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## THE COLLINGWOOD “OLD BOYS” REUNIONS OF 1903 AND 1938

H. David Vuckson

Pioneering communities of the 1850's, such as Collingwood, were fertile ground for clever men who saw an opportunity to move there and make a success of themselves by their activities in business and the professions in a boom town. Many of them saw a need and supplied that need to the public. They also had sons to whom they passed on their passion for wanderlust and adventure as the nation expanded westward from Ontario. John Nettleton, in his reminiscences of Collingwood from when he arrived as a tailor in 1857, details how Collingwood itself, being a relatively new place, a frontier town at the time, had attracted a cosmopolitan population of Englishmen, Scotchmen, Irishmen and Americans. Prior to answering a Toronto newspaper ad for a tailor in Collingwood, he had been to an auction house in Toronto that was selling lots in Collingwood, praising it as “The Buffalo of Canada” when, in fact, as he soon discovered, the houses were built on cedar posts above what had been a swamp and Hurontario St. was “dotted with stumps”. To similar frontier towns in the Canadian and American west (and established cities too), young

men from Collingwood would migrate in later decades as they sought adventure and fortune and, in the process, advanced civilization where they settled.

There was a well-known saying in the Victorian era and while it is widely attributed to Horace Greeley (1811-1872) it is not known for certain if he originated it. He is said to have uttered the words, "*Go west young man and grow up with the country*". Granted, Greeley was an American, and the American "west" he referred to was opening up much earlier than the Canadian west (at one time, anything beyond the western boundary of Pennsylvania was considered to be "the west"). The first transcontinental railroad (Canadian equivalent word = railway) in the United States was completed on May 10, 1869 at Promontory, Utah, when the rails of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific met. Canada would have to wait another sixteen-and-a-half years before the last spike was driven on the Canadian Pacific at Craigellachie, B.C. on November 7, 1885. With the completion of our transcontinental railway, there were unlimited opportunities to be had for a young man willing to apply himself to work hard.

The "Call of the West" was heard 'loud and clear' in Collingwood and countless other Ontario towns, cities, farms and villages. Collingwood, by virtue of its significance as a major transportation link via the railways from Toronto and Hamilton on land, and ships on the upper Great Lakes, was a major gateway to the west and through this gateway many young men from Collingwood, (and indeed from all over southern Ontario) headed west to "see the world" and to seek their fortunes. By the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, these sons of Collingwood were referred to as Collingwood "Old Boys". In 1903, an Old Boys Reunion took place when many who had grown up in Collingwood's early days

and could spare the time, returned to their old home town in August for a reunion with other Old Boys.

On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1903 a letter was published by the Collingwood Old Boys' Association:

*"Dear Sir,*

*Many of the sons of Collingwood have gone forth from the old town to better their fortunes in other spheres, and are scattered throughout all parts of the North American Continent. Those of us who have remained at home and watched the old town develop into a thriving business centre, have not lost sight of those old boys, but have marked with pleasure and pride that the great majority of them occupy positions of trust and responsibility in the various places in which they have located, and are on the high road to success and fortune, many indeed, having already achieved them.*

*The formation of an Old Boys' Association has long been a cherished idea among the old boys, both at home and abroad, and this idea has at length crystallized into fact, and an Association has been perfected with the above executive officers. It is the intention to have a grand reunion of Collingwood Old Boys some time during the ensuing summer, when it is expected a large concourse of former residents will gather together with their wives, sisters and sweethearts, and renew old associations in the old town."*

John Birnie, B.C.L., L.L.B., K. C., the town's Lawyer, and "Commodore" of the Blackstone Hunt Club, was President of the Old Boys Association. My great-grandfather R. W. O'Brien was one of twenty seven prominent Collingwood business men on the General Committee of the

Association. Membership was not complicated. From the 1903 brochure comes the following: *Any person, without regard to age, who has at any time resided for two years in the Town of Collingwood, or its immediate vicinity is entitled to membership in the Association, the fee for which has been fixed at the nominal sum of 50 cents.* The “immediate vicinity” included places like Nottawa, Batteaux and Duntroon.

