straight across the river.

Mr. Dobbin spoke next. He determined that the break in the water main was underneath the dry house and gave the readings for December 11 from his pressure gauge. The third witness was Fire Chief Howard who gave the fireman's journal as evidence. Damage to the building and contents totaled \$2,850,000.00 of which about half was covered by insurance. Eight thousand feet of hose were



used to fight the blaze and nearly fifteen hundred feet were ruined. There were seventeen lines of hose plus the garden hose of nearby residents. Eleven of the nineteen ladders used were destroyed and condolence telegrams came in from Lindsay and Toronto. Many other witnesses told of their narrow escapes from disaster.

The last witness was Mr. Robert Stuart, president of the main Quaker office in Chicago. He stated that plans were being made for the reconstruction of the plant and that the company would work with other officials to ensure that such a disaster would never happen again.

The fire marked a temporary end to the Company operations in Peterborough until the big cereal mill was built. At that time the Canadian head office moved to Peterborough. In the meantime, departments were distributed among Quaker Oats branches in London and Sudbury, Ontario as well as Neepawa, Manitoba and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Part office quarters were set up in the Barrie building on George street and the puffed cereal work continued in the old McAllister Mill on the east side of the Otonabee River.

When I was in high school during the 1970s I remember researching the fire for a school paper and was fortunate enough to speak with several witnesses. An elderly woman who had been a nurse at Nicholls Hospital told me of her shock at the number of people being brought in. She spoke of the tireless efforts of the nurses who could do little else but wrap the badly burned victims in cold wet bed sheets. I also spoke with a woman who had been a teacher at King George School and had vivid memories of the event. She recalled watching spectators flee the streets as she attempted to calm her students, some whose parents worked at the Quaker. She later saw members of the militia gathering near the bottom of the hill from the school where there was little for them to do but helplessly watch. Some were quite visibly upset. By the time of my

conversations with these ladies nearly sixty years had passed since the fire. But their memories of that day were still very clear and both said that, for many years, they thought of the fire daily.

It is often difficult to find the good in devastating events. In the case of the Quaker Oats fire, the loss of twenty-two lives as well as the financial livelihood of approximately five hundred local families was overwhelming. Yet, permanent and positive results of this tragedy were numerous. The matter of additional and more modern machinery for the fire brigade came to Council as the proposition to obtain a motor driven engine was recalled. Finally, in 1922, the city received its first fire truck. As a condition of plant reconstruction, the Public Water Works were required to put water mains throughout the city rather than just the main industrial areas. The installation of new water mains would be completed over the next few years which, during emergencies, would curb the limit to water shortages. As an additional and perhaps more visible requirement, the bridge and shoreline of the river would be adjusted to make it easier to draw water from the river when necessary. Hence, the present Hunter Street Bridge was built which would better meet such needs. And, when the new plant was finally completed, the Quaker Oats Company decided to move the Canadian head office to Peterborough where it has since remained.

With the disaster now so far in the past I find it a little difficult to look across the river and imagine that such an atrocity ever took place. The Quaker has flourished in Peterborough to the point that several generations have now been able to identify with its existence. But even as memories fade the devastation and tragic loss of life along with the more positive changes brought by the fire make it a major event both in the history of our city as well as that of the Quaker Oats Company of Canada.



*Quaker Oats Mill, c. 1914 [Public Archives of Canada, C34624, photo supplied by Martha Ann Kidd]*

## Documentary film seeking descendants of 1916 Quaker Oats fire in Peterborough

### Film to commemorate 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of tragedy that killed 24 workers

**Peterborough, ON** - A committee of descendants working to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the Quaker Oats factory fire is looking for other descendants of the workers who perished in the blaze to participate in a documentary film about the tragedy. Twenty-four workers died when a fire and explosion decimated Peterborough's Quaker Oats plant on December 11, 1916. The planned 30-minute documentary, directed by Peterborough photographer Paul Brown, will provide a historical account of the disaster and feature personal anecdotes from survivors and family of the deceased workers. While the makers of the film have been in touch with some descendants, they are hoping that memories of all of the lost workers can be shared in the documentary.

"It's important that we pay proper tribute to the men who died in the fire and share their stories," says Jane Garvey Gill, whose grandfather William John Garvey died as a result of the explosion and fire. "This tragedy touched so many families in our community. This is an important part of the history of Peterborough."

Garvey Gill is co-chair of the descendants committee along with Lorna Green, whose grandfather Dennis O'Brien and great-grandfather William Hogan both lost their lives in the fire. Green is currently performing in the play *The Hero of Hunter Street* – presently in its premiere performance run at the 4<sup>th</sup> Line Theatre in Millbrook – which chronicles the Quaker Oats fire and the resulting devastation. Descendants of some of the workers killed in the fire, including Green, will be part of a special presentation ahead of the performance of *The Hero on Hunter Street* on Friday, July 8.

The documentary is being planned in conjunction with a number of activities to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fire, including a souvenir booklet, a special ceremony, and the dedication of a new monument to the workers who lost their lives. The Peterborough and District Labour Council recently endorsed the efforts of descendants to create a proper monument.

"We are working with the City to make something happen," says Garvey Gill. "We need an accessible and visible monument to recognize the people who perished and were injured 100 years ago this coming December."

### Names of the workers lost in the Quaker Oats fire on December 11, 1916

Edward Howley – Domenico Martino – Walter Thomas Holden – Thomas Parsons – William Henry Mesley – William Miles – Dennis O'Brien – Alphonse McGee – James William Gordon – James Foster – George Wellington Vosbourg – Albert Ernest Staunton – William Hogan – John Conway – Fillippo Capone – Patrick O'Connell – John Carter Kemp – Vincenzo del Fornaro – Richard Chowen – William John Teatro – William Walsh – Joseph Leo Houlihan – William John Garvey – Richard Healey

For more information, please contact Jane Garvey Gill at 705-652-6049 or [jandjgill@gmail.com](mailto:jandjgill@gmail.com)

This story appeared in the local media in July 2016. [For the record, there is not consensus on the deaths directly attributable to the fire; 22 died by the end of December 1916. EHJ]

The Descendants of the Quaker Fire Organizing Committee would like to announce the following events.

#### December 10, 2016

7pm. Candlelight vigil. Cricket Place  
near the Otonabee river.

8pm. Mark Street United Church. 90 Hunter St. E.

Premiere of the Quaker Fire documentary

*Tragedy on the Otonabee*

Light refreshments.

#### December 11, 2016

Non-denominational service.

Immaculate Conception church.

386 Rogers St. followed by reception.

Join us in a service of remembrance for the victims of the Quaker Fire.

Jane Garvey Gill      Lorna Green  
Co-chairs of the Descendants of the Quaker Fire Organizing  
Committee

## Teacher Pulled Classroom Window Shade So Fire Would Not Distract Pupils

Pete McGillen, Examiner Staff Writer  
Examiner, 11 December 1946

I remember the Quaker Oats fire of 30 years ago, much the same as a child remembers a nightmare, intriguing yet terrifying. It comes back in a kaleidoscope of impressions, some vague others sharply etched, some inaccurate now in the face of more mature judgment, inaccurate perhaps because they were not clearly understood.

I was in senior second at the Immaculate Conception school on Mark street when the explosion occurred. Quickly we turned in our seats and looked out the second-storey west window. We had a perfect view of a huge cloud of smoke billowing heavenward from the vicinity of the smokestack and boiler room. My first thought was that a locomotive had blown up, then we saw the flames enveloping the entire north end of the east building. The fire raced along inside the structure and in a matter of seconds flames were surging through the windows. (Years later when I saw the picture of the atomic bomb explosion at Bikini, the memory came back. It was a similar smoke formation.) Then several of the girls started to cry and immediately the teacher pulled the shade to the bottom.

We tried to concentrate but it was useless. The teacher left the room a minute and Michael Martin and Roy Walsh peeked through the windows. The teacher caught them, and used the ruler. Then the teacher (I don't even remember her name) tried to comfort the girls. Soon some of the boys were crying too. It's strange but fathers of the girls and boys who cried escaped injury while fathers of the dry-eyed ones either perished or were maimed. We had no recess but were sent home early, warned to go straight home and to be back that afternoon as usual.

The remainder of the school day is not registered in my recollections but I do recall at four o'clock. I forgot my parent's admonition and sneaked as far as Big Dave Conroy's house at the corner of Burnham and Hunter streets, where Edwards Service station now stands. There was an iron bridge across the Otonabee then, and the road dipped sharply at Burnham sloping down to the bridge. On the west bank I could see a lot of firehose like huge serpents lying on the road in front of the burning building. Firemen were playing a stream of water on the blaze, and I thought at the time, they look so puny and helpless against the fire monster.

That night my father would not let me out of the house so I went upstairs early and sat at my bedroom window far into the night watching the fire. It was about eight o'clock when the roof of a large concrete warehouse caved in, and the sheet of flame made it so bright, one could easily have read a newspaper on Armour Hill. The weather was much the same as it is this week, scarcely any snow and it wasn't very cold.

It seemed a strange week, everyone was talking about the casualties, and at school we discussed with all the wisdom and knowledge of eight-year olds, the chances

firemen had of ever recovering the bodies. We even speculated on the possibility that maybe a few of the men had escaped into tunnels under the buildings and would be found safe but that bit of boyhood fancy was too good to be true.

The debris burned on into January and February, and the farmer came in to buy load of the damaged wheat to feed to pigs and cattle. It was a bargain I heard the older people say. Then one day they found a body in a pile of wheat, the body of a man without a scratch on him but he had been suffocated when the grain crashed down. I never learned who he was.

Later in the winter I went as far as the Ellis Mattress factory at the east end of the bridge on the south side to look at the ruins. Teamsters were hauling brick and mortar filling an old raceway behind McAllister's big mill. It stood where the Quaker Oats baseball diamond is now on the north side of Hunter from Burnham street to the bridge, curved to fit into the high hill and farther south was the old Calcutt Brewery.

The following spring I learned that loads of bull-feed had been hauled north toward the London street powerhouse and used to fill large holes between the old Goose Pond south of London street and west of the railway track. The word got around that the dump was alive with rats, so the gang armed with catapults went on a rat hunt. We expended plenty of ammunition but not a single rat fell before the barrage.

These are the memories that come back whenever a big fire happens, memories that rush pell-mell from out of the mists of yesteryear, like sawlogs crashing down a chute, some overlapping the others, then they are gone, lost in the swirl of everyday events.

Many Peterborough men were serving in France when this fire took place, but hundreds of other men and women still living in the city, need only a reminder to start them talking of their own recollections of the Quaker fire. They tell stories all different, intimate memories of individuals who perhaps recall much more vividly than I, the many details of this tragedy of three decades ago.

*Leo (Pete) McGillen (1908 - 1973) was one of the most productive and active outdoor writers in Canada. He was the first full-time Outdoors Editor of The Toronto Telegram, the first such position of its kind on a daily newspaper in Canada. He also served as the City Editor for The Peterborough Examiner for 11 years. He broadcast a weekly outdoors show, "Outdoors with Pete McGillen", over CFRB radio in Toronto and was a regular contributor to the CBC Sportsmen's Show on radio. According to a Canadian Press survey of the day, he was "the most widely quoted outdoor writer in Canada." Named to the Fishing Hall of Fame in Chicago in 1954, he was also inducted into the Canadian Sportsmen's Hall of Fame and the Peterborough Sports Hall of Fame. He published a collection of his newspaper and radio writings, Outdoors with Pete McGillen, in 1955 (Ryerson Press).*



## A Human Story: The Victims of the Quaker Oats Fire

Gina Martin

During my time as a grade 10 high school student in the early 1970s, history teacher and local historian Don Barrie assigned me an interesting topic for my second term research project. In the space of just over four weeks I was to come up with everything I could on the spectacular explosion and fire at the Peterborough Quaker Oats mill of December 11, 1916. Of course, being a naïve 15 year old, I assumed that a quick trip to the Quaker Oats head office on Hunter Street would provide me with all the information I would need to produce an A+ paper. Well, not exactly! With the exception of a few photographs of the fire which they kindly agreed to lend me for my project, the folks at Quaker Oats had little in their files that could help and were very pleased that I was attempting to find out more about Peterborough's worst disaster.

Over the next few weeks I became a fixture at the Peterborough Fire Department and the local library where I spent hours looking over the minute books and newspaper reports. I conducted my very first interviews as a young aspiring local historian and spoke with my neighbour, Sheriff Stanley McBride, a most kind and generous man who seemed to me to know all that there was about Peterborough history. I am happy to report that, after all my efforts, I did indeed secure the A+ that I was looking for. But more importantly I found a topic that now, more than thirty years later, still fascinates me as I continually seek to learn more about the event which, during the Christmas season of 1916, took 22 lives and forever left its tragic mark.

A few months ago, I became involved with yet another research project involving the Quaker Oats tragedy as I was asked to prepare a list of the victims for a commemorative plaque being unveiled by the company. The unveiling ceremony will take place on Monday, October 23, 2006 at Quaker Park and comes about three weeks before the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fire. Shortly into my research I made an amazing discovery. Over the past three decades I have looked at what I thought was a very conclusive list of topics involving the fire. I have examined the causes, the chronology of events for that day and the inquest that followed. I have looked at photographs, floor plans and a whole waft of minute books and ledgers. I have talked to both witnesses and participants and published several articles. But, until now, I had not looked at the "human" side of the tragedy. That is, I had always known that there were 22 men who died within the week of the fire but had not really looked at who they were and how their deaths impacted both their families and society in general. It is high time that I corrected that error.

