

Mr. B. Leslie (38)

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ORAL HISTORY

Subject: Mr. B. Leslie (L)

Case Number: 38

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Interviewer: Dave Masters (M)

L; David my name is Bryson Leslie, I was born 5th of July 1920 and I am one of three members of the Leslie family two of us are active in the shoe business going and that's Leslie's shoe store. This business was founded David by our father William Malcom Leslie... and it is rather significant that you should be calling on me today because today we are celebrating at the store the fifty six, fifty sixth anniversary of the founding of the shoe business. This is accidental I know but I think it is still significant. You asked me to tell you a bit about the background about the business which I am very happy to do because I must admit that I am very proud of ^{our} the heritage and the contribution that our father made to this community. Father was born 95 years ago, youngest of a large family out in Thurlow township and he lived some distance from the one room school. I mention this because at about the age of eight or nine years he was seriously injured in an accident involving a run away team of horses and a sliight. This left him with a crippled right leg this was the key to his future, little did he know it at the time. He found that was not practical he just could not manage going to school the distance that they lived from the school on crutches and his schooling was cut off at what we would call today probably grade six or seven. He stayed around home for a while and on the farm and he knew that farming was not his cup of tea. He wanted to get into the

business world... he had an older sister who was a widow at that time and she brought him to Belleville and financed his attending Ontario Business College, which still is in existence today as we all know. He completed the course there and on completion much to his disappointment he could not find suitable work this would be I believe 1899, I stand to be corrected on that year,. So he was living in Belleville with his sister up on what we call Dundas st. West, and he wanted something to do and he started learning barbering business as apprentice. Maybe if I just sidetrack here a moment. In those days there were no such things as coffee breaks but there was a different kind of break among business people. Business men I am told by my father would go to the there favorite barber shop daily and have a shave. Each business man had his own shaving mug and ah so my father was working in this barber shop and one of the steady daily customers was a shoe man by the name of Mr. Vermilyea... my father was not at all happy with barbering he said he was doing his best but he didn't like it and he found it very tiring standing all the time with this crippled leg which was a little shorter than the other, and may I explain without dwelling on the point that this crippled leg became a stiff right knee and the leg was absolutely strait. He was shaving Mr. Vermilyea one day and Mr. Vermilyea noticed that my father was not to interested in what he was doing or maybe we would call it daydreaming and right out of the blue Mr. Vermilyea said " How do you like barbering?" and my father said he would rather be in business and Mr. Vermilyea said "Well, how would you like to come and work for me?" and my dad said " when can I start?"

and that is how my father got started in the shoe business. Mr. Vermilyea operated a very large business, in addition to a very active retail shoe store they also had a wholesale business and I believe at one time there were as high as seven men traveling on the road for Vermilyea Shoe Store as well as working in the store. My dad was one of these travelers his territory being approximately Hastings and Prince Edward county. This seems strange to us today but keep in mind in those days every little country store sold clothing and boots and shoes and what have you and so he had this territory to look after as well as working in the store. He worked for Mr. Vermilyea for twenty years the last twelve years I believe he managed the store and it just so happens that one of his former business associates at Mr. Vermilyea's store and later in his own store lives in this building and her name is Mrs. Annie Watkins, she was known as Mrs. Annie Farkey or Miss Annie Farkey at that time. To the best of my knowledge she is the only person in Belleville who worked with my father at Vermilyea's the rest of them are long gone. There was a man by the name of McKewon a very old and familiar name in Belleville who operated a shoe store, a shoe repair shop and he was also a shoe maker at the present location of our store which is 255 Front Street. This gentleman had a son who operated a drug store for many many years by the name of J. S. McKewon... to get back to Mr. McKewon Sr. as I mentioned he was an old man he was tired he was not well and my father went over to his shoe repair shop one day to pick up a pair of shoes that Mr. McKewon was to have ready, when my father

Mr. Leslie

arrived there he found Mr. McKewon sitting in a chair tired and not feeling well and the shoes were untouched and right out of the blue in answer to my father's inquiry about his health, Mr. McKewon said "Will, why don't you buy me out?" and my dad said "How much do you want?" and Mr. McKewon had an answer the gist of which was pay me invoice price for what is here in the store and the business is yours. They shook hands on the spot and that is just how fast the deal was made. My father did not have enough money but he had confidence that he could find the money somewhere. So they took stock of the inventory and we have in the safe at the store the old two for five cent scribbler which has the complete inventory of Mr. McKewon's stock as it existed in the middle of June in 1919. My father borrowed the... I think he had \$1,000.00 of his own money, he borrowed some more from friends and relatives and went into business for himself. The store was very old and dingy and run down because of Mr. McKewon's age and health and it required money to fix up which my father didn't have, the inventory was the most important thing, so the next few years were quite a struggle. But from the day he went into business he for himself he enjoyed nothing but success the business just continued to prosper and he and my mother kept their belts tight as the expression goes so that if they made a dollar a good portion of it could be turned back into the business to not only pay off the bills but expand and build the business up as he did over the years. So this was in 1919, things were going very well until the depression hit us and he like everyone else felt the depression very much indeed I know we still have at the store the old original

