

The Tayside Textiles Plant/Perth Carpet Factory, on the Perth's Tay Tow Pathⁱ

A stroll along the tow path at Perth's east end, from the corner of Sherbrooke and Riverside Streets, brings some surprises – a bed of anemones, some very old, apparently planted maples, and unusual foundations. These are the memories of one of the town's largest early 20th century industries, best known as *Tayside Textiles* – a woolen factory that had several incarnations and names over its 75 year history, ending in the late 1980s.

The plant, first by the name *Perth Carpet Factory*, was established in 1911 on land purchased from the *Ontario & Quebec Railway Co.* Perth Town Council had encouraged *Guelph Carpet Works* to re-locate to the town with a \$25,000 loan guarantee. The tough competition did not escape the attention of the Guelph Council, who sued (alienation of affection?). Guelph lost, and Perth won a prize that provided employment for many area residents for several decades. The carpet factory's President was W.B. Hart and Secretary, H.C. Stephenson.

The *Perth Carpet Factory* was not the only industrial prize won at this time. Historian Larry Turner points out in one of his booksⁱⁱ that, between 1905 and 1911, Perth Council welcomed the Winn Company (became the Perth Shoe Co., then Brown Shoe Co.), Wampole and Jergens, from Milton, Ontario, and Toronto – attracted by the same loans (apparently without law suit). The arrival of all these plants established a major industrial centre on Sherbrooke Street, next door to the former CPR works (which, having burned in 1904, triggered the pursuit of new industry by the town).

Despite the loan, and a large, 2000 yard order in 1912 for Ottawa's new Chateau Laurier, the Perth Carpet Factory began to experience problems by 1915, and closed in 1916, with the machinery shipped to Guelphⁱⁱⁱ.

However, in 1916, *Boyd Caldwell & Co. Ltd.*, having experienced a fire at their Lanark plant, took over the property, expanded the buildings, and established the *Taybank Woolen Mills*. In 1918^{iv}, it is listed under both company names with head office in Perth and branches at Lanark and Appleton^v. The company management included: T.B. Caldwell, President; B.A.C. Caldwell, Vice-President; D.W.F. Caldwell, Secretary and Treasurer; and C.P. Grierson, Superintendent. In Perth, their products were 'fine tweeds, dress goods, travelling rugs, overcoatings, homespuns and hosiery' – and were known for their blankets and specialty tartans^{vi}. In this era, it employed 80 to 100 people.

In 1919, according to one newspaper article, the company took the name '*Perth Woollen Mills*', still owned by the Caldwell family^{vii}. Possibly, the mill closed in 1923, but it was purchased and re-opened in 1925, under the name *Tayside Textiles*. The buyer was Moore Brothers of Huddersfield, England, who provided management staff from England. That year, the factory employed over 100 people. In 1930, Leslie Stephenson became Managing Director, replacing Sidney Sykes; he held the position until retirement in 1961, when George Young took over.

Apparently, Arthur Moore of Moore Brothers sold his interests to Samuel Zacks of Toronto, in 1945. However, the company continued under the name of Tayside Textiles, and the operation was unchanged for another 25 years.

During the 1950s and 1960s, it is said that import competition closed most of the woolen cloth mills in the Ottawa valley. In 1965, the company's yarn-making, weaving and finishing departments were separated. Yarn production was stopped and the other two departments were rented to an American company, Brewster Fabrics, which operated them in partnership with 'Tayside Textiles'.

In 1966, the cloth department ceased production – said to have been the last of the area cloth mills to go. However, it was leased to a woolen product company from Hull, Quebec, Hanson Mills^{viii} (S. Zacks still owned the plant). Hanson, an established company in west Quebec, also had a plant in Renfrew, in partnership with Mohawk Mills from Hamilton.

There is no record of when Hanson left the Perth plant, but the mill production was completely stopped in January 1971 (S. Zacks had died in 1970). In 1973, the mill was sold to a Brandon, Manitoba company^{ix}, which ran the yarn department (for their Brandon sock and blanket mill) until selling the factory the following year.

On January 8, 1975, the yarn, weaving, knitting and finishing departments of the plant re-opened under the name '*Perth Woolen Mills Inc.*'^x – owned by a Toronto-based company, Dafina Holdings. The plant, which employed 60 people according to a Courier article in December 1975, and produced yarn, cloth, and socks, lasted only into the next year.

In 1976 or 1977, the *Collie Mill* bought the factory, and ran it until a fire in 1979 ended their production – the beginning of the end for the factory. The buildings remained under the ownership of Collie Mills for almost 10 years, until a second fire in 1985.

The buildings were demolished in 1986 or 1987^{xi}, bringing to an end an invaluable part of early Perth industry. In 1986, the property was transferred from Collie to '*Tayside Estates*' of Ottawa, the owners in 2012.

The large maples that line the tow path on the foundation side were presumably planted in the era of the Perth Carpet Factory – see the postcard picture in our Photo Gallery. They are now 'century trees' – and would have witnessed all of the stories above, as well as 100 years of the historic Tay Canal in front. They also, unfortunately, show their age, underlining the end of a great era.

Photos of the vacant mill, taken in 1982, may also be seen on our Photo Gallery.

David Taylor, October 13, 2012
Location: 44.902092, -76.244244

ⁱ The sources of this article include: '*Perth: Tradition and Style in Eastern Ontario*', Larry Turner, 1992, Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc., Toronto; '*The Merchants, Professionals and Tradespeople of Perth*', by Gus Quattrocchi, 1997; Perth Courier article, December 4, 1972; Perth Expositor article, March 26, 1903, Rusty White; *The Textile World Journal Directory, 1918*; Algonquin College archives.

ⁱⁱ ‘Perth: Tradition and Style in Eastern Ontario’, Larry Turner, 1992, Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc., Toronto.

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘The Merchants, Professionals and Tradespeople of Perth’, by Gus Quattrocchi, 1997

^{iv} in the *1918 World Textile Directory*, which also lists the machinery at each location.

^v The company also carried other names in the different locations: Aberdeen Woolen Mills (at Lanark); Mississippi Woolen Mills (Carleton Place); and Perth Woolen/Woolen Mills (Perth).

^{vi} Perth & District Chamber of Commerce, ‘A Walking Tour of Perth’.

^{vii} The March 26, 1932 obituary for T.B. Caldwell states that he was president of ‘Perth Woollen Mills, established in 1919, and later became Tayside Textiles’.

^{viii} ‘The Merchants, Professionals and Tradespeople of Perth’, by Gus Quattrocchi, 1997

^{ix} Lelio Meteu, of Metex

^x Perth Courier article, December 4, 1975.

^{xi} The environmental assessment for Perth’s arterial bypass, ca 2009, states that the buildings are intact in a 1987 aerial photo.