I began my latest research by again looking at the microfilmed copies of the Peterborough Review and the Peterborough Examiner where lists of the dead, injured and missing were updated on a daily basis. I imagined the angst of the families as I saw names moving from the missing to the dead or injured. But perusing the papers also provided valuable context and gave me a glimpse of what life was

like for Peterborough residents in December 1916. While the Quaker tragedy unfolded, the First World War raged in Europe and, through the newspaper reports, I soon discovered that sons and brothers of some of the fire victims were overseas "doing their bit". How difficult this must have been for the families who worried about their loved ones overseas and assumed that their men here were safe only to have them killed or maimed at their jobs. Another point that struck me was that, in December, Christmas was fast approaching. Interspersed with newspaper articles about the events of the war and the devastation at the Quaker Oats were Christmas advertisements from local merchants and notices of upcoming Christmas services at area churches. While Christmas cedar boughs appeared on many Peterborough

doors, others displayed black ribbons signifying the death of a soldier or a mill worker. In the words of Charles Dickens, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

Having gleaned what I could from the newspapers, I began examining the death records from the Vital Statistics of



Ontario. One thing that struck me as I read through the records was the diverse backgrounds of the victims. Ranging in age from 21 to 72 years, these men were sons, brothers, fathers and grandfathers. Some were long time employees and some had been at the mill only a few months. A few were actually occasional employees during busy work periods. Most were general labourers but some were foremen. Many had multiple family members working at the mill while others lived a distance from home sending money to their families at regular intervals. There were Catholics and Protestants, English and European. One thing was certain. This was no discriminatory disaster as it affected lives from all walks.

So who were these men who lost their lives and whose families were suddenly thrown into chaos? Although only their names will appear on the plaque in Quaker Park, it is

their lives and memories that will actually be immortalized. Following is an alphabetical list of the victims along with brief biographies and family information.

#### **Filippo Capone**

Filippo Capone was just 22 years old when he died. He was born in 1896 to Leonardo Capone and Maria Antonia LeDonne in a small town in the Italian province of Foggia known as Roseto Valfortore. Peterborough seemed a natural calling for Capone. His two older sisters, Mrs. Maria Basciano and Mrs. Carmela Aspero, had already settled here where they had married and were raising families.

His brother-in-laws had worked on the building of the Lift Lock and the Trent Canal. The Minicola family, who did very well in the grocery business in Peterborough, had been neighbours of the Capones in Roseto Valfortore and Filippo had heard the stories of their success in Canada. At the tender age of 16, Filippo boarded the steamer "Italia" in the port of Naples and landed at Ellis Island in the port of New York on May 11, 1912 en route for Peterborough. He moved in with his sister Carmela and her family on Victoria Avenue and easily secured work at the Quaker Oats where his brother-in-laws were employed. A year later, his father Leonardo and younger brother Donato came to Peterborough and they too soon became employees of the Quaker Oats. In late 1915, his father and brother returned to Italy not realizing that they would not be seeing Filippo again.

At the time of the fire, Filippo was a bachelor and was employed in the grain room where he operated the rolling machines. When the grain dust ignited, Filippo received deep multiple burns and was taken to Nicholls Hospital where the next day he died of shock. He was buried in St. Peter's Cemetery.

#### **Richard Chowen**

The son of Richard Chowen Sr. and Betsy Jury, Richard Chowen was born in Tibridge, Devonshire, England on April 8, 1849. His family immigrated to Canada about 1860 and settled in Lakefield. On February 6, 1873 he married Jane "Jennie" Montgomery in Lakefield who was the daughter of Andrew Montgomery and Elizabeth Braden. They had four known children and, at some point, moved to Peterborough living at 420 Stewart Street at the time of the fire. Their children were Bruce, Kenneth, Clayton and Hazel Etta.

Richard Chowen was a blacksmith by trade and had worked about two years at the Quaker Oats. It is not immediately known where in the mill he worked. He was rescued from the burning mill on the morning of December 16<sup>th</sup> and taken to Nicholls Hospital where, on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, he died of heart failure and severe burns. He was 67 years old and was buried in Little Lake Cemetery. His widow went to live with her daughter Hazel who, in 1911, had married Raymond Percy Best. Mrs. Chowen died January 16, 1934 and was buried next to her husband.

#### **John "Jack" Conway**

I have not had a great deal of luck with information on Jack Conway. He was born on June 8, 1879 in Galway Township to Joseph Conway and Margaret Buckley. This would make him 37 years old at the time of his death. The family later moved to the Village of Kinmount in Haliburton County where he married Mary Jane Grady about 1902. Several children were born to the couple including John Percival, Simon Clarence and Bertram. At the time of the Quaker fire, Jack Conway lived in Kinmount. The *Peterborough Examiner* reported that he was probably killed instantly in the explosion and that his body was not recovered.

#### **Vincenzo Fornaro**

The second of three Italian immigrants who died in the Quaker disaster, Vincenzo Fornaro was born March 29, 1885 in Francavilla al Mare, Italy to Andrea Fornaro and Maria Febbo. As a teenager he served in the Italian merchant navy and soon married Emilia Febbo of Francavilla. In October 1913, Vincenzo and Emilia came to Canada and settled in Peterborough where Emilia's brother lived. Two children were born to the Fornaros. Andrew Mark Fornaro was born April 25, 1915 and Mary Fornaro on July 29, 1916. Interestingly enough, Andrew eventually married Angeline Aspero, the niece of Filippo Capone. The Fornaros lived in Peterborough on Jackson Avenue. At the age of 32 years, Vincenzo died of infectious burns at St. Joseph's Hospital on December 15, 1916. He was buried at St. Peter's Cemetery. The following year, Emilia Fornaro married Victor Miccoli at St. Peter's Cathedral but then died in 1931. She is buried next to Vincenzo at St. Peter's Cemetery. Descendants of Vincenzo Fornaro still reside in Peterborough.

#### **James Foster**

The son of Matthew Foster and Harriet Cauley, James Foster was born the eldest of eight children in Hackney, Greater London, England in 1852. Later, he and his wife Mary Ann lived at 41 Dove Row in London and became the parents of 6 sons and 4 daughters. James and Mary Ann along with some of their younger children immigrated to Peterborough sometime between 1901 and 1911. They appear in the 1901 census for Greater London at 2 Dudley Road but then are listed at 634 Union Street, Peterborough in the 1911 Canadian census.

James Foster was a stoker in the boiler room at Quaker Oats and was one of a number of men who died in that area of the mill. He was killed instantly in the explosion and his body was one of the first recovered. He is buried at Little Lake Cemetery.

Mrs. Foster was a widow with much to bear. At the time of her husband's death at age 64 she had 4 sons and 4 son-in-laws serving overseas. Sons William, Matthew and James Jr. were all fighting with English regiments having not come to Canada with the rest of the family. Son John was with the 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Mounted Rifles while one son-



in-law was a prisoner of war in a German camp. Her daughters MaryAnn, Rose, Jane and Louise all had husbands overseas. Sons Richard and Thomas were at home. Mrs. Foster died in 1921 and is buried next to her husband.

#### **James William Gordon**

James Gordon was born in Peterborough to William James Gordon and Ann Martin on July 4, 1875. He was the oldest in his family with a younger sister, Ann, born in 1885 and one adopted brother. He held various jobs in the Peterborough area as a general labourer before commencing work at Quaker Oats in 1914. That same year, he married Mabel Ann McKnight of Fraserville, Ontario, a daughter of Samuel McKnight and Margaret Green. James and Mabel were married at St. Peter's Cathedral, Peterborough on April 20, 1914 and lived at 253 Stewart Street. They had no children. James William Gordon was killed in the explosion and buried at St. Peter's Cemetery, Peterborough. He was 41 years old.



#### **William Hogan**

At 72 years of age, William Hogan was the oldest victim of the Quaker Oats explosion and fire. He was born in Smith Township on June 20, 1844 where he farmed most of his life. About 1862 he married Annie Carey, daughter of John Redmond Carey and Ann Logan. Five sons and four daughters were born to William and Annie. They were James, John Redmond, Richard, Austin, Walter, Winnifred Cecelia, Agnes, Julia Lauretta (Laura) and Anastasia (Ann). A strong Catholic family, both Agnes and Ann entered the Sisters of St. Joseph in St. Paul, Minnesota. Laura married Dennis O'Brien who also died in the Quaker Oats fire and will be discussed in another section of this article.

William Hogan worked only a few months at Quaker Oats. He took the job in order to earn some extra money for Christmas. He was killed instantly in the explosion and

his body was removed from the boiler room late on December 11<sup>th</sup>. He was buried at St. Peter's Cemetery. His widow died in March 1926 and is buried next to him.

*Photo: The Hogan Family. Courtesy Gina Martin*

#### **Walter Thomas Holden**

Walter Holden was born the second oldest of seven children to Thomas Holden and Mary Ann Alderton at #2 East House Cottage, Thorpe's Plot, Battle, Sussex, England in November 1883. The family left England on board SS Ivernia on March 13, 1912 and arrived in Boston harbour on March 25<sup>th</sup>, en route for Peterborough. Holden immediately secured a job as a feed packer in the grain dry house at Quaker Oats where he worked until he died of severe burns at Nicholls Hospital on December 11, 1916. He married in England and had two small children at the time of his death at age 33. In 1916 the family lived at 606 Bethune Street but later moved to Hamilton, Ontario. Walter Thomas Holden was buried at Little Lake Cemetery where his parents were later interred.

#### **Joseph Leo Houlihan**

Joseph Leo Houlihan was born in Peterborough in January 1880 and was the son of James Houlihan and Julia Shine. On November 5, 1903 he married Teresa Harrington of Emily Township and moved to a farm near Downeyville. Joseph and Teresa had one daughter, Mary Hazel Houlihan, born in January 1906.

Joseph was employed in the grain dry house at Quaker Oats and died of severe burns at St. Joseph's Hospital on December 29, 1916. He was buried in St. Luke's Roman Catholic Cemetery in Emily Township.

#### **Edward Howley**

Edward Howley was born at Norwood, Ontario on August 15, 1864 to Patrick Howley and Bridget Dacey. His parents were both from Swinford, Kilconduff, County Mayo, Ireland. On November 1, 1893 he married

Margaret Heffernan of Douro Township who was a daughter of Patrick Heffernan and Jane Fitzgerald. Edward and Margaret had 3 sons and 5 daughters and lived on Sutherland Avenue in Ashburnham. The children were John James, Ellen, Mary, Florence May, Jane Aloysia, Patrick Gerald, Bernadine and Edward Ambrose.

Howley was the foreman in the boiler room and, just minutes before the 10:00am explosion, was seen taking buckets of coal from a truck and carrying them into the building. His body was removed from the wreckage of the boiler room on the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> and was later buried at St. Paul's Roman Catholic Cemetery in Norwood.

#### **John Carter Kemp**

John Carter Kemp was born at Kent, England on December 28, 1849 and had lived in Peterborough for 30 years. He was the son of John Carter Kemp Sr. and Ann



Simmons. On August 27, 1877 he married Jemima Northcott at North Monaghan Township. They had one daughter, Fanny Kemp, born October 3, 1880 who later married Wilbert McMillen. John Kemp was a proud and active member of the Canadian Order of Foresters and lived at 595 Division Street. John Kemp worked for several years in the grain dry house and feed room at Quaker Oats and it was thought that, in spite of his burns, he would survive. However, he died of heart failure caused by infection on December 14<sup>th</sup> and was buried at Little Lake Cemetery. From his hospital bed at Nicholls Hospital he was able to give a detailed account of what he saw the morning of the fire. He said that he saw sparks from machinery ignite the grain dust resulting almost instantly in a 15-foot wall of fire. He was certain that combustion was the cause of the disaster.

Initially there was great fear that Mr. Kemp's nephew, Wilbert Kemp of Sherbrooke Street, may also have died in the fire. He had left home earlier that morning en route to Canadian General Electric in search of employment. When told they had nothing at the moment he mentioned to someone there that he would then continue his search at Quaker Oats. When he failed to return home that evening it was thought that perhaps he had gone to Quaker at the wrong moment. However, he turned up the next day, having taken a train to Burleigh Township where he was given work on a road-building project.

inhalation. He does not appear to have been buried at St. Peter's Cemetery or any of the other Catholic cemeteries in the area. His wife did not Photo: Dennis O'Brien family. Credit: Gina Martin have time to make the trip to Peterborough before her husband's death so one speculates as to whether she may have used the money she had been sent to bring his body back to Italy.

#### Joseph "Alphonse" McGee

The youngest of the fire victims, Alphonse McGee was just 21 years old when he died on December 11<sup>th</sup>. He was born in Galway Township on December 29, 1895 to John McGee and Frances Buckley and was the fifth of 10 children. As a child, "Allie" McGee moved with his family to Chandos Township and later to Peterborough where he and his brother boarded at 175 Douro Street. He was unmarried at the time of his death and was buried at St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Cemetery in Galway Township.

#### William Henry Mesley

William Henry Mesley was born August 28, 1864 in Trenton, Ontario and was the son of John Mesley and Naomi Elliott. On November 29, 1890 he married Emma Jones in Trenton and, a few years later, moved to 171 Douro Street in Peterborough. Two sons and six daughters were born to John and Naomi and, eventually, they moved to a house at 247 Westcott Street. Their oldest son Ernie Mesley had been wounded in France earlier in the year and returned home just weeks before the fire. The other children were Lula Marjorie, Leitha Pearl, Gladys May,

Edna, Ellen and an unnamed boy who died at birth.

