

## Massey's glory days

It has been 25 years since Massey Combines Corp., a company that employed generations of Brantford families, went into receivership.

In this special three-part series, Expositor reporters Vincent Ball and Heather Ibbotson relate the history of the company in Brantford, explore some of the reasons behind its closing and examine how the community has changed over the past 25 years. Today's story examines the company's history.

They were wonderful days for a veteran worker. Days when a man felt like he belonged because his experience and effort were valued. "The work has to be done now." William "Yorky" Jordan said to a reporter. "Not next year or the year after that. The need is right this very minute. They pensioned me off after 32 years and treated me right royal. I went away for a year. Went up to Georgian Bay. Then they sent for me to come back."

That sort of treatment, Jordan explained, was like a tonic for an old man. Those were the comments Jordan made to famed Canadian reporter Gordon Sinclair, who had come to speak to him about his family and its connection to Massey-Harris. The headline on the subsequent story was, "116 years in one plant: Record of the Jordan family."

The story included pictures of Jordan, William (Billy) Jr. and a Mrs. George Jordan, who worked at Massey-Harris during the war.

"One hundred and sixteen years in one plant. That's a long time," said Hilda Dawson, 89, of Brantford, showing the clipping of the Sinclair article to an Expositor reporter. "But there were a lot of families in Brantford like that." Yorky was her grandfather, Mrs. George Jordan was her mother and Jordan Jr. was an uncle. Her father, George, also worked at the plant. At the time, her father, her grandfather and her uncle had a combined 95 years at Massey-Harris. The remaining years were split among other family members.

Dawson recalled the article and the visit by Sinclair after reading a brief in The Expositor just over a week ago. This year - March 4 to be exact - marks the 25th anniversary of the closing of the Massey Combines Corp. plant located on Henry Street and Wayne Gretzky Parkway - then known as Park Road North.

The company was forced into receivership and owed creditors an estimated \$290 million. In addition to putting an estimated 2,500 people out of work, the closing and how it was handled were bitter pills for the community to swallow. It also marked the end of an era - an era in which generations of families could work for one company, make a good wage and raise a family. It was a glorious era, a golden age of industry, and Brantford was the centre of it.

The community's connection to the farm machinery business dates back to 1872 when Alanson Harris moved his farm implement manufacturing shop to Brantford. Harris had originally opened his shop in Beamsville, Ont., in 1857.

A decade earlier, Daniel Massey opened a blacksmith and farm implement shop in Newcastle, Ont., In 1867, Massey started exporting products overseas with the first shipment of reapers and mowers being shipped to Germany.

Massey moved his company to Toronto in 1879 and several years later - in 1891 - A. Harris, Son and Company Ltd. merged with Massey Manufacturing to form Massey-Harris. The new company's headquarters were in Toronto. The merger spawned decades of innovation and growth which included manufacturing plants in Europe, as well as in North America.

In 1911, the company moved into the United States farm machinery market. It also purchased other companies both in North America and Europe, including: F. Perkins Ltd. in Peterborough, England; G. Landini and Figli S.P.A. in Italy; and the tractor assets of Standard Motor Co., England and France. By 1961, the company - now known as Massey-Ferguson Ltd. - had worldwide net sales of \$519 million, up from international sales of \$89 million in 1947. It was the world's largest producer of tractors, combines and diesel engines and had 27 factories in 10 countries including Canada.

In the early 1960s, the company employed more than 40,000 people and sold farm machinery, implements, light industrial tractors, equipment, diesel engines and steel office furniture in 161 countries and territories. Massey-Ferguson was a huge company. And, in the early 1960s, its footprint in Brantford became a whole lot bigger. On June 9, 1964, the company officially opened a new \$13.5-million combine plant on what was then known as Park Road North. It was a massive 567,900 square feet. Construction of the plant had begun two years earlier. Its official opening was attended by the Mitchell Sharp, then the federal minister of Trade and Commerce, as well as representatives from 10 countries. The opening was tied in with the company's introduction of new combine lines. The plant was designed to achieve, in the words of the company, maximum production flexibility so that rapid model changes and retooling could be made with minimal physical plant changes. Company officials said, at the time, that it represented "an investment in the future of North America." "It is a sound investment when it is realized that agriculture and its related industries account for 40% of Canada's gross national product," company president A.A. Thornbrough said at the official opening. "And it is sound when we consider that, in the United States, agriculture is responsible for about 30% of all jobs in the country, including some six million people working to provide the goods and services farmers use."

