

*THE MERCURY RISING*  
JAMES INNES: THE "HONESTY OF PURPOSE AND SOUND JUDGEMENT"  
OF A VICTORIAN JOURNALIST

A Thesis  
Presented to  
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by  
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## ABSTRACT

### *The Mercury Rising.*

James Innes: The “honesty of purpose and sound judgement” of a Victorian journalist.

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This thesis is an investigation of the life of James Innes and the significant impact he had on the city of Guelph during the Victorian era. More broadly it is an attempt to show that provincial journalists had an important role to play in the flowering of liberal thought in Canada. It is not, nor does it pretend to be, any sort of comprehensive examination of the development of Canada's liberal society.

I argue that Innes, and his kind, were not necessarily opinion leaders. Rather they were messengers bringing word of shifts in ideas and values to the Ontario hinterland. The ideas came most immediately from Toronto and Montreal but originated in the greater metropolitan centres of Britain and the United States. But they were filtered and shaped for local consumption by the small-city editor/publishers.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>A Note .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
(An outline of my thesis and an overview of what this paper contains)	
- Thesis	3
- Innes' Remarkable Career	5
- His Contemporaries: Josiah Blackburn and Others	9
- Sources	16
<b>Chapter One                      Starting Out .....</b>	<b>20</b>
(A review of Innes' childhood, his arrival in Canada, his first years in Guelph and his establishment as a community figure)	
- Politics Be Damned: The Unlikely Friendship of James Innes and George Pirie	22
- Innes' First Years	26
- Innes Arrives in Guelph	30
- Expansion and Change	33
- The School of Agriculture and the Scandal	37
- Innes' Liberalism and George Brown	43
<b>Chapter Two                      Success and Consolidation .....</b>	<b>48</b>
(Innes becomes fully established in Guelph)	
- Patronage, The Press Association and Macdonald's Libel Action	57
- <i>The Mercury</i> and the New Journalism	69
- Leading Opinion and the Idea of Progress	72
- Anti-Unionism	75
<b>Chapter Three                    The Member for South Wellington .....</b>	<b>78</b>
(Innes' Parliamentary career)	
- The Dominion Life Assurance Company	84
- The Final Campaign and Retirement	86
<b>Chapter Four                      Conclusion .....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Works Cited .....</b>	<b>96</b>

## A Note

A few days after James Innes died in the summer of 1903, the Guelph and Ontario Investment and Savings Society which he served for many years as a director marked his passage. His fellow directors resolved to attend Innes' funeral as a group and they applauded their former colleague who "in his intercourses with us and the Shareholders generally...endeared himself to all by his modest and kindly unassuming manner, by his honesty of purpose and sound judgement."<sup>1</sup> Obviously an obituary notice in a minute book is unlikely to provide a very searching examination of a man's life, and Innes as both a self-made man and a veteran of the political wars had some sharp edges. But in describing the man who built *The Mercury*, and made it prosper, as a person of "honesty of purpose and sound judgement" the directors provided perhaps as concise and illuminating an assessment of Innes as posterity could wish.

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<sup>1</sup> Minute Book, Guelph and Ontario Investment and Savings Society, Vol. 6, pp. 77-78, July 20, 1903. Guelph Public Library.

## Introduction

James Innes and his kind are no more.

The independent small-city newspaper owner and editor has been swept aside by technology and economics. Newspapers, even those as small and inconsequential as *The Mercury* are now owned by conglomerates, in the case of *The Mercury* by Conrad Black's gigantic Hollinger Inc. Today, the person behind the publisher or editor's desk is merely an employee, bending not so much to the demands of local readers, as to the wishes of the profit-driven, big-city managers usually in Toronto.

Gone are the community-centered journalists who once owned and ebulliently operated their small, precariously-financed publications, usually in noisy rivalry with a competitor. They have vanished from Ontario and Canadian society. Their papers were once central instruments in boosting civic self-confidence in communities barely a generation away from the axe of the pioneer, communities convinced they must prosper or die in the race for railways, industry and government largess.

In the last half of the nineteenth century there were hundreds of newspapermen<sup>1</sup> much like Innes all over southern Ontario.<sup>2</sup> Owners and masters of their own papers,

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<sup>1</sup> Sara McLagan, the second wife of John McLagan, Innes' partner at *The Mercury* from 1862 to 1869, has been called "the first female newspaper publisher in Canada". (*Canadian Woman Studies*, Fall 1986, p. 46). She had no link to *The Mercury*, but became owner of the *Vancouver World* on the death of her husband in 1900. However, an earlier example of female ownership can be found. In 1834 Elizabeth Thomson took over the *Kingston Herald* after her husband, Hugh C. Thomson, died "becoming the first woman in the province to publish a newspaper...". (*Dictionary of Canadian Biography Vol. VI*, p. 774). Women began formally entering Canadian newsrooms in the 1880s, normally as writers of "feminine" columns. Important early female journalists in Canada include Sara Jeanette Duncan, Ottawa correspondent for the *Montreal Star*, E. Cora Hind agricultural specialist for the *Winnipeg Free Press* and the *Toronto Mail's* Kathleen "Kit" Coleman, who expanded her "feminine" role to cover the Spanish-American War and the San Francisco earthquake. See Barbara Freeman's *Kit's Kingdom*, or a more popular treatment, *Kit Coleman, Queen of Hearts* by Ted Ferguson.

<sup>2</sup> For 1891, McKim's *Canadian Newspaper Directory* (1892) lists 496 papers in Ontario, among them 42 dailies, 5 semi-weeklies and 365 weeklies. The balance were monthlies and one quarterly. p. 59

they were men of local significance and clout, but beyond their communities they were usually unknown and unheralded. The local nature of their careers means their lives and contribution remain largely unexamined by scholars. I propose to explore the life of James Innes in the belief he is an ideal prism through which to view this whole ignored class of small-city editor/publishers.

### **THESIS - THE NEWSPAPER PROMOTION OF PROGRESS**

This essay is not a lament for the passing of the editor/publisher, nor is it based on any belief that the past was somehow more pleasing than the present. My central thesis is that Innes and his newspaper contemporaries played an important role in bringing “progress” to small-city Ontario.

In spite of spending a great deal of time in often petty political battles, the small-city editor/publishers devoted their lives and much of their energies to achieving what they unquestioningly believed was the advancement of their civilization. As a result, industrial expansion, railway and communications expansion, the expansion of social expectations, the intellectual expansion created by the popular adoption of evolution and science, and the expansion of the country and the Empire all became rolled into one “progressive” philosophy. It was a philosophy that was to be disappointed in some ways with the decline of Imperial Britain, and the centralization of industry. But it was a philosophy, I will nevertheless argue, that contributed directly to the prosperous bourgeois society which predominates in most of southern Ontario today.

Of course, as builders and capitalists the motives of the small-city editor/publishers were not entirely unselfish. Like his contemporaries, Innes saw that the success of his city and his personal success, were inextricably bound together.<sup>3</sup> The equation was obvious: bigger more prosperous cities equalled more readers, more advertisers and thus bigger profits. The fortunes of editor/publishers depended on their cities flourishing, and the shortest route to civic success was “growth”. The absolute need for growth was the orthodox wisdom among the industrial-business elite of which Innes and the other editors were a highly visible part. But a flourishing Victorian city required more than an increase in industrial plants, it also demanded progress in its institutions, its facilities and what came to be known as its social welfare. It was newspapers, it has been argued, which “popularized the idea of reform long before intellectuals discovered urban problems”<sup>4</sup>. Thus men preoccupied with flinty devotion to increasing their capital were, in the remarkable paradox of their age, similarly devoted to improving their communities and their societies. As the historian W.L. Morton so eloquently put it in an essay on Victorian Canada, and the “doers” that occupied it:

With Mill on their lips, they had moved into the world of Marx: insisting on individual freedom, they had brought forth a society of which co-operation was the essence. Such was the Victorian dialectic in Canada as elsewhere, that man freed would forge himself new bonds of social obligation.<sup>5</sup>

These “bonds of social obligation”, manifest so intensely in Innes, resulted in much of rural southern Ontario developing in the space of fifty years from a crude and remote hinterland

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<sup>3</sup> Leo Johnson, “Ideology and Political Economy in Urban Growth: Guelph 1827-1927”, *Shaping the Urban Landscape*, (eds.) Gilbert Stelter and Alan Artibise

<sup>4</sup> Paul Rutherford, “Urban Reform and Municipal Government”, *The Canadian City* (eds) Gilbert Stelter and Alan Artibise, p. 436

<sup>5</sup> W.L.Morton, “Victorian Canada”, *The Shield of Achilles*, p. 333.

of Toronto into a society where even small cities such as Guelph developed most of the institutions of Victorian life. It is a legacy which, though not universally acknowledged or appreciated, is evident in Guelph today.

### **INNES' REMARKABLE CAREER**

Innes was directly associated with *The Guelph Mercury* for 36 years, from 1862 to 1898, a remarkable stretch even by the standards of the day. Just before he sold the paper in 1898 at the age of 65 he described himself flatteringly as “the oldest active journalist in Ontario”<sup>6</sup>. Innes’ newspaper career was a successful one, and as his business fortunes rose so did his remarkable community involvement.

In 1865 Innes was elected to Guelph’s Board of School Trustees. He served on the board for 17 years becoming chairman in 1882.<sup>7</sup> During his time on the board the Central School was built (1875) and the High School re-built (1879), in addition, William Tytler, a teacher and principal who became one of the most influential men in early Guelph education, was hired.<sup>8</sup> In 1868, Innes became a charter member of the new Chalmers Presbyterian Church.<sup>9</sup> It was created after a division arose within the congregation of the established Knox’s Church (later Knox Presbyterian Church). He was also prepared to take a commercial risk in his desire to see advancement and became a founding director of the Guelph Light and Power Company. Though he never took a position on the board of

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<sup>6</sup> Laurier Papers. In a Dec. 4, 1897 letter to Sir Wilfrid Laurier Innes writes he is “now the oldest active journalist in Ontario - having been 43 years in harness - all strong on the Liberal side.” Exactly the same phrase, “...now the oldest active journalist in Ont.” appears in Innes’ entry in *The Canadian Men and Women of The Time*, 1898 edition, “Innes, James” p. 493. A sign the entry was written by Innes, himself.

<sup>7</sup> Greta M. Shutt, *The High Schools of Guelph*, p. 114

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 28-29

<sup>9</sup> Rev. D.G.Paton, *Centennial History, Chalmers Church, Guelph, Ontario*, p. 2

the General Hospital, he was a strong supporter of the institution. In 1872 he was pushing editorially for its creation, endorsing a report on the hospital project as “eminently satisfactory” and urging a speedy start to construction so that after a number of false starts “the people of this town will have the satisfaction of seeing an Hospital in full operation in their midst.”<sup>10</sup> A general hospital funded largely from individual donations was finally opened in 1875.<sup>11</sup> After a long association with Guelph’s St. Andrew’s Society, in which he held numerous executive positions, he was elected president in 1873. In 1876 Innes was named president of the Farmers’ and Mechanics’ Institute and later served on several occasions as a director. In the same year he became a founding director of the Guelph and Ontario Investment and Savings Society and continued as a director until his death. In 1877, after having served on the executive for several years, he was elected president of the Canadian Press Association and brought the association’s annual convention to Guelph the following year. In 1881 Innes become vice-president of The Speed Skating Rink Co.<sup>12</sup> The next year he was elected to Parliament as the Liberal<sup>13</sup> M.P. for South Wellington. He was re-elected twice and held the seat for 14 years. In 1883 he became a member of the Board of Management of the Guelph Library Board which, along with Toronto, established in that year the first free lending libraries in the province.<sup>14</sup> In 1884 he was an incorporator of the Guelph Junction Railway, moving the incorporation through the House

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<sup>10</sup> *The Guelph Weekly Mercury*, Nov. 7, 1872 p. 2

<sup>11</sup> H. Kirkby and N. Cosyn, *A Century of Care and Concern*, pp. 8-9

<sup>12</sup> Leo Johnson, *History of Guelph, 1827-1927*, p. 237

<sup>13</sup> Throughout this paper I will use the terms Liberal and Reform interchangeably, as they were used in Innes’ day. By the twentieth century the term Reform had pretty well died out as a synonym for the Liberal Party. Ironically enough the name has resurfaced in Preston Manning’s illiberal Reform Party.

<sup>14</sup> Lorne Bruce, *Free Books for All*, p. 78

of Commons.<sup>15</sup> His interests even extended to curling. In 1888, the November 28 minutes of Guelph's Union Curling Club note that "...J.P. Innis [*sic*] Esq. M.P....[is] offering a medal to be played for between the Guelph Union and Royal City Clubs".<sup>16</sup> In 1889 he became a director of The Dominion Life Assurance Company and in 1893 was elected president of the Waterloo-based company, a post he retained for ten years until his death.<sup>17</sup> He was also a member of Guelph's Board of Trade and through his paper actively supported efforts to bring industry to the city. His civic mindedness even extended to the grave. In his will, he left \$200 toward the debt of the Guelph General Hospital, and \$200 more to paying down the mortgage on Chalmers Church.<sup>18</sup>

Innes' career spanned a period of extraordinary development in Canadian newspapers. It was a period marked by dramatic technological advances in printing and in newsprint, advances which allowed more papers to be printed, more quickly and more cheaply than ever before. While Innes was associated with *The Mercury*, it moved from being printed on a Washington hand press, through a horse-powered press, a steam-powered press and finally in 1893<sup>19</sup> to an electrically-driven Duplex Press and a Rodgers Typograph.<sup>20</sup> The new presses changed the way papers looked, though change was more gradual in "quality" papers such as *The Globe* and in papers that emulated it, such as *The Mercury*. But even in *The Mercury*, stories became shorter and headlines bigger, there

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<sup>15</sup> *Debates of the House of Commons*, Vol XV. 1st Reading p.198; 2nd Reading p. 542; 3rd and Final Reading p. 1035

<sup>16</sup> Stewart Brown, *Guelph Curling Club 150 Years*, p. 7

<sup>17</sup> *four score years 1889-1969*, a brief corporate history, no author. p. 12

<sup>18</sup> The Will of James Innes, entered at the County of Wellington Registry Office. 3 April, 1902 p. 3

<sup>19</sup> O.R.Wallace, "Transition From Hand to Machine Typesetting", *The Mercury*, Centenary Edition, July 20, 1927 "About this same date [1893] The Mercury changed from steam power to electric power...electric lights also took the place of gas lights." p. 100

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p 97 and The Will of James Innes, April 3, 1902

were more pages, more display advertisements and around the turn of the century newspapers slowly began to use photographs.<sup>21</sup> It was a period of growth fueled by widespread literacy and the development of broad middle and working classes with the leisure to read and the gas and electric lights to assist them. It was “The Golden Age of the Press” when “...almost unchallenged by other media, the press...turned itself into a superlative vehicle of information and persuasion”.<sup>22</sup> It was a crucial time in the development of the modern newspaper, a “Victorian Zenith”, which saw the “...creation of the modern newspaper and thus the creation of what apologists sometimes call ‘the daily miracle’ ”.<sup>23</sup>

For more than 40 years, James Innes helped create that daily miracle in Guelph. Small-city editor/publishers, such as Innes, saw themselves as much more than simply purveyors of information and printing services to their communities. In Innes’ case, his role spread far beyond *The Mercury* office, as he worked with extraordinary energy and dedication to bring all the marvels of nineteenth century invention and enterprise to Guelph. He consistently urged “advancement” on the city through his newspaper, and not just industrial advancement but social advancement as well. In the first days of 1868, in an editorial page meditation on the year just past, Innes wrote in *The Mercury*:

...so intimate is the connection between the individual and society that no act of his fails to exert an influence more or less extensive for good or evil. As the year wanes it might be a beneficial exercise for each to pause for awhile and ask himself how he has played his part in that scene of the great drama of life on which the

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<sup>21</sup> Wilfred Kesterton, *A History of Journalism in Canada*, pp. 50-54/Paul Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority*, pp 149-155. *The Mercury* did not start using photographs regularly until 1906, and even then the pictures were usually studio portraits. Though in special editions, such as the Trade Edition of June 23, 1894 photographs do appear.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Rutherford, *The Making of the Canadian Media*, p. 38. Rutherford’s “Golden Age” stretches for 70 years from 1867 to 1937.

<sup>23</sup> Douglas Fetherling, *The Rise of the Canadian Newspaper*, p. 59. He puts the “Victorian Zenith” between 1872 and 1900.

curtain has just fallen, how he has performed his duty to himself, to society, to his country, to his God.<sup>24</sup>

These words show Innes' strong sense of community and the agreeable interdependence he saw between the individual and society. These musings displayed the philosophical framework on which Innes would construct his large public role in Guelph.

### **HIS CONTEMPORARIES: JOSIAH BLACKBURN AND OTHERS**

To give Innes' role some context, consider the civic involvement of some of his contemporaries. It is perhaps worthwhile to look most closely at a man who can be directly compared to Innes, Josiah Blackburn of *The London Free Press*. Blackburn, a 29-year-old English immigrant acquired *The Canadian Free Press*, as it was then, on January 1, 1853, for \$500.<sup>25</sup> He operated the paper as a weekly until 1855 when he went daily creating *The London Free Press and Daily Western Advertiser*, the weekly version of the paper continued as *The Canadian Free Press* into the 1880s.<sup>26</sup> *The London Free Press* was a Reform paper and it faced three Conservative rivals, rivals that were either weeklies or semi-weeklies. According to a popular history of the paper, *The Free Press* quickly became "an undoubted political and financial success..."<sup>27</sup>

In the 1857-58 election Blackburn ran as a Reform candidate in Middlesex East, but lost. The loss was the beginning of his drift away from the Reform party. By the end of 1858 he was openly questioning the leadership of George Brown.<sup>28</sup> Over the next

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<sup>24</sup> *The Mercury*, Jan 2, 1868 p.2

<sup>25</sup> Charles Bruce, *News and the Southams*, p. 8

<sup>26</sup> Michael Nolan, *A Man for All Media*, p. 6

<sup>27</sup> Orlo Miller, *A Century of Western Ontario*, p. 93

<sup>28</sup> Elwood H. Jones (contributor), *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Vol XI*, "Blackburn, Josiah" p. 81

decade he abandoned the Brownite faction of Reform and finally abandoned the Reform Party altogether. By 1867 he had turned *The Free Press* into a Conservative organ and an influential Tory voice in southwestern Ontario.

The paper flourished because of Blackburn's journalistic and entrepreneurial flair. Like most newspaper publishers, he distributed the daily edition in the city and a weekly country edition in the surrounding farm districts. But Blackburn went further, he also took control of a nearby weekly *The Ingersoll Chronicle* in which much of the material in *The Free Press* was reprinted.<sup>29</sup> It was the start of a corporate expansion that would lead many years later to the creation of the Blackburn Group Inc.. At its height, in the early 1990s, the company would control not only *The Free Press* but a television station, eight radio stations, 25 weekly *Pennysaver* shopping guides and a North American-wide on-line database.<sup>30</sup> The company was finally sold to Sun Media Corp., the publishers of *The Toronto Sun* in 1997.<sup>31</sup>

The development of this regional media giant was based on innovations such as the acquisition of the Ingersoll paper and on Blackburn's introduction to London of one-page "extras". He issued the first in 1855 when British and French forces captured Sebastopol, and he gave it out free to both subscribers and non-subscribers. The policy of giving out free extras, continued through the 1850s and 1860s and, according to Blackburn's biographer, "won for the paper a host of friends and admirers."<sup>32</sup> In 1866 Blackburn took

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<sup>29</sup> Orlo Miller, *A Century of Western Ontario*, p. 96

<sup>30</sup> Casey Mahood, "Blackburn selling media assets", *The Globe and Mail*, p. B1, January 30, 1997. In the story, Blackburn's chairman, Bruce Pearson says the company is up for sale because: "...as we looked out into the future, the opportunities for an independent are more and more risky".

<sup>31</sup> Casey Mahood, "Sun to buy Blackburn papers", *The Globe and Mail*, Mar. 14, 1997 p. B1

<sup>32</sup> Orlo Miller, *A Century of Western Ontario*, p. 93

the remarkable step for a small-city paper of sending a correspondent, Malcolm Bremner, to cover the Fenian raids.<sup>33</sup> There was enormous interest in the raids in London as many local men were sent to the front. London's militia units included 10 printers and compositors from *The Free Press*. Among those printers were two ambitious brothers, William and Richard Southam. William would later found the Southam newspaper empire.<sup>34</sup>

Blackburn's acumen was recognized by Conservative Party fixers, and in 1862 he went to Quebec City to help manage a struggling party paper the *Quebec Mercury*, which he turned into a daily the next year. He resigned in 1864 with the defeat of the government. Blackburn was called on again in 1872, this time by Sir John A Macdonald to help launch the *Mail* in Toronto. The paper was designed to be a Tory rival to George Brown's pervasive, powerful and Liberal *Globe*.

Blackburn stayed with the *Mail* for almost a year-and-a-half struggling to make it viable.<sup>35</sup> But in the end he returned to London to take up his interests there. Later, Blackburn was rewarded for his devotion to the Conservatives by being appointed in 1880 to the patronage position of census commissioner for Western Ontario and in 1884 he was named a commissioner of the federal printing bureau at Ottawa.

