



THE COLLINGWOOD MILLING CO. WAS A FAMILY BUSINESS FOR SIX DECADES

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In the 1894 Collingwood Board of Trade Report, Fred Hodgson laid out a lengthy list of Collingwood “wants”, detailing the businesses and industries that he felt would benefit the town and its growth and prosperity. On pages 106-7 in the history book *Reflections* he presents his list after extolling the advantages of Collingwood for young men of talent and ambition:

Collingwood being a progressive town, has a large number of wants...Any man with a well-defined scheme, and brains and nerves to follow the scheme up, is sure of success if he makes this town the theatre of his labors. There is not a man in town that has been a success that brought anything here with him to start with; all was made here by energy, push and well directed effort, and opportunities now are just as many and accessible as ever. To the young man of brains, who also possesses “Push” and a little capital, there is no place on the continent that offers more favorable inducements for business success than Collingwood does, for

sooner or later, she will be a grand distributing point for every conceivable kind of manufacture that will be required in the great North West. Examine a map; you will be convinced.

One of the things Fred wished for was a flour mill in town:

We want a flouring mill in our midst. This is a great wheat growing country, one of the best in the Dominion, and a hundred-barrel per day mill, would pay both owner and town. There is a splendid site for a mill at the mouth of Pretty River—plenty of water and ample fall with excellent roads leading to it. There are other sites, too, that could be obtained quite reasonably, if the right man comes along. The Corporation is quite willing to deal liberally with any person starting a mill of this kind.

Fred would get his wish for a flour mill but he would have to wait eight years to get it when one was built on First St. far away from the Pretty River and using steam, not water, power. True to Fred's words in 1894, The Town of Collingwood did "deal liberally" and not only donated the land but also provided a loan to get the mill started. The new mill had a capacity of 165 barrels of flour a day. Men of business from Strathroy, Ontario made the mill a reality. We will meet them shortly.

Locals and tourists alike driving through Collingwood on First Street/Highway 26 pass a tall, 3-storey brick building at the corner of Walnut Street. Now known as Kelseys Original Roadhouse, this building, formerly known, variously, as "Cameron, Shipley & Company", "The Collingwood Milling Co.", and "Shipley's Mill" from 1902 until it closed in the 1960's, is, along with the Collingwood Terminals grain elevator, one of the few remaining vestiges of Collingwood's proud past industrial history.

One practical reason for the building's location which is not evident today is that it was located alongside the railway that ran between Hamilton and Collingwood via Beeton Junction: the old Hamilton & North Western Railway which was eventually absorbed by the Grand Trunk Railway (1888) and then, the Canadian National Railways (1923). This railway coming into town from Beeton through the

familiar nearby communities of Creemore, Glen Huron, Duntroon, Nottawa and then along the west side of Walnut St., crossed First St. here at the mill on its way to nearby Lake Junction where it joined the railway line from Collingwood to Meaford. A siding branched off the main track south of First St., crossed the highway and terminated along the east wall of the Collingwood Milling Co. Here, rail cars loaded with prairie grain fit snugly up against the building to be unloaded and bags of flour could be loaded and shipped far and wide, the product eventually reaching customers around the world. The flour mill was not the only industry situated at First and Walnut Streets to take advantage of the convenience of the once-important railway connection. Directly across First Street alongside the railway was the Wilson Bros. Planing Mill. The flour mill and planing mill were both constructed in 1902. Unfortunately, Wilson's facility was totally destroyed by fire on March 5, 1917, the fire starting around 2:00 a.m. Typical of the history of devastating fires in Collingwood, there was a strong breeze blowing, fanning the flames and blowing sparks around the neighbourhood threatening nearby structures. The snow on the roof of the flour mill is believed to have saved it from catching fire. Still, it must have been a nerve-wracking, sleepless night for the Shipley Brothers when they were wakened from sleep with the news that a massive fire was burning across the street from their place of business.

Adjacent to the flour mill in the first two decades of the 20th Century was another industry that until 1920 received rail car loads of pine tree stumps and roots which were turned into turpentine. The stumps are said to have come from near Midhurst. The virgin forests of Simcoe County in the 19th Century contained massive stands of pine trees covering many thousands of acres, but in the huge lumbering boom of the second half of that century these stands were reduced to many thousands of desolate acres of stumps and blowing sand. The reforestation of Simcoe County began in 1922. By then the supply of stumps had probably run out for the turpentine factory.

The following information from Vernon's City Directory of Collingwood for 1912-13 gives some idea of the scope of the Wilson Bros. operation:

WILSON BROS. LTD. WHOLESALERS AND RETAIL MANUFACTURERS OF DOORS, SASH, WOOD-TURNINGS, INTERIOR FINISH, HARDWOOD AND PINE FLOORING. OUR FLOORING IS KILN DRIED, STRAIGHTENED, HOLLOW BACKED, BORED, END MATCHED, STEEL POLISHED AND BUNDLED.