While the Massey-Ferguson's success can, in part, be attributed to a culture of innovation and expansion, a lot of other factors contributed to its spectacular growth. One of those factors was the implementation of a North American "common market" for farm machinery. The common market meant there were no tariffs on farm machinery goods shipped between Canada and the United States. The removal of the tariffs was deemed important enough to recognize with a plaque that was unveiled at the opening of the Park Road North plant.

"The plaque, which we are about to unveil, states that the dedication of this plant serves to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the removal of tariffs on agriculture equipment between Canada and the United States," Sharp said at the opening. "I think it could well be said that the plant also serves to commemorate the achievements and dedication of Mr. (Tom) Carroll." Carroll had been the chief engineer of the harvesting equipment company when he retired from

Massey-Ferguson in 1961. He had developed the world's first practical self-propelled combine in 1938 for the company, which at that time was known as Massey-Harris. So revered was Carroll that he was the first engineer outside the United States to be awarded the Cyrus Hall McCormick Gold Medal by the American Society of Agricultural Engineers. The plant's official opening was a marvellous affair, featuring lobster Newburg, beef stroganoff and Restigouche salmon, with music provided by the Royal Canadian Regiment band. Massey-Ferguson officials from around the world attended the event and a special seven-car train brought 250 dignitaries from Toronto. Those at the opening included Brant MP James Brown, former Ontario Premier Leslie Frost, industrialist E. P. Taylor and Brantford Mayor R.B. Beckett.

Plans called for the plant, which covered 13 acres, to employ 1,000 people and turn out 15,000 combines a year. In the years immediately following the opening, there were more investments at the site by Massey-Ferguson. Extensions and storage pads were added in 1967 and another storage facility was added in 1969. Then, in 1973, plans were announced for a \$17.5-million machine shop and implement assembly plant to be built next to the combine plant. In 1975, the company announced further plans to build a \$2.6-million stamping plant. Many of the buildings are still at the site of Henry Street and Wayne Gretzky Parkway. But to get a good sense of the combines that were once produced there and other farm implements manufactured in the community over years, you have to take a trip out of town.

Located at 8560 Tremaine Rd., Milton, Country Heritage Park has more than 20,000 artifacts depicting rural life over a 150-year span in Ontario. It has more than 30 exhibit buildings on an 80-acre site, including one exclusively dedicated to Massey, Harris, Ferguson. "Most of the equipment in this building was brought here after the plant closed in Brantford and they dispersed the museum pieces that they had and, as well, we have equipment that we've acquired over time," David Nattress, the general manager of the park, said. "There are well over 100 artifacts in here, depicting the history of Massey and the merging of Massey with Harris and the other mergers eventually ending up as Massey-Ferguson. "A lot of the equipment in here was manufactured in Brantford, like the 1939 combine that we have here." The self-propelled combine was probably one of the first to come on the market to make farming easier for farmers. "This was a real breakthrough and Massey was one of the leaders in this and Brantford was one of the key areas for manufacturing combines," he said. "At the time, this was quite a monster to see in the field. Quite a sight for farmers in 1939 through the 1940s and into the 1950s." Prior to the self-propelling combine, a thrashing machine was used to thrash the grain, cut with a binder and make stooks and sheaves out of it. There was a lot of manual labour eliminated with the advent of the self-propelled combine.

The exhibit includes a room providing a timeline of the company's growth beginning with Daniel Massey in 1847 and continuing with the mergers and acquisitions that led to world prominence. The exhibit also includes photographs of the company founders. There are other interesting exhibits, including a Ferguson tractor. Its serial number is No. 1. "It was the first one that Harry Ferguson manufactured in North America," Nattress said. "It was manufactured in the United States and he (Harry Ferguson) drove it off the assembly line." As well, there are marketing posters from the glory days when products from Brantford were shipped around the world. "There is a lot of history in this building and Canada should be proud of it and Brantford should be proud of it as well."