Innes, of course, viewed Blackburn as a powerful political rival though, given the distance between their cities, not as a commercial one. In the spring of 1878, Innes wrote in what is now a rather obscure but nonetheless interesting note to his friend, the prominent and powerful Elora Liberal, Charles Clarke, that:

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p.160

<sup>34</sup> Charles Bruce, *News and the Southams*, p. 8

<sup>35</sup> Elwood H. Jones, (contributor), *Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol XI*, p. 82

I have sent Cameron [John Cameron editor of *The (London) Advertiser*, 1863-1883 and later editor of *The Globe* <sup>36</sup>] a note about the Blackburn business. I have some recollection of Blackburn's name being mixed up with the Foote [?] business....[it is] of no special interest, none but to Cameron who can have a dig at Blackburn.<sup>37</sup>

Though Blackburn laid the foundations of a substantial regional media empire, he did not gain the same financial success as James Innes. When Blackburn died in 1890, thirteen years before Innes, he left an estate totalling \$55,000<sup>38</sup> less than half the \$125,000<sup>39</sup> Innes would leave his heirs.

Blackburn's influence in Western Ontario was broad and important but even his admirers admit he was not a popular public figure:

For one thing he was not "approachable" and for another he had very definite views on a wide variety of subjects and at no time hesitated to proclaim them....Indeed, far from being popular he was at times, and with some people, decidedly unpopular. On several occasions he was threatened and even chased by political opponents and on one occasion, in the 1860's, following his secession from the Clear Grits, he was struck down from behind by a malcontent as he was ascending the steps of the London post office.<sup>40</sup>

Such were the realities of political debate in small-city Victorian Canada. But while Blackburn may never have been popular he played a large role in improving his community, though his involvement was never as pervasive as that of Innes. He was a backer of the London Musical Union, the Mechanics' Institute, the London Board of Trade and a strong supporter of efforts to bring a branch of the provincial university to his

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<sup>36</sup> John Willison, *Reminiscences, Political and Personal*, p. 66

<sup>37</sup> Clarke Papers. Innes to Charles Clarke, April 11, 1878.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Nolan, *Walter J. Blackburn, A Man For All Media*, p. 11

<sup>39</sup> Debra Nash-Chambers, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol XIII* p. 498

<sup>40</sup> Orlo Miller, *A Century of Western Ontario*, p. 223

city.<sup>41</sup> Blackburn was also a founding member of the Canadian Press Association in 1860.<sup>42</sup>

Blackburn placed a definite mark on his city. He established a valuable sense of regional independence, more so than Innes did, not only because London is more distant from Toronto than Guelph, but also because unlike the Liberal press, Blackburn did not labour under the dominance of a single overwhelming party paper such as *The Globe*. The Liberal stalwart, Sir Richard Cartwright contended some faithful party supporters “especially among the Scotch settlers...hardly read anything except their *Globe* and their Bible”<sup>43</sup>.

Sir John Willison who wrestled with party domination as editor of both the Liberal *Globe* and the Conservative *Toronto News* said of Blackburn, “For half a century...*The Free Press* [was] influential throughout Western Ontario. Neither overshadowed by the newspapers of Toronto nor submissive to their authority.”<sup>44</sup>

That was not a claim Innes could make. He was profoundly influenced by his exposure to George Brown for whom he worked on several occasions early in his career, it was an association which “left an indelible mark on his approach towards publishing and politics”.<sup>45</sup> There is no evidence Brown and Innes remained in direct contact after Innes left *The Globe*, no correspondence, for example, has survived. But Innes’ devotion to Brown’s views, and more generally to those of *The Globe*, is evident in the similar editorial positions *The Mercury* adopted on numerous large questions.

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<sup>41</sup> Elwood H. Jones, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol XI*, pp. 81-82

<sup>42</sup> A.H.U. Colquhoun, *A History of Journalism*, p. 11

<sup>43</sup> Richard Cartwright, *Reminiscences*, p. 9

<sup>44</sup> Sir John Willison, *Reminiscences Political and Personal*, p. 61

<sup>45</sup> Debra Nash-Chambers, “Innes, James”, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol XIII*, p. 497

While Innes may have been less independent than Blackburn, he certainly played a fuller and more immediate role in his community. An unidentified writer in a special edition of *The Mercury* published in 1917 wrote that Innes took “a leading role through his paper in moulding the thought of the community...and personally helping to promote every worthy-cause...”.<sup>46</sup> Of course, *The Mercury* had every reason to take a generous view of Innes, particularly in light of the fact that the then-publisher James Innes McIntosh was Innes’ nephew and the chief beneficiary of Innes’ will.<sup>47</sup>

Blackburn is the most important of Innes’ contemporaries. But there are others. Consider the civic contributions of Innes’ rival, the owner of *The Herald*, F.J.Chadwick. He served on city council several times and in 1877 was elected mayor, he was a founding director of the Guelph Gas Company and an incorporator, along with Innes and other prominent business people, of the Guelph Junction Railway in 1884; among his numerous other roles he was an officer in the local militia and a member of the Guelph Cricket Club. In 1882, Chadwick left Guelph for the Northwest, and in a dinner tendered in his honour he talked of the deep satisfaction he took in seeing Guelph grow and prosper. His remarks must have had a special resonance for many of the city’s prominent builders:

When I came to Guelph in 1848, it was a small place; the spot on which is now erected the Wellington Hotel [where the testimonial dinner was held] being a lumber yard, and scarcely a building of any pretensions between here and the market place. Her population at that time being counted in hundreds where now there are thousands. Coming here at an early period of my life I might almost claim to be a native, and as you have been kind enough to express in the address I have been identified with everything that has made Guelph what she is. Nothing, since I was able to take my share has been done for the advancement of our good city in which I have not taken an active part.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *The Guelph Mercury and Advertiser*, Anniversary Edition, July 20, 1917 p. 4

<sup>47</sup> The Will of the Late James Innes entered in the County of Wellington Registry Office, Aug. 18, 1903

<sup>48</sup> *The Mercury*, May 23, 1882. “Presentation to Mr. F.J.Chadwick”, p. 1

Then there was Innes' one-time partner, John C. McLagan. Their partnership dissolved, amicably, in 1869, when McLagan, a man of abundant entrepreneurial grit and daring left *The Mercury* to start the Guelph Sewing Machine Company as "...the sewing machine business was then in the hey-dey of its prosperity".<sup>49</sup> Besides being a leading business personality<sup>50</sup>, McLagan was involved in numerous schemes to improve the city. He was a founding director in 1870 of the Guelph Gas Company,<sup>51</sup> he sat at least four times on the town and later the city council, and in addition, he was a director of the Mechanics' Institute and an elder of his church. Later he moved to Vancouver where he became editor and publisher of *The World*.

A lesser but still revealing example may be found in the contribution of Frank W. Galbraith. A Guelph native he started with *The Mercury* as an unpaid "assistant" in 1884, he slowly moved up to the business office, became a reporter and finally editor. In 1898 he and James I. McIntosh, Innes' nephew, bought *The Mercury* from Innes and Davidson when the partners retired. His most important civic contribution, beyond his role in the paper, was in 1893 as a founding member of the Guelph Humane Society. At that time the society was predominantly concerned not with animal welfare, but with the care of children.<sup>52</sup> Galbraith served the society for almost ten years, acting as president in 1900 and 1902.

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<sup>49</sup> *The Mercury*, Centennial Edition, July 20, 1927, p. 99

<sup>50</sup> In the 1879 edition of Dun, Widman & Co.'s *Mercantile Agency Reference Book*, McLagan is described as being in insurance, brokerage and oil.

<sup>51</sup> *The Mercury*, Aug. 24, 1870, "Guelph Gas Company", p. 1

<sup>52</sup> Bob Rutter, *A Century of Caring*, p. 11

All these men were important contributors and activists in their communities, and there were hundreds more like them throughout the province. But it is clear that in spite of their considerable work, none of them equal Innes in the volume of causes or interests.

## SOURCES

In this thesis, I have relied of necessity primarily on what Innes wrote, or appears to have written in *The Mercury*. In his day there were no bylines on stories and there can be no certainty about the authorship of even the editorials. It was (and remains even on big city dailies) common practice to occasionally relieve the editor of burdensome writing duties by publishing, unsigned and unacknowledged, guest editorials. There was also the practice of using boiler plate copy. This was material prepared and typeset elsewhere then shipped ready to print to newspapers.<sup>53</sup>

Innes left no personal papers beyond fragments of bank books and account ledgers held in the McIntosh Family Papers at the University of Guelph. Extensive inquiries among the McIntosh family have failed to turn up anything other than a single receipt for \$1.25 acknowledging payment of a year's subscription to *The Weekly Mercury*. It is signed Innes & Davidson and is probably not in Innes' hand. About two dozen letters written by Innes are extant. They are found in the papers of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and the papers of the Speaker of the Ontario Legislature, Charles Clarke. Innes' name also crops up in the Sir John A. Macdonald Papers, as the result of an abortive libel action brought against Innes by the Conservative leader. It is conceivable that more Innes letters have

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<sup>53</sup> Paul Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority*, "The advantage of 'boiler plate' was that it freed the small-town publisher to concentrate on collecting local news and drumming up local advertising." p. 66

survived, but a search of the papers of Edward Blake, George Brown, Richard Cartwright, Alexander Mackenzie, Oliver Mowat, and others has turned up nothing. Beyond this there are the formal records of the handful of speeches Innes made in the House of Commons, and brief minutes from some of the boards he served on including the records of The Dominion Life Assurance Company now held in Toronto by Manulife Financial, and finally there is his will. These limited sources mean there are many aspects of Innes' life that cannot be illuminated. However, enough material exists to support this brief biography of a remarkable small-city editor/publisher.

The important lives and contributions of small-city editor/publishers have been largely overlooked. While metropolitan journalists, by definition a literate class, have left a large monument to themselves and their craft in the form of memoirs, popular histories and biographies, their work understandably concentrates on personalities or newspapers considered to have some national importance. With few exceptions, the careers of purely local journalists have been ignored and the sparse record of small-city and small-town journalism is insecurely preserved in a few narrowly-distributed private printings.

But even the slim canon of small-city reminiscences seems large when compared to the dearth of work by professional historians on either big or small-time English-Canadian journalists. Canadian scholars seem to have been attracted to the broader fields of media and communications perhaps because both Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan were Canadians, but when it comes to the examination of individual practitioners of journalism, only the craft's very brightest stars have received attention.

The work on those “stars” however, is important. Of this limited academic *oeuvre* the most influential piece is probably J.M.S. Careless’s two volume *Brown of The Globe*, completed in 1963. In the same year Ramsay Cook published *The Politics of John W. Dafoe and the Free Press*. There is also J. Murray Beck’s two-volume study of Nova Scotia’s anti-confederationist Joseph Howe, published in 1982 and 1983. Howe, the editor and publisher of the *Novascotian*, is remembered as much for his fight for freedom of speech as for his battle against Confederation. It was Howe after all who, in 1835, following his famous victory in an action for criminal libel brought against him by members of the Halifax establishment, declared “the press of Nova Scotia is Free”.<sup>54</sup> However, like William Kilbourn’s 1956 study of the sometime Upper Canada journalist and rebel William Lyon Mackenzie, *The Firebrand*, Beck’s books focus on the political dimension of his subject. Howe’s journalistic career is seen as almost incidental to the main work of his life.

Beyond this material there is Barbara Freeman’s 1989 study of Kathleen Coleman, *Kit’s Kingdom*; and Carman Cumming’s book, *Secret Craft*, published in 1992, on the odd but influential life of Edward Farrer, a journalist who was a political mercenary willing to employ his pen vigorously and effectively for whichever side paid him best. Then there is *Walter J. Blackburn, A Man For All Media*, written in 1989 by Michael Nolan a journalism professor at the University of Western Ontario. It contains a well-documented chapter on Josiah Blackburn (1823 - 1890), but the book was commissioned by the Blackburn family and as such cannot pretend to scholarly detachment. Finally, there is Douglas Fetherling’s *A Little Bit of Thunder, The Strange Inner Life of the Kingston*

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<sup>54</sup> J. Murray Beck, *Joseph Howe, Vol I*, p. 141

*Whig-Standard*. Though Fetherling is not an academic - he is a poet, novelist and journalist - his book is generously annotated and the product of thorough research. It contains several useful chapters on the early editors of the *Whig-Standard*

But after these, with the exception of some excellent entries on small-city journalists in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, including one on Innes, there is a scholarly black hole. Those few professional historians who do look with any depth at journalists, continue to focus solely on the metropolis and ignore the small-city press. It is as if a scientist studying a plant looked only at the flower and ignored the more prosaic but vital stem and root.

In this paper I will explore some of that stem and root partly through examining the editorial positions Innes adopted, and tracing their links to the ideas of his Age and the ideas of such opinion makers as George Brown. The argument I will make is that Innes and his small-city contemporaries were vital in creating a climate of progress in Ontario's hinterland, and developing an expectation on the part of the people who lived there that they too were entitled to all the benefits of Victorian modernity.

## Chapter One

### Starting Out

His austere photographs and weighty editorial legacy give little idea of the “Jim” Innes<sup>55</sup> known to his contemporaries. But one undated anecdote, offers a small glimpse of the informal man:

St. George’s, St. Andrew’s and St. Patrick’s patriotic societies did much benevolent and social work, and celebrated the natal days of their peoples with special events. St. Andrew’s Society...usually had on November 30 a banquet, concert and ball, I think that was the order. There was a tradition that at 3 a.m. on December 1 one year Donald Guthrie, Q.C., James Innes, afterwards M.P. and John Hogg, perhaps our leading merchant...danced a Highland fling on the Eramosa bridge on their way home..<sup>56</sup>

The story may be apocryphal. F.W. Galbraith, who recorded it, says he “cannot vouch for [its] truth”<sup>57</sup>, but the fact it is told at all suggests something of Innes’ innate conviviality and generosity. Galbraith knew first hand about Innes’ kindness. In 1887 when Innes was attending Parliament and Galbraith was just beginning his duties as editor, the Jesuits’ Estates Act was generating enormous controversy:

...the green editor wrote a two-column editorial, his first of importance. Mr. Innes sent to the Mercury office from Ottawa to know if Donald Guthrie, K.C., had written it. Donald Guthrie had been the member at Ottawa and later at Toronto ....Mr. Davidson [Innes’ partner] was pleased to be able to reply to Mr. Innes’ inquiry that they did not need to go outside the office for such editorial: Mr. Innes sent the editor \$10 [close to a week’s pay in 1887<sup>58</sup>] as evidence of appreciation.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> George H. Ham, *Reminiscences of a Raconteur*, p. 243. In this lighthearted and lightweight book Ham makes a passing reference to “Jim” Innes. There is no other indication that Innes was known as Jim, but it seems likely among friends.

<sup>56</sup> F.W. Galbraith, *Fifty Years of Newspaper Work*, p. 13. Galbraith was with *The Mercury* for 22 years (1884-1906), rising from office assistant to part owner. He went on to become owner of *The Red Deer Advocate*. *Fifty Years of Newspaper Work* contains articles he wrote just before his death in 1934.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 7-8

<sup>58</sup> John Willison recalled that in 1883 he was paid \$10 a week as a reporter on *The Advertiser* in London. *Reminiscences Political and Personal*, p. 58. And wages at *The Mercury* were no more generous, a quarter of a century later in 1909, when Thomas Costain was named editor of *The Mercury* he did the job, “...at a salary of \$28.” Floyd S. Chalmers, *A Gentleman of the Press*, p. 191

Another former *Mercury* employee recalled that as an apprentice he at first found Innes intimidating:

Mr. Innes came to the office every morning at 9 o'clock promptly, with a quick step, examined the books and looked over the exchanges. Of a rather brusque manner, he was apparently, at first meeting, but as you began to know him more, you soon found out that he was a very kind man in every particular.<sup>60</sup>

And Innes' colleagues on the board of The Dominion Life Assurance Company were to memorialize him as a man of "uniform kindness and geniality of disposition..."<sup>61</sup>

Posthumous remembrances of Innes may be fond, but he had a vinegary side too. There were his prolonged and sometimes nasty personal battles with *The Herald*, battles which normally intensified during election campaigns. There was his bad tempered outburst in the summer of 1878, during the Guelph convention of the Canadian Press Association, when a trivial but embarrassing error appeared on the front page of *The Mercury*. Clearly humiliated in front of his journalistic colleagues and perhaps wanting to deflect any professional criticism from himself onto his defenceless employees, Innes went as far as to admonish an unnamed worker on page one: "In the make-up of yesterday's Mercury the printer made a ridiculous mistake by the transposition of eight lines at the bottom of the first column of the report of the meeting of the Press Association".<sup>62</sup> There was his bitter display of public petulance the day after his election defeat in 1896 when he accused the returning officer, John Newstead, of being "unscrupulous". He charged that Newstead used "all the machinery of the iniquitous Election Act" to favour Christian

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<sup>59</sup> F.W. Galbraith, *Fifty Years of Newspaper Work*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>60</sup> George Anderson, "Mercury Apprentice Recalls Experiences of Early Days". *The Mercury Centenary Edition*, July 20, 1927 p. 100

<sup>61</sup> *Minute Book, The Dominion Life Assurance Company, Dec. 1888 to Dec. 1910*. Board meeting Oct 23, 1903 p. 224

<sup>62</sup> *Guelph Daily Mercury*, July 10, 1878, "Local News", p. 1

Kloepfer, Innes' Conservative opponent, in the appointment and placement of "polling places, returning officers, constables etc."<sup>63</sup> Privately he called Kloepfer "the most unprincipled man on the Tory side"<sup>64</sup> and just months before the 1900 election he characterized Kloepfer as a man "who will stick at nothing to carry the Riding again, who is wealthy, having gained his election in 1896 largely by the lavish expenditure of money, and who will not scruple to do the same thing again".<sup>65</sup>

Then there was Innes' wheedling tone in his correspondence with Prime Minister Laurier in which, with increasing desperation, he unsuccessfully pursued appointment to the Senate<sup>66</sup>. In his letters to Laurier he was also quick to disparage other possible candidates, "I notice Mr. Jas. Young's name has been mentioned in this connection...he was opposed to the Liberal policy in the election of 1887 - and wrote opposing it while I perilled my political life at that time on behalf of my leader and the party".<sup>67</sup>

But against the temperamental outbursts, the pettiness and the occasional spitefulness there is a long record of decency and good works.

## **POLITICS BE DAMNED:**

### **THE UNLIKELY FRIENDSHIP OF JAMES INNES AND GEORGE PIRIE**

Take Innes' somewhat anomalous but affectionate association with George Pirie. Pirie was editor and later owner of *The Weekly Herald*, from 1849<sup>68</sup> until shortly before

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<sup>63</sup> *The Mercury*, June 24, 1896 p. 2

<sup>64</sup> Laurier Papers, Innes to Laurier, May 9, 1899

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, Innes to Laurier May 9, 1899

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, Appeals for a Senate appointment appear in letters from Innes dated: Aug. 27, 1896; Dec. 4, 1897; May 9, 1899; July 11, 1899; Feb. 13, 1901 (telegram); Jan. 26, 1903.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, Innes to Laurier Dec. 4, 1897

<sup>68</sup> The 1849 date for the start of Pirie's time with *The Herald* is given in the paper's own history published in 1895, but both Acton Burrows in *The Annals of the Town of Guelph* and *The Mercury's* 1927

his death in 1870. As editor of *The Herald* a paper which "...was a staunch advocate of the principles of the Conservative party,"<sup>69</sup> Pirie was Innes' direct commercial and political competitor.

The editorial tradition of the time saw spirited and often mean-spirited attacks on rival newspapers. Innes frequently engaged in protracted sniping with the third paper in Guelph, *The Advertiser*. It was nominally a Reform paper but because of its support for the Macdonald Coalition in the election of 1867, something Brownite Reformers such as Innes found contemptible, it was the focus of frequent and vitriolic attacks from *The Mercury*. (In 1867, John A. Macdonald formed a Liberal-Conservative government in Ottawa. In Ontario, John Sandfield Macdonald (no relation) headed a coalition. They got there by campaigning together in the 1867 election. Their "hunting in couples" drew the undying hatred of Reformers.<sup>70</sup>) But while it delivered unstinting abuse to *The Advertiser*, Innes' *Mercury* pointedly withheld its attacks on the Conservative *Herald* during Pirie's regime.

In part this might be explained by the fact that in 1867 both *The Advertiser* and *The Mercury* went daily and were thus engaged in the cut-and-thrust of competition six days a week. *The Herald* meanwhile, remained a weekly until "1871 or 1872"<sup>71</sup>, sometime after Pirie's death, and was thus somewhat on the edge of the battle.

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Centenary Edition, which probably used *The Annals* as its source, put Pirie's starting date a year earlier, 1848.