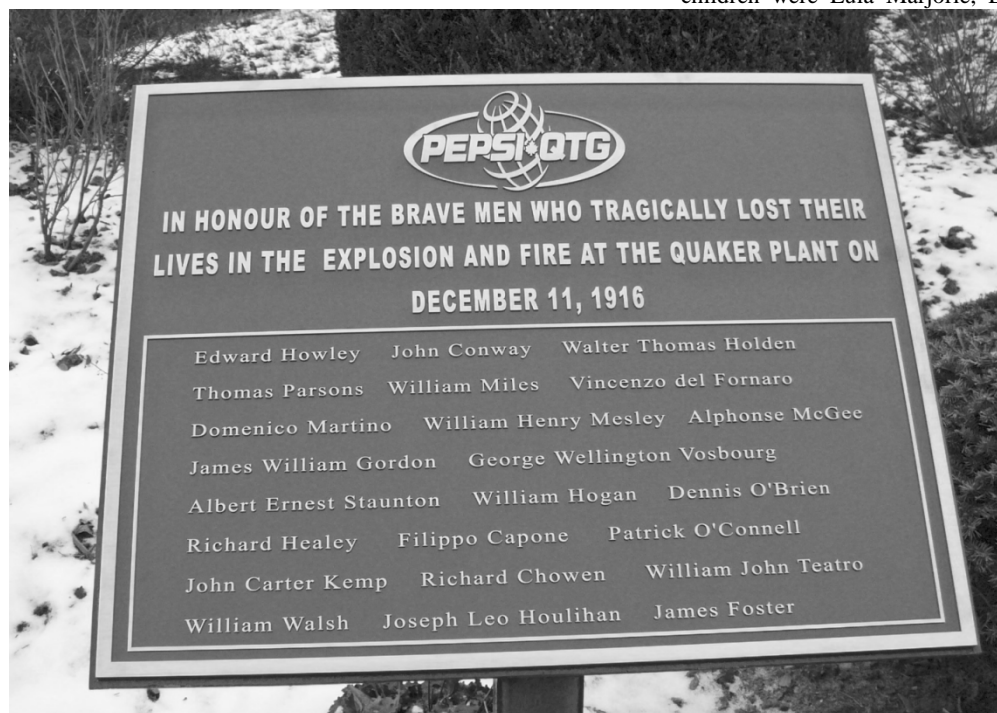
William Mesley was a foreman at Quaker and his body was found in the boiler room where the explosion killed him instantly. All six of his daughters were employed at Quaker Oats and, miraculously, all escaped the fire unharmed. Mesley was buried at Little Lake Cemetery.

#### William Miles

William Miles was 64 years old when he died on December 11, 1916. He was born in Dummer Township in 1851 to Frederick Miles and Mary

Elizabeth Rae. On January 5, 1876 he married Eliza Jane Drain of Dummer and became the father of 6 children. They were Frances Ann, William (died in infancy), William Noble, Mabel Eliza Jane, Allan Wesley and an unnamed boy who died at birth.

After farming most of his life in Dummer, William Miles moved to a house at 471 Rogers Street in Peterborough after securing a job as a stoker in the boiler



#### Domenico Martino

There is little information for Domenico Martino. He had been in Canada just a short time and boarded in a house at 284 Smith (Parkhill) Street. He was married with a wife and baby son in Italy. Just two weeks before his death he sent money back to Italy instructing his wife to come with their son to Peterborough. He was employed in the boiler room and died the morning of the fire of shock and smoke

room. One of his sons also worked at Quaker Oats but managed to escape the fire without injury. William Miles was buried at St. Mark's Cemetery in the village of Warsaw, Dummer Township.

**Dennis M. O'Brien**

Dennis O'Brien was born in Ashburnham on August 13, 1876 to Maurice O'Brien and Catherine Hobbins. On 18 October 1905 he married Julia Lauretta (Laura) Hogan, daughter of William Hogan who was also killed in the Quaker fire. The O'Briens lived at 552 Harvey Street and were the parents of six children. They were Joseph Maurice, Irene, George Stanley, Mary Catherine (Kay), Michael and Dennis Jr. Mrs. O'Brien was pregnant with Dennis Jr. at the time that her husband died, giving birth on 31 May 1917.

Dennis O'Brien was employed as a motor grinder in the feed room and initially escaped the fire relatively unharmed. Twice he returned to the burning building to carry injured coworkers to safety. Witnesses said that he went back in a third time and never came out. His body was never found. After the fire, the two men that he rescued visited Mrs. O'Brien at her home and told her of her husband's heroism.

**Patrick O'Connell**

Patrick O'Connell was born in Lakefield to Dennis O'Connell and Mary Leahy. In 1892 he married Emma McCauley of Lakefield and they had 5 children. They were Vincent Leo, Walter, Alice Helen, Kathleen Mary and Mary Rita. The family lived in Peterborough at 479 Parnell Street and attended Sacred Heart Church. Patrick was a member of the Canadian Order of Foresters, St. Peter's Court. He died at age 47 at Nicholls Hospital on December 13<sup>th</sup> and was buried at St. Peter's Cemetery.

**Thomas Parsons**

Thomas Parsons was born in Birmingham, England in April 1867 to Charles and Mary Parsons. He and his wife, Mary Townsend, had 5 children before immigrating to Peterborough in 1913 where they lived at 459 Chamberlain Street. The children were John, Arthur, Edwin (Ted), Elizabeth and Fred. The Parsons were long time members of Knox Presbyterian Church. The year 1916 was a trying one for the Parsons. In May Mrs. Parsons gave birth to twins, Benjamin and Marjorie, who were quite sickly. Benjamin died on September 16<sup>th</sup> and Marjorie on October 8<sup>th</sup>. At the same time, their son John was overseas with the Canadian army, having lied about his age in order to enlist. Their daughter Elizabeth had been born with a congenital heart defect and took a bad turn in the spring of 1916. She recovered only to die on February 2, 1923 at the age of 14. Thomas Parsons worked in the boiler room at Quaker Oats and was on the missing list on the evening of December 11<sup>th</sup>. His body was found on the 12<sup>th</sup> and was buried at Little Lake Cemetery.

**Albert Ernest Staunton**

Albert Staunton was born on September 23, 1879 in Beaverton, Ontario where his father worked on the Beaverton railway. He was one of eight children of William Anthony Staunton and Margaret Hussey. His siblings were William Robert, Sarah Elizabeth, Harvey James, Alice Maude, Wilfred, Alfred Myles and Alexander Clarence. The family came to Peterborough when Albert

was 7 years old and moved into a spacious house at 20 Benson Avenue where the family lived for many years. They attended St. John's Anglican Church.

Albert Staunton never married. He was reported missing the afternoon of the fire and his body was never found. The family held a memorial service for him at St. John's and put up a marker to his memory at Little Lake Cemetery.

**William John Teatro**

William Teatro was born on February 14, 1857 in Kingston, Ontario to Michael Teatro and Johanna Noonan. On October 1, 1892 he married Julia Murray in Peterborough. They had no children.

Mr. Teatro was pulled from the Quaker wreckage and taken to St. Joseph's Hospital where he was treated for severe burns. For a while it looked as though he would survive but he succumbed to blood poisoning on Christmas morning and was buried at St. Peter's Cemetery. His wife died on January 1, 1927 and was buried next to him.

**George Wellington Vosbough**

Born in the village of Castleton in nearby Cramahe Township on June 12, 1885, George Vosbough came to Peterborough as a very young man and worked on the building of the canal system including the Lift Locks. He was the son of Samuel Vosbough and Ida Ellis. On August 15, 1906 he married Harriet M. Kellogg at Campbellford, Ontario and later moved permanently to Peterborough where he resided at 352 Simcoe Street. The Vosboughs had no children.

George Vosbough worked as a checker in the boiler room at Quaker Oats and was reported missing on the evening of December 11<sup>th</sup>. In spite of the fact that his body had not been recovered, the coroner filled out a death certificate giving the cause of death as "burned to death". Presumably they felt that, with all the carnage in the boiler room, it was quite probable that this would have been Vosbough's fate. However, when his body was found two weeks later, there were no signs of burns. A farmer shovelling snow in a field outside the boiler room found the body half buried in the snow and ice. It is likely that Mr. Vosbough was thrown from the building when the north and east walls of the plant blew across the river. His body was returned to his family in Castleton where he was buried in the Vosbough family plot.

**William J. Walsh**

Mr. Walsh was born in Douro Township on January 5, 1880 to William Walsh and Margaret Meade. He married Margaret Maude Quinlan on November 27, 1900 and lived on Rogers Street in Ashburnham. Eight children were born to William and Margaret. They were Madge, Leo, Willie, Roy, Lillian, Kathleen, Freddie and Aileen. The family attended Immaculate Conception Church and William was active in the Canadian Order of Foresters, St. Peter's Court. Before working at the Quaker Oats, William Walsh worked on the Trent Canal system. Mr. Walsh was the foreman in the dry house and, like others, was expected to survive his injuries. This seems an amazing thought given the fact that witnesses saw him being hurled many feet into the air through the blown out wall and landing on the banks of the Otonabee River. He suffered minor burns but had a broken leg and jaw. Sadly, gangrene developed in the leg and he died at St. Joseph's Hospital on 27 December 1916. His

funeral mass was held at Immaculate Conception and he was buried at St. Peter's Cemetery. He was 44 years old.

With such prolific loss of life it goes without saying that the town of Peterborough was deeply affected by this tragedy. Evidence of the carnage could be seen for years as many survivors walked the town bearing unsightly scars and burns. Ashburnham was particularly devastated as many of its inhabitants worked at the mill. With so many of his parishioners employed at Quaker Oats, The Very Reverend Dean McColl held a special mass at Immaculate Conception on the evening of December 11<sup>th</sup> for the dead and injured. There were children of various victims who were suddenly unable to finish school now having to go to work to support their families. This was especially true if the older brothers in the family were currently in Europe. Even the families of the survivors were now in dire financial situations since, with the mill gone, everyone was now out of work.

There is one question that bears asking. Did the number of Quaker Oats victims end at 22? Some of the survivors were so badly injured that they were never able to work again. Some may even have succumbed to their injuries years later. We know this to be true in at least one case. Richard Healey of 328 Euclid Avenue received a severe skull fracture that day and was never able to return to work. His wife, the former Adela Sullivan, had 7 children to look after and relied heavily on the help of her oldest son, 11 year old Leo. Mr. Healey, just 32 years old at the time of the fire, lived for another 12 years suffering from severe headaches as a result of the fracture. He died from pressure in the cranium on May 1, 1928 and was buried at St. Peter's. So while technically he did not die in the fire, his life was certainly cut short as he suffered for years from an injury that eventually ended his life at age 44. How many other "victims" like Richard Healey were there?

In view of my recent research into the victims of the Quaker Oats fire I must say that I am very much looking forward to the upcoming plaque unveiling on 23 October. Not just because such a plaque is long overdue. Not just because it will commemorate a huge event in the history of Peterborough. The truth is that in the last few weeks I feel I have developed somewhat of a bond with each of these men. I have spoken with some of their grandchildren and great grandchildren and felt the huge void left by so many untimely deaths. I have looked at their photographs and seen ordinary men who suffered extraordinary fates. But most of all, I have determined that there has never been a group of people more deserving of plaque that commemorates their lives and honours their deaths.

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## William Garvey (1880-1918)



One of the most serious casualties of the Quaker fire was William Garvey who died nearly two years after the fire, and was employed by Quaker until he died. The death certificate says William Garvey, male, 38 years, died November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1918. He was born in Douro, and was living at 17 Cricket Place, and working for Quaker Oats when

he died. His parents were Dennis Garvey and Catherine Sheehan. He was attended by Dr. James V. Gallivan, 248 Hunter Street. The informant was Mrs. Garvey, 17 Cricket Place, November 7, 1918. He died of influenza, which he had for a period of three weeks, and of pneumonia which he had for ten days. (Accessed on Ancestry)

The 1911 census lists W. J. Garvey, a labourer at Quaker Oats, working 50 weeks a year. He was born in January 1880, lived at 506 Elm Street, and his wife was Mary A. Garvey, 27. They had two children: Lillian F., 4 and Edward J., 3.

The obituary in the Examiner, Monday, November 4, 1918 read:

### MR. WILLIAM GARVEY

The death took place yesterday evening at the family residence, 17 Cricket Place, of Mr. William Garvey, of pneumonia.

Mr. Garvey was badly burned at the Quaker Oats fire, and was at the time of his death in charge of the cereal department of the Quaker Oats.

He leaves to mourn his loss, besides his wife, five small children.

The funeral was held this afternoon to St. Peter's Cemetery.

In the 1921 census, the Widowed Mary Garvey was living at 442 Driscoll Terrace, and had five children: Lillian, 14; Edward, 13; Carmnetto, 8; Marcelle, 7; William, 3.

On May 29, 1923, Mary Garvey (nee Allen), 41, married John Burke, 48, a miller, also of Peterborough.

Mary Garvey died on 31 December 1933.

*Monument at St. Peter's Cemetery, but he was aged 38.*



## Quaker Oats fire and the Court House

... The court house was regarded as invulnerable to fire from the outside, but like the heel of Achilles it had its vital spot and when the tiny brand from the Quaker Oats building lodged in a wooden crevice in the eaves at the northeast corner of the building and ate its way under the tin roofing, disaster soon threatened. The only vital spot was in the wooden eaves and practically the first cinder lodged there.

The flames swept under the roof and across the broad court room to which section the firemen confined the destructive forces of the fire. The thick walls also helped to save the building in preventing the fire from spreading, and they suffered damage from smoke and water only.