OUR PLANT IS ONE OF THE LARGEST IN CANADA AND EQUIPPED WITH MACHINERY OF THE LATEST TYPE. WE OBTAIN OUR RAW MATERIAL FROM THE IMMEDIATE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF THE FACTORY. WE ARE SO SITUATED AS TO PROVIDE THE MOST EXCELLENT SHIPPING FACILITIES. ALL OF THESE ADVANTAGES ENABLE US TO PRODUCE THE BEST MATERIAL AT THE CLOSEST PRICES. SPECIAL ATTENTION GIVEN TO WESTERN BUSINESS.

The previous issue of Vernon's Directory for 1910-11 has multiple ads for The Collingwood Milling Co.:

THE COLLINGWOOD MILLING CO. MANUFACTURERS OF HIGH GRADE MANITOBA FALL WHEAT AND BLENDING FLOURS.

WHEN YOU WANT THE BEST BREAD FLOUR MANUFACTURED, ASK YOUR GROCER FOR THE NORTH WEST BRAND, MADE BY THE COLLINGWOOD MILLING CO.

INCREASE YOUR TRADE BY HANDLING THE PRODUCT OF THE COLLINGWOOD MILLING CO.

NORTH WEST 1ST MANITOBA PATENT FLOUR

NORTH STAR 2ND MANITOBA PATENT FLOUR

NORTH LAND STRONG BAKER'S FLOUR

GOOD LUCK BLENDED FAMILY FLOUR

MAGIC FALL WHEAT PASTRY FLOUR

THE COLLINGWOOD MILLING CO., CORNER FIRST AND WALNUT, PHONE 91.

This gives some idea of the activity in that 3-storey building. While commonly known to many as “Shipley’s Mill”, the ownership of the business passed through three generations of that one family. When first constructed, it was owned by George Stewart (an uncle to the Shipley brothers) and George R. Cameron, both men from Strathroy in Middlesex County near London, Ontario, under the name Cameron, Stewart & Company. In the 1901 Canadian Census, George R. Cameron lived in Strathroy and stated his profession as “Miller”. The Collingwood mill opened on December 1, 1902 according to David Williams in the *Huron Institute Papers Vol. III*. These two entrepreneurs who had successfully built and operated a number of feed and flour mills in southern Ontario knew an opportunity when they saw one and must have decided that Collingwood, “The Chicago Of The North” could use a flour mill as well. George Stewart sold his share of the business to his nephew John Shipley in 1903 and the firm came to be known as **CAMERON, SHIPLEY & CO.** These words were painted in large letters at the top of the east side of the building. In 1906 John Shipley’s brother George Stewart Shipley purchased Cameron’s shares at which time the lettering on the side of the building was changed to **COLLINGWOOD MILLING CO.** Between the second and third floor were painted the words **FLOUR MILLS**. This can be seen in the upper photo on page 36 of the Collingwood history book *The “Chicago Of The North”*.

Another partner associated with the flour mill was Daniel McDermid (1868-1936) also from Strathroy. In December 1906 in Collingwood at age 37 he married a young widow, Minnie Alberta Currie (nee Loughheed) of Collingwood, age 30. One of the witnesses to the marriage was John Shipley. In the 1910-11 and 1912-13 Vernon’s Directories for Collingwood, Daniel McDermid is listed as “Head Miller”. My great-aunt Vetta O’Brien enumerated the McDermids for the 1921 Census. The household consisted of Daniel, his wife, one daughter and two sons, but no servant like the Shipley brothers (see below). After working 50 years as a miller, Daniel McDermid died tragically as a result of an accident that happened at the flour mill on August 13, 1936 when he was caught in the machinery and very badly injured. His death registration signed by Dr. Donald McKay Sr. indicates that he was caught on one of the belts (see below) and fractured the radius and dislocated the ulna (the two bones in the arm between the elbow and the wrist)

in one of his arms, and had many other cuts on his head and face, etc. He was taken to the General & Marine Hospital in shock with a severe concussion and died there the next day aged 67 ½.