<sup>69</sup> "History of The Herald", *The Guelph Herald, Special Illustrated Edition*, Dec. 1895 p.1

<sup>70</sup> Bruce W. Hodgins, *John Sandfield Macdonald*, pp. 89-93

<sup>71</sup> A.W.Wright, *Now and Then, Pioneer Journalism in Wellington*, p. 20

But even during the election of 1867 Innes avoided attacking his Conservative opposition. The voting stretched over two months, August and September,<sup>72</sup> and while *The Mercury* was full of venomous political rhetoric against *The Advertiser*, it took only one gentle swipe at *The Herald* throughout the whole campaign. It lauded *The Herald* for criticizing a secret meeting held by the coalitionists to nominate candidates. Somewhat tongue-in-cheek *The Mercury* observed:

We can readily sympathize with *The Herald* in his indignant comments. It's editor has, for the space of twenty years, worked for the conservatives with a fidelity and persistence which even Reformers, though opposed to him, could not but admire. By virtue of his labours on its behalf he is entitled to the utmost confidence of his party. But what do we find? He is not asked to attend the secret and midnight meetings of his political friends. He is not acquainted with their plans, nor aware of the "machinery" which *The Advertiser* glibly talks of...While their champion and friend, who fought their battles time and again, is left out, their new convert *The Advertiser* is taken into full confidence...<sup>73</sup>

While *The Mercury* and *The Advertiser* were engaged in a sulphurous public debate throughout the election, accusing each other of stupidity, carelessness and plagiarism, Innes was giving *The Herald* a virtual free ride; and *The Herald* was returning the favour. Shortly after *The Mercury* became a daily in July 1867, Pirie's *Herald* welcomed "the commendable enterprise of the proprietors of 'The Mercury'...".<sup>74</sup> A friendship between Innes and Pirie would seem to be the only explanation of this extraordinary situation, a situation which was to change dramatically with the death of Pirie in 1870.

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<sup>72</sup> J. Murray Beck, *Pendulum of Power*

<sup>73</sup> "Reproof from a Friend", *The Guelph Evening Mercury*, Aug. 7, 1867 p. 2

<sup>74</sup> *The Herald*, reprinted in *The Mercury*, Aug. 1, 1867 p. 2

The two rival editors had a number of connections outside the newspaper world. Like Innes, Pirie was a long-serving member of the Board of Education, he was on the board for twenty years, from 1850 until his death<sup>75</sup>; Innes served from 1865 until 1882.<sup>76</sup> Pirie was also president of the Temperance Society which for several years rented the second floor of the new *Mercury* building (completed in 1867) on Macdonnell Street (as it was then spelled) as a temperance hall.<sup>77</sup> They were also both Scots by birth and though Pirie was 34 years older than Innes they may have become friends in the fraternal bosom of the St. Andrew's Society of Guelph. Innes was a long and active member of the society, serving in several executive positions. He was president in 1873-74. Pirie was secretary and served in that post for 21 years. He became a much-loved fixture and in 1866 was given a silver tea service by the members in recognition of his long service.<sup>78</sup>

Innes may have had another reason for being gentle with *The Herald*. Through most of the 1860s his brother-in-law, John A. Davidson managed the paper for Pirie.<sup>79</sup>

On Pirie's death *The Mercury* observed in an obituary, undoubtedly written by Innes, that:

He [Pirie] had an acute, vigorous intellect, keen and pungent wit, sometimes strikingly caustic and sarcastic, and very often would floor an opponent more effectively with these weapons than with labored argument....But though he held to his own views with great tenacity, and fought the battle out with spirit and unflinching courage, yet when it was over he bore no resentment, and but seldom did those discussions alter private relations with an opponent.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *The Mercury, Centennial Edition*, July 20, 1927 p. 99

<sup>76</sup> *Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. XIII* p. 497

<sup>77</sup> *The Mercury, Centennial Edition*, p. 99

<sup>78</sup> *Minute Book, St. Andrew's Society of Guelph 1859-1940*

<sup>79</sup> *The Mercury, Jubilee Edition*, July 20, 1917 p. 4

<sup>80</sup> *The Mercury, Jubilee Edition*, July 20, 1917 p. 3

A final illustration of what appears to have been a special relationship between Pirie and Innes may be seen by the fact that Innes (along with Davidson and five others) was chosen to act as one of Pirie's pallbearers. "The funeral was one of the most mournful sights ever seen in Guelph," Acton Burrows, the editor of *The Herald*, (1874-1878) was to write later, "nearly all the inhabitants wearing crape, and a very large number joining in the procession to pay the last tribute of respect to one whom all honoured, whatever their differences of opinion may have been".<sup>81</sup>

It would be unwise to make too much of this journalistic odd coupling, but it gives further insight into Innes, the man, and it illustrates how the inevitable interconnections of ethnicity, family and society could, especially in a small-city, sometimes supersede even political differences. Evidence of the strength of these interconnections can be seen in a speech given in 1897 by Pirie's son, Alex, who was also a newspaper man. Unlike his father, Alex Pirie was a Liberal, and in an address in Guelph he paid a particular compliment to Innes acknowledging his influence by calling him "my political godfather".<sup>82</sup>

## **INNES' FIRST YEARS**

Innes was born Feb. 1, 1833 in Huntly, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, the son of a stonemason Alexander Innes and his wife (variously spelled) Elspet Fordyce.<sup>83</sup> Innes' father must have had some success because he was able to send his son to the Grammar

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<sup>81</sup> Acton Burrows, *The Annals of the Town of Guelph*, p. 148

<sup>82</sup> *The Guelph Weekly Mercury*, Dec 23, 1897, "Young Liberal Banquet", p. 2

<sup>83</sup> Elspet is the spelling found in *A Dictionary of Scottish Emigrants to Canada Before Confederation* p. 142. *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography* prefers Elsbeth, p. 497..

School in Aberdeen where Innes gained the necessary qualifications to become a school teacher. According to his biographical entry in the 1898 edition of *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time*, which he almost certainly approved, and as was noted early (in Footnote 3), may even have written,<sup>84</sup> Innes, after leaving school "...for 5 yrs. followed the occupation of a school teacher..."<sup>85</sup>. If the information is accurate it would mean Innes became a schoolmaster at the remarkable age of 16.

In 1853, when he was 21, Innes left Scotland. He headed for the United States and stayed briefly in Missouri before going to Toronto where instead of continuing as a teacher he became a reporter. There is nothing to indicate whether it was inclination or necessity which caused Innes to change his occupation, but it was not uncommon for schoolteachers, who usually could be counted on to know their grammar, to enter the newspaper business. According to his own recollections, his connection with *The Globe* "...began in May, 1854".<sup>86</sup> The formidable George Brown, a Scot himself, was still in control of the powerful Liberal mouthpiece though by the time Innes arrived, Brown's brother Gordon had taken over day-to-day operation as managing editor. The editorial change had been made because of "the absorption of George Brown in politics and the business management of the paper".<sup>87</sup> However, George Brown remained a large presence who deeply influenced the impressionable young immigrant. Innes described

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<sup>84</sup> M. Brook Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans*. In one of the few sketches of the life of Henry James Morgan, the man who compiled *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time*, Taylor says that as a career civil servant Morgan was careful not to offend any of his subjects. "his solution to the problem was to solicit information from his subjects and then rely uncritically on their responses to construct a series of biographies..." p. 170

<sup>85</sup> Henry James Morgan, *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time*, 1898 Edition, p. 493.

<sup>86</sup> *The Guelph Daily Mercury*, May 10, 1880, "Death of the Hon. George Brown", p. 2

<sup>87</sup> M.O.Hammond, *Ninety Years of the Globe*, unpublished p. 47. Also J.M.S.Careless, *Brown of The Globe, Vol I*, pp. 176-179.

himself as being “born a Liberal,” and after becoming a Brown disciple he worked “zealously and continuously for the Party”<sup>88</sup> all his life.

After *The Globe*, Innes moved to another Reform paper, the *Hamilton Banner*. It was here, sometime in the mid-1850s, that Innes appears to have grown tired of being a mere employee and took the bold step of getting involved in a small, and as it turned out, unsuccessful sawmill in Kincardine. None of his “official” biographies mention this episode. But a short biography of one of Innes’ brothers-in-law, James McIntosh (he married Innes’ sister, Margaret, in 1857) in *The Historical Atlas of the County of Wellington*, published in 1906, mentions such an endeavour: “...the Innes and McIntosh families went to Kincardine, where Messrs. Innes and McIntosh engaged in sawmilling, but the venture was not a success, and Mr. Innes left....”<sup>89</sup> A prominent Guelph amateur historian, A.E.Byerly, warned of inaccuracies in the atlas. He said it was a mistake “to take as gospel truth” early settlers’ memories of their families:

In many instances it is hearsay and full of error. Whoever compiled an atlas of Wellington County a number of years ago must have collected their historical accounts that way, for mistakes are frequent. In fact much of the real history of the county is not given, for it was a commercial effort, and history cannot be commercialized.<sup>90</sup>

In spite of Byerly’s misgivings about the accuracy of the atlas there is some fragmentary evidence to support the story that Innes may have briefly tried the lumber business. An undated accounts book exists with a page titled “Thompson & Co. in ac/ with James Innes”, the entries run from July 1858 to November 1859. A following page

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<sup>88</sup> Laurier Papers. Letter from Innes, Jan. 26, 1903

<sup>89</sup> *Historical Atlas of the County of Wellington*, p. 46

<sup>90</sup> A.E.Byerly Papers, undated clipping, “Collection of Historic Lore Very Valuable”, with note “presumably Guelph Mercury”.

which bears no date or name is headed "Kincardine" and on two further facing pages there is what appears to be a listing of the assets of J. Innes on one side and of J. McIntosh on the other. Under McIntosh's name there are entries for "lumber" and "wood", and one for "mill share - \$10.57".<sup>91</sup> These pages provide circumstantial evidence at least, that in 1858 and 1859 James Innes either operated or was a part-owner of a small sawmill.

He may have avoided mention of this when brief entries on his career were prepared for George Rose's *A Cyclopaedia of Canadian Biography* and for Henry James Morgan's *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time* because of lack of space, or because the venture was a failure, or the editors, who tended to emphasize the positive, may have considered this aspect of his career too minor or too embarrassing to include in their biographical compendia.

In 1858, with the troubled sawmilling business flagging, Innes returned to Toronto to work as assistant editor at *The British Colonist*, a Conservative paper. But at *The Colonist*, Innes' Reform principles and the open vote (the secret ballot was not introduced until 1872) got him in trouble. "I gave my first vote," he was to recall years later, "for George Brown in 1858 when employed in a Conservative office in Toronto and nearly lost my situation as a consequence."<sup>92</sup> Later, perhaps spurred by his political leanings, he moved back to *The Globe* where he worked "on the circulation end"<sup>93</sup> of the paper. Twenty years later he still remembered how the circulation department was bedevilled by the slow and unreliable presses of the day: "I have helped to mail the last of a weekly edition of *The Globe* only the day before the next one should have appeared...it was weary

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<sup>91</sup> McIntosh Family Papers, undated account book.

<sup>92</sup> The Laurier Papers. Dec 4, 1897 letter from Innes to Laurier.

<sup>93</sup> *The Mercury*, Centennial Edition, July 20, 1927, p. 99

work and no publisher now-a-days would risk the loss, to say nothing of the vexation, resulting from such delays".<sup>94</sup> There is some evidence his duties also included cleaning up the subscription list and travelling "through Hamilton and Niagara to collect outstanding newspaper fees".<sup>95</sup>

## **INNES ARRIVES IN GUELPH**

In 1861 Innes came to Guelph as editor of *The Advertiser*. The next year, on July 26, 1862, the ambitious 29-year-old bought the troubled *Guelph Weekly Mercury* in partnership with John McLagan, who at the time was *The Advertiser's* printing foreman. The partners purchased *The Weekly Mercury* from George Palmer, a lawyer who had acquired it only nine months earlier, primarily to promote his political career.

The paper did Mr Palmer good service in 1861, when he ran for mayor...and was elected....Having attained the height of his ambition as regards the Council, his desire to publish and control a newspaper weakened, especially as week by week the bills for the payment of the wages were presented to him.<sup>96</sup>

When Innes and McLagan took over *The Mercury* in 1862 it was nominally Conservative. At first, at least according to *The Mercury's* own history, the partners were not very political in spite of Innes' strong Reform principles:

They did not meddle much with politics for a time, the government of the day, the Sandfield Macdonald-Sicotte Coalition being acceptable to neither party. On the formation of the Macdonald-Dorion Government, in 1863, however, they felt it their duty to support it, as it recognized the principle of representation by population, which was then the question of Upper Canada. They also supported the Coalition Government formed in 1864 for the purpose of bringing about Confederation, but opposed the continuation of the Coalition, when the end was

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<sup>94</sup> "President's Address to the Canadian Press Association", *The Daily Mercury*, July 9, 1878 p. 2

<sup>95</sup> Gayle Coldwell, cited without attribution in her University of Guelph undergraduate paper, "The Elite and Community Development", p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> *The Mercury*, July 20, 1917, "Weekly Mercury Started in 1854" p. 4

accomplished, in the election of 1867....<sup>97</sup>

Innes and McLagan brought important and complementary skills to their partnership. McLagan was an experienced printer having worked on the *Woodstock Sentinel* and the *Quebec Chronicle* before coming to Guelph as foreman at the *Advertiser*.<sup>98</sup> Innes had a substantial editorial and newspaper business background gained at *The Globe* and elsewhere. But the operation the new partners bought was decidedly insubstantial. The circulation is not known nor is the advertising revenue, but obviously Palmer could not make it a paying proposition. In addition, *The Weekly Mercury* faced two well-established competitors, *The Advertiser*, which the partners had just left, and *The Guelph Herald*.

The young firm, without capital, with some misgivings, but encouraged by friends and full of hope, entered on their work. They soon infused new life and spirit into the paper, greatly improved its appearance, and the public began to see it was in the hands of men who understood their business, and who were determined, if hardwork could do it, to make a success.<sup>99</sup>

Any great improvement in the appearance of the paper is not obvious to a modern reader, but, appearance aside, there are examples of the new journalistic vigour Innes brought to the paper. Consider his extraordinary and enterprising efforts to cover the clash with the Fenians at Ridgeway in the late spring of 1866. A series of raids by the Irish-American extremists along the Canadian border had excited enormous public interest and concern but it was difficult, in Guelph, to get the latest news of the engagements because of "the Government having taken possession of the telegraph lines".<sup>100</sup> To

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<sup>97</sup> *The Guelph Evening Mercury and Advertiser*, Centenary Edition, July 20, 1927 p. 99

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, Jubilee Edition, July 20, 1917, "Weekly Mercury Started in 1854" p. 4

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, Centennial Edition, July 20, 1927 p. 99

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, Jubilee Edition, July 20, 1917 p.4

overcome this problem, on Saturday, June 2, 1866, the day the Canadian volunteers skirmished with the Fenians at Ridgeway<sup>101</sup>, Innes went to Toronto to dig up the latest news:

...[and there] from the telegraph and newspaper offices obtained every scrap of information about the fight and the movements of the Canadian forces and the Fenians. Before starting for Toronto he had given instructions for the printers to be on hand on Sunday morning, and after the arrival of the midnight train, which did not reach Guelph till 7 a.m., the men set to work to put into type the news he had gathered. Before church time, the matter, comprising a couple of columns of reliable news, was in type and printed, in the shape of [an?] extra, which was eagerly bought by hundreds of people in the town and also from the surrounding country, many of whom had travelled a good many miles to -- get the latest news.<sup>102</sup>

Having printers work on a Sunday was no small step. But Innes was encouraged by *The Globe* which also issued a Sunday extra after "...George Brown's instincts as a newspaperman overcame [the paper's] strict rule against Sunday labor".<sup>103</sup> In Guelph, according to *The Mercury*, the clergy took no offence at the publishers' initiative "...the ministers of the town, without exception, commended their enterprise and remarked that at such a crisis, when Canadian soil was being invaded, lives lost and endangered, and property destroyed, the few hours Sunday work was justifiable as an act of necessity and mercy."<sup>104</sup>

In the same year Innes wrote a lengthy series of articles about Guelph's early history. They were published in weekly installments in *The Mercury* and "greatly stimulated demand for the paper, and its circulation rapidly increased."<sup>105</sup> Debra Nash-

<sup>101</sup> Major George T. Denison, Jr., *History of The Fenian Raid*. Contains a contemporary account of the inconclusive Battle of Ridgeway. pp. 43-48.

<sup>102</sup> *The Mercury*, Jubilee Edition, July 20, 1917 p. 4

<sup>103</sup> J.M.S. Careless, *Brown of The Globe, Vol II*, p. 225

<sup>104</sup> *The Evening Mercury and Advertiser*, Jubilee Edition, July 20, 1917 p. 4

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, Centenary Edition, July 20, 1927 p. 99

Chambers calls the work “a key synopsis” of the city’s history.<sup>106</sup> Innes was obviously proud of his effort, and more than a decade later, in 1877 he was quick to criticize Acton Burrows, when the young editor of the rival *Herald*, produced a brief history called *The Annals of the City of Guelph*. Innes ridiculed this effort in the pages of *The Mercury*: “...we are sorry to say it contains a great many errors.” He added “it will require careful revision and correction before it can be looked upon as a reliable history of the Town.” Innes said he felt compelled to attack a history “...we would have been glad to praise could we have done so conscientiously.”<sup>107</sup>

The Fenian Raid extras and Innes’ pioneer history were two of a number of initiatives that helped make *The Mercury* a success. A company bank book, while not a comprehensive record of the firm’s financial affairs, offers some evidence of steady corporate growth. On Dec 3, 1862 the balance on deposit at The Ontario Bank was \$321.13. There follow five years of generally expanding balances and the book’s last entry on July 5, (probably 1867) showed \$910.49 on deposit.<sup>108</sup> While the fragment is not definitive it does point to steady growth.

## EXPANSION AND CHANGE

More concrete evidence of that growth can be seen in 1867, when the partners took several enormous steps. Innes at the age of 35 was ready, in July of that year, to

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<sup>106</sup> Debra Nash-Chambers (Contributor), *Canadian Dictionary of Biography, Vol XIII*, p. 497

<sup>107</sup> *The Mercury*, May 3, 1877

<sup>108</sup> The McIntosh Family Papers. The bank book of Innes & McLagan Co. lists company assets on deposit at The Ontario Bank, Guelph, 1862-1867.

make the costly move of putting *The Mercury* into a new, specially-constructed building on Macdonnell Street (it was later assigned the street address, 77 Macdonnell).

The office is thirty-two feet front by forty-two deep, and including the basement three stories in height. The basement is twelve feet from floor to ceiling, and being half above the ground and lighted by eight windows, forms an admirable press room. Here the press on which *The Mercury* is printed, and the heavier job presses, are located, and here the mailing is done. Provision is also made in this department for putting in a boiler and engine, which the proprietors hope to do at a future day.<sup>109</sup>

The new building was more than adequate to fill the immediate requirements of the paper but the partners were not only setting aside room for growth, the company was also preparing for coming technological change by making provision for ‘putting in a boiler and engine...at a future day’. Innes and McLagan realized that very soon the hand and horse power used to drive the presses would be replaced by steam. Even so, it was *The Advertiser* not *The Mercury* that became the first paper in Guelph to switch to steam. The exact date is unknown but it was sometime before 1870:

Much was made of the fact that the first steam power had been installed in a Guelph printing office. The late Mr. George Copp...worked in the *Advertiser* office....He used to say that when they stopped the press they had to hustle to shut off the engine, which threatened to run away.<sup>110</sup>

But before Innes made the decision to move to steam he had to take a much bigger gamble. On July 20, 1867, shortly after moving into *The Mercury's* new building, Innes and McLagan turned their paper daily. The prospectus on the front page of that first daily edition reads:

[*The Mercury*] will appear every afternoon (Sundays excepted) at 5 o'clock, and will be furnished to subscribers in town and country at \$4 a year, paid strictly in advance....no abuse, no unseemly language, nothing of a personal character, shall mark our discussion of public questions. We shall in short

<sup>109</sup> *The Guelph Weekly Mercury*, Oct 30, 1867 “Building Operations In Guelph in 1867” p. 1

<sup>110</sup> *The Guelph Evening Mercury and Advertiser*, Centenary Edition, July 20, 1927 p. 99

spare no pains or expense to make THE EVENING MERCURY an interesting and reliable newspaper, in every respect worthy of public patronage.<sup>111</sup>

In the same prospectus the paper unequivocally states its political loyalties. “The great principles of REFORM by the exercise of which alone we believe the prosperity of this country will be secured, shall be on all occasions faithfully and earnestly inculcated.” While Innes may have deviated during his editorial career from his vow to never drag personalities into public debate, when it came to his political principles, he remained, for more than 30 years, rigidly faithful to the cause.

Turning *The Mercury* daily, only weeks after *The Advertiser* made a similar move, was a risky if inevitable response. In acknowledging the change, *The Herald*, which was weekly at the time, warned, “One thing is certain, a town of five or six thousand inhabitants cannot support two dailies. The crowd will shout “fight dog, fight bear” for a bit and then laugh at the loser.”<sup>112</sup> *The Herald’s* warning was prophetic. In the fall of 1873 *The Advertiser* folded, selling its subscription list and copyright to Innes.