The lawyers' room, the county council room, the grand jury room and the offices underneath, except the county clerk's office and on the north side, were practically untouched except by water. Many of the volumes in the law library were frozen together and many were unsalvageable.

Work was started at once to renovate the damage suffered to the building and the re-decorated courtroom was formally dedicated at the opening of the June sittings on the 11<sup>th</sup> of that month in 1918.

With His Honor Judge Huycke on the bench were Warden Anderson and Canon J. C. Davidson. Others

present were as follows: D. W. Dumble, K. C., Crown Attorney G. W. Hatton, K. C., E. A. Peck, F. D. Kerr, O. A. Langley, J. H. Burnham, at that time Member of Parliament, W. J. Johnson, J. L. Goodwill, V. J. McElderry, G. N. Gordon and Joseph Wearing.

In regard to the new court room, the Examiner of that date states: "The county council is to be congratulated upon the results of its work. Before deciding upon the rearrangement of the room and the fittings to be provided, Reeve Anderson visited the court houses in Toronto and other cities in the province, adopting some of the ideas that were seen and improving upon others."

Since the time of the fire new offices have been built into the building, such as the registrar's office but on the whole the building remains practically the same as it did after the renovation made compulsory by the fire.

Standing in its commanding position overlooking the beautiful Victoria Park it serves as a symbol of justice as well as to recall the pioneer days and the tasks that were endured in its erection. It is a wonderful old building.

[Peterborough Examiner, 3 July 1929]

## Mayor J. J. Duffus Goes to New York and Chicago

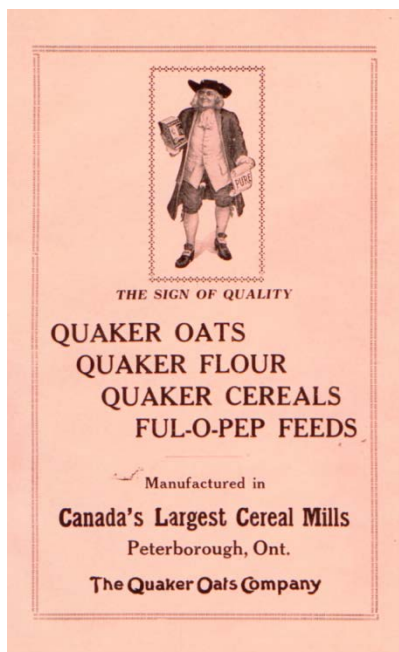
*Elwood H. Jones  
Peterborough Examiner*

Sometimes, fires were followed by worse disasters. When Peterborough suffered its worst fire in December 1916, there were many sad stories to tell. However, the concerted efforts of many people and the striking initiatives of Mayor J. J. Duffus led to astonishing results. Peterborough had a building boom that led to high wages for workers, and the city pursued its most impressive public works project, the impressive Hunter Street Bridge.

The Quaker Oats fire of 11 December 1916 is still the most disastrous fire in Peterborough's history.

In the aftermath, 23 people had died, several hundred people faced the prospect of lost jobs and property damages at Quaker Oats totaled over \$2.5 million. As well, a house on Brock Street was destroyed and the Peterborough County Court House lost its roof, and suffered other damage. For a day, the fire burned so fiercely that other parts of the downtown were directly threatened by fire.

The factory complex next to the Hunter Street Bridge had been built since 1901 and had after a 1904 fire featured some of the finest construction and best fire sprinklers in Peterborough. Some buildings in



the impressive complex towered seven storeys high; after the fire, all that remained were 18 elevator walls and piles of disfigured steel framing. The Fire Marshal's investigation determined the fire was caused at 10 a.m. by a spark from a grain grinder that touched off an explosion in the grain dust.

The fire fighters were helpless in dealing with the heart of the fire. Partly, the equipment was not good enough. Horses still hauled pumpers, and on a cold, windy day were not very effective. Quaker Oats was a huge complex of tall buildings, too high for the fire hoses. The Otonabee River could not be effectively utilized because the explosion had dropped the water pressure in the city mains.

Quaker Oats gave employees the full pay they would have earned and this eased pains over the Christmas season. The plant had been working at full capacity, three shifts a day, to meet the demands of soldiers overseas. Indeed,

some believe that as the factory was operating on three shifts a day, the cleaning operations that would have prevented the fire were not possible. With a backlog of federal contracts, Quaker employed some workers in the clean-up activities, and leased space around the city. Many employees continued to work, but workers and their families worried how long those jobs might last.

Quaker Oats was based in Chicago, and had emerged in the 1890s as a very successful grain handling and food company, the American Cereal Company. It had expanded to include several factories and warehouses, including some in Canada. The company had good support from the city, and its work force was loyal and well-trained. Peterborough was in the heart of an oat-growing area, and the Trent Canal provided easy transportation to the Great Lakes and Chicago. Peterborough was a magnet for workers from the surrounding countryside, and Quaker Oats was the city's leading employer of women.

Quaker had to consider its options.

Peterborough was attractive, but it might be easier, for example, to expand at London, Ontario, than to rebuild in Peterborough. The advent of the automobile had already made traffic jams a nightmare, and the company had tried several times since 1906 to get a high-level bridge that would allow trains to unload and load without the hassle of road traffic. The city was not keen to make such costly improvements when it had already given the company generous property tax inducements to locate here.

The city of Peterborough responded to the challenge. The annual city elections were always held at the start of January, and so the Quaker fire was a campaign issue. Mayor J. J. Duffus, running for a second term as mayor, clearly articulated what was needed to keep Quaker in Peterborough. The city needed to prove it could fight

persuade Quaker not only to stay, but to build a bigger and better factory complex. Every voter knew that Peterborough needed Quaker Oats.

Mayor J. J. Duffus went to New York City in March 1917. He took the veteran newspaperman, F. H. Dobbin with him, and Dobbin enjoyed the tourist experiences, including the exciting introduction to automat restaurants. These were still exciting to me in 1958. You lifted the clear door and took your food to the cashier and then ate in the large dining area. Dobbin wondered how much food got stolen. Meanwhile, J. J. Duffus, who had arranged the trip on his own time and resources, had fruitful discussions with their fire chief, who in 1917 was earning a \$25,000 salary. Duffus wanted to know how New York City fought fires in large buildings. He received many recommendations for fire fighting equipment, and the best pumper of the day. Despite this impressive first-hand research, Peterborough City Council voted to repair the old fire equipment rather than spend money on new equipment. The Council needed to improve its fire-fighting equipment to protect the city from high insurance premiums. Duffus worried that Quaker might have expected a stronger commitment.

Mayor Duffus led a delegation to Chicago later in March to talk with Robert Stuart, the president of Quaker, and other executives at Quaker Oats. Quaker quickly agreed to rebuild in Peterborough. Stuart proposed that Peterborough build a cantilever-style bridge, not unlike great harbour bridges in Chicago and Quebec City. Such bridges require expensive maintenance and continual repainting, and are quite ugly in restricted spaces. In any case, Duffus and Stuart had to agree about the bridge, and in Stuart's view, ensure that the main office could be approached from the bridge level. The company wanted to

build its main offices with easy access to the new bridge.

Peterborough quickly moved toward a more compelling bridge design. A concrete bridge would be good looking, and low maintenance. The city hired Frank Barber, Ontario's most renowned and innovative bridge builder. Barber, in turn, hired New York architect, Claude Bragdon (1866-1946), to design the bridge based on Barber's concepts coupled with Bragdon's commitment to the Arts and Crafts movement.

The bridge was remarkable in countless ways. From above, the roadway forms a gentle S that joins two streets that were never aligned. From the side perspective it consists of 11 arches with the long centre arch spanning the Otonabee. The low-profile centre arch was designed with reduced iron reinforcement. The width of the bridge was



fires in tall buildings and that it could build a bridge that would eliminate traffic jams. In exchange, it had to

reduced iron reinforcement. The width of the bridge was



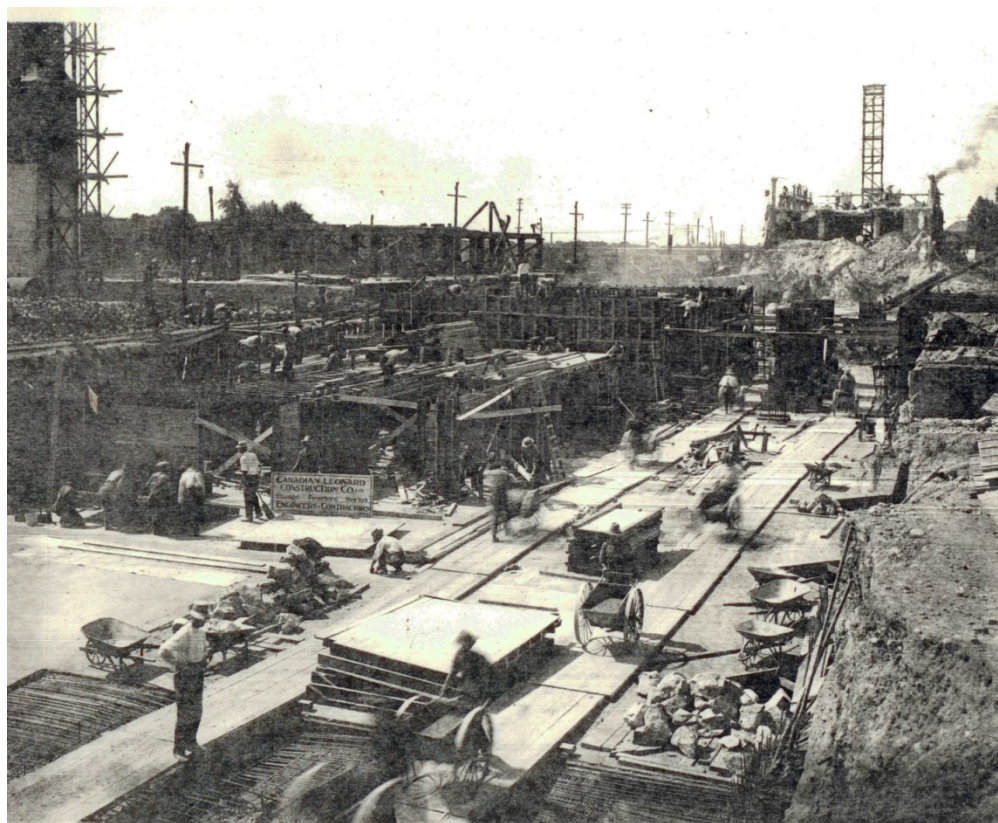
designed to carry streetcars, and the railings were terra cotta from one end to another. By any standard, this was an ambitious bridge even after the City Council removed the street car line and limited the terra cotta decorations to the railings above the central arch. The bridge cost \$525,000, double the early estimates and City Council decided not to spend money on an official opening. In truth, the bridge was a bargain, and remains a tribute to a rare moment when Peterborough accepted good design in a public works project.

Building the bridge simultaneously with Quaker Oats created a boom in the construction industry. Men received high wages because the war had created a shortage of workers locally. Remarkably, the labour movement enjoyed good pay, high reputation and political influence until 1922.

The Quaker Oats fire was a defining moment for Peterborough. In December 1917, at the end of his second term, the Examiner commended J. J. Duffus for “his capable and active leadership in the stressful times in which

we live.” Even though City Council was still cheap, it had convinced Quaker Oats to rebuild, it had a remarkable bridge, and at another time could address the question of better fire fighting support. Curiously, the City Council of 1921 put a plaque on the bridge that honoured them rather than the Council of 1917 which had begun the project while the smoke of the Quaker fire still hung in the air.

