

The Scoop on Indulge

The Bitter-Sweet Past of Ayr's Downtown Business and the Tale of 'Grinning Joe'

By Rachel Morgan Redshaw, Historical Researcher of the North Dumfries Municipal Heritage Committee



Today, the building situated at the corner of Stanley and Northumberland Street stands as a central feature in downtown Ayr providing villagers and travellers with sandwiches, treats and ice-cream of various kinds. Perhaps it is difficult to picture it as a building built in circa 1850 once tending to the needs of men, women and children of the 19th century.

The original owner of 32 Stanley Street was a man by the name of Joseph Kilgour. Daniel Manley, who owned a great amount of land in the downtown area, sold lot 1 on Stanley Street to Joseph Kilgour on May 1st, 1853.

There is evidence that there was a store on the corner before 1853 when Joseph bought the land. In an 1851 census he is listed as a general merchant and so it has been supposed that the building was built in 1850 and the land was bought later on. It was situated across from Robert Wyllie's post office (the man credited for naming Ayr) and William Wyllie's drug store which at the time was roughly in the area of Ramona's Hayr & Body Care and the building which currently houses Bucky's of Ayre and Ayr Village Pizza.

Joseph Kilgour was a very influential man in the town. He was an issuer of marriage licences and a hardware merchant. He also became an appointed librarian after co-founding the first circulating library in Ayr in 1847 where he housed a small subscription library in his store. His accomplishments made him very popular in Ayr and the surrounding area.

He and his wife were born in Scotland and immigrated to Canada and eventually started their business in Ayr. Together they had five children: John, Joseph, Henry, Mary and Arthur. Henry and Mary who both share the same birth years are assumingly twins. Their first daughter died in 1860 at the age of one.

His store was well known in the area, dubbed 'Kilgour's corner' explained in an article as "the 'round up' place from north and west, the rallying place for the boys-as many of the girls were likely to pass 'Kilgour's corner'".

In 1860 he is noted as 'historian Joe', a history buff of the village seemingly who also made the claim that his wife Mary Anderson was related to Robbie Burns, however this wouldn't be the first claim in the

village of such legacy.

In an account written by J.P. Jaffray called The Important Role Played by Village of Ayr in Early Days of Western Ontario Joseph Kilgour is mentioned, "He's an old Ayr boy. When I first met him he was a member of the Farragut Boat Club of Chicago, and an admired member of its amateur dramatic branch; a slim, well set-up young man". Other mentions of him describe him as jovial and humorous which gave him the name of 'grinning Joe'.

In 1881, he was listed as a hardware merchant but eventually the store passed to another. By 1888 Mr. Morton of Ayr was operating a store at the corner known as 'Morton's Corner Store'. He sold dry goods, groceries, dress goods and muslins. At the turn of the century Robert Morton passed away.

Within two years after his death all three of his children, Ray, Daniel and Clarence passed away. His widower Alice Morton was devastated. For years she continued owning the building until eventually she sold it to the Union Bank of Canada in 1911. The Union Bank later sold to the Molson's Bank in 1919 which therein sold it to the Bank of Montreal and later to the Ayr Farmers' Mutual Fire Insurance Co. in 1941. Carl Weitzel, a former Ayr Reeve ran a variety store in the building for over 20-years and closed the store in 1962 when the Ayr Farmers' enlarged their offices.

Other businesses included a clothing store by the McDonald brothers, Sing Laundry and there was a claim of an undertaking business called Wilson Undertaking.

A past employee of Indulge remembers a sinister account of the building. Rebecca Redshaw was once a worker at Indulge. Meeting her at the end of her shift she would come out telling me stories of the day. Some evenings she would report to me unusual circumstances. She described to me some of the unnatural occurrences.

"When I was closing up the store one night something odd happened. There's a beep for when people come in. As I was cleaning up it started going off without stopping but there was nothing there, no cars, no trucks or people, nothing".

Other incidents include the displacement of objects such as pens and cleaning supplies. "Things would move. One time I was cleaning up a table at the end of the night and when I left the room and returned the paper towel or cleaning bottle would be in a different spot". She also discussed the older bathroom in the building and the door that she and other employees firmly closed, which they were later to find had opened although was securely shut.

Some do not like to indulge in such paranormal stories, nonetheless, in a place of prosperous business and by chance undertakings it holds a colourful history. Whether they are merely natural causes or tricks played by 'grinning Joe' or another restless soul is up to the mind of the reader.

The building has housed many businesses in Ayr, surviving the circumstances of floods and fires that plagued the Watson Factory and other



Morton's Dry Goods and Groceries 1888

buildings that had run along Stanley Street. It continues on in the lively town of Ayr providing the community with the necessity of ice-cream and other such goodies and carries on being a hot spot in town.



Indulge As The Building Appears In 2010