Besides turning *The Mercury* into a daily, Innes soon became its sole proprietor. In 1869 his partner, McLagan, sold Innes his interest in the paper and went into the then-booming sewing machine business. McLagan remained active in Guelph, serving as an alderman on at least three occasions. Later he went west ultimately becoming the owner of the *Vancouver World*. He cannot have been an easy man with whom to work. Even the assiduously promotional *A History of Canadian Journalism*, published in 1908 called him “rash and impulsive and often erratic”<sup>113</sup>. *The Mercury’s* history diplomatically

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<sup>111</sup> *The Evening Mercury*, July 20, 1867 p. 1

<sup>112</sup> *The Guelph Herald*, reprinted in *The Mercury*, Aug. 1, 1867

<sup>113</sup> R.E. Gosnell, “In British Columbia”, *A History of Canadian Journalism*, p. 204

described McLagan as “nervously energetic...”<sup>114</sup>, while *The Herald* less delicately called him “energetic and unscrupulous” and reminded readers that McLagan was convicted of bribery during one election.<sup>115</sup> *The Herald* also published evidence of McLagan’s quick temper. During the election of 1878, when he had already left Innes, *The Herald* recounts a visit by an infuriated McLagan, who was angry over what he said was a false report in the paper: “...he rushed into the business office of the Herald...and in language more expressive than choice, declared it to be ‘a lie, a d\_\_\_d lie’. The Herald will not publish the rest of his remarks, out of pity of him.”<sup>116</sup> In spite of McLagan’s peculiarities, Innes seems to have been on good terms with him during, and after, their partnership.

The dissolution of that partnership did nothing to diminish Innes’ growing success. By 1871 credit rating agencies listed him as a “good” credit risk and put his “pecuniary strength” at \$5,000 to \$10,000.<sup>117</sup> Clearly he had taken some significant steps since arriving in Guelph ten years earlier. One thing that marred Innes’ success was news from Scotland that his father had died.<sup>118</sup>

If the years 1867-72 were important for Innes, they were also important for Guelph. During this period more than two dozen manufacturing industries were established, some of which were to grow to substantial size. By 1870 for example the Raymond Sewing Machine factory employed between 70 and 80 people. In the five years between 1867 and 1872, Guelph’s population almost quadrupled, from 1,832 to 7,189.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *The Guelph Evening Mercury and Advertiser*, Jubilee Edition, July 20, 1917 p. 4

<sup>115</sup> *The Guelph Herald*, September 12, 1878 p. 2

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2

<sup>117</sup> *Credit Reference Handbook, July 1871*, R.G. Dun, as cited by Debra Nash-Chambers 1988. *Two Steps Forward or One Step Back?* p. 404. Ph.D. diss. University of Guelph.

<sup>118</sup> Innes makes a passing reference to “my father’s recent death” in a letter to Charles Clarke which is filled with gossip political observations. Feb 21, 1871

<sup>119</sup> All figures from Leo Johnson, *History of Guelph*, pp. 253-255.

In 1872 the provincial government, now a Liberal government with the defeat of John Sandfield Macdonald, essentially decided to put the proposed Agricultural College and Experimental Farm in Guelph rather than in Mimico as originally planned. The Guelph land belonged to the successful English-born farmer, Frederick W. Stone who in 1860 became the first person to bring registered Hereford cattle into Canada.<sup>120</sup> After extended negotiations the Stone farm was purchased in October, 1873 for \$74,500 and the agricultural college was opened May 1, 1874.<sup>121</sup> It was a momentous development that shaped the future of modern Guelph. The college expanded with the addition of the Macdonald Institute in 1902 and the arrival from Toronto of the Ontario Veterinary College in 1922<sup>122</sup>. In 1964 it became the University of Guelph and is now the city's main economic engine and its biggest employer with a student body of 13,000 and a full and part-time staff in excess of 6,000.<sup>123</sup>

## THE SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURE AND SCANDAL

"Agriculture is the basis on which all other industry must build."<sup>124</sup> This and similar platitudes were repeated frequently in Innes' *Mercury*. While the proceedings of agricultural societies and agricultural fairs were well reported and while *The Weekly Mercury* served a wide rural readership with reports from district correspondents laboriously re-telling the happenings of dozens of small towns, there is no sense that Innes

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<sup>120</sup> D.A. Andrew, *The Hereford in Canada 1860-1960*, pp. 6-9

<sup>121</sup> Alexander Ross, *The College On The Hill*, p. 6

<sup>122</sup> F. Eugene Gattinger, *A Century of Challenge, A History of the Ontario Veterinary College*, p. 86

<sup>123</sup> Figures cited in a pamphlet *Guelph At A Glance*, University of Guelph, 1993

<sup>124</sup> *The Mercury*, Trade Edition, June 23, 1894, "Guelph Central Exhibition" p. 1

actually believed agriculture had the same importance to the future of Guelph as manufacturing.

But moving the proposed model farm to Guelph was one agricultural issue that quickly seized *The Mercury*. In early 1872 a report that found the Mimico site wholly unsatisfactory was made public. A subsequent report described the soil at Mimico as “far better for making bricks than for raising crops”<sup>125</sup>. It soon became evident that the search committee was looking at an alternate farm site, and their investigation was concentrating on the Guelph area. The visit of the Council of the Agricultural and Arts Association to Guelph (which in spite of its name was a government-appointed body) in February, 1872 was carefully covered by the paper. The time was ripe for a move. The Liberals were in power in Toronto and Guelph was a loyal Liberal city. Some Conservative critics even suggested the government moved the farm to appease Guelphite Peter Gow for his expulsion from cabinet.<sup>126</sup>

The political underpinnings of the Council’s decision were emphasized at a brief civic reception held for them at the Royal Hotel when they made a visit to Guelph. The Council members had just finished a tour of some potential local sites and were waiting for the train back to Toronto. As *The Mercury* reported, over “a basket of champagne”, toasts were exchanged including one proposing “success to the agricultural college” to which a member of the Council replied:

Hon. Mr. Skead responded in a few humorous remarks. He remarked that they [the Council] had an important duty to perform to the country. The Government, in selecting the [Mimico] farm, had made a bad choice. The

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<sup>125</sup> The report by professors Miles and Kedzie is cited by Alexander Ross, *The College on the Hill*, p. 4

<sup>126</sup> Alexander M. Ross, *The College on the Hill*, p. 5

soil had a clear grit bottom (laughter), and was not suited for the purpose.<sup>127</sup>

The “clear grit” remark was a reference to the Reform party and to the unsuitability of the Mimico soil. The term “clear grit” had once been a difficult one for Brownite Reformers, such as Innes, but by the 1860s even Brown’s *Globe* adopted the name “Clear Grit” for the whole Upper Canada Reform party.<sup>128</sup>

Whether the Mimico site had a “clear grit” bottom or not, what was clear to Innes was that the agricultural college would be good for Guelph, though he could hardly have imagined how hugely important the college would become in shaping the community.

As the college developed it became rapidly apparent to Innes and to others that it represented not only an important intellectual and commercial asset to Guelph, but it was also a source of steady jobs. Innes’ brother-in-law and former sawmill partner James McIntosh obtained a position as soon as it opened in 1874 “as foreman carpenter at the Model farm, which position he held until he resigned in 1899”.<sup>129</sup>

According to recollections of descendants, McIntosh, with his wife Margaret (nee Innes) and family had moved to Guelph in the early 1860s “...where Margaret Innes’s brother James Innes, a Scottish schoolmaster, had become a part-owner of the local newspaper.”<sup>130</sup>, (the *Historical Atlas*, in the entry quoted above, puts the date as 1862).

The families must have been close. As outlined earlier there is some evidence McIntosh

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<sup>127</sup> *The Mercury*, Feb 29, 1872 p. 2

<sup>128</sup> Initially the term distinguished the radical faction [of the Reform party]...whose American democratic tendencies the *Globe* had fervently deplored. It was the Liberal-Conservative press that had freely applied “Clear Grit” to the general mass of Western Reformers, helpfully implying they were all ultras and republicans at heart, while Brown’s journal had naturally shunned the title for that very reason. But now the name was safe enough. The Upper Canada Liberals could be “the Grits” henceforth, as far as the *Globe* was concerned. J.M.S. Careless, *Brown of The Globe, Vol II.* p. 14

<sup>129</sup> *Historical Atlas of the County of Wellington*, p. 46

<sup>130</sup> Letter from Innes Allan to his niece, Mary Davey, Oct 31, 1980 (copy in possession of author).

and Innes jointly ran a small sawmill in Kincardine in the 1850s, and it seems reasonable to assume that Innes used his influence to acquire a comfortable carpentry job at the college for his brother-in-law.

Innes was not the only Liberal to find a position for a relative at the school. David Stirton, a prominent local M.P.P. arranged for his son, James, to be named as farm superintendent. In his application the younger Stirton listed eight members of Parliament as references. And a Mr. Henning, a relation of George Brown, was briefly and unsuccessfully added to the staff. Other appointments were no doubt politically motivated, including that of at least two of the matrons, a Mrs. Mercer and a Mrs Petrie. Their conduct was to add a note of sexual impropriety to a larger scandal that rocked the Model Farm in its first year of operation.<sup>131</sup>

From its inception the farm came under savage attack, sometimes from farmers who felt schooling in agriculture was unnecessary, and sometimes from the Opposition enraged at what they saw as rampant Liberal cronyism and mismanagement at the farm. The attacks were particularly ferocious during the first months of the Model Farm's existence. Its first principal, Henry McCandless, faced numerous complaints and was dismissed less than a year after he was appointed. A Legislative Committee, as *The Mercury* put it, found McCandless "...has failed in coming up to the expectations formed of him; that he is wanting in the knowledge of practical agriculture; and that he lacks the capacity for managing those employed under him, and governing the pupils committed to his charge."<sup>132</sup> Premier Oliver Mowat softened McCandless' departure by approving what

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<sup>131</sup> Alexander M. Ross, *The College on the Hill*, pp. 12-15

<sup>132</sup> *The Mercury*, July 15, 1874. "The Provincial Farm" p. 2

amounted to severance pay of \$1,500. The Opposition called it “hush money” but if it was hush money it did not keep McCandless quiet for long.

*The Mercury*, of course, endorsed McCandless’ dismissal and at first insisted it was “unnecessary to go into all the unpleasant details connected with the management of this Institution...”.<sup>133</sup> But in November everything changed. McCandless, apparently bent on revenge, sent a 10,000 word letter to the *Toronto Mail* which published it. The letter was a sweeping condemnation of all associated with the college and included not only charges of incompetence but allegations of sexual impropriety on the part of female staff including an incident involving the college matron and the Commissioner of Agriculture and Arts, Archibald McKellar.<sup>134</sup> The *Mail* described the letter as “a condemnation complete” of the government. “Of nepotism and undue favoritism the Cabinet was long ago convicted,” the paper fulminated, “but the shameless system of wholesale trafficking in public offices exposed by the Professor’s explanation of the cause of our failure in the experiment of an Agricultural College, is, we are thankful to say, unprecedented.”<sup>135</sup>

Under this kind of attack the government was compelled to do something. On December 1, a lengthy Opposition motion was moved, the opening words of which must have gratified Innes. The motion began, “Whereas it has been stated in the *Guelph Evening Mercury* that a serious disaffection has arisen between the Principal and the heads of different departments in the Agricultural College at Guelph....”<sup>136</sup> The motion and subsequent amendments saw the creation of yet another committee to examine the Model

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., July 15, 1874, “The Provincial Farm” p. 2

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. Nov. 30, 1874. “A Blast from McCandless” p. 2 “We notice the late Principal of the Agricultural College has a letter in today’s *Mail*...”

<sup>135</sup> *Toronto Mail*, Dec 2, 1874. Cited by Alexander M. Ross, *The College on the Hill*, p. 15

<sup>136</sup> *The Mercury*, Dec. 3, 1874. “Ontario Legislature” p. 1

Farm. This committee would launch a fuller, public investigation. The partisan press entered the fray with relish. Even before testimony had begun, *The Mercury* dropped its earlier guise of discreet distaste and confronted head-on McCandless' allegations of improper conduct on the part of the Matron, Mrs. Mercer, (though she is not actually named in the article). The paper said "not a whisper had ever before been made against her character..." until she had been "most foully slandered by this upstart Professor". It went on:

In all our experience we never came across a man so unscrupulous, so unjust, and such an adept at misrepresentation as this discharged Professor has proved himself to be. Ignorant, arrogant, conceited and tyrannical, he sought to be the autocrat of the Institution, where every one would cringe to him as if they were his slaves. When they refused to do that, he marked them out as his objects of revenge; he set spies to watch their every footstep, and pursued them with a hate that was little short of devilish.<sup>137</sup>

In mid-December, after hearing sometimes juicy testimony, the committee ended its deliberations. Its final report found McCandless was "a vain, rash and reckless man without administrative ability...."<sup>138</sup> But it also reported that one of the matrons, Mrs. Petrie, entertained men in her room late at night; and it found that Archibald McKellar, the Ontario Commissioner of Agriculture and Arts, had made evening visits to the woman who replaced Mrs Petrie, Mrs Mercer, though McKellar and his supporters vigorously asserted that no impropriety had occurred. McKellar subsequently married Mrs. Mercer.

After Christmas 1874 the controversy settled down, and the college under the important principalship of its first successful leader William Johnston (1874-79) began to develop and prosper.

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid. Dec. 3, 1874. "McCandless' Slanders" p. 2

<sup>138</sup> *Sessional Papers, Province of Ontario*, Vol. 7, No. 23, Pt. 2, 1874, pp. 42-49. Cited by Alexander M. Ross, *The College on the Hill*, p. 14

Innes' interest in the new college seems to have been particularly stimulated during the Johnston years. Like Innes, Johnston was a Scot, a Presbyterian and a loyal Reformer so the two men may have found a great deal in common. When Johnston retired from the school in 1879, his friends and admirers, including Innes and other prominent citizens, had an illuminated scroll prepared and gave him a watch and chain to mark his role as "...one of the principal causes of the great success and popularity of the Ontario School of Agriculture."<sup>139</sup> Johnston, who was only 31 at the time, went on to become a lawyer and later the secretary of the Central Reform Association. But Johnston suffered from some form of incurable kidney disease and on Jan. 7, 1885 he died "while paying a week-end visit to Mr. James Innes"<sup>140</sup>. *The Globe* attributed the death to "the derangement of certain glandular structures of the body situated immediately above the kidneys and known as supra-renal capsules."<sup>141</sup> It would be interesting to see what Innes had to say about the life and death of Johnston, but unfortunately *The Mercury* for the key dates is missing.

Innes retained a lifelong interest in the agricultural college, frequently appearing as a speaker at the annual prizegivings and other events. Not surprisingly his nephew and later owner of *The Mercury*, J.I. McIntosh "...was one of the first students to attend the Ontario Agricultural College"<sup>142</sup>.

## **INNES' LIBERALISM AND GEORGE BROWN**

The Model Farm controversy is an illustration of Innes' tendency to move in lock-step with *The Globe*, George Brown and the Reform Party. During the controversy Innes

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<sup>139</sup> Alexander M. Ross, *The College on the Hill*, p. 27

<sup>140</sup> *The Mercury*, Centenary Edition, July 20, 1927 p. 65

<sup>141</sup> *The Globe*, Jan 8, 1885 p. 1

<sup>142</sup> *The Guelph Mercury*, March 29, 1930 "City Loses Prominent Resident In Passing Of James Innes McIntosh" p. 1

republished related articles and letters from Brown's paper, even though much of the story was unfolding in Guelph. Editorially, Innes seems to have been encouraged to be more frank about some of the salacious details of the affair after *The Globe* decided to publish them, and it is clear that throughout the controversy *The Mercury* saw itself as part of the partisan bulwark designed to repel criticism of the Mowat government.

Innes seems to have been most comfortable keeping his paper fairly close to George Brown's Reform line on almost all matters. He vigorously supported the party, despised the Conservatives and during elections repeatedly urged readers to vote Reform. Brown was a powerful, dominating, and controversial personality. Goldwin Smith a former Oxford don, a journalist, and a widely-recognized ornament to the intellectual life of post-Confederation Canada, was scathingly critical of Brown:

A Liberal he may call himself; but it could only be in a party sense. Of liberality of character and sentiment, of breadth of view or toleration of difference of opinion, no human being was ever more devoid. Master of *The Globe*...he used it without scruple to crush everybody who would not bow to his will.<sup>143</sup>

But Brown had his supporters. His faithful friend, the former prime minister, Alexander Mackenzie, wrote in 1882 that *The Globe* publisher:

...was a man of strong feeling and warm enthusiastic disposition, [who] conveyed sometimes to those who met him occasionally the idea that he was intolerant of other people's opinions, and resolved to have his own way. Those who thought so did not know him.<sup>144</sup>

There is no evidence Innes knew Brown very well, though as a junior *Globe* employee in the 1850s he knew him as a boss and recalled seeing him "...pore over a

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<sup>143</sup> Goldwin Smith, *Reminiscences*, p 433

<sup>144</sup> Alexander Mackenzie, *The Life and Speeches of Hon. George Brown*, pp. 150-151

sentence for a long time before he could get the exact word to suit.”<sup>145</sup>. There is no extant record showing Innes had any dealings with Brown after he left *The Globe*, though J.C. McLagan, Innes’ one-time partner, said he had “...come in contact with the late Senator in political and business matters...”<sup>146</sup>. Presumably Innes would have shared in some of those contacts. But whatever the relationship between Brown and Innes, *The Globe* clearly was a pervasive intellectual and political influence on *The Mercury* and its editor. Brown, Innes was to write, “...attained a power and exercised an influence which no other public man ever possessed in this country.”<sup>147</sup> Innes was clearly among those influenced.

In the spring of 1880 when George Brown succumbed to a bullet wound inflicted several weeks earlier by a dismissed employee, *The Mercury* reported the death by reprinting *The Globe* story on its front page.<sup>148</sup> On page two it ran a black-bordered five column obituary, written by Innes. Understandably, it was longer than the obituary the paper would run for Sir John A. Macdonald in 1896 and it was rivalled only by the treatment *The Mercury* gave the death of Queen Victoria.

Innes’ Reform principles sprang from a number of sources. Most immediately they were founded in the ideas framed daily by *The Globe*, but more deeply than that they reached back to British Liberalism and, less directly, to the egalitarianism of Jeffersonian Democracy. In a speech in 1893, Ontario premier Oliver Mowat acknowledged some of the intellectual debts owed by Canadian Liberals:

The spirit of Liberalism is the same in the old land as in the new. It is the spirit that animated Pitt, Burke, Bright, and that now animates the great and glorious

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<sup>145</sup> *The Guelph Daily Mercury*, May 10, 1880, “Death of the Hon. George Brown” p. 2

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, May 18, 1880, “City Council, Tribute of Respect to the Late Mr. Brown” p. 1

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, May 10, 1880, “Death of the Hon. George Brown”, p. 2

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, May 10, 1880, “Hon. George Brown’s Illness and Death”, p. 1

Gladstone...and his supporters, English, Irish and Scotch. God bless them!<sup>149</sup>

A full exploration of the Reform movement in Canada must be left for others, but it is certain it was a reflection, or perhaps one might more properly say an interpretation, of the ideas of the Reform League and the broader reform movement in England. The class structure and the fundamental question of who should be allowed the chance to rule was the issue that led to Britain's three Reform Bills (1832, 1867-68, 1885), bills which, by extending the franchise and erasing "rotten" and "pocket" boroughs would change the face of British politics. Though primarily involved with who should vote, the Reform Bills became the touchstone for wide ranging radical thinking in Great Britain and attracted the support of a diverse array of intellectuals and social activists. But not all intellectuals embraced the change. Particularly after the Hyde Park Riot of 1866, Thomas Carlyle and Matthew Arnold "...saw it as the final break in the chain of deference which had enabled English society to progress peaceably...the working classes had shown themselves prone to anarchy, and the upper classes had revealed themselves as having lost the will to rule."<sup>150</sup>

The agitation in English politics inevitably influenced political culture in colonial Canada. But in Canada's more egalitarian atmosphere, where there was a less well developed class system, electoral reform moved to different imperatives, the imperative of accommodating Quebec and other regional interests being the chief among them. But as Mowat pointed out in his speech, the liberal sentiment which developed in Britain (and the United States) deeply influenced thinking in Canada. At first the influence was primarily

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<sup>149</sup> *The Guelph Weekly Mercury*, Jan 14, 1893, "Toronto Young Liberals Banquet" p. 2

<sup>150</sup> F.B. Smith, *The Making of the Second Reform Bill*, p. 132

political, inspiring and providing some of the philosophical underpinnings for William Lyon Mackenzie's rebellion of 1837<sup>151</sup> and leading to the development of Canada's Reform Party. But in time the influence was to become profoundly social. A type of across-the-board liberalism was to mark all aspects of life, and the change was promoted largely by the newspapers. And not, I argue, just by the mighty journals of the great cities, but also by the little papers in the smaller centres. While the little papers may only have been aping their metropolitan betters they still defined and delivered the message of late-nineteenth century liberalism to the front doors and the farm gates of people a long way away from the intellectual and cultural centres of Canada and the English-speaking world.