Elwood H. Jones recently prepared a special issue of the Heritage Gazette of the Trent Valley on the life and times of the Hon. J. J. Duffus, Senator. Copies of this issue are free, and may be received by requesting a copy from the Trent Valley Archives, 705-745-4404 or [admin@trentvalleyarchives.com](mailto:admin@trentvalleyarchives.com) The text of the special issue can also be viewed on the webpage of the Trent Valley Archives, [www.trentvalleyarchives.com](http://www.trentvalleyarchives.com)



*Building the Hunter Street Bridge was a big project providing good paying jobs for lots of workers. (Trent Valley Archives, Electric*





## Quaker Oats Education Program

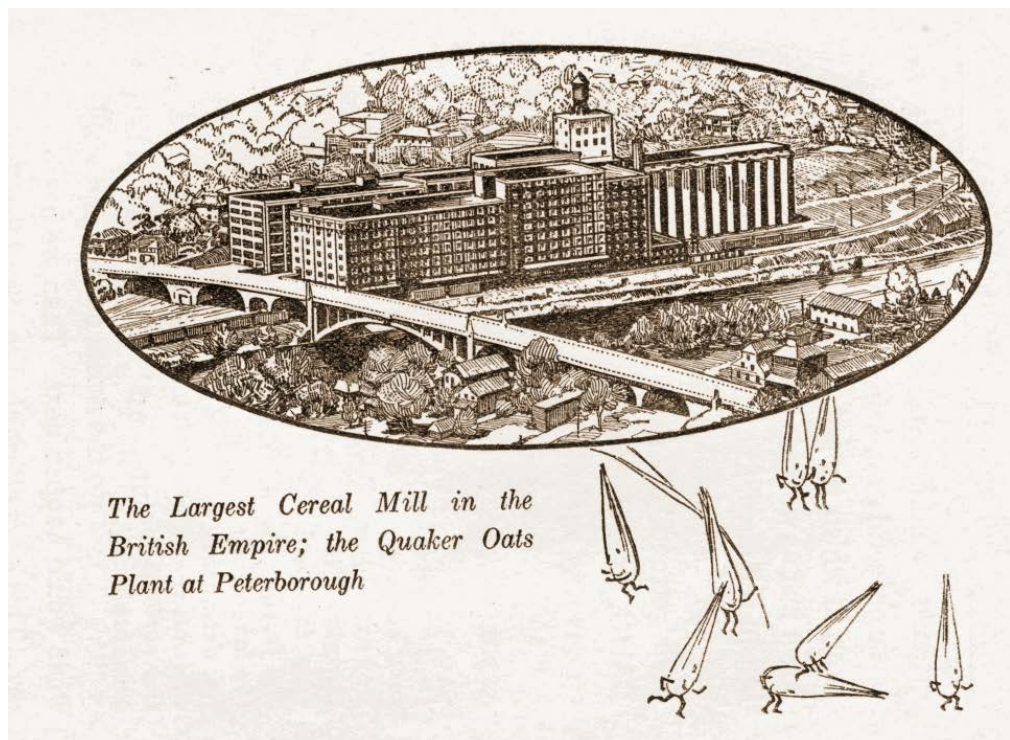
Elwood H. Jones



Quaker office staff, 1932; Ken Gadd is in the back row, second from left. (Trent Valley Archives, Gadd fonds)

When I was 16, I had the opportunity to meet Clyde R. Miller, the author of *The Process of Persuasion* (New York, Crown, 1954). He had been studying advertising and propaganda since the 1930s when he was teaching at the Columbia University teaching school in New York. Clyde Miller was one of the founders in 1937 of the Institute for Propaganda Analysis, based in Philadelphia. Their main interest was to encourage people to know what was happening, and that propaganda was as common in America as in Germany even in the 1930s. That early Miller had observed that if advertisers could persuade children that there was only one brand that mattered in breakfast cereals,

those children would carry those ideas through life. It would be much easier to persuade the next generation the same ideas for their parents would already know it. Even





then, advertising for cereals such as Kellogg's Corn Flakes and General Mills' Wheaties were aimed at children. Before meeting Miller, it had never occurred to me that advertising was aimed at children. Certainly with television, which came to my town in 1954, cereals and toys were advertised on all the cowboy shows, and other programs directed at children. In the 1950s, Tony the Tiger took corn flakes to the next level, as sugar-frosted flakes. Now I was more aware that, at least with cereals, children rather than parents made the buying decisions at the supermarket.

The *Process of Persuasion* has had a long shelf life. His ideas lay behind Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders*, which I read in the 1960s. I remember the discussion of colour in shopping. Women were attracted to red, and men to blue. Best selling cereals, for example, were placed on lower shelves and as we bent down to get them our eyes would be attracted to the red of Kellogg's or the blue of Wheaties, or of the new products being introduced.

Miller's approach was more direct. The cereals were promoted less for their taste and their quality than for the associations. Wheaties, was the "Breakfast of Champions" and implicitly this was an endorsement or testimonial from the champion, and it also was an invitation to join the bandwagon, and perhaps become a champion by eating the cereal. The Snap, Crackle and Pop of Rice Krispies joined you for breakfast, and added fun. Both cereals appeared to be for ordinary people.

A few years ago, I learned that a friend had worked in the premium department at Quaker Oats in Peterborough. Quaker was advertising on radio shows, where it was advertised that children could get prizes for clipping coupons and sending them to Peterborough. Even when researching for *Peterborough: the Electric City* (1978), Bruce Dyer and I had difficulty getting much material from Quaker Oats, and I still believe that the major archives for Quaker Oats Peterborough must be in the head office in Chicago. What we were given came from the Publicity Department, and included photos from the 1910s and 1920s showing displays at local exhibitions, or on floats in the parades, such as the one in 1927 celebrating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Confederation.

There are many collectibles tied to Quaker Oats. Aunt Jemima was featured as a cookie jar as early as 1922. A similar cookie jar was still available by collecting coupons in the 1950s. The trademark for Quaker Oats and the man in Quaker garb was received in 1877. The smiling old man in Quaker dress was appearing on buttons as early as the 1890s. Quaker Oats

was advertised in a national magazine campaign in 1882, and in 1890 sample boxes of Quaker Oats were distributed to every house in Portland Oregon, after being shipped by train from the huge mill in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. However, Quaker Oats seemed to be marketed to parents rather than to children.

Quaker Oats began as American Cereal Company which in 1891 was the product of the amalgamation of several cereal companies founded in the previous quarter century. That company came to Peterborough in 1901 after acquiring the property that had been developed by the Dicksons, whose raceway serviced several companies between Hunter and London Street on the west side of the Otonabee River. Quaker Oats added a plant in Saskatoon around 1911, and these remained the main places for cereal until Quaker consolidated in the late 1980s.

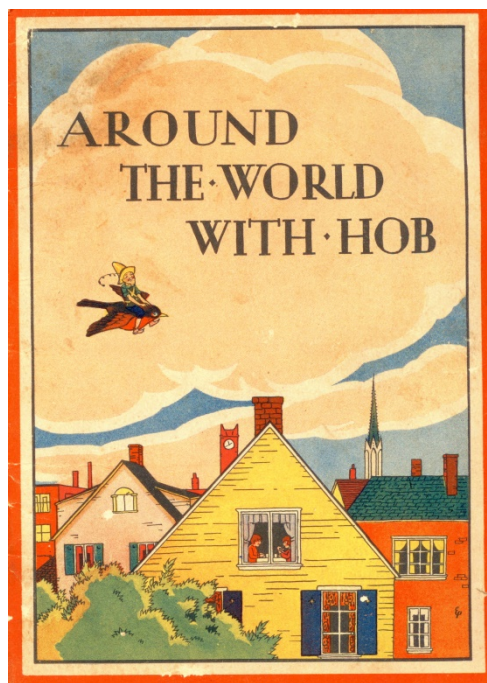
At least, so I thought. Diane Robnik, then the assistant archivist at Trent Valley Archives, spotted a book on Ebay that was directed at children and was published in 1932 by the Quaker Oats Company in Peterborough and Saskatoon Canada. She acquired the book and we then wondered if there was a bigger story. *Travels of a Rolled Oat* was written by Grace T. Hallock who had written several little books that were aimed as supplementary readings for school curricula. There was an American publication of *Travels of a Rolled Oat*, published 1931. As well we found little books, also by Hallock, called *Hob ' the Mill* (1929) and *Around the World with Hob* (1930). I have since read the books. All were published by Quaker Oats in Chicago, for its School Health Service, and intended to be used in schools as curriculum supplements.

The joint author of *Hob o' the Mill* was Julia Wade

Abbot, director of Kindergartens for the public schools in Philadelphia. The book is described as suitable for children in grades 4, 5 and 6. The book opens with a song, "Sing oats and wheat and corn . All of an April morn." The story features a friendship between Peter, the son of a miller, and Hob, an elf that keeps rats away from the mill, and tells stories from centuries past. Grain was discovered in old cave, in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome and Scotland. One story is set in Runnymede in 1215, coincident with the signing of the Magna Carta, while the last one takes place with Native Americans. The last was a tale told by Squanto of a young brave fasting and eventually being given the secret of grain, which could be an option to hunting and fishing. The book concludes with the "Song of the Farmer."

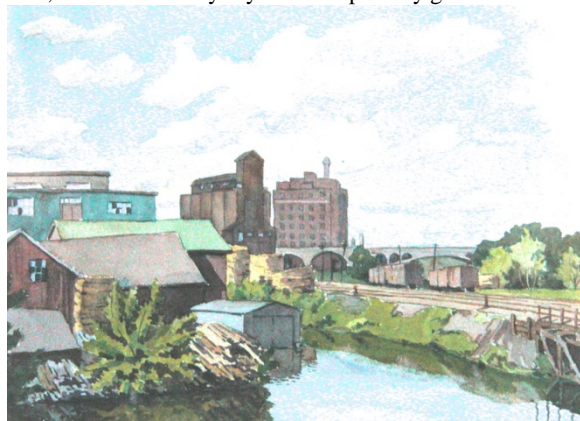
*Around the World with Hob* features the little man Hob winging around the world on a robin. In every country he visits Hob finds a young person enjoying oatmeal. The stories are

simple poems together with pictures each with a little verse suggesting the colours in the picture. The colouring book that I have is neatly coloured but the child has not give careful attention to the colour suggestions made by





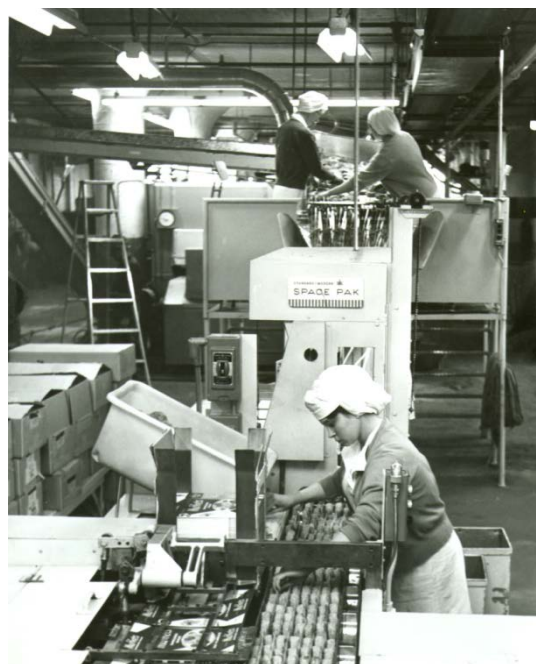
Hallock. The book is for a younger child than *Hob o' the Mill*, but Hallock only says it is for primary grades.



Painting by xxx showing the riverfront from Canadian Canoe Company, foreground, to Quaker Oats and the bridge, c. 1940 (Trent Valley Archives)

*Travels of a Rolled Oat* is more ambitious, and explicitly tied to Quaker Oats. This story begins and ends in Sweden where Nils, a shop-keeper's orphan boy, and his bilingual parrot Kim, are celebrating the joyous midsummer festival near the land of the midnight sun. The shop had been stripped of all its toys, and the window had one box of Quaker rolled oats. A singing rolled oat gets the attention of Nils and Kim, and soon engages in a conversation where the rolled oats tells its life story while Nils and Kim fill in gaps about what must have been happening. The story includes the growth of oats on a farm, the harvesting, the shipping to the Quaker Oats plant where the oats are tested for quality. A series of conveyor belts remove the chaff, the weed seeds and the garbage that has mixed with the oats. After the adventures within the Quaker Oats plant, the rolled oat is shipped, with his companions, to the far corners of the earth, but his shipment goes to Sweden. Even in Sweden, the rolling oat is able to relate a tale that Nils identifies as a trip through the beautiful Gota canal from Gotesburg to Stockholm. Then the rolled oat is cooked and eaten by Nils. Apparently rolled oats like to be boiled and eaten.

The Canadian version of *Travels of a Rolled Oat* differs only slightly from the American version. The Quaker Oats plant is in Peterborough rather than in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and the oats are grown in four Canadian provinces rather than in 17 American states. The travel from farm to mill is 2,000 miles in Canada, and only 200 miles in America. As well, the grain is shipped to different countries, as the Canadian oats are shipped to countries with British connections. The illustrations are black and white prints which are the same in both versions except for the prints that show the Quaker Oats plants, and the maps of Canada and the United States. Quaker Oats in Peterborough is described as the largest cereal mill in the British Empire, while the Cedar Rapids plant was the largest in the world.



Muffets (which were whole wheat, not oats) being packaged at Quaker Oats. (Trent Valley Archives)

The books seem consistent in seeing rolled oats as healthy and wholesome as well as good tasting, and impart information that is accurate. *Travels of a Rolled Oat* presents interesting information about the complexity of cereal mills that is not readily available in adult books.

Clyde Miller did not comment on these books, which are examples of persuasion by virtue. We are meant to think that oatmeal has a long history of helping mankind, and that it is nutritious in every land. The emphasis on the largeness of Quaker Oats is also meant to suggest leadership. It is interesting that the appeal to young people is through the schools rather than the family home. As for me, I am not persuaded by little elves or talking oat grains that remain chipper after being rolled and after being boiled.

Illustrations: Quaker Oats plant around 1930 as printed in the Canadian version of Grace Hallock's *Travels of a Rolled Oat*, page 40; also, the cover for *Around the World with Hob*.

The Quaker Man: 1877 Quaker Oats registered as the first trademark for a breakfast cereal. The trademark was registered with the U.S. Patent Office as "a figure of a man in 'Quaker garb.'" Both former owners, Henry Seymour and William Heston, claimed to have selected the Quaker name as a symbol of good quality and honest value.

# My Quaker Years

Marjorie Rasmussen-Shephard

Care to go for a ramble? There's nothing like the right attitude to go for a ramble, that just might turn into a good story – create a few smiles, and the best smiles are from good memories.