As was customary in factories in the 19th Century and well into the 20th, the flour mill's machinery was operated by a system of overhead line shafts and pulleys driven by flat leather belts from a central power source, originally a stationary steam engine (until 1916) then a massive 100 horsepower electric motor. A man named Fred Thompson was the "Engineer" at Shipley's mill in 1912-13. The engine and boiler rooms were in a one-storey building on the north side of the main building. Holes were cut in the floors for the drive belts to pass through from one floor to another. From each drive shaft stretching across the ceiling, drive belts would come down from pulleys of various diameters to floor level to operate the machinery. The overhead line shafts rotated in only one direction and so, depending on the direction of motion required of the machines, some of the belts were twisted like a figure 8 to run a machine in the opposite direction to what the overhead shaft was turning and this overlapping produced the distinctive "slapping" sound of drive belts that was once so common in factories of yesteryear. An illustration of this system can be seen on pages 234-235 in Christine Cowley's book *Butchers, Bakers And Building The Lakers* which shows the two different arrangements of belts in the Imperial Steel & Wire Company plant. This type of machinery was also in use at the Collingwood Dairy building near the north end of Hurontario St. As a boy in the early 1950's I was fascinated by the movement of the ceiling pulleys and belts at the rear of the building that I caught a glimpse of when I accompanied my mother to our cold storage locker accessed through a door labeled "Creamery" adjacent to the Dairy Bar at the front of the building. As detailed above in the death of Daniel McDermid, these exposed belts and machinery could be very dangerous.

Brothers George Stewart Shipley (1871-1950) and John Shipley (1873-1955) were born into a farming/cattle ranching family in the Village of Ailsa Craig in Middlesex County, north of London, Ontario. The record of John's marriage to Jessie Telfer of Collingwood on June 5, 1912 states that he had lived in Collingwood since June

1st, 1904. Stewart was married in January 1904 to Johana Maude Stewart (1878-1956), a school teacher, in Middlesex County.

In the 1910-11 Vernon's Directory, George Stewart Shipley was listed as the "floor manager" and his brother John was the "manager". Both men were enumerated in the June 1921 Canada Census by my great-aunt Vetta O'Brien who recorded that each family was now prosperous enough to have a maid/servant living in their substantial brick homes at that time. Stewart lived at 168 Maple St. on the north-west corner of Third St. directly opposite the First Presbyterian Church. His maid was a 21-year-old Irish girl named Myrtle Gallagher who earned \$300.00 a year for her work. His brother John lived at 147 Beech St. (east side) between 2nd and 3rd and had a 20 year-old Scottish maid named Mary McDuffy who also earned \$300.00 a year. According to a descendant, these young women looked after the children, cooked and baked, cleaned, washed and ironed, etc. at a salary of \$25.00 a month.

While prairie hard wheat was used to produce various grades of flour for making bread, one of the mill's most popular products was made from local soft wheat grown within 25 miles of Collingwood. This grain was used to produce their Magic Pastry Flour used for baking cookies and cakes and it is claimed that it was sold as fast as they could produce it. An article in the former *Enterprise-Bulletin* newspaper by Editor J. T. MacMurchy in the early 1960's observed that a railway boxcar he saw parked outside the mill could hold six hundred 100-pound bags of this flour, representing two days' production in the mill. The boxcar's destination was Montreal.

Aside from the two founding Shipley brothers, other family members worked in the mill as well. John Shipley's son Howard S. (1916-1980) is listed as "Miller" in the 1940 Voters List, living with his first wife on West St. On the 1949 Voters List he is still a miller but on his own and back living with his parents on Beech St. He soon embarked on his second marriage (to Jean McConnell) in Montana in 1952 and settled in Alberta as a "Timekeeper". John's other son George (1913-1968) chose a banking career in his twenties. He was a Bank Manager in Dundas, Ontario prior to his sudden death at age 55. John's daughter Jean (1919-2010)

married Harvard Connolly. The 1940 Voters List shows Stewart's son Athol Shipley (1917-1990) working at the Dominion Government Fish Hatchery on Raglan St. at Sunset Point but by 1945, Athol was working in the mill. Athol's older brother Harold (1906-1996) had followed a different career path, attending university and studying chemistry. In 1935 at the time of his marriage to Ruby Mae Francis in Toronto, 29-year-old Harold Stewart Shipley lived in the Georgian Hotel in Midland and stated his profession as "Chemist". He subsequently worked at General Foods in Montreal as a product analyst and researcher. Following his father's death, Harold and Ruby returned to Collingwood and to the family business. When Uncle John Shipley died in 1955, Harold became Sales & Business Manager and his brother Athol became Production Manager. In the 1965 Voters List, Harold S. Shipley is listed as "Mill Manager" and his brother Athol as "Miller. In the 1968 Voters List, Harold and Athol are still indicated as associated with flour milling. The mill had stopped producing bread flour for export in 1954 as other countries began their own flour milling operations and Magic Pastry Flour became the mill's principal product. A second line of production was that of livestock feed. 100 pounds of grain yielded 70 pounds of flour and 30 pounds of feed.