Brownite Liberalism was the keystone of Innes' political philosophy and to his "...half-century's devotion to the Reform Party."<sup>152</sup> It informed and supported most of his other ideas, including his belief that individuals must play a role in their community. But Innes not only editorialized, he acted, manifesting his views in his enthusiastic personal commitment to education (though he had no children), the free library, the hospital, his church and other community activities. And Innes' community commitment and political faith were to lead to a public career, a public career which in the early 1870s was about to blossom.

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<sup>151</sup> William Kilbourn, *The Firebrand*, pp. 85-97 describes Mackenzie's trip to London and his exposure to Radical elements there.

<sup>152</sup> The Laurier Papers. Innes to Laurier, Aug. 27, 1896 .

## Chapter Two

### Success and Consolidation

By 1873 Innes was fully established in Guelph. His industry and acumen had brought him substantial success. His paper's letterhead boasted "The "Mercury" has a Circulation Three Times Larger than that of any other Paper published in the County of Wellington"<sup>153</sup> Circulation claims almost always tend to be inflated. In 1876 Innes was claiming a daily circulation of 600, as was *The Herald*, but Innes reported a whopping circulation of his weekly edition of 5,700 compared to *The Weekly Herald's*, 2,600.<sup>154</sup>

He now entered into a period of consolidation, expansion and intense competition with his Conservative rival, *The Herald*. Innes also got married and began to assume a leadership role in many important civic organizations.

The years 1873-1878 were Liberal years in Ottawa. Alexander Mackenzie was prime minister having defeated John A. Macdonald who had been humiliated and disgraced by the Pacific Scandal. There was also a Liberal government provincially, led by Oliver Mowat, the Coalition government of John Sandfield Macdonald having been defeated in December 1871. With the Liberals in power, Innes may have begun to seriously consider for himself the biggest political prize available locally, a seat in the federal parliament. It was to be an ambition he realized on his first try at public office in 1882.

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<sup>153</sup> Charles Clarke Papers. A typical example of this letterhead is found in a note to Clarke from Innes, July 3, 1873

<sup>154</sup> T.F. Wood & Co's., *Canadian Newspaper Directory (1876)*, p. 29

If 1873-1878 were important years for Innes, they were also important for Guelph. In spite of hard economic times the town continued to grow. The agricultural college was beginning to have a profound effect on the community, and the groundwork was laid for Guelph to become a city in 1879.

The year 1873 had special significance for Innes. He returned to Scotland for the first time since his departure 20 years before. His return was necessitated by a major development; his decision at the age of 41 to marry. His intended was a widow, Helen Gerrard who had previously been married to Jonathan Date, a planter in Grenada, the West Indies. At the time of her marriage to Innes, Helen Gerrard lived in the London suburb of Stratford. Why Innes went to England to marry; why he chose a woman who, her will indicates, was of only modest independent means<sup>155</sup>; why he chose a widow who had borne no children in her first marriage and seemed unlikely to provide an heir for Innes; how the marriage was arranged: all remain mysteries.

Of course returning to the old country to find a wife was not that uncommon among well-to-do immigrants. George Brown for example, laid down the burdens of *The Globe* and Reform politics in the summer of 1862 and returned to Scotland for a visit. There the 44-year-old bachelor fell in love and married Anne Nelson, the refined and educated daughter of the Edinburgh family which owned the famous Thomas Nelson and Son publishing house.<sup>156</sup> Sir John A. Macdonald met his first wife in England and married

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<sup>155</sup> The will of Helen Gerrard Innes, Wellington County Registry Office.

<sup>156</sup> J.M.S. Careless, *Brown of The Globe, Vol. II* pp. 75-78 and M.O. Hammond, *Ninety Years of The Globe*, p. 72

her there. Sometime after her death he married his second wife in England though he met her first in Canada.<sup>157</sup>

One of the few facts known about Helen Gerrard is that she was, like Innes, a native of Aberdeenshire.<sup>158</sup> Perhaps they met through mutual friends; perhaps they knew each other when they were young. In his editorial musings on the passing year published five years before his marriage, Innes wrote of how, when a man looks back over his life, there may be parts that were rugged but “still he will be able to behold spots where he has rested and been fanned by the breath of true love, and sympathy unfeigned.”<sup>159</sup> Could Innes have been thinking of Helen Gerrard?

Curiously, there is no mention of Innes’ marriage in *The Mercury*; however, he wrote a series of five long letters to the paper while he was away. They are published under the headline “Stray Leaves from the Old Land”<sup>160</sup> The letters show just how prosperous Innes had become. He remained in Britain for about two months and travelled extensively. On a trip to London, the first time he had ever been to the city, he visited the great Scottish historian and political philosopher, Thomas Carlyle.

I had, through the kindness of a relative, [perhaps Carlyle’s older brother, Alick, who lived in Rockwood though there is no evidence he knew Innes<sup>161</sup>] the privilege of calling on Thomas Carlyle. The distinguished philosopher lives in a plain, unpretentious brick house in a quiet retired street in Chelsea. I do not think it right to give details of a purely private interview, but may say that the reception was all I could desire - frank, genial, and kindly.... Altogether I was more than pleased with my interview, which will remain among the most pleasant recollections of my visit to the old land.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Sir Joseph Pope, *Memoirs of the Right Honourable Sir John Alexander Macdonald*, pp. 64, 333-334

<sup>158</sup> *A Cyclopaedia of Canadian Biography*, ed. George Rose, p. 373

<sup>159</sup> *The Mercury*, Jan 2, 1868 p. 2

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 5; Sept. 11; Sept. 25; Oct 2 and Oct 4, 1873.

<sup>161</sup> James Anthony Froud, *Thomas Carlyle, A History of His Life in London* p. 375

<sup>162</sup> *The Mercury*, Sept. 25, 1873 p. 1

Soon after his return Innes was elected president of the Guelph St. Andrew's Society.<sup>163</sup> The society like other fraternal organizations of the day had two important official functions, it offered charity to needy fellow countrymen and it held an annual ball.

Typically, at the annual meeting which elected Innes as president, members were told that relief "had been extended during the year to thirteen persons, principally for the purpose of joining their friends at a distance. \$20 was forwarded for the relief of suffering Scotchmen in Memphis."<sup>164</sup> The meeting also set the date of the annual concert, banquet and ball. The size and complexity of these affairs was remarkable, and would probably be impossible to reproduce today. Consider the elaborate meal served at the ball and supper on Nov. 7, 1876. It took place at the Old Town Hall and 400 people attended (Fig 1).

But the St Andrew's Society, like the other fraternal organizations, was involved in much more than gourmandizing, bonhomie and philanthropy. It was a place to establish important business and political connections. The presidency of the society was the first important leadership position Innes was to assume in a community organization. Many others were to follow.

In 1873, Joseph Hacking the owner of *The Advertiser*, the main competition of *The Mercury*, despaired of the struggle to keep the paper afloat and sold his copyright, subscription lists and subscription accounts to Innes. In the final edition of his paper on November 27, 1873, Hacking wrote:

With this issue, our readers have the last of the Guelph Advertiser in its present form. Hereafter, the paper will be amalgamated with The Guelph Mercury, and will appear as one under the title of "The Guelph Mercury and Advertiser."<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> *The Mercury*, Oct 8, 1873, "Guelph St. Andrew's Society", p. 1

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.* Jubilee Edition, July 20, 1917. p. 2

<i>Menu</i>		
<i>Roasts</i>		
Turkey	Leg of Mutton	Chicken
Beef	Filet of Veal	Duck
<i>Boiled</i>		
Tongue	Spiced Beef	Ham
<i>Entrees</i>		
Scotch Haggis	English Game Pie	French Raised Pie
Pigeon Pie		Jellied Tongue
Celery		Pickles
Bread		
Jellied Turkey	Turkey a la Yorkshire	Gelatin Turkey
	Jellied Chicken	
<i>Pastry</i>		
Mince Pie	Meringue a la Creme	Open Tart
	Pastry a la Paris	Cheesecakes
<i>Desserts (II)</i>		
	Trifle	Champagne Jelly
Blanc Mange	Macadamia Jelly	Noyeau Jelly
Charlotte de Russe		Jelly Roll
Bavarian Cream	Scotch Shortcake	Fruit Cakes
Sponge Cake		
	* * *	
Oranges	Grapes	Raisins
	Nuts	
Tea & Coffee		

**Menu of St Andrew's Ball and Supper in Guelph - Nov. 7, 1876<sup>166</sup> (fig. 1)**

<sup>166</sup> St Andrew's Society Minute Book, n.p.

There is no direct evidence of why *The Advertiser* folded, but it is almost certain it was a victim of the simple fact that there were not enough readers in Guelph to go 'round. While it could just manage to survive in daily competition against *The Mercury*, it succumbed almost immediately when *The Herald* under the new and vigorous ownership of F. J. Chadwick turned daily probably in 1872.<sup>167</sup> With the death of *The Advertiser*, Guelph now had two clearly competitive papers, *The Mercury* a dedicated Reform journal and *The Herald* an unabashedly Conservative partisan. According to Acton Burrows (editor, and subsequently part-owner of *The Herald* 1874-78) everything at *The Herald* was improved under Chadwick. "The only feature in the paper, indeed, which did not undergo a change," he wrote, "was its unswerving support of the principles of the Conservative party..."<sup>168</sup>

One of the first things Chadwick did was to move *The Herald* offices to a new location above the Queen's Hotel.<sup>169</sup> He was also soon to persuade a man who had once been *The Mercury*'s best writer, James Fahey, to leave a new position in Hamilton and come and reinvigorate *The Herald* as editor. Innes in a letter written to a friend in late 1871 acknowledged Fahey's talent during his time on *The Mercury*:

Jim Fahey has left me having made an engagement with [Jonathan] Wilkinson [publisher of the *Guelph Advertiser* 1858-1870] to edit the *Hamilton Standard* which he proposes to start on the 1st of January. I might have kept him had I been willing to pay him enough, but the fact is he did not altogether suit me. For writing an article there was none better, but he was of little use on the local work, and you know on a country paper that is as important - even more so.<sup>170</sup>

<sup>167</sup> Acton Burrows, *The Annals of the Town of Guelph*, p. 150. Burrows says Chadwick took over the paper in Dec. 1871 and turned it daily. He does not specify exactly when.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.* p. 150

<sup>169</sup> *The Mercury*, Jubilee Edition, July 20, 1917, p. 3. In its own history published Dec. 1895, *The Herald* says the paper was already in the Queen's Hotel when Chadwick took over.

<sup>170</sup> Charles Clarke Papers. Letter from Innes Dec 4, 1871.

Fahey, a man of “bubbling but never unkind wit”<sup>171</sup> did not stay with Chadwick and *The Herald* for long but moved on to other, bigger papers, justifying Innes’ assessment of him as a talented writer. He worked with at a number of prominent papers including *The Toronto World* and as editor of the *Toronto Evening News*.<sup>172</sup> He established a solid reputation and was remembered by Sir John Willison, the some-time editor of *The Globe* as “the best paragrapher of his time in Canada.”<sup>173</sup>

In spite of Chadwick’s energy and willingness to hire the best available talent, there were money problems at *The Herald*. A former editor, writing of Fahey recalled that “[he] knew what it was to work hard for his wages and work harder to get them when they were earned. I think some of the wage cheques issued at that time by *The Guelph Herald* are still in circulation.”<sup>174</sup> The paper’s own history published in 1895 recalls that “the labor and money lavished by [Chadwick] on *The Herald* failed largely of accomplishing the desired results.”<sup>175</sup>

The loss of Fahey and the growing intensity of the competition with *The Herald* did not shake Innes’ confidence. At the end of 1873, with his circulation swelled by the acquisition of *The Advertiser* he was able to boast in a notice showing revised advertising rates that “The Weekly Mercury and Advertiser...has now a guaranteed circulation five times more than that of any other paper published in this county, and equal to that of any weekly in Canada outside of Toronto.”<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> P.D.Ross, *Retrospects of a Newspaper Person*, p. 4

<sup>172</sup> Russell G. Hann, “Fahey, James A.”, *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. XI*, p. 307

<sup>173</sup> John Willison, *Reminiscences*, p. 46

<sup>174</sup> J.P.Downey in John Willison’s, *Reminiscences*, p. 45

<sup>175</sup> “History of The Herald”, *The Herald, Special Illustrated Edition*, Dec 1895, p. 1

<sup>176</sup> *The Mercury*, Dec 27, 1873 p. 2

In 1874 Innes took another important step in the development of the newspaper. He took on his brother-in-law, John A. Davidson as a partner. Davidson had been with Innes since 1869 when he came over from *The Herald* where he “had the management for six or seven years [to] take charge of the practical work” at *The Mercury*.<sup>177</sup> He became the printing foreman and in the 1871 census he is listed as a printer rather than a manager.<sup>178</sup> While Davidson may have been useful in a practical way he had no facility for writing editorials and so the full weight of that essentially daily chore fell to Innes.

Innes, desperate for help but obviously careful with his dollars, was willing to offer his old friend and political confidante, Charles Clarke, some free advertisements in exchange for editorials “on militia matters, politics, or any other question that wants ventilating.” Innes went on to complain:

The fact is I have more than I can do, and have not half time now-a-days to write as I would like to. My assistant [Davidson?] is next to useless in that line and I am often badly off, being pressed continuously with the business.<sup>179</sup>

In spite of Davidson’s shortcomings as an editorialist he was remembered by later generations as “a successful manager, and, like Mr. Innes, a man in every way calculated to inspire the confidence of the business public with whom the firm dealt.”<sup>180</sup> So Innes formed a partnership with Davidson and they remained partners for 24 years until they both retired in 1898.<sup>181</sup> Unhappily, in the year that Davidson and Innes became partners,

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.* Dec. 27, 1873 p. 4.

<sup>178</sup> 1871 Census of Ontario. Dist. 033, Sub Dist. C, Div. 3, p. 47

<sup>179</sup> Charles Clarke Papers. Innes to Clarke, April 23, 1870. Clarke was editor of the [Elora] *Backwoodsman* and an influential Reformer. He was a Liberal M.P.P. from 1871 to 1891 and later Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.

<sup>180</sup> *The Mercury*, Jubilee Edition, July 20, 1917. p. 4

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4

Davidson's wife, Mary Jane, who was Innes' sister, died, leaving Davidson at the age of 41 a widower with three children. Mary Jane Davidson's death was observed with the same Scottish reticence which marked Innes' marriage. A terse black-bordered note appeared on the front page. It read in its entirety: "In consequence of the funeral of Mrs. Davidson taking place to morrow afternoon, at 2 o'clock p.m. no paper will be issued to-morrow, and the Mercury office will be closed from one till five o'clock."<sup>182</sup>

In 1876 Innes became president of the Farmers' and Mechanics Institute. The institute was designed to improve the education of workingmen and it ran a lending library. It was a popular cause among the town's business elite and over the years its directors included most of the important names in Guelph. In 1883 the Mechanics Institute was instrumental in establishing one of the first free public libraries in Ontario. By that time Innes was a member of the Board of Management of the Free Library.<sup>183</sup> It was an association he would continue until his death in 1903. In fact, in April of that year, just three months before he died, Innes spoke briefly at the laying of the corner stone for Guelph's new Carnegie Public Library.<sup>184</sup>

The latter part of 1873-78 were years of worldwide depression. Even so, Guelph, at first, seemed to be riding out the economic storm. "So strong was the Town's image as a growth centre," Leo Johnson writes in his *History of Guelph*, "and so well established were its factories, that despite the general depression of 1875-1880, Guelph's population continued to grow..."<sup>185</sup> At the start of 1873 its population was 7,189. Five years later it

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., Nov. 20, 1874 "Notice" p. 1

<sup>183</sup> Leo Johnson, *History of Guelph*, pp. 143-145

<sup>184</sup> *The Mercury*, April 21, 1903 p. 1

<sup>185</sup> Leo Johnson, *History of Guelph*, p. 257

had risen by more than 2,500 inhabitants to a population of 9,918.<sup>186</sup> But in spite of the growth the depression began to take hold, factories closed and there was widespread unemployment. By December 1878 a soup kitchen was opened “to relieve the destitute...”<sup>187</sup>

Perhaps in an effort to stimulate citizens, the town, in the same year, applied to the province to become a city. The request was granted and officially proclaimed on April 23, 1879.<sup>188</sup> But the effects of the depression were so bad that a prominent local Tory, John Horsman, urged the prime minister to postpone a proposed visit to Guelph by the governor-general, the Marquis of Lorne. “People are depressed in spirit,” he wrote “ & no town I think feels it worse than Guelph...Guelph is now the dullest place in the province & quite uninviting.”<sup>189</sup> It is not clear if this letter led to the postponement, but the trip was put off until September.<sup>190</sup>

### **PATRONAGE, THE PRESS ASSOCIATION & MACDONALD’S LIBEL ACTION**

In this economic gloom, Innes did what he could to continue to build his paper, his reputation and the fortunes of his community. In 1877 he was elected president of the Canadian Press Association. The media historian Paul Rutherford sees little merit in the organization.

The CPA was the first ever press organization, its birth dating from a Kingston meeting of assorted journalists back in 1859. Then, and for many years afterwards, the life of the CPA had been determined by a kind of fraternal

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid. Cites the Census and city directories as source.

<sup>187</sup> *The Mercury*, Dec 27, 1878 p. 1

<sup>188</sup> Leo Johnson, *History of Guelph*, p. 261

<sup>189</sup> Macdonald Papers, Horsman to Macdonald, Mar 24, 1879

<sup>190</sup> Leo Johnson, *History of Guelph*. p. 259

imperative. True enough, CPA leaders did do some lobbying on the issue of postage rates and libel laws...but CPA meetings were usually occasions for good times and high-falutin rhetoric about the glories of the press, CPA energies [were] devoted mostly to organizing a summer excursion bigger and better than the year before.<sup>191</sup>

Professor Wilfred Kesterton in *A History of Journalism in Canada* differs from Rutherford. He argues the association had much more than mere recreational utility. He says of the Association that it "...provided strong leadership in the fight to abolish postage on newspapers, agitated for improvements in the libel law, actively combated an injurious paper combine, and focused attention on such problems as the setting of newspaper subscription rates, the elevation of the tone of the press, and the ethical procedures to adopt in the handling of quack medicine advertising business."<sup>192</sup> The CPA no doubt had a strong social side to it, something which the association's visit to Guelph underlined, but Kesterton's more generous view is certainly one Innes and his contemporaries would have preferred, and no doubt considered more accurate.

For Innes, the presidency of the CPA was a coup, an important and timely opportunity to promote himself, his business and his community. During his one-year term, he arranged for the association's annual meeting to be held in Guelph and he persuaded Town Council to entertain the visiting journalists in a royal manner. They were driven around the community, feted at the Model Farm and then treated to a publicly-funded banquet and concert. About seventy association members and their wives attended. There were no representatives from large papers, most delegates coming from smaller Ontario towns and cities. But there was one big name at the gathering, Goldwin

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<sup>191</sup> Paul Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority*, p. 111

<sup>192</sup> W.H.Kesterton, *The History of Journalism in Canada*, p 56

Smith. The former Oxford and Cornell professor was probably the leading journalistic figure of Victorian Canada and he was elected vice-president of the association.<sup>193</sup>

Notably, Innes' rival editor, Acton Burrows, now part-owner of *The Herald*, did not attend the CPA meeting, though F.J. Chadwick, who was the town's mayor as well as one of *The Herald's* proprietors did go to the civic banquet<sup>194</sup> But this did not stop Innes' attacks on his rival, and even during the convention he published a very public, if veiled, swipe at Burrows. A short front page item in *The Mercury* reads: "BULLETIN. - *The Mercury* devil, with a stubbed toe, is better, and so is Mr. C.A. Burrows, "managing proprietor" of the *Herald*."<sup>195</sup>

Innes gave his president's address on opening day. It was a somewhat hackneyed telling of the advances of the press in Canada over the preceding quarter century. But then, between lauding the better education of reporters and commenting on how the advent of the telegraph had changed the business, Innes touched on the matter of government patronage. As the history of the association was to recall 30 years later, in a judgement which can have been shared by very few, Innes "dealt courageously with the relations that ought to exist between the press and politicians."<sup>196</sup> Innes told the gathering:

...the Press of Canada ...has, we may say, nearly altogether got from under the control of the politician. We mean by this that a paper now-a-days very rarely, and to a very small appreciable extent, depends for its existence or support on individual or party. Parties there will always be, and it is right they should be

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<sup>193</sup> Smith was a complex and bitter man. Around 1891, E.E. Sheppard, then editor of *Toronto Saturday Night* observed of Smith: "He's a disappointed man, he thinks that with his abilities he should be filling a much greater place in the world's affairs." Hector Charlesworth, *Candid Chronicles*, p. 112

<sup>194</sup> *The Mercury*, "The Canadian Press Association, A Grand Reception Given Members of the Fourth Estate", July 10, 1878, p.1

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, "Local News", p. 1

<sup>196</sup> *A History of Canadian Journalism*, ed. by committee, p. 89

upheld by their own papers. But they are not now slaves of the party as we have seen....Government advertising has come to be largely a business arrangement and it is right that it should be....The more independent the press becomes so much the better will it be for parties and the body politic. And the day may yet come - we hope to see it - when all newspapers will be thoroughly and to the fullest extent independent of parties.<sup>197</sup>

Innes' high-toned words about the growing independence of papers and the fact government advertising was "largely a business arrangement" must have had something of a hollow ring to his audience, flying as it did in the face of their daily experience. But there is no record of Innes' remarks sparking any controversy: in fact matters of patronage and partisanship seem to have been far from the minds of the delegates. On the day following Innes' speech, perhaps intoxicated by Guelph's delights, they decided to put pleasure before business and deferred further proceedings. They did manage to stay for the lavish civic banquet with its extraordinary number of noble toasts but at 1:30 in the morning, the distinguished delegates, who by the nature of their craft were men used to rapid comings-and-goings, embarked on the train for a junket to Detroit.<sup>198</sup>

Given the brilliance of the evening it is perhaps unnecessary to record that no editorial appeared next day in *The Mercury*.