The Official Programme began with a brief history of Collingwood. The style of writing is that of Fred T. Hodgson, local architect, eternal optimist and enthusiastic promoter of Collingwood, and one of the Vice-Presidents of the Old Boys’ Association. The opening paragraph reads, in part:

*“The town of Collingwood is a ‘winning’ sort of place, so busy and so beautiful, that the traveler within its borders not only carries away with him many pleasant recollections, but becomes a sort of missionary for the town by his constant flattering references to it. It is difficult to wholly believe that this now populous and thriving city was nothing but a dismal and impenetrable swamp in 1852, the haunt and home of the wild deer and the wolf, untracked and untrodden by the foot of man...”*

He eventually goes on to describe the changes wrought by the coming of the railway and the progress of the town up to the present [1903] time.

The 1903 Collingwood Old Boys Reunion was held on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, August 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, and 28<sup>th</sup> “Under the Patronage of the Pioneer Old Boys of Collingwood”. The names in this distinguished list of pioneers included Dr. A. R. Stephen, Fred T. Hodgson, William Watts, Thos. Long, George Moberly, Charles

Cameron, and Charles Macdonell, the town's oldest living resident, born in Kingston in 1826, and a fixture in Collingwood from 1851.

Wednesday, the first day, was devoted to the reception and registration of Old Boys at the Town Hall. All trains and boats were met by a Reception Committee which escorted the visitors to City Hall to register and receive their official button (in the Official Programme, Collingwood is referred to as "Our City of Collingwood" and the Town Hall as "City Hall"). The afternoon was free time to visit friends before the Official Reception in the Grand Opera House at 8 p.m. The evening included a "Grand Concert" until 10 p.m. after which there was a ball held in the Court Room, the music supplied by the Glionna Orchestra.

Under the headline "**HOME-COMERS ARE HERE, OLD BOYS' RETURN TO OLD TOWN—GIRLS ARE ALSO HERE--Town Gaily Decorated**", the *Bulletin* newspaper reported:

*"Almost every train this week has brought a contingent of both sexes and today we have in our midst many of the sons of the town who have been absent for years. They are all welcome. As the Bulletin goes to press the Old Boys are being officially received in the Grand Opera House by Mayor Hogg and President Birnie. A concert is also taking place and a grand ball is arranged to take place in the Temple [presumably the Temple Building of the Masonic and Oddfellows Lodges]. An overflow dance is also being provided in the hall of the Crescent Club and a smoking concert is being carried on in the Court Room."* [Note that the Official Programme and the *Bulletin* newspaper do not entirely agree on the events.]

A special train from Toronto, due to arrive at 11:40 a.m. on Thursday, brought not only more Old Boys and their friends, but also the 48<sup>th</sup>

Highlanders Band and a full Pipe Band, the musicians “in full costume” who then escorted the passengers the few blocks to City Hall. At 1:30 in the afternoon “...a procession will be formed at the Market Square, in which the council, the citizens, and the Old Boys will take part, and proceed to the Town Park [Central Park] by way of Hurontario and Hume streets. Major Bruce will be Marshall.” The grand parade assembled on the Market Square [now occupied by the eastern half of the Arena], and on Ste. Marie St. and Elgin St. Participants assembled in this order: Union Jack and Canadian Ensign flags, the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders Pipers, young boys with flags and banners, Officers of the Old Boys Association, Members of the Old Boys Association, Pioneer Old Boys in carriages, the Mayor and Council in carriages, Old Boys on horseback, and, lastly, private carriages.

