

Forest City Flashback – 100 Years to a Younger ‘Old South’

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Closet clean-outs can be more history than housekeeping. Finding a *This Is Your Life* gold-embossed binder brought such sentiment. Its nostalgia of name-dropping and flashbacks to London landscapes, some long since paved over, was created in 1956 by Kinsman and future mayor, Allan Johnston. Tapped on a typewriter, the tribute was to ‘roast’ my father, F. Don Ross, then Kinsmen president, to recall local life in Dad’s youth. In its pages, I’m time-capsuled back to nearly 100 years ago now to post WWI in London, Ontario’s ‘Old South’.



I can see the pop bottle sign, almost taste the tangy bubbles as I read of the Wishing Well plant at Bathurst & Richmond, former grounds of Grandpa’s employer, McLaughlin Buick. What an ideal re-use of the site – Buicks to beverages – given JJ McLaughlin (son) invented Canada Dry ginger ale. Grab a soda and enjoy snippet quotes (and a few interjections by me) from this 1956 perspective back to Dad’s birth – **1920s in the Forest City.**



“Richmond & CNR [rail] was a level crossing with gates. Tecumseh House [hotel] stood where the bus terminal now is. There was no Richmond St. bridge to London South, but Labatt’s [my own employer before I began Word’s Worth] was down that way for at least 100 years before.

Wellington St. bridge had a separate bridge for street cars that went up High as far as Tecumseh. Belgrave was one of the early streets that had cement roads, and I mean cement – every 50 feet there was an iron bar placed across to allow for a change in temperature. Boy, how those bars could crash the front wheel of a bicycle, and even a Buick in the good old days. Three years earlier, freight cars were running through his back yard [49 Belgrave at Tecumseh]: Traction Electric Railway to Port Stanley, 15¢ return for children under 15.”



Ldn. Pt. Stanley Ry L1 • Bill Volkmer

Celebrated citizens, schools

“Sir Adam Beck, Chairman of Hydro Electric Power Commission, was elected MPP. Dr. Cameron Wilson was Mayor ... ready to build the new University buildings [Western] north of London on the old Kingsmill farm [Bellevue].”

Near the time it moved to its current campus on former Kingsmill land, it was at Western that, in 1920, Sir Frederick Banting, one of 18 Canadian Nobelists, awoke from sleep to write just 25 words that led him to discover insulin: “*Diabetes. Ligate pancreatic ducts of dogs. Keep dogs alive till acini degenerate leaving islets. Try to isolate the internal secretion of these to relieve glycosurea.*” (Now that’s getting our Word’s Worth.) Another school was breaking ground, too. A high school alma mater to Dad and I was being built. From blooms to bricks; lifelong friendships.

“Tecumseh School had 100 acres of field surrounding it. Lots of daisies [photo at right, 1923-24?]. When Don got his entrance, he only had to cross the street, for the new South Collegiate [LSCI] was in full swing. I bet the quartet of Sumner [Jack], Aldis [Barc], Merrifield [George], and Ross helped build that collegiate.”



Dad, bro George, LSCI lot

These classmates were affectionately known to me, also; lifelong friends to Dad. I’m as lucky to still have my best friend from school, too (www.southalumni.ca).

I read to the end, grateful. And I count: Dad was then 33. Turns out, exactly halfway through his life. Of all words in my own growing cache, my favourite is ‘honour’. Best not to wait, this tribute proves, to honour people, places. Even if it seems *This Is Your Life* may not yet have much to reflect on – do!