While the conventioners may have taken Innes' words lightly, there is no doubt that government advertising was an important and widely anticipated source of revenue for papers sympathetic to the party in power. When Macdonald returned to office in 1878 he had a confidential list prepared indicating newspapers that were to get government advertising. Needless to say they were all Conservative or Independent.<sup>199</sup> "There are

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<sup>197</sup> *The Mercury*, "Canadian Press Association, President's Address", July 9, 1878 pp.1-2

<sup>198</sup> *The Mercury*, "A Grand Reception Given Members of the Fourth Estate", July 10, 1878 p. 1.

<sup>199</sup> Macdonald Papers, Vol 303, Nov. 13, 1878

several Independent Papers in the Dominion who get a share of advertising,” but generally, he wrote in a brief, blunt note “Our rule is not to patronize newspapers decidedly hostile to the Gov’t...”<sup>200</sup>.

Government patronage could make a startling difference to a publisher’s revenues. For example, between 1891 and 1896 one of Toronto’s leading Conservative papers, *The Empire*, received \$9,707 in government advertising and printing contracts. In the same period the Liberal *Globe* received \$80.40 from Ottawa. When the Laurier Liberals came to power, the situation reversed. Between 1896 and 1901 *The Globe* got \$12,276 in government contracts, *The Mail and Empire* in the same five year period pulled in a paltry \$983.<sup>201</sup>

Innes himself, in spite of his principled words at the 1878 CPA convention, benefitted from friends in high places. Though the Liberals were in opposition in Ottawa, they were in power in Toronto and Premier Oliver Mowat’s Ontario Liberal government issued generous contracts to friendly papers such as *The Mercury*. In 1874, Innes aired the issue publicly after *The Herald* complained that the Mowat Liberals had switched some advertising to *The Mercury*. “*The Herald* might have continued to receive these favors till doomsday,” Innes editorialized, “before we would have complained, or brought the matter under the notice of those whose duty it was to see that their friends got a share of what official work there was at their disposal.”<sup>202</sup> Clearly Innes saw it as the “duty” of governments to look after “their friends”. Innes went on to chide *The Herald* for its

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<sup>200</sup> Acton Burrows Papers, Macdonald to Burrows, Oct 29, 1886

<sup>201</sup> Paul Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority*, p. 218

<sup>202</sup> *The Mercury*, July 18, 1874, “Grieving for the Loss of ‘Pap’”, p. 2

“simulated indignation...over the loss of this trifling bit of ‘pap’...the greed and impudence of some of the Tory organs are immeasurable.”

Innes was considerably less sanguine about the issue of government advertising when the matter came up in the federal parliament in the early summer of 1886. By that time Innes was an M.P. and he and fellow Liberals were roasting the Conservatives over the way the Macdonald government was “subsidizing” Tory newspapers with government advertising. As the debate raged a Conservative member pointed to just how well the provincial government treated *The Mercury*:

Mr WALLACE (York). ...the firm of Innes & Davidson, proprietors of the *Guelph Mercury*, one of the firm, I believe, being a member of the Dominion Parliament, have received for advertising in the *Mercury* during the past year \$844 from the Ontario government, and, if it was a corrupt act on the part of the Dominion Government to give advertising to certain newspapers, it must have been still more corrupt for the Ontario government to give it...to men who are members of Parliament.<sup>203</sup>

Innes could not let that pass and briskly defended the payments. “The money was not paid for advertising,” he told the committee: “nine-tenths of it and more was paid for printing, covering nearly two years.” Innes, in spite of several interruptions from the government benches, went on to assert that the Ontario government was charged the usual commercial rates. “The account was an honest one...and not like many sent into this Government for printing and advertising...I am perfectly satisfied that there was good value given for the money, or else the Ontario government would not have paid the accounts.”

Innes’s attack stirred Sir John A. Macdonald to conclude the debate by observing to the committee: “We all know that it has been the habit of Governments to favor the

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<sup>203</sup> *Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons, Vol. XXII, May 27, 1886 p. 1558*

press that usually support them. Hon. gentlemen opposite did so when they were in power, and I have no doubt they will do so when they are in again....”<sup>204</sup>

And, sure enough, when the Liberals returned to power in 1896 Innes’ concerns about “subsidization” evaporated. Witness his letter to the new prime minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, written only a few months after Laurier assumed office:

Dear Sir,

I beg to call you attention to the fact that the Mercury has, up to the present time, been wholly overlooked by the heads of several departments. Nothing in the shape of advertisements has reached the Mercury, although I notice that other leading Reform papers are receiving patronage with a Liberal hand. A word from you to the departments will no doubt rectify the matter.

Yours sincerely,  
James Innes<sup>205</sup>

This letter, with Innes baldly demanding his due in government patronage, is surely high hypocrisy in light of his address to the CPA almost two decades before, and his fulsome protestations of patronage purity in the house ten years after that. Laurier, who was no doubt swamped by importuning Liberal editors, pushed this request off to one of his ministers claiming there was nothing he could do.

Another question about Innes’ sincerity is raised by the fact that as he addressed the convention delegates about the new-found independence of the press, he was, due to his own intense party loyalty and willingness to unquestioningly reprint stories from *The Globe*, facing a \$10,000 libel suit from Sir John A. Macdonald, who was then the Leader of the Opposition. The suit was not extraordinary, such court actions were a common

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., Vol. XXII, May 27, 1886 pp. 1558-1559

<sup>205</sup> Laurier Papers, letter from Innes, Nov. 13, 1896

peril of publishing.<sup>206</sup> In fact, just a few years before George Brown had sued *The Guelph Herald*.<sup>207</sup> But it underlines Innes' partisanship, and casts another shadow of hypocrisy across his "courageous" presidential address.

What sparked Macdonald's suit was a rancorous debate in the House of Commons in April, 1878. It lasted through the night and reports, notably by the representative of *The Globe*, stated flatly that Macdonald was drunk:

To say Sir John A Macdonald was on Friday night somewhat under the influence of liquor would be a grossly inadequate representation of fact. He was simply drunk in the plain ordinary sense of the word. As the night wore on he became still more so, and from six to eight on Saturday evening he was, to quote the conventional language usually employed on such occasions, 'thoroughly laid out' and had to be hid away by his friends...<sup>208</sup>

The report was reprinted by Liberal papers throughout the province including *The Mercury*, which ran the story in both its daily and weekly editions. Macdonald sued the Brantford *Expositor* and the *Peterborough Examiner*, then a little later *The Mercury*.<sup>209</sup> There is no record of him suing *The Globe* over the matter, though George Brown, then in Parliament as a senator, referred to the incident in a letter to his wife, Anne:

My Dearest Anne,

...The Opposition in the Senate is furious - especially at the *Globe*'s article on John A's drunkenness. They threaten awful things - but they had better not. They talk of calling me to the Bar of the House for rebuke! They'll never regret that but once, if they try it.<sup>210</sup>

<sup>206</sup> When Innes' partner, John Davidson, became president of the CPA in 1886, libel "...formed the chief topic of President Davidson's address." *A History of Canadian Journalism*, p. 112

<sup>207</sup> *The Mercury*, Nov. 18, 1874, "The Brown Libel Suit" p. 2. The cause and the outcome of the suit is unknown, but a brief reference in *The Mercury* says a writ was served "...on F.J.Chadwick for the libel published in the *Herald* last July."

<sup>208</sup> *The Mercury*, April 17, 1878 "The Scenes in the House on Saturday" p. 2. Reprint of *The Globe*, April 16, 1878

<sup>209</sup> Allan Levine, *Scrum Wars*, p. 10

<sup>210</sup> George Brown Papers. Letter to his wife, Anne, 17 April, 1878

The suit against *The Mercury* was due to the vigour and vigilance of *The Herald's* aggressive young editor, Acton Burrows, which probably explained his non-appearance at the Innes-organized CPA meetings a few months later. He spied what he called, "the slander", and alerted Macdonald in a letter remarking that "the temperance element is very strong here & of course these statements will have a certain effect". He went on to write:

I have talked over the matter with a number of your friends who think that something ought to be done & at their request write to suggest that the Mercury proprietors be called on the show cause. I am [not] writing out of any spirit of ill will towards them but merely from a party point of view.<sup>211</sup>

Burrows may have been, as he suggests, simply passing on important party intelligence, but he could hardly fail to have calculated that a lawsuit, whether successful or not, would injure Innes' bank account and probably damage *The Mercury*. Burrows was not one to let such an opportunity slip by. Two days after his first letter he sent another:

My dear Sir John,

On receipt of your letter this a.m. [the letter, regrettably, has been lost] I at once saw Mr. A. H. Macdonald [a prominent local lawyer, and later mayor]. He has since obtained evidence of the publication. I have announced in the paper that you will proceed by criminal information. Anything I can do in this matter will be cheerfully performed, as I think it high time the publication of such statements should be made an example of.

Yours truly,  
C. Acton Burrows<sup>212</sup>

And in that day's edition of *The Herald*, Burrows in a prominent note immediately above the editorial let the public know all about the suit and at the same time implied the paper was very much in the close confidence of Macdonald:

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<sup>211</sup> Macdonald Papers, letter from Burrows, Apr. 26, 1878

<sup>212</sup> Macdonald Papers. Letter from Burrows, Apr. 29, 1878

### A Guelph Libel Suit

The Herald is authorised by a telegram from Ottawa to announce that Sir John A. Macdonald has instructed Mr. A. H. Macdonald, of Guelph, to institute criminal proceedings against the proprietors of the Guelph Mercury, for the scandalous charges made in that paper charging the Right Hon. gentleman with drunkenness in the House of Commons.<sup>213</sup>

On the same day, A.H. Macdonald wrote to the Conservative leader to acknowledge receiving his instructions about taking action against the proprietors of *The Mercury*. In May, in another letter, the Guelph lawyer arranged to meet Sir John in Toronto at a favourite Tory establishment, the United Empire Club, a forerunner of the modern Albany Club.<sup>214</sup> In June, the matter was still alive for A.H. Macdonald. He told his distinguished client, presumably in a response to a query about Innes' ability to pay damages that, "Innes is considered very comfortably off."<sup>215</sup>

In July, just days before the CPA conference, Innes mentioned the libel action in his paper. He reprinted an article from the *Ottawa Free Press* which sarcastically observed that some newspapers "have been guilty of the solemn offence of trifling with Sir John's high reputation for personal integrity and political righteousness..."<sup>216</sup> But while he reprinted the article, Innes was careful not to reprint the alleged libel, something which could have exposed him to heavier damages in the event Macdonald's suit was successful.

So the libel action could not have been far from Innes' mind when he spoke to the Press Association delegates about the trend toward a less partisan press. It is also certain his audience knew all about Macdonald's suit as the story had been widely reported.

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<sup>213</sup> *The Guelph Herald*, Apr. 29, 1878 p. 2

<sup>214</sup> The U.E. Club folded in 1881 and was replaced later that year by the Albany Club, which still operates. John Hewitt Amys, *The Albany*, p. 7.

<sup>215</sup> Macdonald Papers, letter from A.H. Macdonald, June 6, 1878

<sup>216</sup> *The Mercury*, July 3, 1878 p. 2

Macdonald's court actions were to have started in the fall but were dropped.<sup>217</sup> He may have concluded they could not succeed, or he may have become preoccupied when an election was called in mid-August by the Liberal government of Prime Minister Alexander Mackenzie. It was an election Macdonald would win overwhelmingly, leaving a Mackenzie biographer to conclude that "Canadians had preferred Conservative optimism to Liberal caution...they preferred Macdonald drunk to Mackenzie sober."<sup>218</sup>

By the time the Macdonald action fell off the legal ledgers, Acton Burrows, the man who engineered the entire affair, had moved on. In July 1878 he dissolved his partnership with Chadwick<sup>219</sup> and went to Manitoba, where he worked in the newspaper business and was from 1882 to 1887 the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Statistics and Health. In later life he moved to Toronto to publish a string of trade publications.<sup>220</sup>

As for Innes, his hard work in the community and with his paper was starting to pay off. He was gaining prominence, he was winning the circulation battle with *The Herald* and he was becoming increasingly prosperous. As early as 1873 Innes had raised *The Mercury's* advertising rates with the boast, which he had dramatically typeset, that: "THE WEEKLY MERCURY AND ADVERTISER...has now a GUARANTEED CIRCULATION FIVE TIMES MORE THAN THAT OF ANY OTHER PAPER PUBLISHED IN THIS COUNTY, AND EQUAL TO THAT OF ANY WEEKLY IN CANADA, OUTSIDE TORONTO"<sup>221</sup> That claim was up from the year before at which

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<sup>217</sup> Allan Levine, *Scrum Wars*, p. 10

<sup>218</sup> Dale C. Thomson, *Alexander Mackenzie: Clear Grit*, p. 339

<sup>219</sup> A.H. Macdonald's Legal Ledger. An entry dated July 20, 1878 records the dissolution of the partnership. The fee was six dollars. p. 41

<sup>220</sup> Henry James Morgan, *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time* (1912 edition), p. 177

<sup>221</sup> *The Guelph Daily Mercury*, Dec 27, 1873 p. 2

time Innes wrote *The Mercury's* "circulation is three times larger than that of any paper published in Guelph".<sup>222</sup>

In the newspaper business, unsubstantiated circulation figures were (and remain) notoriously inaccurate. Figures published in a leading newspaper directory in 1876 show the daily and weekly *Mercury* with a combined circulation of 6,300 as against *The Herald's* combined circulation of 3,200.<sup>223</sup> Clearly, *The Mercury* was winning the circulation war though not by the margin claimed by Innes. In the spring of 1878, Innes underlined his paper's regional dominance by citing post office figures which show that of the \$413.38 spent on newspaper postage in Wellington County between January and September 1877, \$194.41, or close to half, came from *The Mercury*. "It is therefore established by figures that cannot lie," Innes wrote, "that the circulation of *The Mercury* is within a fraction equal to half of the aggregate circulation of all the other ten papers published in the Town and County."<sup>224</sup>

<u>Comparative Circulation</u>		
	<u>1876</u>	<u>1892</u>
<i>The Mercury</i>		
The Daily Mercury	600	1,550 (sworn)
The Weekly Mercury	5,700	4,750 (sworn)
Combined	6,300	6,300
<i>The Herald</i>		
The Daily Herald	600	1,000
The Weekly Herald	2,600	3,000
Combined	3,200	4,000
Sources: <i>The Canadian Newspaper Directory</i> 1876, 1892		

(fig. 2)

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., Dec 5, 1872 p. 1

<sup>223</sup> T.F. Wood & Co's. *Canadian Newspaper Directory*, 1876, p. 29

<sup>224</sup> *The Mercury*, April 11, 1878 p. 2

Indicative of the publishers' willingness to inflate circulation figures is an advertisement for *The Herald* in the 1892 edition of McKim's *Canadian Newspaper Directory*. Over the name of "H. Gummer, Publisher & Proprietor" is the following assertion, "THE HERALD is ahead of all its competitors in influence, patronage and circulation in the County of Wellington."<sup>225</sup> This claim was made even though figures in the body of the directory clearly indicated that *The Herald's* circulation was substantially less than that of *The Mercury* (see fig 2). Similarly a *Weekly Mercury* advertisement in the same book claimed the paper has a "guaranteed circulation over 5,000."<sup>226</sup> when in the body of the directory Innes & Davidson had sworn to the obviously rounded-up circulation of 4,750.

### THE MERCURY AND THE NEW JOURNALISM

Beside waging circulation and political wars, Innes was being influenced, perhaps subconsciously, by new currents in his industry which would see small-city newspapers gradually develop from simply being party organs into becoming active agents for change. The idea of the crusading journalist, no matter how untrue it may be in reality, is nevertheless a widely held cultural myth of modern times. It is so well developed it is hard for the modern reader to think of a time so relatively recent when such a creature was unknown, in fact had never even been thought of. But in the late 1800s, a so-called "new

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<sup>225</sup> *The Canadian Newspaper Directory*, 1892 p. 281

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.* p. 302

journalism” was sweeping the western world.<sup>227</sup> In Canada, the new journalism was manifest in the introduction of more dramatic layouts, bolder headlines and shorter, punchier stories. Paul Rutherford has written extensively about the creation of a “people’s press” in Canada represented by such papers as Joseph Atkinson’s *Toronto Star*, John Ross Robertson’s *Toronto Telegram*<sup>228</sup> and Hugh Graham’s *Montreal Star*. Rutherford points out that the new papers “were designed to appeal not only to professionals and businessmen but also to clerks, workingmen, women and the young.”<sup>229</sup> These changes came slowly to *The Globe* and to paper’s such as *The Mercury* which was patterned on it. As late as 1910, Thomas B. Costain recalled how, when he first became editor of *The Mercury*, the paper still had an “old fashioned” appearance. He remembered one of his first victories as a rookie editor was to persuade the printers to produce two-column headlines!<sup>230</sup>

But there was more to the new journalism than typographical and layout innovation. There was a growing belief that the journalist should root out and expose evil; that the newspaper writer had a professional and social obligation as the hackneyed phrase goes “to comfort the distressed and distress the comfortable”. The supreme role model for this kind of journalism was the famous W.T. Stead, editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. In 1883 he used his paper to persuade the British government to form a Royal Commission

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<sup>227</sup> The English poet and thinker, Matthew Arnold is credited with coining the phrase in 1887. He described it as “...full of ability, novelty, variety, sensation, sympathy, generous instincts; its one fault is that it is feather-brained.”. Cited by Fredric Whyte in *The Life of W.T. Stead* p. 237

<sup>228</sup> Two of the principal movers at *The Telegram* were John R. Robinson and C.O. Knowles, both graduates of *The Mercury*. See Galbraith’s *Fifty Years of Newspaper Work*, p. 11 and the Centenary Edition of *The Mercury*, p. 100. In Ron Poulton’s, *The Paper Tyrant*, a popular history of *The Telegram*, he describes Robinson as “a dogmatic frankly obstreperous man” p. 115 and C.O. Knowles as “a first class s.o.b.” p. 200

<sup>229</sup> Paul Rutherford, *Canadian Historical Review*. Vol. LVI 1975 “The People’s Press” p. 175

<sup>230</sup> *The Mercury*, July 20, 1927 p. 101

to look into the condition of London's poor. Two years later, he created an international sensation by exposing the trafficking in poor young girls in a series of articles known as "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon". Stead, who even his sympathetic biographer acknowledges was "a compound of Don Quixote and Phineas T. Barnum,"<sup>231</sup> personally bought a 13-year-old girl, a certified virgin, from her mother for five pounds. The girl was quickly put in the care of the Salvation Army and taken out of the country. Though Stead was charged and convicted of abducting the young girl (the court ruled he had not obtained her father's consent to remove her) his series of articles led to changes in British law and enhanced the protection of young girls.

Innes was no W.T. Stead, but he was a regular reader of the *Pall Mall Gazette* which he cited frequently in *The Mercury*. He would have been fully aware of "The Maiden Tribute" and Stead's other "booms" as the English editor called his big stories. Stead's example must have, at least subconsciously, influenced Innes and his writers who began to see themselves as more than just loyal yeoman in never-ending political combat. There is a small example of this enormous change in outlook - trivial when compared to Stead's sensations - but nevertheless a departure of substantial proportions for *The Mercury*.

F.W. Galbraith, then a reporter on the paper, wrote an article about a hotel owner who was breaking the law by selling liquor freely on a Sunday. The hotel operator threatened to sue unless the paper revealed its source. *The Mercury*, and Innes, refused to say anything. When the matter got to court, Galbraith again declined to identify his source, "...the prosecuting counsel...after pressing the question for a minute or two, left it

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<sup>231</sup> Fredric Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, p. 104

unanswered, much to my surprise". Galbraith recalled that had the lawyer pursued the issue he was ready to "go to jail rather than reveal the name"<sup>232</sup>. Hardly "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" but in a small way evidence of a willingness to stand up for a principle which was not a party principle, and evidence, perhaps subtle evidence, of the beginning of a philosophical shift in an understanding of what was the right thing for a newspaper and a reporter to do.