When ready, the parade proceeded north on Ste. Marie St. to Huron St. then turned left toward Hurontario St. through an arch in the shape of an evergreen tree and then proceeded up Hurontario St. through another arch in front of the Town Hall which proclaimed “**WELCOME TO YE OLDE BOYS 1903. HAPPY TO MEET—SORRY TO PART—HOPING SOON TO MEET AGAIN**”. The procession continued up Hurontario to Hume St., and then across Hume St. to the Town Park. At the park, there were sporting events. It should suffice to describe the format of just one of the races to give an idea of the activities:

*3<sup>rd</sup> Race, Umbrella race—Rider to first stand to horse, light cigar, put up umbrella, mount and ride a quarter of a mile, dismount, close umbrella, uncork and drink a bottle of ginger ale, mount and ride back to starting point with umbrella up and cigar lighted. Entrance free. First prize, silk umbrella, value \$3.50; second prize, ebony clothes brush, value \$2.00.*

All ladies above the age of 18 years were eligible to enter the “Comfort Soap Race for Ladies”. This was overseen by officials sent from Toronto by Messrs. Pugsley, Dingman & Co., the manufacturers of Comfort Soap. Prizes included ladies’ watches in gold and silver, a sugar bowl and a purse. There was also a “Tug of War—Visiting Old Boys vs. Resident Old Boys. Twelve men on a side, best two out of three pulls. Prize: a box of cigars” (the cigar box was likely empty by the end of the day). During the afternoon the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders Band and the Pipe Band played at various times in the park.

On Thursday evening at 7:00 p.m. the Old Boys and their ladies were given an hour-and-a-half excursion around the bay on the Northern Navigation Co. steamer, *City of Collingwood*. This was followed at 8:30 p.m. by a “*grand illumination of the Town, a procession of illuminated boats, a free open air concert by the Highlanders Band, a Water Fete on the Bay, with splendid display of Fireworks*”. The Highlanders played on the slab dock at the foot of Maple St. during the fireworks which were fired off from a barge anchored off the slab dock.

On the final day, Friday, the morning was spent by the Old Boys visiting the various industries including the Shipyard, Cramp Steel, the Collingwood Meat Company, the Charlton Sawmill, the Imperial Steel and Wire Company and others. In the afternoon at 2:00 p.m. there was a Reunion Picnic at Victoria Park (an earlier name for Sunset Point). This included lacrosse and baseball for Old Boys and running and obstacle races and a tug of war for Old Girls. The final words printed in the Official Programme were, “*God Be With You Till We Meet Again*”.

In Volume II of the *Huron Institute Papers and Records*, published in 1914, David Williams, in the introductory remarks, speaks of

Collingwood Old Boys *“who have lived far removed from the town and who have spent much of their life and energy in building up other towns and cities, but who have never in sentiment been dis-associated from the place of their birth and early life”*. He then goes on to list over 380 names of individuals, with photos, sons of Collingwood born and/or raised there who had scattered far and wide across the continent, including the United States, to pursue their chosen fields of endeavour, and others who had remained in Collingwood to pursue their careers at home. Some of these names are repeated perhaps multiple times because they appear in various group photos including sportsmen, friends, staff members of T. Long & Bro., and of Telfer Brothers, Sunday School classes, soldiers, High School students, members of various fraternal organizations/secret societies, ship owners and shipbuilders.

Some of them who left before the Great Fire of September 1881 and returned in 1903 must have been amazed at the physical change and growth in the town compared to how they remembered it. The wooden buildings on the main street between First/Huron and Second/Simcoe Streets had been largely cleared away by the Great Fire and replaced with handsome brick structures of two and three stories. There was a splendid new Town Hall (albeit without a clock and bell in the tower until 1951) and attached Grand Opera House to marvel at, the town had waterworks and electricity, and the Collingwood Shipbuilding Co. Ltd. was now constructing large steel ships and launching them into a newly expanded drydock. None of the foregoing existed in 1881. By 1901 Collingwood had become a sizeable town with a population of 5,755, just over 1300 more souls than resided there in 1881 when many of the Old Boys were finishing their schooling at the good old C.C.I. *“in days of yore”*.