Although the railway tracks between Creemore and Collingwood were removed in late 1960, the track lifting had stopped at the intersection of Walnut and 2nd Streets, leaving the "Collingwood Industrial Spur" from Lake Junction so that the daily way freight between Allandale and Meaford could switch rail cars for the mill when required. For many years there was also a siding off the main line for the Canadian Oil Company ("White Rose") storage depot just south of First St. My railway contacts tell me that abandonment of the remaining trackage from Lake Junction was authorized in late July, 1962. Since the mill was no longer making bread flour, there was no need for prairie grain to be brought in by railway boxcars. This was also a time when more and more freight was being carried by trucks as the railway lost customers one by one. Where the main track and the separate flour mill siding crossed busy First St. there were only the traditional wooden crossbuck signs in the form of a letter "X" warning motorists of the presence of the railway as well as a sign indicating that there were "Two Tracks"

to be crossed. After 1960 with freight service to Glen Huron and Creemore just a memory, this railway crossing was seldom used; nevertheless, First St. was also Provincial "King's Highway 26" and there were two sets of tracks crossing it. Considering the very limited use of this railway spur, it would have been very costly for the CNR if it had been ordered to install and maintain flashing warning lights and bells like they had where the railway crossed Huron, Ontario and Hume Streets and Highway 26 near Georgian China. A certain amount of maintenance of the track and the trestle where it crossed the western branch of Underwood Creek (south of First St.) was required as well and the time came when it became uneconomical for the CNR to provide this rail connection. The mill's principal product now was Magic Pastry Flour produced from locally-grown/trucked-in grain and for the mill's remaining years of operation, the finished product could be shipped out by truck, thus ending the last vestige of the Hamilton & North Western railway link in Collingwood.

I had a personal connection to the Shipley family. Harold and Athol Shipley had a sister named Charlotte (1912-2007). My mother Catharine Hewson and Charlotte were born about three months apart in 1912 and were lifelong friends, the closeness of their friendship allowing me to call her "Aunt Charlotte" when I was young. Charlotte was married in her late 30's to W. H. (William Harold) Hill (1900-1987) whom everyone knew as "Brownie", a Great Lakes ship Captain. They were married on December 27, 1950 at the Shipley family home on Maple St. My mother played the Wedding March on the piano for Charlotte to come down the stairs to the ceremony. Not quite a year later, the Hills suffered a tragedy when their infant daughter died in November 1951. They had no more children. Brownie Hill and my father Dan also had a connection as Great Lakes sailors. Although my father had quit sailing after the War and came ashore to work, briefly at Globe Plywood, and then for the next 33 years in the Shipyard, he nevertheless retained his Mate's Ticket for life and participated as crew to deliver at least two new Collingwood ships to their owners down east during the years he worked in the Yard. Dad and Brownie could talk ships. Charlotte died in May 2007 and had remembered my father in her Will. However, he had died about five months earlier, so Charlotte's bequest then came to me as his next of kin,

after which I donated the substantial bequest to the pipe organ fund at First Presbyterian Church.

Charlotte's brother Athol (nickname "Grain Dust") was a bachelor until age 53 and had continued to live in the family home on Maple St. while single. Once, when my parents and I were there for dinner with Charlotte and Brownie, we were seeing through the big house and came across Athol watching television in his upstairs room. In 1970 he married widow Norma Bowins and moved to 132 Peel St. One day my mother and Charlotte went to the mill for some reason and my mother told me that Athol "was covered in dust and surrounded by cats at his desk". A plaque outside Kelseys states that the mill closed in 1964, but, as mentioned earlier, in the 1968 Voters List, Athol and Harold Shipley are *still* listed as "Millers". By the time of the 1972 Voters List, Athol Shipley's listed profession was now "Glass Cutter" and his brother Harold was working in the CNR Telecommunications Office.

The Collingwood Milling Co. was not a major employer in terms of the number of people who worked there. When Jack MacMurchy wrote up the business in the 1960's, the firm employed six people. However, despite the small staff, the bread flour they produced for so many years had carried the name of Collingwood to countries all around the world. The building was sold in 1969 and became a discount store for clothing, etc. known as "John's Old Mill". In 1973 the property was purchased by Toronto business partners Bill Stevenson and Harry Wilson of Stevenson Projects Ltd., a.k.a. "The 44 Restaurants". They had purchased the Holiday Inn (renamed Cranberry Inn in the late 70's) and began the creation of Cranberry Village Resort in 1975. In an interview with the *Enterprise-Bulletin* circa 1979, Bill Stevenson announced the opening of a new restaurant in the old flour mill the following summer. It later became Kelseys Restaurant and continues so today as Kelseys Original Roadhouse.

David Vuckson is a great-grandson of pioneer Collingwood merchant R. W. O'Brien. His roots in town go back to 1875. David and his wife Pamela live in Victoria, B. C.