### **LEADING OPINION AND THE IDEA OF PROGRESS IN GUELPH**

South Wellington was traditional Reform territory. The constituency returned an unbroken string of Reform or Liberal candidates between Confederation and Innes' defeat in 1896. But during this period the federal government was always Conservative except for the Mackenzie government of 1874-78. Provincially, the Liberals took power in 1871 and kept it for 34 years, and for most of that time Guelph remained loyally Liberal. But there is no way of measuring how influential *The Mercury* was on Guelph voters, other than to observe that in 1896, it could not get its proprietor elected.

Locally, endorsement by *The Mercury* often meant victory in the annual election for mayor, though the paper usually backed the candidate with the strongest Reform connection. If its candidate lost the paper could be testy, as it was in January 1869 when Dr G.S. Herod defeated the man Innes had endorsed, Robert Melvin:

[Herod] had all the advantages of a thorough organization. Nearly every team in town which could be engaged for love or money was pressed into service, and employed to bring up votes. He had moreover the benefit of an active and indefatigable committee, who searched out every vote, and brought him up to the poll. And yet with all these things in his favour, with all proper and improper influences bro't to bear on his side, and against his opponent, he only secured a

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<sup>232</sup> F.W. Galbraith, *Fifty Years of Newspaper Work*, p. 10

beggarly majority of fifty. We may well repeat that Dr. Herod need not be proud of his victory, and we are fully satisfied in our own mind that had Mr. Melvin been able to attend personally to his election he would have been returned.<sup>233</sup>

There is no basis to conclude that *The Mercury* was a leader of civic opinion. It may have helped like-minded individuals shape and articulate some of their political views, but given the generally highly partisan atmosphere one suspects editorials were more likely to reinforce existing positions than to change many minds.

The same problem - to what degree did *The Mercury* influence opinion - comes up when one looks at the paper's editorial position on expansion. What *is* clear is that Innes and *The Mercury* were for it. Innes worked tirelessly both editorially and practically to bring the benefits of the urban nineteenth century to Guelph. He supported railway expansion and more and better public services. In 1867 he was campaigning vigorously for municipal fire protection. He attacked council for failing to adequately support the fire brigade which in December of that year disgustingly resigned *en masse*. "It cannot be expected they [the fire brigade] will keep up a sham organization," he editorialized. "when they are not provided with the proper apparatus for effectively quenching fires, and when their repeated representations to the Council are either allowed to go unheeded, or aid doled out to them in miserable driblets."<sup>234</sup>

Three years later, Innes was pushing the advantages of natural gas and supporting the formation of the Gas Company. The Gas Company was organized by local business people who floated shares to generate the necessary working capital.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> *The Guelph Evening Mercury*, Jan. 5, 1869 p. 2

<sup>234</sup> *The Mercury*, Dec 7, 1867 p. 2

<sup>235</sup> Leo Johnson, *History of Guelph*, pp. 252-253

Exactly the same corporate approach was used to create a manufacturer of agricultural implements. Innes told his readers that such activities were vital to the economic well-being of Guelph. "We are" he wrote "in a state of commercial chrysalis, in a condition of transition from old to new that may prove either injurious or beneficial to our entire hereafter, according to the manner in which we should shape our opportunities of the moment."<sup>236</sup>

Innes was not ideologically dogmatic about how that growth should occur. While he was essentially a free enterprise capitalist, he strongly supported municipal intervention to attract industry and believed municipal "bonusing" was vital. In 1872 he even supported a bid to attract a piano manufacturer from Whitby by offering a richer bonus than one being offered by Oshawa. He then roundly attacked council for delaying a motion to grant an \$8,000 inducement, "a small bonus" to the company "on the bare technical objection that a rule of the Council did not allow such a motion to be brought up."<sup>237</sup>

The success of municipal bonusing in the nineteenth century is unclear, but the practice helped generate a sense of doing something in the face of enormous competition from other communities. Ultimately, whether they employed bonusing or not most medium-sized communities lost out to big regional centres as economic power and decision making became increasingly concentrated.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> *The Guelph Evening Mercury*, Nov. 29, 1870 p. 2

<sup>237</sup> *The Guelph Weekly Mercury*, May 23, 1872 p. 2

<sup>238</sup> For more on this idea see Gilbert Stelter's essay, "The City Building Process in Canada", in Stelter and Alan Artibise, *Shaping the Urban Landscape*.

As evidence of how wide were Innes' concerns about municipal growth, consider his strong advocacy in 1882 of the essential work of a city health inspector. Such a position represented a drain on the municipal coffers and may very well have been construed as a frill by many residents. But Innes forcefully pressed home the vital need for such a person: "...in most of our towns and villages there is little or no drainage, and no sewerage at all, but in their place a collection of privies and cesspools, which are the birthplace and the abode of all obnoxious and fever breeding gases..."<sup>239</sup>. He said that now Guelph had a health inspector he hoped he would "...make a careful examination of every backyard, lane, and water-closet...", and Innes wrote, he must "...do his work without fear, favour or affection, and in doing so...he will greatly help to preserve the health of the city..."<sup>240</sup>.

There are numerous examples of Innes and *The Mercury* supporting all sorts of schemes to make Guelph a more modern and better place to live. This theory of "progress" was essentially unchallenged by the industrial-commercial elite, and Innes' editorial policy clearly supported the accepted view. But while he may have articulated it there is no clear proof he shaped it.

## ANTI-UNIONISM

As a property owner and employer Innes had every reason to fear trade unionism. In this he certainly mirrored the sentiments of the other employers in Guelph as well as the views of George Brown who had been hit by a number of strikes by the powerful

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<sup>239</sup> *The Mercury*, April 30, 1882, "Sanitary Regulations" p. 2

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.* April 30, 1882, "Sanitary Regulations" p. 2

Typographical Society. In a typical anti-union editorial entitled “Trades Unions and Strikes”, Innes writes: “It is in the order of nature - and we cannot doubt that all things in nature are ordered aright - that there should be some men who have wealth as their heritage, while there are others who have no patrimony but strong constitutions, energy and muscle”. In the same editorial he says Trades Unions “have been a disgrace to themselves and to civilization, and a curse to those who were members of them as well as to many who were not”.<sup>241</sup>

Innes frequently attacked unions. However, in the spring of 1872 *The Mercury* offered a balanced report on an enormous meeting in Guelph of the “nine-hour movement”. As the name implied the movement consisted of workers who wanted the work day reduced to nine hours. Innes’ own reporter wrote “there must have been considerably over 1,000 people present.” The views of the pro-union speakers were fairly presented but plenty of room was left for rebuttals by employers who attended the gathering.<sup>242</sup> The meeting came shortly after a bitter printers strike in Toronto had ended with the arrest of 14 of the strike’s leaders. They had been arrested partly at the behest of *The Globe* and George Brown who had been among the principal forces advocating the strong action.<sup>243</sup> So the meeting in Guelph must have been of particular interest to Innes. However, despite his anti-union views, there is no evidence that *The Mercury* was ever hit by a strike in Innes’ time. Innes’ views on trade unions are a mixture of self-interest and a reflection of the views of other members of the industrial-business elite. So the

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<sup>241</sup> *The Guelph Evening Mercury*, Oct 21, 1867 p.2

<sup>242</sup> *The Weekly Mercury*, May 30, 1872 (no page number visible).

<sup>243</sup> J.M.S. Careless, *Brown of The Globe, Vol II*, p. 295. Careless says of Brown’s actions. “...it was an extreme step, an unwise step that might do George Brown’s own cause more harm than good.”

conundrum remains, was Innes leading community opinion or simply reporting on opinions already held.

In a sense it is a puzzle that needs no solution. Because what is certain is that Innes was delivering those opinions and ideas, what ever their source, to the citizens of Guelph. In doing so he was making them part of the great philosophical and social changes of their times. *The Mercury* made the people of Guelph feel they were part of the Victorian Age, not simply distant, out-of-touch observers. The nineteenth-century newspaper helped end the intellectual and social isolation which was once an accepted part of country life. The end to that isolation is evidence of the important role small-city editors, such as Innes, played as emissaries of ideas and as the pioneers of what McLuhan was to so-aptly name “the global village”.

As for Innes, his role as editor and community leader hit a high point in early 1882, when after 17 years as a board member on Guelph’s Board of School Trustees, he took on the important public position of chair. But this was not to be the pinnacle of his political success. Unforeseen events would soon force him to resign from the school board and move on to other challenges..

## Chapter Three

### The Member for South Wellington

In the spring of 1882, a fractious parliament in Ottawa was winding down and rumours of an early election started to circulate. The government pushed through a last-minute riding redistribution bill which was seen as nothing but “gerrymandering” by outraged Reformers. “Never, we believe, in the annals of public life in Canada, has there been so flagrant a violation of the rights of an electorate for the sake of party purposes...”<sup>244</sup> *The Mercury* thundered. The paper was particularly aggrieved because the redistribution saw the good Grit town of Erin severed from South Wellington, a town which in the last election delivered a 222 vote Liberal majority. “A thrill of indignation” Innes editorializes, “must sweep through every Township left at the manner in which this Riding has been dished up to serve Tory interests”<sup>245</sup>.

As usual Innes threw himself into the election fray. Throughout his time in Guelph, Innes was to write, he “had been an active worker in all the elections in the County of Wellington, both Dominion and local...” and had “...collected considerable sums of money in aid of the Reform candidates.”<sup>246</sup> In 1882, Innes was president of the Reform Association in South Wellington and he began to prepare the faithful for the coming election. The Liberal member, the Guelph lawyer Donald Guthrie, was expected to run again and Innes organized what he anticipated would be a straightforward nomination meeting endorsing Guthrie’s candidacy. But on May 16, 1882, just a few days before the

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<sup>244</sup> *The Guelph Daily Mercury*, May 1, 1882 “The Gerrymandering Bill” p. 2

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>246</sup> Laurier Papers, Innes to Laurier Aug. 27, 1896

Reform meeting, Innes, in what he subsequently suggested in *The Mercury* was an entirely unexpected letter, received word from Guthrie that he would not stand again. Guthrie blamed recent “pecuniary losses” and explained “...I cannot afford to be absent from my business so long a time as is now and hereafter is likely to be required to attend the sittings of the Dominion Parliament at Ottawa.”<sup>247</sup>

Innes at first withheld the news. Possibly he wanted to test what support he could get if he put his own name forward for nomination. But because of the lack of private correspondence, or other sources of illumination, beyond Innes’ carefully sanitized version of events in the paper, his motives and manoeuvres remain obscure. But whatever Innes was preparing, events soon caught up to him. Two days after he received Guthrie’s letter, the government called an election. Innes immediately published the letter and declared he would stand for the nomination. *The Herald* speculated there was a private arrangement between Guthrie and Innes to pass the Reform torch. That issue of *The Herald* has been lost, but Innes ridiculed the attack in *The Mercury*: “The talk of the *Herald* about any private compact between Mr. Guthrie and the President of the Reform Association [Innes] is too silly and childish for even our contemporary, which, of course, had to say something under the circumstances, and thought this would be a most telling point.”<sup>248</sup>

Whatever the truth of *The Herald’s* assertions, Innes did win the Reform nomination. The campaign against James Goldie, the Conservative candidate, appears to

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<sup>247</sup> *The Mercury*, May 18, 1882, “Mr. Guthrie Declines to be a Candidate”, p. 2. Then as now, running for Parliament could be an expensive proposition. Years after he left politics Innes was to complain that he bore the entire expense of each of his four election campaigns “...without asking the friends for a cent”. (letter to Laurier, May 9, 1899) The expenses, according to Innes, included “the preparation of the Voters Lists, which was no small amount as well as freely contributing according to his means to all the Party funds”. (Letter to Laurier, Aug. 27, 1896)

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.* May 20, 1882, “The Herald and South Wellington”, p. 2

have been fairly uneventful, though Sir John A. Macdonald made a campaign stop in Guelph. Needless to say, *The Mercury* was unimpressed by his performance, “the old fallacies were gone over, the old statements reiterated, the old arguments advanced...”<sup>249</sup>

But those “old fallacies” worked, and the Conservatives under Macdonald were returned to power. Though the Liberals lost, Innes won his seat. His majority was only 118 and his votes came mostly from the rural parts of the riding. Nevertheless he was launched on a new and exciting journey. He resigned his seat as chair of the School Trustees and began to prepare for his new role.

Parliament sat much less frequently in Innes’ day than now, and it wasn’t until February 1883 that it resumed and Innes, for the first time, took his seat. He “...sent some editorial back from the capital, and a regular weekly letter for Wednesday which took the place that day of the editorial.”<sup>250</sup> These reports normally centred on ponderous Parliamentary debates, but Innes occasionally interspersed observations that bring some sense of the excitement he must have felt at going to Ottawa and moving among the great of the land. In his first dispatch he concluded with a colourful account of the invitation-only Saturday evening winter carnivals at the governor-general’s residence:

On approaching Rideau Hall grounds from the city the illuminated surroundings attract the attention, which is completely absorbed when the beholder alights from his sleigh in front of the Vice-Regal residence. Hundreds of Chinese lanterns are suspended from wires which run all the way along the tobogganing slides; a huge bonfire blazes from the centre of the scene of beauty; lighted lamps are numerous; hundreds of ladies and gentlemen in picturesque sporting dresses are to be seen moving about, climbing up the steep ascents leading to the summits of the slides; the band of the Governor-General’s Foot Guards discourses stirring music;...while the spectators, who are among the invited guests, look on in wondering admiration

<sup>249</sup> *The Mercury*, June 10, 1882, “Sir John at Guelph”, p. 2

<sup>250</sup> F.W. Galbraith, *Fifty Years of Newspaper Work*, p. 7

at the animated and fairy-like scene.<sup>251</sup>

A few weeks later Innes' parliamentary report takes on the air of a travelogue as he elegantly describes Canada's still relatively new capital. They are among the finest lines Innes ever wrote:

Ottawa is not what one would call a finished city. Its streets everywhere give evidence of transition from large town to ambitious city....The finest view of Ottawa is obtained from the bold eminence on which stands the Parliament Buildings. Before you lies the heart of the city with its streets stretching away into the country....Face the other way and you have a full view of Hull and the magnificent basin of the Ottawa below the Falls and a long stretch of the river till its course is lost among the hills.<sup>252</sup>

But then as now an Opposition backbencher, particularly a neophyte backbencher, got little opportunity to speak, and Innes said nothing for the four months that Parliament was in session. In fact throughout his entire Parliamentary career Innes spoke hardly at all, something he privately acknowledged after his defeat. "It is true," he wrote in a letter in 1897, "I took little part in the debates while in the Commons, but there were so many there eager to go to the front that I often gave way when I should not have done so, and was often prevented by my own diffidence."<sup>253</sup>

In January 1884, Innes returned for another session. Now a little more seasoned, he was appointed a member of the Select Committee to Supervise the Publication of the Official Reports of the Debates of the House, it was a position he would retain throughout the rest of his Parliamentary career. Finally on Monday, Feb 11 just after the opening of business at 3 p.m. Innes made his maiden appearance in Hansard briefly introducing for

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<sup>251</sup> *The Guelph Daily Mercury*, Mar 14, 1883, "From the Capital, A Meagre Week's Work", p. 2

<sup>252</sup> *The Mercury*, Mar 27, 1883, "From the Capital, Some Notes About Ottawa", p. 3

<sup>253</sup> The Laurier Papers, Innes to Laurier December 4, 1897.

first reading “without remark or debate” a bill to incorporate the Guelph Junction Railway.<sup>254</sup> The bill was passed in March<sup>255</sup>. Innes had his first legislative success.

These brief appearances by Innes, usually focusing on local constituency matters, mark almost his entire time in Ottawa. In April, 1885 he had a question about the mails between Shiloh and Fergus<sup>256</sup>, in July he wondered about free mail delivery in Guelph<sup>257</sup>, and in June, 1886 the pattern continued with Innes inquiring about a government pension for the family of a Mounted Police volunteer from Guelph who was killed at Duck Lake<sup>258</sup>. In 1888 during a long debate on The Railway Act, Innes inserted his local concerns about the railways responsibilities to provide undercrossings:

I think the section should be amended so as to be as much as possible in the interests of municipalities. There is a case in point in the corporation of Guelph.... When the Grand Trunk was constructed, a good many years ago, they made an embankment of 20 feet across the road allowance...and the company has never made an under-crossing. The matter is now in litigation....<sup>259</sup>

Innes, perhaps pressed by constituents, clearly saw his role in Parliament primarily as a voice for the people of South Wellington, rather than as a player on a bigger stage. In the spring of 1885, Innes delivered an uncharacteristically long and well-prepared speech on a matter not directly touching his constituency or his personal business interests. He spoke on a government bill designed to erase differences in provincial voting regulations, and standardize franchise qualifications across the Dominion. The Liberals and Innes opposed the idea. “We find no franchise of this kind in any country in the world,” Innes

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<sup>254</sup> *Debates of the House of Commons*, Vol XV Feb 11, 1884 p. 198

<sup>255</sup> *Debates of the House of Commons*, Vol. XV Mar 21, 1884 p. 1035

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. XVIII April 20, 1885 p. 1211

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. XX July 11, 1885 p. 3309

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. XXII, June 1, 1886 p. 1742

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. XXVI, May 3, 1886 p. 1181

told the House, “and considering the heterogeneous elements in Canada, considering the different nationalities, the different customs and habits of the people of Canada, I think a uniform franchise would work very unsatisfactorily and have disastrous effects.”<sup>260</sup>

While Innes was away at Parliament, others had to look after *The Mercury*. Around 1884 he seems to have begun his association with his nephew, James Innes McIntosh, the son of Innes’ one-time sawmill partner, James McIntosh. F.W. Galbraith who started work at *The Mercury* in January 1884 as an editorial assistant, recalled those days half a century later:

Mr. Innes McIntosh, the bosses’ nephew, came in to handle the editorial and news work, when Mr. James Innes, M.P., was absent at Ottawa. Mr. McIntosh was mighty glad to get some help, as he had been a stenographer and private secretary at the Legislative buildings at Toronto [among others he served T.B. Pardee, the minister of Crown Lands as private secretary<sup>261</sup>] and was not so thoroughly posted on the newspaper work.<sup>262</sup>

Guest editorials seem to have been common, a prominent Liberal lawyer E.F.B. Johnston, K.C. recalled in 1917 that “in the days of my old friend James Innes, I was very close to the editorial sanctum”. He goes on to claim that “James Innes informally installed me as editor for a month or two at a time”.<sup>263</sup>

Innes’ absences in Ottawa must have been made easier by the knowledge that things were well in hand at *The Mercury* under his partner Davidson and his nephew McIntosh. So, while Innes tended to his political career, *The Mercury* prospered. In January 1880, Dun, Wiman & Co. rated Innes and Davidson as “Good” credit risks with a

<sup>260</sup> *Debates of the House of Commons*, Vol. XVII, May 8, 1885 p. 1739

<sup>261</sup> *The Guelph Mercury*, Mar 29, 1930, “City Loses Prominent Resident In Passing Of James Innes McIntosh”, p. 1

<sup>262</sup> F.W. Galbraith, *Fifty Years of Newspaper Work*, p. 7

<sup>263</sup> *The Guelph Mercury*, “E.F.B. Johnston Contributed to Mercury Editorial Columns”, Jubilee Edition, July 20, 1917 p. 2

worth of between \$20,000 and \$40,000.<sup>264</sup> By March 1898, R.G. Dun & Co. (the successor to Dun, Wiman & Co.) list Innes & Davidson's as "High" on their scale of creditworthiness.<sup>265</sup>

But while things were going well at *The Mercury*, *The Herald* was mired in financial difficulties. F.J. Chadwick went through several partners in an effort to make the paper a success, but finally in 1885 *The Herald* was sold under chattel mortgage to Harry Gummer. As the paper's own history was to recall a decade later, taking over the stumbling paper and making it once again viable "was anything but clean sailing"<sup>266</sup> Gummer faced problems with equipment, advertisers and subscribers. He also faced a lengthy lawsuit over title to the paper. But Gummer seems to have been an excellent manager, and was able to right the struggling paper. By 1898 R.G. Dun and Co. have granted him a "Good" credit rating and estimate his "pecuniary strength at somewhere between \$10,000 and \$20,000"<sup>267</sup>.

## **THE DOMINION LIFE ASSURANCE COMPANY OF CANADA**

Innes' Parliamentary career was a pedestrian one, but it did open some interesting doors, the most notable one being to The Dominion Life Assurance Company. Innes was to become president probably because his fellow directors believed that as a Member of Parliament he would perhaps lend a reassuring appearance of solidity and integrity to the young company.

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<sup>264</sup> Dun, Wiman & Co., *The Mercantile Agency Reference Book*, Jan 1880

<sup>265</sup> R.G. Dun & Co., *The Mercantile Agency Reference Book*, March 1898

<sup>266</sup> "History of The Herald", *The Guelph Herald, Special Illustrated Edition*, December 1995 p. 1

<sup>267</sup> *The Mercantile Agency Reference Book*, R.G. Dun & Co. March 1898

On July 3, 1889 Thomas Hilliard a 47-year-old former school teacher and journalist (he operated the weekly, *Waterloo Chronicle* for nearly two decades) who was now the principal driving force behind the creation of a new insurance company received a short but important telegram from Ottawa:

Bill passed just now will attend now to senate. I send you the bill as passed by this night's mail.