MY QUAKER YEARS - 1960 to 1973

'MISS ELEANOR'S PLACE'

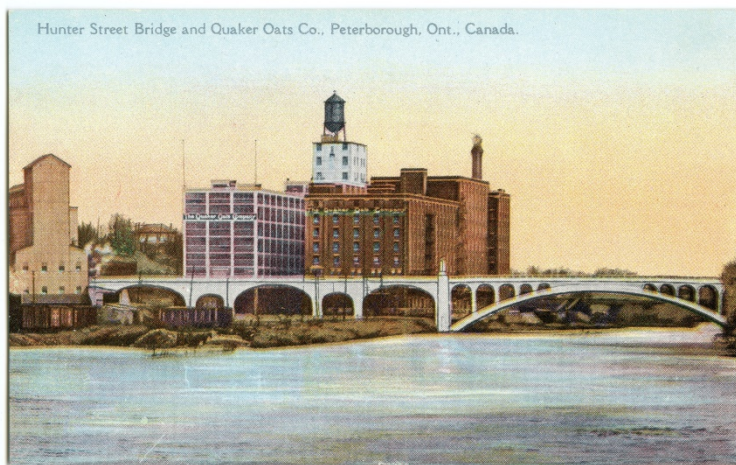


By Marjorie Rasmussen-Shephard

The time was autumn 1960. My husband and I had separated and I and my two young sons were living with my mother in the family home on Reid Street. One morning my younger brother, Wray (Nixon), had offered me the use of his car to look for work, if I would first drive him to the garage he worked at which was on Parkhill Road. Sounded like a good idea to me, so I surely did just that. We pulled into the garage and who pulled in after us by Andy Rutter, a friend from the Bethany Ski Club. And was one of the smilingest guys you could ever hope to meet – and greeted me with one of those big smiles, and “What’s up?” Well, I hesitated for a bit then told him I was looking for a job. It wasn’t long before he told me to drop in and see him at the Quaker Oats Company offices at the bridge on Hunter Street. I couldn’t believe my luck. Quaker Oats was one of the major employers in town in those days, so I quickly made plans to ‘drop in’, just as he’d said. There is such a strong memory for me of entering the offices that day – an atmosphere of wood paneling everywhere, the receptionist, Brenda Murdoff, greeted me and called through to Andy saying I was there to see him. He came out and took me into his office – just a little down to the right from the main foyer. I do remember windows everywhere, the desks with people behind the – whom? Heavens knows – I knew my stomach was a-flutter, but after a chat and some forms filled out – there I was – a

Quaker Oats Company of Canada employee, in the Premium Department, under Lola Leach who was head of the Promotions Department, but Muriel Craig would be my direct supervisor. There is a little blip here, as it was Quaker Oats Company policy NOT to hire married women, and the term ‘single mother’ hadn’t been invented yet! So Andy worked a kind of miracle for me – I wonder now how others felt in the office at this obvious breaking of in-place rules!

Did I relay to Andy that I had taken Latin in school in preparation to becoming a veterinarian? I think perhaps I didn’t – but I did tell him my office experience since my first job working in my Dad’s company office in Orangeville where I did my first efforts at typing – the definite one finger pick ‘n find method. In that Premium Department I learned about so many towns across Canada – you couldn’t imagine! We used the CPR Railway Guide to tell us the correct spelling as every request for a premium came in handwriting form. What a learning curve! My typing did improve, I sure had to do a lot of it. After a time, Lola asked me to come ‘upstairs’ (that in itself was a promotion), and help her with the monthly statement from our advertising agency, as all costs had to be broken down and charged against the particular Quaker product involved. I sure was the “new girl on the block” those first few months on the main floor – and there, of course, is where I first heard the booming voice of Jim Wharry calling out “Miss Eleanor, come in, please.” Jim Wharry was the President and occupied the corner office looking out eastward over the Otonabee River. Miss Eleanor was his



Quaker Oats, c. 1960 (Trent Valley Archives, F546)

secretary and as such, being the President’s secretary, was the ‘first woman’ in the office setting. (Perhaps I should say ‘first girl’ there, but somehow that sounds more than appropriate.) I’m sure you know what I mean.

When I had a minute to look around the office on the perimeter of this first floor (you came in directly off the



bridge to this floor) – there was Mark Kellow, Personnel Manager, on the first left office, with his secretary Edna Lee; Gerry Perdue who was secretary to the Past President, Reg Faryon; then Betty Pogue, secretary to J. Blake Bell, our Treasurer; then Fred Ash, Vice President – Production and his secretary Helen Zakos (who married to become Helen Drury, and left Quaker). Helen was replaced by Kay Young, and Sandy Bennett in later years. Randall Stacey was the Office Manager and Ernest (Ernie) Wolff was the Manager of Export Sales; Stewart (called Stu) Lockington was our Grains Purchasing Agent, working with Bill Ogilvie. Jack Cochran was our General Purchasing Manager and Darrell Willshaw worked with Jack. There were many other Quaker staff on this floor, and over in the Mill as well – with Mill Managers Art Saalfeld, Max Clarke (who would replace Fred Ash when he retired as Vice President – Production); Don Whittaker who was also a Manager in the Mill, Lloyd Ash and Dave Addyman. Doug Kirk was in the Mill Personnel Department when he first came to Peterborough from the Sales force in the West. Doug was such a kind man. When I left Quaker late in 1962 he offered to write me the nicest reference – the only one I ever had, and I still have it! Louise Blaby (whose twin sister was Dr. Gamble’s nurse when I was in that office so often before my son, David, was born) – in our size town everything seems to connect up somewhere else in town, was our Company nurse and many a cup of tea was shared for afternoon tea breaks. Louise was a great support in many ways to many Quaker employees. When Louise left, Annie Munro became the Company nurse, and Annie, of course, has a connection as she was a good friend of my brother Bill Nixon in their PCVS days.



*Quaker Oats packaging (Trent Valley Archives)*

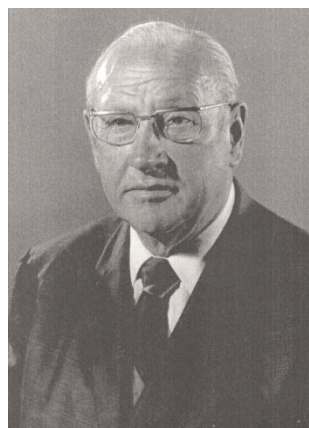
Walker Jones was one of the nicest men you would ever meet and was head of the Traffic Department – rail cars coming in and out of the plant as well as travel arrangements for executives were handled by his staff – Pat Lagana and Vi Lee. Walker was married to Fred Ash’s wife’s sister. The Payroll Department was also on the second floor where John Wood was Manager, with Bud Gallagher and Elsie Johnston. Agnes Grant ably handled the steno pool – would you believe it in those days we used onion skin paper for copies, and a pink copy of all correspondence for Company files – filed by Marilyn Theberge. Yes, we used little pieces of paper between those onion skin copies, when we had to correct a mistake and an

old fashioned eraser at every desk! What a relief when in the mid-1960s we all got IBM typewriters that had correcting tape!

By today’s standards, when I mention the ‘computer room’ modern day office workers might find it a little more than quaint that yes, we had a computer, a large thing that made an immense amount of noise as it rattled away at the cards that had to be hand punched, then fed into it, creating records of inventory, accounts or other vital statistics – figures that most of us knew were there, but we didn’t enter that closed room as ordinary ‘dust’ and motion wasn’t good for the machines. Doug Tanney and Hugh Affleck were the ‘owners’ of this space, with men – I played tennis at the Quaker Tennis Club (employees in those days could have an annual membership of \$2 – how could you resist!) Doug played now and then. Hugh lived near my little rented house in the north end of town and offered to cut my grass for me as I didn’t have a lawn mower – both kind men.

“Miss Eleanor”

That’s a strange thing to ponder in the middle of the night. The power of feelings, when you are quiet and can think about it, and allow your thoughts to roam without noise interference – the powers are quite immense, I think. They possess the power to feel: loyalty and respect, admiration; fear and reprisal, revenge and vindictiveness; care and love for others, and, conversely, fear and hatred for others.



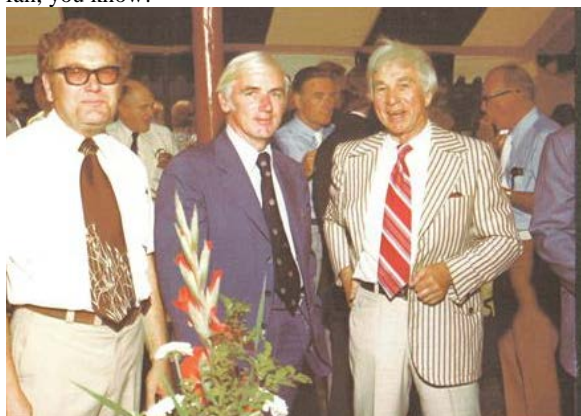
*Jim Wharry (Marjorie Shephard)*

I like the first one best – loyalty. Miss Eleanor was filled with it, jam-packed one could say – actually, to her family, especially her much loved brother and his family. (Eleanor never married or made a family for herself and one would wonder why; she certainly had the looks and personality!) Her loyalty to the man in the corner office, Mr. Wharry (I never heard her call him “Jim”), and the Company he represented—that loyalty was always there and very upfront. Strange, I knew Eleanor smoked, and office workers were allowed to smoke at their desks in this days, but I don’t remember the smell of smoke over in that special corner of the old office, the Executive area.

The first Quaker Oats offices I worked in were lovely, as I reflect back on them, with all that lovely dark wood, and yet there was a feeling of airiness too. They weren’t the “first” Quaker offices, of course, as those



would have been place before the big fire in 1916, and I wasn't around then (though my mother watched some of the fire from her schoolroom in Central School). There was a move to new offices in the late 1960s, to the "white ice cream brick" I called it, on the east bank of the Otonabee River. We now had to travel over that historic old bridge and enter the new space. Was it a happy move? It certainly was anticipated, yes, but once in, it took a lot of "settling in". The place was strange; almost too sterile, no windows to open, either. In an instant, employees weren't sure just what layers of clothing to wear, certainly not the same as in our drafty old familiar offices across the river, now remembered as treasured spaces! What did we gain anyway? We all certainly knew we couldn't go back so best get at a friendly routine over here. We gained colds more readily, it seemed, in that new ice cream brick office space – jackets on, jackets off, sloppy sweaters seemed the most successful at keeping the steady air blow of a constant and controlled air conditioning system at bay – dry as a stick, and crackly in winter too! Nope, definitely not a friendly system – for quite a while at least. We tackled it like a new marriage situation, better simply to keep adjusting, our attitudes, our layers of clothing – throw out those old fans, drat! You can control your personal temperature on a hot Ontario's day, sitting in a steno chair, with a well-placed fan, you know!



*Peter Ungar, Frank Morgan and Ken Gadd (Andy Rutter is framed by Morgan and Gadd in background). (Marjorie Shephard)*

The coffee room in the new building was at the rear of the second floor and proved to be a friendly place to retreat for a break in the day. Mr. Wong served us coffee in his crisp white jacket, and always with a smile – with a special greeting for Mr. Wharry when he dropped in. I'll always remember Mr. Wharry could tell a joke like no other. I would try so hard to remember the details and bring it home to tell my husband, and yes, you're right- I goofed the punchline every time! Mr. Wong owned the restaurant that is Charlotte Anne's today, though then it had a different name. He came to the Quaker offices twice a day to serve coffee, this special service was never in any other office where I worked over the years. I'll bet Mr. Wharry had something to do with this special treat. Arleigh Brockenshire, who was Walter Ward's secretary (Walter was the Manager of Quality Control of Quaker products), used to go for coffee with me, but often I would be too busy. By this time, I was in the Executive offices myself.

To go for coffee she would pass my desk and see me frantically trying to take a letter from Mr. Morgan in my "flying longhand" I called it – no time for coffee today! Arleigh would also tell me when they were testing Puss 'n Boots Cat Foods (my boys and I had a lovely black cat, Taja) which were made in our Trenton plant and were regularly tested. Cat owners in the office could take home the opened tins, and freeze them, or whatever, for their pets. It sure saved me a lot on my grocery bill in those days, and Taja thought it was just fine too.

Between the Executive offices, in the new building, which were on the second floor adjacent to the Hunter Street wall, and the coffee room in the rear – was a buzzing active place. This was where the Advertising and Product Managers "lived". They were a lively bunch of men (I'm sure there would be women there today, but in those days it was men) – Johnny Philips, Wally Wilkins; International trainees from other Quaker offices around the world such as Tomas Landmann and John Costa from Brazil; Arch McLean was our New Product Manager trying to bring new products into the Quaker line. He introduced us to new flavours of Aunt Jemima syrup, and frozen waffles. There was Barry Stranks who was Research Manager – there were others as well that I can't remember at the moment, but there was always an "up" buzz going on in that space. In the late 1960s before we all moved to the new building, I had worked for Hank Skinner who had been brought in from Toronto to be Director of Product Management. He was the 'hot shot' ad man that had been brought in to liven up our advertising and promotion of Quaker products. Did someone say the products would literally 'fly' off the shelves with new advertising? Somehow Hank didn't last long, not a good personality fit perhaps. When I worked for him I was also Supervisor of the Marketing Department secretaries – a job I didn't really enjoy, but it had to be done. There were many shifts at the management level over the next few years.

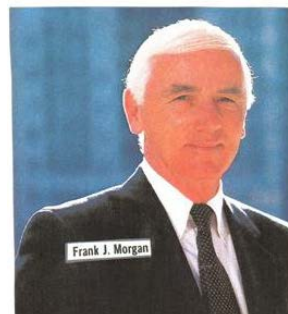


*Donald Kelly (Marjorie Shephard)*

One of the most traumatic of these shifts involved a situation where Miss Eleanor's feelings were hurt, just a little, I think. In the new offices, I was now secretary to the Vice-President – Marketing, Don Kelly, and his office in the Executive Suite, was next to Mr. Wharry's – the corner office again, looking out over Quaker Park and the river. Mr. Wharry had a heart attack within the first year in those new offices and someone else would have to fill in until his health improved, perhaps even longer. Discussions at "high levels" in Chicago H. O. decided Don Kelly would be the new President – and heavens to Betsy, he wanted me to be his secretary, instead of Eleanor – Moi! I could hardly believe it.