So important was Collingwood as a marine, business and shipping centre in connection with Chicago and the American west, that the United States maintained a Consulate in town for many years in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and into the 20<sup>th</sup>. A number of the Old Boys written up by David Williams in 1914 had left Collingwood, "The Chicago of the North", for the real Chicago in Illinois to pursue their careers, further strengthening the bond between Chicago and Collingwood.

Here is a sampling of the careers pursued by the Collingwood Old Boys as they fanned out across North America and as recorded by David Williams: Druggist; Real Estate Agent; Insurance Agent; Banking; Education; Theology; Court Bailiff; Mariner; Boat Building; Jeweller; Dentist; Immigration Agent; Land Commissioner; Commission Merchant; Collector of Customs; Designer of Grain Elevators; Lawyer; Judge; Surveyor; Civil Engineer; Heating Engineer; Contracting; Postmaster; Harbourmaster; Stock Broker; Lumbering; Medicine; Politics; Journalism; Hotel Management; Photography; Music; Architecture; Painting/Decorating; Ranching/Farming; Mining; Transportation; Theatricals; Advertising; Piano Manufacturing; Chief Librarian; Dominion Government Inspector of Harbour Improvements and Provincial Lieutenant-Governor. One of the briefest listings was for "John Foster, Gentleman of Leisure".

One thing common to a majority of Old Boys was their membership in secret societies/fraternal organizations including, but not limited to, the Masonic Lodge, the Oddfellows Lodge, the Loyal Orange Lodge, The Ancient Order of United Workmen, the Ancient Order of Foresters, the Knights of Pythias, the Elks, The Maccabees, Sons of Scotland and the Bald-Headed Society, also known as "The Baldies". This last one was "the most popular secret society of its time" according to David

Williams. The group photo of 1886-87 shows all the members with a full head of hair. They got their name when one of the members, Jack Fagan, got a haircut that was so closely cropped, they called him "Baldy". (A 20<sup>th</sup> Century equivalent of this would be Jerome Howard who had a full head of hair but had it shaved off and became known as "Curly" of the 3 Stooges.) The Baldies included two members of the Watts boat-building family, William Watts being the President (there was also a member of the Doherty boat-building family). Other well-known members included Captain George Playter and David Williams.

One Old Boy whose legacy in Collingwood continues today at C.C.I. was William Williams, the Head Master/Principal of Collingwood Collegiate Institute from 1873 to 1901 after which he turned his attention to the *Bulletin* newspaper. Speaking of his father's legacy as an educator, David Williams stated in 1914, "... throughout the land the graduates of the school are found in all the professions and in every walk of life". This validated a statement made in the very first issue of *Collegiate Institute Times*, in December 1886: "*The attendance is steadily increasing, being this year 305. This shows the growing popularity of the school. Students, preferring this Institute to all others, come from all parts of the Province, and from the Provinces of Quebec and Manitoba. More teachers, (if necessary) will be engaged, to suit the requirements of the increasing attendance. No pains will be spared to carry on the work of the school efficiently*". The 1886 report went on to say, "...Collingwood stands first in the Province. We are happy to be in a position to present such a flattering report to our students and friends....Careful teaching and energetic work, combined with a good system are the great factors of success in our school". There is a direct link between the excellence

of the teaching staff at C.C.I. in the 1880s and the success stories of the Old Boys written up by David Williams in 1914.

Fans of Collingwood history will recognize some of the more familiar family surnames of some of the Old Boys. Collingwood's first Mayor in 1858 was W. B. Hamilton. His son, Heber J. Hamilton, B.A., D.D., became the Anglican Bishop of Japan. E. R. Carpenter, famous Collingwood druggist, had a son, H. S. Carpenter C. E., who was a Civil Engineer and Land Surveyor in Regina. Another son of E. R. Carpenter, E. M. Carpenter, was a druggist and real estate entrepreneur in Edmonton.

One of the greatest claims to fame for a son of Collingwood was the success of Daniel H. McMillan, an Old Boy whose military career in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century had included the Fenian Raids of 1866 and the two Riel Rebellions of 1870 and 1885. In the business world he engaged in the grain business and his name was painted on many wooden grain elevators across the prairies. In 1900 he was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba and, in this capacity he was the Honourary President of the Collingwood Old Boys Association, his official title being, "The Honourable Sir Daniel H. McMillan, K. C. M. G.", the initials standing for "Knight Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George", a British order of chivalry.

