

Vernon Johnson

Written by his daughter Grace Ford

Vernon Johnson came from sturdy stock! His father, Thomas, and uncle, Andrew, walked into the Dufferin-Simcoe County area in the mid 1800's carrying only a straw pallet, an axe and a hen. North of Staunton (on present day Airport Road), they viewed a stream at the bottom of the hill. Thinking that it reminded them of Ireland, they named the stream the "Boyne River". Andrew settled in Rosemont and Thomas, in Banda.

Vernon Johnson was born on a farm in Banda, one of a family of six children. After receiving his education in Creemore, he began his apprenticeship as a tailor, with his brother, Robert, in Creemore. Deciding that tailoring would be his life's business, he travelled to Owen Sound Business College to receive the proper training. Continuing his apprenticeship, he worked under the guidance of Mr. Smart in Collingwood. He also apprenticed in Barrie.

In 1905, he opened an establishment in the Wilcox Block in Stayner. There his tailoring business flourished. At one time he had a staff of six. Two of the local girls were: Alice Dickey and Clara Robinson.

Vernon's reputation as a skilled tailor soon spread, and the guaranteed quality in men's clothing became well known. Many wedding suits were made at Johnson's Mens Wear. Living proof of this quality lies with the testimony of the late George Synnott, who passed away at 103 years of age. He still owned the wedding suit that Vern Johnson made him.

Vern married his wife Eva in 1915 and the couple raised one daughter, Grace. As the business grew, Vern became the area distributor for Tip Top Tailors, a very reputable brand in the early 20's and later.

In 1925, the standard price for a made-to-measure suit was \$25.00 varying up to \$50.00 depending on the material and style. A good overcoat could be purchased for about \$25.00. A popular item sold in the store to accent the suits during that era was the men's front-pocket handkerchief. Colourful displays hung in the store close to Christmas. Handkerchiefs were a great gift and well used by men of any age.

In 1920, Vern took a leave of absence from business to farm. During a four-year period, he became restored to good health and returned to Stayner in 1924, where he bought the building which now houses Robinson's Mens Wear and Swanton's Travel Service.

Some of the staff over the years were: Robert Johnston, Alice Dickey, Clara Lamont, Lyle Currie, Norm Lamont and Clint Cauthers. Clara Robinson, Annie Lamont and Alice Dickey were talented seamstresses.

Clint Cauthers worked for Vern from 1936 to 1941. Clint attributes his knowledge of the tailoring trade to Vern Johnson. Clint said, "He was a very good man to work for. He used to sit at the back with his legs curled up working for hours."

Vern John kept a diary all his life and his daughter Grace still has those diaries. Through these records, the reader learns that operating costs for a downtown business were high. In 1933, Vern was paying \$63.99 annually for taxes. That rate jumped to \$75.00 in 1934. On December 15, 1933, Vern recorded that Christmas business was "very good" as he had made \$119.00 that day. That may have been due to the weather as he also remarks in his diary that "the temperature was 42 degrees below zero!"

Vern leased the store to Bert Gilbert of F.T. Hill & Co. in 1940 and retired at the age of 61.

(Vern's story to be continued in the fall newsletter)