

Gleanings From Memories By Paths Of Erin
– Stores, Shops And The First Advocate
– – by Harry Smith

In this part of her story Florence Baker tells of the many stores and shops that once served the citizens of Erin and surrounding community.

...Memory takes me to a visit of the stores and shops of Erin (in 1880 and later). At the lower end was a drug store and post office of Mr. Robert Wood and his brother. John, I believe, was a partner. Miss Jennie McMillan was an assistant in the post office. It was up to date in everything. Cosmetics were used freely by the ladies. Hinds Honey, Almond and Cream with Hoytes German Cologne made you feel just lovely. Smelling salts were sold in dainty little silver top bottles, and many ancient dames carried them on their watch chain with other gold trifles at their belt line. I remember one old lady, who let me open the top of her aromatic spirits bottle for my first smell. O, dear - everything went black and I saw all the stars before I came to.

Mr. R. Woods lived in the fine residence now owned by Mr. Griffin. Years ago, the myrtle covered the ground near the front fence. I went in October 1943 to that spot and the myrtle is still there. Also a lovely holly tree. It was always, and is yet, a beauty spot; Mrs. Ada Ballentine who died in January 1944, was the oldest daughter of Mr. R. Wood.

Next to the Drug Store was a dry goods and groceries kept by Mr. James Milloy, a son of Mr. Hugh Milloy, who was famous for making the best ploughs in the County of Wellington. The share of these ploughs was noted for cutting the toughest sod of this new farming district, and always won the plowing match prize, wherever used. His Smithy Shop of stone was on Main Street between two hotels. The Erin Creamery occupies this site now (1944).

Our foot-steps take us now into a little shoe-maker's shop where Mr. James Sawyer made and mended boots and shoes; the boots were made from the cow-hide by hand, and nearly all children's boots had copper toe's or a cap of the metal across the toe end. It was a cruel weapon, also when boys used them in their fights.

Mr. Sawyer was a very intelligent man. His knowledge of politics and foreign affairs was much enjoyed. The children would visit his shop to watch him sew and peg the boots. When he thought they should go, he got rid of them in a hurry by giving each a cuddly of black wax to chew. It was a grand treat; there was no Wrigley gum in those days.

The next store was a big roomy shop kept by the Overland Brothers, Charles and George, - of groceries, cured pork, and barrels of salted herrings, cod and tobacco's. I can still see two pictures of men, advertising the Navy Plug tobacco. One picture, was a sick looking man with a dirty old pipe in his hand. The other a happy man smoking. The sign read, "Before and after smoking Navy Plug."

Sugar came in great hogshead barrels, brown and coarse. White sugar was a luxury in the early days and brown was used for preserves, in crockery containers and was lovely. When the great

barrels were empty of what they could scrape out, they were stored in a rear yard, where we children were never disturbed, as we hurried like bees, to that great treat of salvaging a tasty scrapings out of those sweet tunnels. And no germs were known to scare us away from getting our share while it lasted.

I believe Mr. Charles Overland was also a funeral director of Erin, as was Mr. Smith Travis, who came to Erin in 1874, and conducted a furniture-manufacturing establishment. Erin was a very lively village, then as now.

The next store was that of Mr. Thomas Carberry Sr. A fine general store, dry goods and groceries where, in very early times Spencer Shotter had a dry goods store and George Beals a shoe store. Mr. Carberry was a merchant for many years, an Anglican, who never opened his store on Good Friday. The old lively home is still in good repair, where strangers to the Carberrys, live now.

After Mr. Carberrys death, L. Carberry, Jr. and J. Collier continued the business for many years. Then, there was a tinsmith named Kennedy in early days. Later a Mr. Sutton Sr. had a fine hardware store carried on later by his son. Mr. Wm Medley had a shoe store with the latest in classy shoes. These names are now just pleasant memories of good times in Erin Village in the 1880s and early 1890s. Mr. Richard Hamilton had a general store and Thomas Aitken a barbershop.

Early in this period the Erin Advocate was introduced, and a printing business was established. The first I remember who conducted this great treat was a Mr. Diltz. Mr. John Houston was a printer in this office, also a Mr. Harry Dewar. I cannot remember the next owner before Mr. Wellington Hull was proprietor.

We now wander into Mr. Wm. Stevensons, Tailoring and Gents furnishing store, a very busy place. Also Mr. James Murray was a tailor on Main Street. His family home was a farm on the hill near Mr. Justice Sr.'s first homestead.

Back to the shops - the Luther Overland Harness Shop. The butcher shop, I believe Mr. W. Hull was owner of one. I remember a Mr. Homer also had a butcher store; also William and Alan McDonald kept a meat store. Another fine business was Mr. Mathew's Harness making where every ornament for Dobbin was found. They were very clever workers in leather in those far away times, and Mr. Mathews carried off many prizes wherever his work was exhibited. What is lovelier to look at than a well fed and well dressed span of horses! The age of motor speed ended many fine trades in leatherwork, sleigh bells and ornaments.

The Roxy Tea Room restaurant is a fine place to dine, and Mr. Mathews, Jr. a grandson of the harness emporium owner is the proprietor. Perhaps some future day may once more bring back those past industries, at least, partly. Somewhere amid these stores, was the little fancy shop of Miss Caldwell before you came to Mr. Wm Conboy's dry goods store which was a well established business long before we came to live in Erin in 1879. It was a very fashionable store with lovely silks, cut velvets, cashmeres and millenary for the latest fashions, and the richest purse.

Harry Dahl was a clerk in this store and needless to remark a great favorite with the ladies, as he too belonged to Erin where his parents resided with a sister and brother, Wm. Dahl. Their home faced the Guelph Road opposite Mr. Stewart's home of the corner. This home looks just the same as years ago.

Mr. Stewart was a gardener with a wonderful field of cabbage. His wife was formerly a Mrs. Bush, mother of Mr. John Bush.

Mr. Fenwick had a jewellery business. I also heard Mr. Blasher was in the same business. Mr. Henry Boomer and his brother James kept a general first class store, which is today a fine building. Mr. Boomer kept a great variety of seafood including oysters.

Another well remembered carriage and wagon shop was Mr. Sibley's, a very busy place. Mr. Sibley was also Superintendent of the Methodist Sunday school, a good kindly man. His wife was of pioneer family, the McLaughlins. A happy home to visit and enjoy with a large family of boys and girls.

Another landmark, the residence now known as the Busholme Inn. This property has gone through many different hands - a fine blacksmith shop was in connection with this property, and a family well known lived there in the 1870s - 80s. The Root 's Bros. had a prosperous business. I also heard Donald McMillan was a blacksmith there and the farmers, who went into Guelph, with loads of grain and produce, would bring the smithy his supply of iron. This Donald McMillan, was no relation to the McMillan Pioneer families of Erin Township. Mr. George Ramesbottom was Blacksmith there, when Dr. Martin occupied the residence and a fine lawn replaced the original industry.

Next week Florence tells about the state of medicine in the early days of Erin and surrounding district.

"Harry Smith, a former resident of the Town of Erin, is a columnist for the Erin Advocate. Some of his weekly articles relating to the Town of Erin are reproduced here."