My Three Quaker Oats  
Canada Presidents



Don had been given a rather irreverent poster from an ad agency when he was V-P Marketing – of a Nun, with Don's face on it, and we all called it/ her Sister Kelly. Methinks she wouldn't fit into the corner office so she was rolled up and kept somewhere. So the move was made and Eleanor became secretary to Ken Gadd, the Director of Sales and she moved out into the happy mayhem of the advertising/sales space beyond the Executive Suite door! Eleanor would know how she felt about that, but she never said, and one of our jokes together was that she sometimes didn't remember people's names – so she and I agreed, if she was talking to me, or taking a call for me – I'd answer to 'Hazel' – and I still say that today, if in doubt 'I'll answer to Hazel'! Do you remember that television series from the 1960s and Hazel was a character, she was the servant/ housekeeper (Don DeFore her boss, as I recall) – and yes, she ran the place!

In the change of things, with Mr. Wharry ill and gone from the office, and Don Kelly in the corner office, we were stable for a while, then Quaker H. O. in Chicago got the idea that all marketing and sales jobs could be handled for "all" of North America out of the Chicago office. What

an uproar followed and the end result was that the whole Marketing Department quit – en masse! We who were left felt devastated, Mr. Kelly quit as well, saying if the employees were to be treated that way, he would leave the Company. Not to worry, not too long afterwards he was offered a job at the Harvard School of Business and yes, you guessed it – lecturing in International Relations! But at the time the 'fit hit the fan', we were all so very upset.

Yes, we managed to hold a going away party for all leaving – where Andy Rutter showed up in his "Quaker Man" outfit – this time with his white sideburns and Quaker Man hat, his smile, and a tin cup! It was lots of fun, scared, but fun too. But here was I sitting looking into an empty President's office. It wasn't empty for long as they brought in Ed Miskiman, a Supervisor in the Sales Department to fill in, until the dust settled. Ed was a "neat desk" man – and Sister Kelly and I – we smiled and did the best we could, she in the bottom drawer of my desk. There were times I felt like putting her up again, I have to admit – that impish smile would be relief from all the tensions that seemed to go on for such a long time. One of the gifts Don Kelly gave me was that he called me "Big M", these being Frank Mahovolich days and maybe he was teasing me as I'd played hockey in high school. I wasn't a small M for sure. I still use that initial "M" to represent me today, some gestures last.

Things do settle down after a while, and in a year or so, in came the one and only Frank J. Morgan – what a super guy (both Eleanor and I agreed on that). Frank Morgan to be exact from Chicago H.O. born in Iowa. He could walk into a room, smile his smile, and make everyone feel at ease. He was a short man, but in stature only – he used to tease me as to why did he always end up with tall secretaries, as his secretary in Chicago had been tall too. He also liked to tease me about the long chains I liked to wear and I'd better watch out or they just might get caught in my IBM typewriter and 'kaboom', I'd blow out the whole place! Within a year of his coming to Peterborough, our offices were to hold the Quaker Oats Company Annual Meeting – for Quaker International. This was a big undertaking, and I was kept busy, long hours making charts, making everything – this was before computer imaging, folks – and Randall Stacey (our Office Manager) and I were in charge of all the logistics to handle the VIPs coming in from all over the world. Thank goodness, Randall and I worked well together, we had a big job to do, and all to happen in this town of ours on the Otonabee River.

In the fall of 1973 I had remarried to a man with three children, plus my two boys – well, we were a 'blended family' before the term was invented. Not an easy road, and certainly with many countless responsibilities and challenges. After much agonizing thought and consideration, I felt I had to make a decision. I enjoyed my job at Quaker and my friends there and felt I had really accomplished a lot – starting out as a typist in the Premium Department and ending up as Secretary to the President, it doesn't get much better than that.

I asked Mr. Morgan for a 'moment' as they say in British theatre – and told him sadly that I had one too many men in my life. He laughed and then looked a little serious, and asked 'surely I didn't mean him!' Well, yes, I did. He

took me out for lunch at Roland's on my last day at Quaker and we had a pleasant time together. One of our laughing moments as well was that a year or so earlier I had gone into his office in mid-December and asked him for a half day off. He said to me, "you never take a day off, what's it for?" Well, I told him Walter and I were to be married that Thursday afternoon in City Hall; he smiled again, and told me to take Friday off too. He had a wonderful, natural way with people, always making them feel at ease.

At the Morgan's Christmas staff dinner that year in their home – Frank and Mary Morgan invited Walter and I as well – what a delight! And it just happened to all on our anniversary, December 21<sup>st</sup> – we were so happy to chat and be with old Quaker friends once more, and all thanks to the



*Art Butcher, Lola Leach, Jon Grant, Robert D. Stuart Jr., Eleanor Whittaker and James Wharry on the occasion of Quaker's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Canada, 1976. (Marjorie Shephard)*

generosity of Frank Morgan, a wonderful man.

And the tale gets better – as guess who was back in the Chief Secretary's Chair – to the President, Frank Morgan – none other than our 'Miss Eleanor'! Great news! And from stories she told me over the years, she enjoyed working for him as much as I had. When Eleanor retired from Quaker, Geesje Smit-Ranger took her place as Secretary to the President. Geesje had worked in many secretarial positions at Quaker over the years, beginning in the steno pool, and then working for Ken Gadd when we were still in the old offices.

Many years later, Miss Eleanor invited me to attend the 'party and celebration' that was held when Frank Morgan officially retired from Quaker Oats Canada. It was a lovely sunny summer party held in Quaker Park and I was so happy to be there, and thankful to Eleanor for being so thoughtful as to ask me to attend. Frank was moving on to be the Chairman of the Board at Quaker Oats Company in Chicago.

Eleanor was such a 'good sport' about so many things. I knew she played softball when she was a young woman – and the women's league in Peterborough was 'big' in the 1930s and 1940s – with many of the big industries having their own team. I was told Eleanor was asked to come to Quaker as an employee as among other

things they wanted her pitching skills! She certainly golfed and curled in her Quaker years, but there another part of her that was such a good sport. She once teased my brother-in-law, Tom Joore, at a birthday party for him by buying him a "red one". She was famous on Cedar Lake (just outside Selwyn on Chemong Lake) for her real red ones – vodka, Clamato, a splash of tabasco. She had a cottage there called a 'Summer Place' – and it was a happy party place many summer evenings. Eleanor retired from Quaker Oats Canada in 1989.

Eleanor Whittaker, born 1927, died 1999. Her final resting place is right beside her much loved brother's spot in Little Lake Cemetery – a place chosen for the outstanding view over Little Lake. She was more than a little put out when the cemetery company put in tall columbaria for cremated remains, right in front of their plot, near the Chapel – how dare they block the lovely view of her sunset!!

**LOLA – and my Long Black Leather Gloves**

How many people do we know from our lives, when we look back – and we say to ourselves – 'where would I be without \_\_\_\_?'

Lola was so important to my development – as a successful person in the business world (can't say secretary, wasn't trained for that; can't use the work 'accountant' – wasn't trained for that either) – but in my working years under Lola's

supervision, I look back on many accomplishments – of how to do things in an office atmosphere, and make them accountable, efficient, and right!

Lola worked for Andy Rutter, that lovable renegade that hired a separated woman like myself, at 25 with two sons to think about and look after, and when I went to work for Quaker Oats in Peterborough in the early autumn of 1960, Lola was right there – the supervisor. I first worked in the Premium Department, which was under her direction – with Muriel Craig and Mildred Thirnbeck. We accepted all those little envelopes from across Canada that contained a cheque or a money order for a 'premium' that was offered on one of Quaker's products. I remember the Swiss clock as a premium for Muffets, and the doorknocker as one offered for Quaker Corn Flakes. Aha, you didn't know that Quaker used to make corn flakes – well, they did and the led in the marketplace for a while. Then another manufacturer got the scoop – I think it was the Disney creature they used in their advertisements. Nonetheless, Quaker's role as number one corn flakes maker was a short one – ow their role in the Puffed Wheat and Puffed Rice business was a little longer success story. Anyone who lived near the factory on Hunter Street bridge knew exactly when they were 'puffing' (cooking and adding air) the wheat or rice – and it was actually a very pleasant smell.

But, back to me, experienced (sort of) in office matters (having taken Latin in school to prepare myself to be a veterinarian, my typing skills were self-taught, and therefore lacking), but I certainly had a respect for



mathematics and a balance sheet. So Lola brought me 'upstairs' from the floor below where I worked in the Premium Department, where I also knew Bill Young and his staff in the Service Department under Howie Macdonald. Lola put me to work figuring out the balancing of the advertising account that we received in the office every month from J. Walter Thompson Ad Agency in Toronto. The thousands of dollars spent at first intimidated me, but I soon adjusted, as each invoice had to be charged back to a certain product, the certain decision was made by a Product Manager in the Advertising Department before the invoice would be paid. It was a big task, but doable. Lola showed me, in a very 'specific' manner how to do things, not to waste anything, be as specifically efficient as was possible, and then a small bit of applause when I succeeded. This might sound pressure ridden, but at that time it didn't seem that way. Lola was a farm girl, from a farm out the other side of Bethany, and she was a no-nonsense woman who knew what she had to do, and be quick, and correct about it. She passed that on to those under her direction. I herald her 'quickening' of my ability to do things in a quick and accurate manner – a tendency that was to stand me in good stead in the many jobs I had after those first years at Quaker.

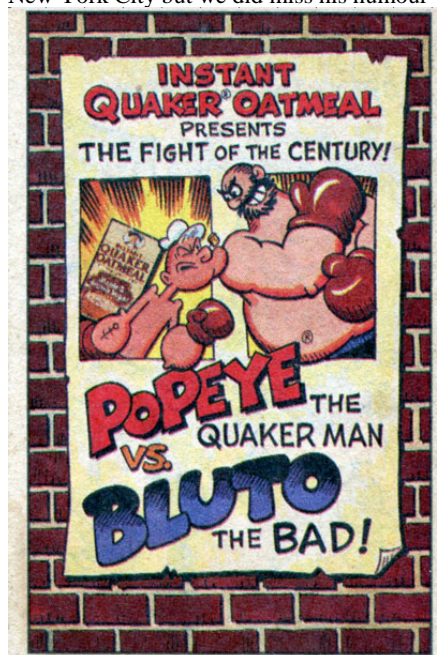
Dear Lola – what a girl! She was one of the 'girls' – she and Miss Eleanor, Marg Weir, Dot Jackson, and a few others socialized together and enjoyed each other's company. She had her mineral steam baths every month and swore the health benefits of that steam bath keeping her away from the colds and other health issues that seemed to drag others down. And dear Lola again, when I left Quaker in November 1962 to travel west (who says the guys only do it!) – she gave me a lovely pair of long black leather gloves. I still have them today, and treasure them, as I do her memory. She lived in her own home on Mark Street – I still look at that house and think of her. She was close enough to Quaker to go home for lunch, and she confided in me one day that her greatest fear was that someday she would go home for lunch, take off her skirt (which she did) have her lunch, and come back to work – without putting on her skirt again! And yes, every now and then in my later working years I would do the visual check to make sure I had everything on before going back to work after lunch! Lola was in her late 50s and early 60s and felt every now and then a half day would be a nice gesture to such a longtime loyal employee.

Let's meet some of those Special Quaker People:

Glen Huntley – here was another man in the 'the corner office'. I remember Glen as being the head of Quaker's Advertising Department in the late 1960s when the offices were located on the second floor – in the mill building, looking out over the railway tracks. I can't imagine what the other office staff felt – was this preferential treatment, one more time, for those Advertising 'weirdos', to have their offices removed from the greater office staff? Who knows, perhaps, one didn't stop to ask them – we just carried on. I do remember we had our own coffee machine, in the small boardroom, and coffee was pretty much available during the work day. We had to pay for the coffee, so hm ... the solution was at first voluntary payment – put a quarter in the can beside the coffeemaker,

but everyone know that only lasts so long – there's always someone who cheats when allowed. So guess who got the task of going around on Fridays and 'collecting'!! Moi again. Looking back I am a little astounded at the time it took just to collect coffee money!

Glen had a special, quiet and humourous way about him. When he and his wife first came to Peterborough in the early 1950s – they rented a small apartment from my grandmother, Mrs. Lizzie Oke on Reid Street. Glen often remarked how fond he was of my grandmother and grateful they were for her kindness to them as newcomers to town. Glen went on to greater things – I think the first stop was New York City but we did miss his humour when he left.



*One example of Quaker advertising, date uncertain.*

Dorothy Langley was Ken Gadd's secretary when he was Sales Director for all Canada. She and I were both tall, and along with Marilyn Theberge (relief switchboard operator and filing clerk) – we all wore size 11 shoes. Walkwel was the only store in town that 'might' bring in one pair of size 11 shoes every now and then. There were three of us at Quaker, how about other offices in town – I know I counted on a shoe store in Toronto to send me shoes when I needed a new pair.

Arch McLean – Arch was hired by Hank Skinner, then Director of Marketing, in 1966. He was to be our New Products Manager and worked with Barry Stranks, newly hired as Research Manager. Arch was very tall, rangy man with a brush cut and he had the stride of a man who knew who he was, what he wanted and where he was going.