The family name Watts is well-known in Collingwood for their involvement in wooden boat building for nearly one hundred years and the name Trott is well-known for that family's furniture and undertaking business. William Watts, Jr. was a son of Collingwood's pioneer wooden boat builder William Watts, Sr. Edward Trott was part of the famous Trott family of furniture makers. These two men heard

the call of the West in 1884 and found their way to Port Arthur (today's Thunder Bay) on Lake Superior. For three years they lived there building boats and then crossed the rest of the continent to Vancouver where they arrived in late 1888 and soon formed the Watts & Trott Boat Building Company. They had all the work they could handle. The famous "Collingwood Skiff" design was taken up by the west coast salmon fishery. When Trott withdrew to pursue other ventures in Calgary, William Watts continued on his own account and eventually the business became the Vancouver Shipyards constructing work boats, yachts and other pleasure boats, life boats, tugs, etc. This Collingwood old boy lived out his life on the Pacific Coast.

One of the sons of Dr. A. R. Stephen, "Collingwood's grand old man", was a steamer Captain on the upper Great Lakes, another was a doctor on Manitoulin Island, and another was a banker.

There are numerous listings for Collingwood men connected with the Telfer family business and with T. Long & Bro.—representatives and "travellers" who covered the western provinces for the businesses in Collingwood.

David Williams did not write about the father of every Old Boy in the *Huron Institute Papers and Records*. One example, to which I have a direct family connection, was my great-uncle Henry Byrne O'Brien (1876-1949), known as "H. B. O'Brien", the first-born son of my great-grandfather R. W. O'Brien. From the age of 16 H. B. was a business partner with his father (R. W. O'Brien & Son) but in 1908 he turned his back on the family business (furs, gentlemen's furnishings and millinery), and, apparently the family as well, and went out on his own and into the Real Estate and Insurance business which he conducted on

Hurontario St. H. B. O'Brien was the "black sheep of the O'Brien family", but an Old Boy nonetheless. There wasn't the slightest mention by David Williams of how H. B. O'Brien got his start in the business world with his well-known father.

Not all Collingwood Old Boys went west; success and fortune were found in other directions as well. The Best Brothers, Thomas H. and David M., were in business on the east side of Hurontario St. at the time of the Great Fire of September 1881. They were among the many merchants located in wooden buildings that were destroyed in the fire. The loss to their "Gents' Furnishings" business was \$8000.00 but their insurance coverage was only \$2000.00. Thomas subsequently worked for E. Fair & Co. The Best Brothers appear to have stayed in Collingwood for about another decade before changing direction and heading south to Toronto. There, in 1891, Thomas Best founded The Ontario Publishing Company Ltd. which produced *The Canadian Magazine Monthly*, a publication of Politics, Art, Science and Literature. He occupied the positions of Director and Business Manager for the magazine. His brother David left for Toronto in 1892 and, with a business partner, founded the Mendelssohn Piano Co. He withdrew from the piano factory in 1897 and founded D. M. Best & Co., a manufacturer of piano hammers and bass strings and supplier of piano parts to the industry. The firm was still in business in the 1970's (I was one of its customers) when it was acquired by the Heintzman Piano Co.

## **1938**

Unlike the 1903 Old Boys' Reunion which was held at a time when Collingwood was still a boom town with its population and prosperity steadily increasing, the 1938 Reunion came during the decade of the

Great Depression when, as stated by John Sewell in his Five Lectures on the history of Collingwood, the population had stagnated and the town's economy "was at a standstill". No one thought of Collingwood as "The Chicago of the North" anymore. Pioneer Old Boy Fred T. Hodgson (1832-1919) had moved to the area in 1848 when the site of what would become Collingwood was still a "dismal, impenetrable swamp" and was named the "Hen & Chickens Harbour". Hodgson had lived to see the town begin to decline in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, contradicting his heady growth prediction of 1894 (see below) and, sadly, this coincided with his own decline. According to his 1919 death registration, he had suffered senile decline for 14 years prior to his death. The sad reality of Collingwood in 1938 was a small town with its economy at a standstill and a town in which many property owners did not have the funds to pay their property taxes. This, in turn, had a negative effect on the town treasury.

