



ICE CREAM CONES, BOWLING PINS & BICYCLES

By H. David Vuckson

Near each end of the Collingwood business district on the east side of Hurontario St. in the 1950's there was a dairy with a dairy bar selling ice cream cones, milkshakes, etc. At the south end between Ontario St. and Fourth St. East was Potts Bros. Dairy and at the north end was the Collingwood Dairy & Creamery. Ice cream lovers could well-satisfy their craving at these places.

The Collingwood Dairy & Creamery building was a fascinating place for a youngster. The sign out front was in the shape of a huge glass milk bottle. In the dairy bar at the front of the building ice cream cones cost 5 and 10 cents. As the cost of living rose, the price increased to 6 and 12 cents, a hardship that most people could easily handle. (At the same time, we had parking meters that accepted pennies for 12 minutes of parking.) At the

north end of the building was a doorway labelled “Creamery” and this led to the real dairy operation out back where there was an overhead line shaft with multiple belts coming down from the ceiling to operate the machinery--a magical place for a boy fascinated by things that move. Also in this area (immediately behind the dairy bar) was a cold storage facility where my parents rented a locker to keep food frozen. This was a convenience from a bygone time when not everyone owned (or could afford) an electric refrigerator/freezer or, if they had one, had more things to keep cold or frozen than there was space for at home in the fridge or icebox.

In the early 1900’s there were many 3-storey brick buildings on the main street of Collingwood, most of them since then destroyed in a number of disastrous fires. The still-standing 2-storey building at 27 Hurontario St. that housed the Collingwood Dairy & Creamery in the 1950’s is on the site of James Lindsay’s 3-storey building from the 1870’s which survived the Great Fire of 1881 but was totally destroyed by fire in 1905. The ground floor of the 3-storey building

immediately south of the Collingwood Dairy was a bowling alley in the 1950's. Hanging over the sidewalk was a sign advertising "Black Cat Cigarettes". This had been the location of E. R. Carpenter's Drug Store in the 1880's with Lindsay's Music Hall on one of the upper floors. The next 3-storey building [Melville, Fair & Co. in the 1880's] had two stores at street level in the 1950's, one of which was Stoutenburg's Bicycle shop. Many Collingwood young people got their first tricycle and, later, their first bike at this location and when winter came, people took their ice skates to Stoutenburg's to be sharpened. The grinding wheel directed the sparks into a funnel connected to a stove pipe and chimney. [From the long-ago radio program "Call For Help" in the early days of station CKCB comes this reminiscence: a female voice says "Hello, I would like to get a pair of skates for my daughter who is eight years of age in good condition" similar to "I know a man with a wooden leg named Smith".]

Fifty-five years ago these two adjacent 3-storey buildings from the Victorian era were totally destroyed in a massive fire in the early morning hours of November 14,

1961. The bowling alley had been converted into the “Chalet Normand Steak & Chicken House”, an upscale fine-dining type of establishment that is so common today, but was something new in town at the time. The adjacent building contained two stores: Mostyns Men’s Wear and Mary Lyn Ladies Wear (Stoutenburgs had moved to the Temple Building). Both of these clothing stores were managed by a husband and wife team named Wood who, with their two sons, lived upstairs over the stores. Their older son, Jim Wood, was in my homeroom class at C.C.I. in 1961. When the steak house exploded and caught fire before 2:00 A.M., the two buildings were doomed. More than 13 people living in a number of apartments on the upper floors of these two buildings as well as the buildings on either side were lucky to escape with their lives. Some were rescued through windows and down a ladder by the Fire Department. As in the Great Fire of September 1881, the whole east side of the block up to Simcoe St. as well as the houses on Ste. Marie St. were all threatened as the wind blew flaming debris and sparks far and wide. One fireman sustained critical injuries in a fall from the aerial ladder while rescuing residents from the upper floor of

the Collingwood Dairy and Creamery, and a second fireman injured a leg at the rear of the same building. Additional fire trucks and firefighters were called in from Barrie, Stayner and Wasaga Beach to assist.

In addition to totally destroying the two side by-side buildings, the fire also seriously damaged the Collingwood Dairy & Creamery operation and the Public Utilities Commission building but these two structures survived and remain today. A mobile crane with a wrecking ball was brought in from the Shipyard the next day to knock down the hazardous brick walls of the two destroyed buildings. The space they occupied can be seen empty with a fence closing it off in a 1960's photo on page 224 of Christine Cowley's book *Butchers, Bakers & Building the Lakers*; the large milk bottle sign on the Dairy building is visible just south of Crest Hardware and the ground floor windows of the Dairy building are boarded up. Eventually, after the wreckage was cleared away part of the vacant site became the new-in-town Bank of Nova Scotia in the 1960's [long since relocated to the corner of Hurontario and 4th St. East]. The single-storey buildings at 33 and 35 Hurontario St. now occupy

the site of those destroyed by the fire of November 14, 1961.

David Vuckson is a great-grandson of pioneer Collingwood merchant R. W. O'Brien. His roots in town go back to 1875. He and his wife Pamela live in Victoria, B.C .where he works as a piano tuner while maintaining a keen interest in the history of his hometown.