In those day, I performed secretarial duties for not only Hank Skinner but also for Arch and Barry. Arch put great emphasis on the entry of frozen foods into the marketplace. I believe at the time there were frozen vegetables available (and of course, ice cream) but not much in the way of frozen baked goods (in Quaker's case waffles would be the first entry). He also wanted to expand the varieties of Aunt Jemima Maple Syrup. Arch was

capable of great bursts of humour and action. He once teased me that if I didn't have a certain report ready for him on time, he would 'lift me over' the privacy barriers in the offices (about five feet tall, I think) – and sure enough that's what he did one day! And everyone knows I'm not a 'little thing' easily hoisted in the air! I think you can imagine I did put extra effort into getting those reports to him on time in the future (but truly, it was a fun moment, no intimidation allowed). Wally Wilkins told me that when he had his gall bladder attack in the office and was in great pain, Arch was the man who lifted him up and carried him down to the waiting car to go to the hospital.



*Filling a bag with flour at Quaker. (Trent Valley Archives)*

Barry Stranks who worked with Arch was very quiet, he smoked his pipe (allowed in those days – he and Blake Bell), and he stood back and smiled when Arch was in a cavorting mood. Before the breakup of the Marketing Department a few years later, Arch was looking around for another job, and a short while after we'd moved across the river and into the new offices, he moved on to accept a 'higher' ranking position at Playtex. He didn't stay there long, not a 'good fit' obviously, and soon we heard of his exploits and achievements at the McCain Foods empire that was growing in New Brunswick. He'd found his niche.

Arch and his wife Kay and family when they were in Peterborough lived out near Norwood. When I moved into my little rented house in the north end for the first while I had to take my laundry to a laundromat. Arch soon fixed that situation as he gave me their old washing machine – a stainless steel tub with a wringer! I called it the 'zipper buster' as that's what happened when I washed, and wrung out, the boys jeans – still I could my laundry at home, rather than trek out to the Brookdale Plaza. He also gave us a black kitten, which we called 'Taja'. What a precious cat he was – elegant, and what a story he could tell of his life

with us as we moved a few years later from our house in the north end down to Reid Street to rent the top half of my mother's house, then down here some years later to River Road South. Each move Taja put great effort into returning to the 'home' he'd just left, but when we moved down here on River Road South he simply wouldn't, couldn't cross the then iron mesh bridge on Lansdowne over the Otonabee Rivr. He was stuck! What a cat! What a guy was Arch McLean!

Wally Wilkins – Wally came to work at Quaker when Hank Skinner was Director of Marketing – remember him from an earlier story – he was the one that Doug Kirk hired me back to Quaker to work for when I returned to Peterborough in 1965 (little thinking I would remain here, I was just visiting my mother, and then I was heading back to the west, where I thought real life was!) Oh well!!

Hank hired Wallace F. Wilkins to bring into the Quaker stream some new cold cereals – really make those Kellogg shelves rattle, so to speak. One of the new products that Wally researched and proposed was a cold cereal called 'Tintin'. Now, Tintin was a French comic strip character – a little boy dressed up in a certain way, and was sure popular in France, and to some degree in Quebec as well. A lot of time and advertising money went into this venture, the product was lined up and Wally was in Paris (yes, the one the other side of the Atlantic) on a promotional venture, when who should be on the phone in his hotel room, but Hank Skinner telling him to return to Peterborough – immediately! Wally had meetings lined up, and details he had to procure – so a very quiet, but firm 'no' was his response to his boss. I think this could perhaps be an instance that could foretell that Hank's tenure at QOC Peterborough would not necessarily be a long one.

I left Quaker in the summer of 1973. By this time, I had married Walter and my family responsibilities were demanding much more of my time – I moved on and out of Quaker and took a part-time job in Wally's business as Secretary and bookkeeper. Again, I would repeat, Miss Eleanor moved back into the President's office at QOC to be the President's secretary which she had been for Jim Wharry, and now for the one and only Frank J. Morgan. Who says what goes 'round doesn't come back 'round again!

## Viola Lee Remembers

*[Viola Lee, Letter to Marjorie Shephard, May 2008]*

Like you I started in the Premium Dept. but October 4, 1941. At that time Lil Guerin was Dept. head and Quaker sponsored the radio show, "Little Orphan Annie", so there were kids' premiums for Little Orphan Annie. From there I went to the Steno Dept to turn out the weekly price sheets on animal feeds. These were set up on a drum and you had to change the price and run off the copies I guess for the salesmen.

When I was transferred to Walker's [Jones] Dept. He did customs drawback. In the war years there was a federal freight drawback on animal feeds and I worked on that as

well as sales tax. Later, I did freight accounting and had to check rates with the Traffic Dept. After Walker retired Bob Channen (Bell Ringer at the People's Chime) took over. Walker became a customs broker and Quaker was a customer of his.

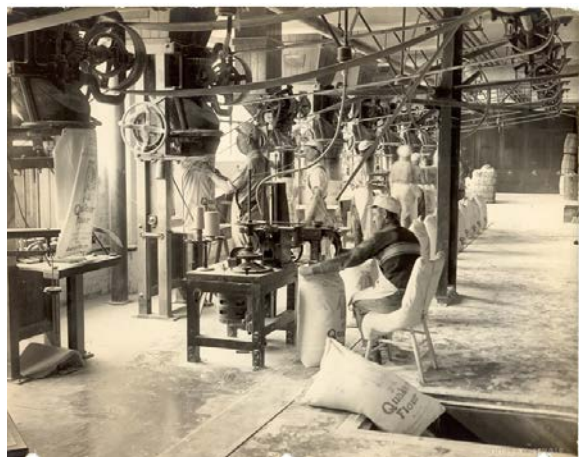
In your time Dick Kennedy was Traffic manager. Harry Smith worked with him and Pat Lagana was in that Dept.

Right after the war they had open house for the farmers of Peterborough County. They parked their cars on the north side of the bridge all the way to Burnham Street. They were conducted in groups through the plant and then given a lunch. Each group had a leader in a lab coat and a tail to keep them together as some liked to wander off if they saw a worker they knew they liked to visit.

In your time Abe Benney would have been chief Engineer of Canada; Don Whitaker followed.

You must have been there when the gas main blew up under the sidewalk on the north side of the bridge.

Years ago Walker took our dept. on a trip through the plant which included a trip up on the roof with a wonderful view down to the lake and the river and canal.



*George Carruthers bagging flour at Quaker Oats (Quaker Oats)*

During the war years there was a shortage of man power in the plant as many of the men had joined up. Some of us would work in the office till quitting time, go home and change our clothes, and return to work another three hours. I worked on filling bags of oatmeal.

NEW YORK TIMES BUSINESS PEOPLE

## Quaker Oats Gets A New Chairman

Published: September 15, 1983

The Quaker Oats Company, the big marketer of food, pet foods and toys, announced yesterday that its chairman, Robert D. Stuart Jr., would step down Nov. 9 at the company's annual meeting.

The announcement prompted several other changes. William D. Smithburg, the 45-year-old president and chief executive, was named chairman and chief executive. And Frank J. Morgan, 58, executive vice president for United

States and Canadian grocery products, was named president and chief operating officer.

Mr. Stuart, 67, has been with the company since 1947, having started in the sales division after graduating from Princeton and the Yale Law School.

He was made president and chief executive in 1966, the year that Mr. Smithburg happened to join the company as a brand manager. Mr. Smithburg had worked in advertising agencies and held a succession of jobs before settling into Quaker Oats. Mr. Smithburg is a graduate of De Paul University in Chicago and holds an M.B.A. from Northwestern University.

Mr. Smithburg was named president and chief operating officer in 1979 and in 1981 took the added duties of chief executive when Mr. Stuart relinquished them.

Mr. Stuart will remain on the board for another year, will be a member of the executive committee and will head the finance committee.

Quaker Oats, based in Chicago, is in the process of acquiring Stokely-Van Camp in a \$208 million tender offer. Along with its cereals, it makes Ken-L Ration pet foods and Fisher-Price toys. It operates specialty retailing and direct mail marketing companies.

Mr. Morgan, the new president, has been with Quaker since 1964, holding a number of key assignments, including the presidency of Quaker-Canada.

He will be succeeded as executive vice president for grocery products by Robert N. Thurston, 51, who is now executive vice president in charge of international grocery products. Paul E. Price, 49, will move into that slot. He is currently in charge of chemicals and direct-to-consumer businesses.

New York Times, COMPANY NEWS

## Quaker Oats Restructuring

Reuters Published: August 22, 1987

**CHICAGO, Aug. 21**— The Quaker Oats Company said today that it had reorganized its United States and Canadian grocery products businesses, which account for more than 60 percent of the packaged-food concern's revenues.

A company spokesman said the move was not intended to save money but to better divide labor among key executives.

The reorganization follows the resignation of Hedric Rhodes, executive vice president of Quaker's United States foods division. As part of the reorganization, Quaker said it had selected James Tindall, president of its cereals division, to replace Mr. Rhodes.

Quaker said Philip Marineau, currently president of its grocery specialties division, would assume the position of executive vice president of grocery specialties and market development, a new position.

Douglas Mills, executive vice president of diversified grocery products, would continue to head the Pet Foods and food service divisions, Quaker Oats Canada and the marketing research department.

The company said the three executives would report to Frank Morgan, president and chief operating officer, and would be members of Quaker's management committee.



## Quaker Oats Photographs



*The Quaker Park ball diamond. Note the Tennis Club and the clubhouse behind. The ball field was situated on part of what is now the parking lot for the building that served as the Head Office of Quaker Oats. (TVA, Jenkinson fonds)*



*Quaker Oats, the London Street power plant and dam viewed from the east bank of the river. (Elwood Jones)*



*Quaker Oats plant, and Hunter Street Bridge, c. 2010. (Elwood Jones)*

Trent Valley Archives would like to thank the sponsors of our Little Lake Cemetery Twilight Pageant:

Fourth Line Theatre

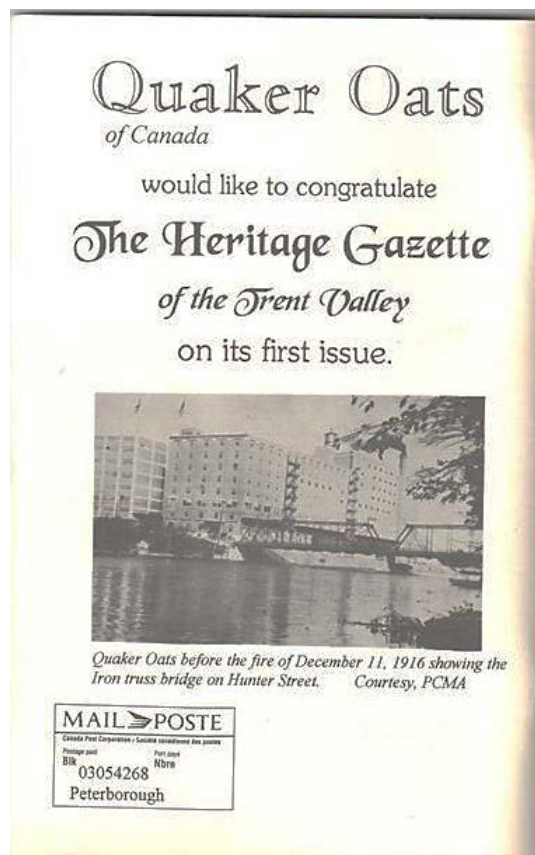
Lang Pioneer Village

Peterborough DBIA

Peterborough Theatre Guild

Tim Hortons (Water St.  
Location)

... and our many volunteers



*Quaker Oats was the first sponsor for the Heritage Gazette of the Trent Valley, and this was the look of the back cover. We did a large mailing of the first issue and so had a postal arrangement. David Morton, a most generous supporter of TVA, was president of Quaker Oats when this ad appeared, in 1998.*



**POSTCARDS from PETERBOROUGH  
and the KAWARTHAS**

*Vintage Postcards from the Trent Valley Archives*

*Elwood H. Jones and Matthew R. Griffis*



A century ago, people sent postcards like we make phone calls today. In fact, if text messages are today's telegrams, then postcards are yesterday's Instagram posts. They predate television news and even modern magazines.

According to some media historians, picture postcards were one of the first examples of mass-produced images in modern culture. At a time when ordinary people did not own personal cameras, the purchase of a picture postcard was a relatively inexpensive way of preserving a memory of one's local surroundings. Postcards offered not just an inexpensive and efficient means of written communication, but also a glimpse of faraway, often extraordinary places.

Since the 1990s, books devoted to reproducing postcard views of a specific place or community have become increasingly popular. In some cases, postcards are the only surviving visual record of a specific place or event.

Consequently, postcards have become the subjects of archival digitization initiatives, digital humanities projects, and research studies by social, cultural, media, and popular art historians.

While other works about the history of Peterborough and the Kawarthas have included postcard images as illustrations, *Postcards from Peterborough and the Kawarthas* is the first to focus exclusively on the history of postcard manufacturing and collecting in the Kawarthas and one of the first to reproduce, in their original tones, many of these vintage views. These cards include views of residential and downtown streets, important (and, in some cases, lost) architectural landmarks, city skylines and natural landscapes, important people and institutions, and scenes from the Trent-Severn Waterway including bridges, lift locks, and steamboats.

*Postcards from Peterborough and the Kawarthas* is both a celebration of the Kawarthas' postcard heritage and a resource for researchers. Its inventory provides a descriptive list of all postcards, print and digitized, currently in the Trent Valley Archives' collections. In addition to raising awareness of the existence of these cards, this book can inform a variety of present and future research projects relating to the history of our region.

ISBN 978-0-9810341-8-8  
\$30

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