Collingwood had reached a peak in population in the 1911 Census: 7090 souls. A mere ten years later it had dropped to 5882, barely changed from the 5775 level of 1901. By 1931 with the Great Depression in full swing, the population had indeed stagnated to 5809, virtually the same level of 1921 (5882). The population would not increase until the demand for wartime workers in the early 1940's brought an influx of new people to town. Contrast these figures with the words of Fred T. Hodgson, the eternal optimist mentioned earlier, who said in his 1894 Board of Trade Annual Report for the year 1893:

*"...it does not require any extraordinary mental acumen to feel convinced that sooner or later the town must become a place of considerable importance and it is safe to say that in all human probability, and by a course of natural development, the boy is now*

*going to school who will see the census of this town figure up to around 100,000 inhabitants". [!]*

The 1938 event was sponsored by the Collingwood Progress Club, founded in April 1937. John Sewell states, *"The pain of the Depression resulted in social contraction. The attempt to break out of the paralysis caused by the economic depression was made by a service organization called the Collingwood Progress Club. It initiated a relatively simple program to instil confidence and pride—assigning street numbers to the residences and businesses in town and erecting street signs."* For those wondering how residents received their mail without house numbers prior to this event, this is explained by the fact that home delivery of mail in Collingwood actually did not begin until August 1950. Prior to that date, everyone picked up their mail at the Post Office in the Federal Building.

By the time of the 1938 Old Boys'—Girls' Reunion, many of those documented by David Williams in 1914 had lived out their days and a new roster of younger individuals was on hand for another reunion.

The Reunion was held on Civic Holiday Weekend, Saturday, July 30<sup>th</sup> to Wednesday, August 3<sup>rd</sup>. On the Saturday, a special train from Toronto arrived. Registration for Old Boys and Girls took place at the Y. M. C. A. on Third St. (later known as "The Hood", home to the Sea Cadets, and now an apartment building). The Y. M. C. A. served as Reunion Headquarters. On Saturday evening there was a Civic Reception at 9 p.m. including a Floor Show and a Street Dance.

The Official Programme listed "Daily Features" for this 5-day event: Sim's Midway "Canada's Greatest", and Round and Square Dancing every night on a special dance floor erected on Hurontario St. with

music by Russ Creighton's Famous Dance Band ("with loud speaking equipment"). There were daily aerial acrobatic acts and a floor show, band concerts (with nine bands) and parades. On Thursday, July 21, 1938, a display ad in the *Enterprise-Bulletin* stated:

*"OLD BOY'S REUNION July 30<sup>th</sup> To August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1938 ALL AVAILABLE ACCOMMODATION WILL BE REQUIRED FOR OUR VISITORS. If you have not already registered your available accommodation, please call or telephone, Headquarters, Y. M. C. A. Building, telephone 140. Don't forget to have your friends register at Headquarters on arrival in town. We appreciate your co-operation. COLLINGWOOD PROGRESS CLUB."*

On the Thursday following the Reunion, the *Enterprise-Bulletin* featured a photo by local photographer D. O. Deacon taken from a rooftop at the south-west corner of Hurontario & 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets looking north toward the Town Hall. Titled "*HURONTARIO ST. IN RE-UNION ATTIRE*", the caption stated: "*The above is a view of Hurontario Street as it appeared during Old Home Week. Thousands passed up and down the mid-way during the celebration which lasted five days.*"

Some of the returning Old Boys and Old Girls were young enough to have attended the original 1874/79 C.C.I. before it burned down in 1923. They would have been amazed at the 1925 building which took its place on Hume St. Perhaps some of the band concerts took place in its auditorium to the delight and amazement of those who had attended the old school. The Grand Opera House behind the Town Hall may also have been the scene of some of the events. One thing that had not changed since the 1903 Reunion, however, was the clock tower on the Town Hall. In 1938 it was still without a clock and bell and



would continue so for another 13 years until a private citizen provided the funds for them.