Jas Trow M.P.<sup>268</sup>

The Bill was the act incorporating The Dominion Life Assurance Company. The next day, perhaps by luck or perhaps in haste, Hilliard called together the company's shareholders. Two of them were from Guelph, Innes and Thomas Gowdy the owner of Gowdy's Agricultural Works. What their links were to Hilliard, or why they ventured to Waterloo to get involved in an insurance company remain unclear. A 20-man board of directors was elected including both Innes and Gowdy<sup>269</sup>. In the first 15 months of the company's existence, Hilliard, who was to become Dominion Life's long time managing director and later president, succeeded, working alone, in writing over a quarter of a million dollars in insurance business, a remarkable amount for the time<sup>270</sup>.

In 1893, after the death of the company's first president (James Trow, the M.P. who pushed the company's original incorporation through Parliament) Innes' position as an M.P. was probably a key factor in his fellow directors unanimously elected him president. Innes was to be re-elected president for each of the next ten years. When not

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<sup>268</sup> The Dominion Life Assurance Company, corporate records. Telegram from Trow to Hilliard July 3, 1889

<sup>269</sup> *Minute Book, Dec. 1888 - Dec. 1910, The Dominion Life Assurance Company, First General Meeting of Shareholders, July 4, 1889* p. 13

<sup>270</sup> *A Concise Chronicle of Accomplishment*, a corporate history booklet prepared to mark the 75th anniversary of the company. No author pp. 3-4

in Ottawa he regularly travelled to Waterloo for the company's board meetings for which he received a small stipend. As president, he was also paid a salary: in 1898 it was \$200 a year<sup>271</sup>, by 1903, with the company prospering, it rose to \$400<sup>272</sup>. However, this was not particularly generous. For example, as early as 1898 the president of the Guelph and Ontario Investment and Savings Society, which Innes served as a director, was receiving \$600 annually.<sup>273</sup>

Innes' role at Dominion Life was primarily that of a figurehead. The insurance company's day-to-day operations were ably managed by Hilliard, though it was Innes who confirmed all board minutes, and it was over Innes' signature that the glowing annual reports were delivered. And the glowing reports were justified. While Innes could take little credit for it, the company did do remarkably well during his tenure as president, with its insurance business growing several times over. Innes also increased his personal holdings in Dominion Life. In 1903, the year of his death, he held 6,900 shares<sup>274</sup>.

## THE FINAL CAMPAIGN AND RETIREMENT

In the summer election of 1896, the Liberals under Laurier finally broke the Conservative stranglehold on power. But Innes was to lose in South Wellington, and so the Liberal warrior was denied the spoils of the political war in which he had fought so long and so loyally.

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<sup>271</sup> Minute Book, Dominion Life, Dec 1888 to Dec 1910, "That two hundred dollars be paid Mr Innes the president...." Feb 2, 1898 p. 144

<sup>272</sup> Ibid. "That the salary of the president be \$400...." Feb. 5, 1903 p. 214

<sup>273</sup> Minute Book, Guelph and Ontario Investment and Savings Society, Annual General Meeting 1898

<sup>274</sup> *The Dominion Life Assurance Company, 14th Annual Report, 1903* p. 13

The Manitoba Schools Question was the overriding issue in the election. The Tories had tried to put off the contentious issue with a long series of references to the courts, but finally in the summer of 1896, with only a few weeks left in their mandate, they were forced to confront it. They sought to put a Remedial Bill through parliament which would see the return of separate schools to Manitoba. In English Canada the Tories portrayed themselves as merely loyal servants of the Crown delivering the remedy the Judicial Committee demanded, in Quebec on the other hand they made the Bill appear as a bulwark for Manitoba's oppressed French and Catholic minority against a tyrannical English majority<sup>275</sup>.

During the lengthy debate surrounding the Bill, Innes gave an uncharacteristically long speech. It was to be the last he delivered in Parliament. He repeated the line taken by most Ontario Liberals, that Manitoba voters had twice rejected separate schools, and the Remedial Bill amounted to the imposition of "rank tyranny" on the people of Manitoba. "The very idea," he told the House, "in the nineteenth century, of forcing on a free people a system such as this, and this to be done by an outside power like the Dominion Parliament, is repugnant to all men of independent spirit, and there is no wonder that the people of Manitoba feel indignant that we should try and force at the tail end of a sixth session, such a system on them."<sup>276</sup> Innes must have been pleased with the speech, he had it reprinted almost in its entirety in *The Mercury*.<sup>277</sup> As it was, due to Liberal delaying tactics and the refusal of some Ontario Tories to support the Bill, the prime

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<sup>275</sup> J. Murray Beck, *Pendulum of Power*, p. 76

<sup>276</sup> *Debates of the House of Commons. Vol. XLII*, April 8, 1896, p. 5638

<sup>277</sup> *The Mercury*, April 13, 1896, "Mr. Innes on the Report of the Winnipeg Conference", p. 2

minister, Sir Charles Tupper, was forced to withdraw it adjourn the house a day before it was legally due to come to an end.

Tupper and the Tories now faced a nearly hopeless election. After almost two decades in office they were tattered and torn by internal strife. Sir John A. Macdonald was dead. He had died within months of taking office in 1891. In the following five years the Tories had four different leaders and, the last of them, Tupper was now in his seventies. In spite of his age and his dim prospects, Tupper fought a vigorous campaign, introducing "...the leader's cross-country campaign tour...he delivered 42 speeches in the last 13 days of electioneering."<sup>278</sup> But in the end the Laurier Liberals won. The election of 1896 was described by a contemporary observer as one in which "...the government showed strength where its destruction was looked for; [and] the voters for whom it risked its life refused to vote for it."<sup>279</sup> In Quebec, where it was anticipated the Remedial Bill would attract votes, the Conservatives were humiliated, but in Ontario, where the Tories foresaw an electoral blood bath they managed to capture 43 seats, only five less than they had in the previous election.

Among the defeated Liberals was Innes. F.W. Galbraith in his brief but valuable memoirs says the loss came to those in the Innes camp as "the shock of their lives". According to Galbraith the successful candidate was "not a speaker, nor posted on public affairs", but he employed "an outsider" who spent three months in organizing.

Innes insisted his opponent gained election, "largely by his lavish expenditure of money"<sup>280</sup> He also railed against what he charged were dishonest manipulations by the

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<sup>278</sup> J. Murray Beck, *Pendulum of Power*, p. 78

<sup>279</sup> John W. Dafoe, *Clifford Sifton in Relation to His Times*, p. 92

<sup>280</sup> Laurier Papers. Innes to Laurier, May 9, 1899

returning officer. It appears Innes considered and then rejected the idea of a formal protest. But the memory of his defeat and his frustration at failing to gain a Senate appointment still rankled nearly seven years later: "After the election of 1896," he wrote to the prime minister in January, 1903, "at the urgent request of the Liberal Committee, the protest against my opponent was dropped, on the promise, I was told, in my absense [sic], that I would get a seat in the Senate."<sup>281</sup>

Innes was inclined to blame outside forces for his defeat and to hint that the election was somehow "stolen" from him. But Galbraith, the old newspaper man writing almost 40 years after the event, made a more penetrating assessment. He suggested Innes fell into the trap which has devoured so many incumbents; the belief that after several terms of solid service, victory is certain. "The Liberals were over-confident," Galbraith recalled, without ever mentioning Innes' name, "and did not put in much work until the last ten days or so when it was too late."<sup>282</sup>

Innes' defeat in 1896 may have precipitated his decision along with that of his partner Davidson, to sell *The Mercury* to Innes' nephew, James Innes McIntosh, and to the paper's editor, Galbraith. By that time the paper had become a substantial operation with a circulation of over 6,000 and if a photograph from 1892 is anything to go by a workforce, including many paper boys, of well over 50<sup>283</sup>. After leaving the paper Innes lobbied tirelessly for a government appointment. He seems to have been considered as a possible postmaster<sup>284</sup>, but the appointment never materialized and in spite of intensely

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<sup>281</sup> Laurier Papers. Innes to Laurier, Jan. 26, 1903

<sup>282</sup> F.W. Galbraith, *Fifty Years of Newspaper Work*, p. 15

<sup>283</sup> Robert Stewart, *A Picture History of Guelph. Vol. One*, p. 138. A picture "about 1892" shows *The Mercury* building with what appears to be the staff standing in front.

<sup>284</sup> Laurier Papers. Innes to Laurier, March 4, 1902

pressing the prime minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, he never achieved his final ambition “to finish my political career in the Senate”<sup>285</sup>.

Though Innes’ career as a member of Parliament was to last for 14 years it represents only a tiny part of his contribution to Guelph. He was, after all, a minor opposition backbencher who rarely spoke, and who had little or no influence. Measured against his role as an editor and as a community activist, his Parliamentary sojourn seems almost irrelevant. It was probably more important to Innes, the man, than it was to the community. The experience gave him a chance to see beyond Guelph, and to get a little closer to the intoxicating but still distant winds of power. It was an experience which was to make Innes, in the political-business world he most admired, “a somebody” a fact underlined by his election as president of Dominion Life.

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<sup>285</sup> Laurier Papers. Innes to Laurier Dec. 4, 1897.

## *Chapter Four*

### **Conclusion**

Most modern historians are uncomfortable with what critics call “progressive” history, a view that sees all history as a movement toward an unequalled present. My thesis might be seen as “modified progressive” history. I believe this short paper proves, in the case of Innes and his contemporaries, what is self-evident: that what they created has contributed inevitably to what exists now. The nineteenth century residents of Guelph might stand condemned of failing to bring Guelph industrial and commercial greatness, but equally the frustration of their ambitions may be seen as beneficial to a modern Guelph, devoid as it largely is of the smokestacks and clanging detritus of industrialism. Determining if what exists now is better than what went before is an entirely subjective and personal exercise that must be left to the individual. But indisputably what exists now is largely the result of what went before and clearly Innes was a major contributor.

As this paper outlines, Innes was philosophically and personally committed to any number of causes both political and practical. How much he actually influenced events through his paper, or whether he was just an extremely active part of a general cultural trend, is impossible to gauge. What is clear, is that while Innes may have moulded some opinion, he was not an independent thinker. His views on almost every subject reflected his deep commitment to Reform Party principles, and in his editorial role he was to boast that he had “ever been active in promoting the interests of the party...”<sup>286</sup> He viewed himself as a loyal soldier in the political wars and faithfully adhered to the party line.

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<sup>286</sup> Laurier Papers. Letter to Laurier Aug. 27, 1896

It is an oft repeated assertion that newspaper editors shape opinion, but it is an indistinct and slippery phenomenon difficult to capture and difficult to measure. Like all editors, particularly small city editors, Innes had to develop a careful strategy. He had to be opinionated and provocative enough to engage and perhaps inform his readership, but at the same time he could not present ideas that were so progressive or so unpopular or so out-of-step with the party line that they could not be comfortably considered by his audience.

The difficulties of party journalism are illustrated by the experience of Sir John Willison who was on the staff of *The Globe* in the 1890s when the contentious Jesuits' Estates Act was at the centre of public discussion. In his memoirs he recalled how the paper vacillated:

Once, I remember, I was stopped on the street by an acquaintance, who intimated, with stern displeasure, that he did not like *The Globe's* position on the Jesuit Estates question. I retorted angrily and in unparliamentary language that he must be d\_\_\_\_\_ hard to satisfy since there was no possible position on the question that *The Globe* had not taken. The truth was that *The Globe* had first opposed disallowance...[then] discovered that public opinion was overwhelmingly in favor of disallowance.<sup>287</sup>

Innes, and other party journalists, may have sometimes felt editorially trapped by their party loyalties, but trapped or not they spent a lot of time trying to shift opinion -- in Innes' case, in a Liberal direction. However, in the end they found themselves giving voice and shape, if not actual birth, to ideas which were beyond simple partisanship. In Guelph, as in so many other small cities, the prevailing orthodoxy among the ruling elite was a belief in expansion. It was a view Innes endorsed and promoted in his paper, and it was a view that cut across all political lines.

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<sup>287</sup> John Willison, *Reminiscences*, pp. 170-171

Innes' commitment to his community was particularly large, but his intense involvement was not unusual when compared with the work of other prominent small-city figures. This desire to better their communities and their countries whether by organizing free libraries or by agitating for improved civic sanitation is evidence of the huge liberal shift in societal sentiment that took place in Britain, America and later Canada in the nineteenth century. Part of this sentiment was reflected in such things as the Free Library Board or the appointment of a city health inspector, part of it was reflected in Morton's "bonds of social obligation" which Innes and his contemporaries so willingly assumed. Initially this liberalizing trend was linked with political change such as the Reform Bills in Britain and the attainment of responsible government in Canada. Later it became manifest in an overwhelmingly social way though the social and the political cannot be entirely disentangled. Swept by reformist sentiment, Canadian society in the last half of the nineteenth century embraced major new developments in health, education, economic equality, art, communications and science. Even Albert, Prince Consort appeared to condone at least some of the new thinking acting as president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1859, an act that was interpreted by many as "royal approval" for the new age of ideas<sup>288</sup>. As Carl Berger points out, "the implanting and growth of science in Victorian Canada was one strand in a complex fabric of transplanted British civilization overseas; like other strands in that culture it was modified and the resulting pattern was not an exact duplication."<sup>289</sup> This explosion of new ideas and new expectations and the adaptation of them to Canadian society was an issue Innes engaged

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<sup>288</sup> A.B.McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence*, p 95.

<sup>289</sup> Carl Berger, *Science, God, and Nature in Victorian Canada*, p. xiii

and promoted both editorially and often practically through personal involvement. As a liberal and a George Brown Reformer, Innes was philosophically attuned to bringing what he saw as the best of the Victorian age to the small city where fate had elected he would lead his life. Because of Innes and others like him, it has been argued that "...by the end of the Mowat period an embryonic welfare state existed in Ontario"<sup>290</sup>.

Guelph was in the forefront with its commitment to municipal ownership including the ownership of its own Guelph Junction Railway, a project with which Innes had been deeply involved. Early 20th Century civic boosters saw the municipal railway not only as good city management but also as a sagacious piece of financial foresight. In 1909, it was calculated that "...on this \$193,000 investment we are now receiving yearly dividends amounting to \$25,000...the dividends have consistently increased...and will unquestionably reach double their present proportions."<sup>291</sup>

On July 16, 1903, Innes died, aged 70. He was still active and involved, though in 1897 he was complaining of chronic "writer's cramp"<sup>292</sup>, which was possibly some form of arthritic condition. The condition could not have been that serious as there is no record of Innes ever having been admitted to the General Hospital<sup>293</sup>. Innes died of pneumonia while on a train trip to St. John's to visit his friend, Harry Reid, of the Newfoundland Railway Company.<sup>294</sup> He died a successful and comparatively rich man. As noted earlier,

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<sup>290</sup> Donald Swainson, *Oliver Mowat's Ontario*, "Introduction" p. 4

<sup>291</sup> W.J. Bell, *Municipal Ownership and Civic Government -- By Commission*, p. 3

<sup>292</sup> Laurier Papers, Innes to Laurier Dec 4, 1897, "Please overlook my poor writing as I have suffered for ten years from writers [sic] cramp."

<sup>293</sup> *Register of Guelph General Hospital, 1875-1904*

<sup>294</sup> *Historical Atlas of the County of Wellington*, "Innes, James" p. 36

he left an estate valued at more than \$125,000, a substantial sum at the turn of the century.<sup>295</sup>

While Guelph never became the major city Innes and other early promoters hoped for, it has developed into a prosperous, stable, middle-sized community. Its' present shape and size would perhaps disappoint Innes' ambitious nature, but he would no doubt be proud of the institutions and municipal services which stand as his legacy.

What influence did Innes and his kind have on Ontario and Canada? Like most men he was a bit player, admittedly a very active bit player, but nevertheless a minor figure, a backbencher, a country editor whose concerns hardly extended beyond the boundaries of Wellington County. One might well ask, what difference did he really make? I believe the difference he made was that, along with so many other tiny currents, he contributed to a great stream of change. He both took momentum from the stream and contributed to it. It is hardly original to state that the whole is the sum of its parts, but as trite and unimaginative as it may sound it is nonetheless as true in Innes' life as it is in geometry.

In the successful management of his newspaper, in his contribution to the community and in his political and broader business career, James Innes proved that he was, as his colleagues on the board of The Guelph and Ontario Investment and Savings Society asserted, a man of "sound judgement and honesty of purpose".

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<sup>295</sup> *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol XIII, Debra Nash-Chambers. p. 498

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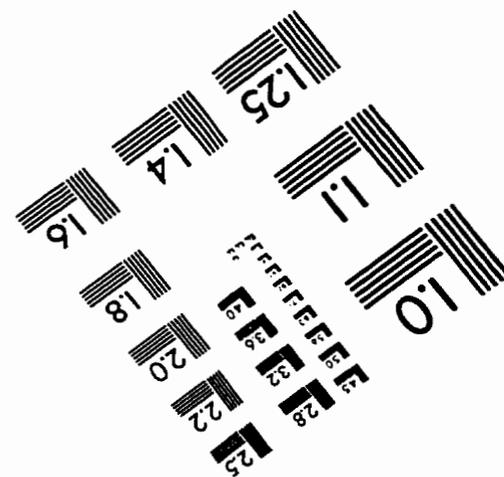
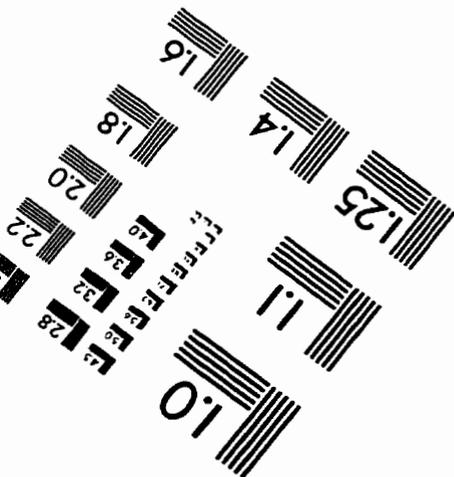
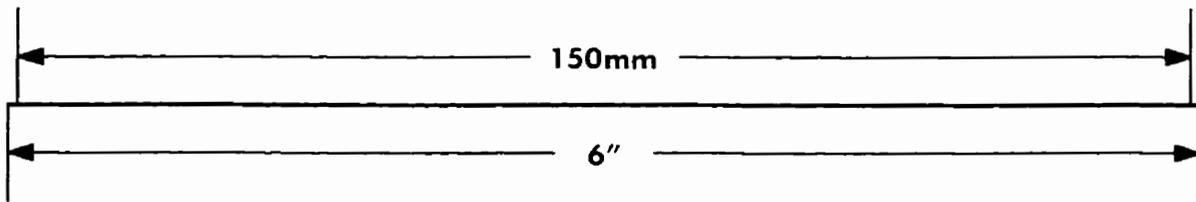
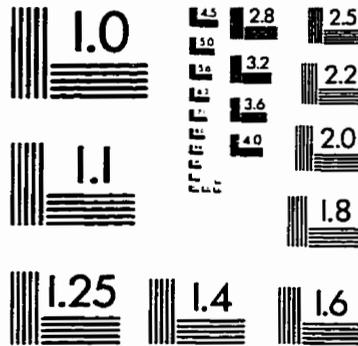
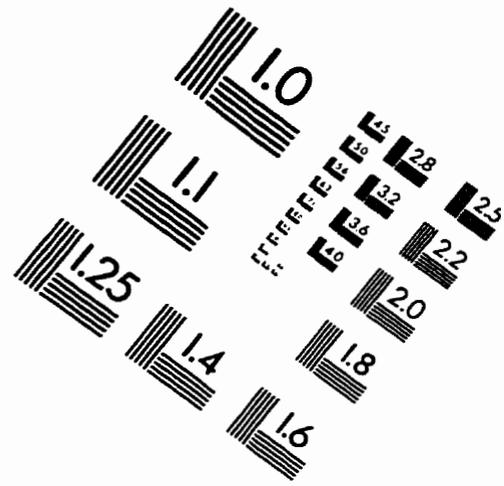
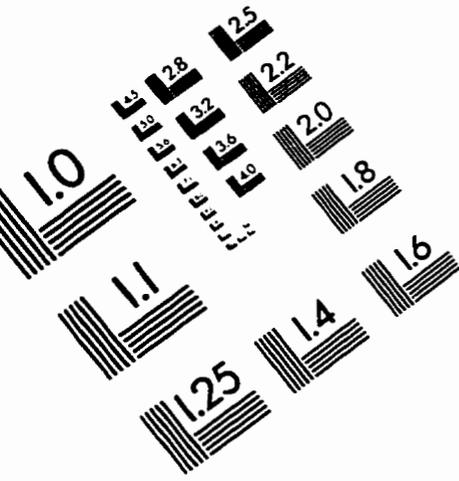
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