Considering the year of 1938, the Great Depression was still in effect. In a gratifying *temporary* spurt of activity, the Collingwood Shipyard had launched a new ship, *H. M. C. S. Fundy*, a Minesweeper, on June 19<sup>th</sup> of that year, the first new ship built in the Yard since 1932. A second ship, the oil tanker *Imperial* was under construction for the Imperial Oil Company on the east building berth at the foot of St. Paul St. and would be launched on September 24<sup>th</sup> of the same year. One major change in the harbour that the returning Old Boys noticed in 1938 was the absence of the landmark wooden Grand Trunk grain elevator which had been demolished in 1937. Replacing it at the outer edge of the harbour was the new, concrete, two million bushel-capacity Collingwood Terminals elevator, however, the dust bowl conditions of the drought on the prairies had ensured that the new elevator did little business. Collingwood's once-busy harbour was a shadow of its former self for much of the 1930's.

The Collingwood Progress Club, in sponsoring this Old Boys-Old Girls Reunion, was celebrating a measure of progress, the Shipyard being the mainstay in the economy of the town. The keel for the Minesweeper was laid in January 1938 and work for at least some Shipyard employees continued right through to late November when the oil tanker departed on her maiden voyage. The optimism created by this spurt of activity for the year 1938 would not continue. No ships were built in 1939, but with war clouds fast forming over Europe, the economic activity in Collingwood would soon go into overdrive. In March 1940 the Shipyard would lay the keel for the first of many

Corvettes for the war effort and the Clyde Aircraft factory would also be going flat out making airplane parts and other war supplies.

The years of the Great Depression were hard for Collingwood's merchants and that included my grandfather R. J. Hewson and his brother-in-law Robert Reginald O'Brien in their men's clothing business "O'Brien & Hewson" at 69 Hurontario St. There were few local men ordering new suits if they didn't have money for necessities like bread and milk and taxes in those days. In 1938 when Reginald O'Brien had little more than eight months to live, the business partners placed a display ad in the booklet for the Old Boys'—Old Girls' Reunion advertising their exclusive dealership for Tip Top Tailors:

*"Hello There! Drop in! We're glad to see you. And by the way—have you seen the new Tropical Worsted Suits yet? For eye-catching smartness and up-to-the-minute style they cannot be beaten. Every Tip Top suit is individually hand-cut and tailored to your personal measurements. A full range of patterns and colours and famous British Woolens. Let us take your measurements and send your suit to your home. You'll never get more for your money than you will at O'BRIEN & HEWSON 69 Hurontario Street, Exclusive dealers for Tip Top Tailors Clothes."*

There are the combined elements of desperation and hope in this advertisement, the hope being that at least some of the returning Old Boys who had become successful and had cash to spare might be measured for a new suit. The reality was that business remained poor. In March 1939, Reginald O'Brien died at the young age of 53 leaving no heirs. In October of that year, The Town of Collingwood would assume ownership of the Hurontario St. building for back taxes and this

situation would not be reversed until 1941 when business picked up due to the war. It is a high irony that prosperity returned to Collingwood because of the need to go to war.

The Great Depression notwithstanding, the 1938 Reunion was a time to renew old acquaintances and make new ones. The many entertainments planned helped people to take their minds off the hard times of the 1930's, if even for just a few days, and the event *was* a general economic boost to the town of Collingwood. In just 13 more months the stark reality and hardship of six long years of war and its sacrifices would cast its gloom.

***David Vuckson, a Collingwood "Old Boy", heard the Call of the West in the mid 1970's, about a hundred years after some of the people in this story heard it. He 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.***