books and a few years ago I took the time to glance through some of them one day and through the thirties you could see year after year they had to use red ink to record the profit loss picture of the year. However he worked ~~as~~ hard as did his staff and they weathered the storm. Now David I can go on and on and on hum there are a few side stories of those early years that I like and they may be of interest to some others. He had a very good friend who was his keen competitor this may sound strange today but it was an absolute fact. The competitor and friend's name was Mr. McBride who operated another large shoe business much larger than my father's in the position where Whites Hardware store is today and I believe the name of the business was Haines now I think if you go back far enough it was called Haines and Lockett but in later years I believe Haines Shoe Store. Mr. McBride as I mentioned had a huge stock, I believe there were three floors of inventory there and he and my father had a gentlemen's agreement that if each had any merchandise that the other needed he could buy it from the other and they recorded these transactions throughout the week and on Monday morning the two men sat down and they added and subtracted and each paid the other the difference. Well as you can imagine Mr. McBride having a larger inventory and my father having a small and my father's business getting bigger and bigger as time goes on there were many more shoes going from Haines to Leslie's than there were from Leslie's to Haines and on each Monday morning my dad and Mr. McBride had this visit and my father paid him what he owed him, this went on for a long long time, I am not aware of anything like this going on in business today.

So we got through the depression and then along W.W.II. I entered the business full time in July 1938 up to that time i had worked at the store as a part time school boy we have always had part time school boys we still do. I don't actually remember when I started working around the store and if you were talking to my brother he would say the same thing he does not remember because we started off doing **incidental things** like working in the warehouse if it was even customary in those days at busy times of the year especially Christmas to have a boy on hand to open and close the door for customers, we certainly havn't heard of that for a long time. So after finishing school i started working for my father full time in 1938 and then along came WWII and I got itchy feet to join as so many others did and I joined the army in 1940so I was away for the balance of the war. It was very very difficult for all business people including my father to operate a business throughout WWII because the young men were leaving thier business right and left and joining the services and it was only the older men and female help that were available for the store. Now let me hurriedly explain that we couldn't get along in the shoe business without female employees they are marvelous, we have many of them at the store today we always have had and always will havebut there is so much work that goes on behind the scenes that requires manual labour and it was a problem to get this done during the war and of course supply was a problem everything was a problem and I found when I returned home at the end of WWII I was suprised and shocked to find that my father had aged as much as he had in the four years that I was overseas and I in addition to being concerned

for his son as all fathers have it was the difficult time of doing business through these years... had its toll. Also he was getting older and having health problems and when I arrived back home he started to take it easy and in a, easier and in a short space of time well he we'll call he went into semi-retirement and unfortunately through the later years of his retirement or semi* retirement he didn't enjoy the best of health and as I intimated earlier the war had taken the best out of him and he had many thing s wrong with him and he passed ~~at the~~ away in 1952 at the age of 73. My mother who has always been in the background as far as the family business is concerned has always been interested in the business, she is still vice-president of the company... this may surprise people because they never see her around the store and her investment in the buiness is minimal but I am not referring to dollars and cents I am referring to interest and encouragement and to this day she is now 91 years of age she is still interested in what we are doing at the store and likes to get down on occasion and see the place and we find it most interesting that when she does visit us at the store whether or not it is during business hours or during the evening she, the store makes her think of some old story that happened back in the early years and we like to hear these stories and many of them are crossing my mind at the moment but I don't want to take up all afternoon telling you these personal little anecdotes. I have a I said at the beginning there are three of us in the familyan older sister Margaret whos married name is Trusdall she and her family and husband live in Cyndrom norht of Kingston, they too are in are in a family business.

And then there is my brother Don who is six years younger than I am (cough) excuse me. Don and I have worked together all these years and continue to do so. Don was still in school when I returned from WWII he was just finishing school he went to Ontario Business College as I had done in the spring of 1938 and as I mentioned our father in 1898 or 1899 I am not to sure of that year and then he entered the business and it was very fortunate for both Don and myself that our father was around and on the job when we started in business together because we have ah we have made an excellent team by that I don't mean that we run the best shoe business in the country I mean that we get along extremely well and the reason for this is that our father got us started on the right foot and I'll always remember and I hope that many of us today will use this practice with our children and I will always remember the day that my brother started working in the store full time, I don't remember the year, and I well remember my father calling me out in the warehouse and he said Bryson he said I want to have a little talk with you he said Don is ~~is~~ starting in full time as I knew and he said that I well aware of the fact that he is single and you are married and he is living at home and you have your own home and he has the use of my car which you have to but it is not that convenient for you because you live the other side of town and you have a son, which I did at that time, the first baby had arrived, and he said there is just no comparison between the family expenses of you two boys but he said I want you to know that the first day Don starts working in this store I am paying him exactly to the cent what I am paying you no more no less.

He said you~~r~~ are both brothers, you are both my sons one is no better than the other and never will be as long as I have ~~it~~ anything to do with the business and from that day to this very day we continue to draw exactly to the cent identical salaries. And I may have a handle of president and he may have a handle of secretary-treasurer only because a limited company has ot have these headings but we are co-workers, co-managers, co-owners, co-everything else and it has been one of those extremely happy relationships. David when a business is your whole life you get so wrapped up in it that it is difficult to single out incidental things and individual stories and so on but while we have been quite successful in business I will always give credit to the fact the business was so well founded now I am inmodest enough to realize that you can't run a business indeffinately on reputation that you have to work at it every day and this Don and I enjoy doing but it is a lot easier to work with something that is well founded whether it is building a house or a business and I would like to just mention a few of the people that helped my father in those early days, the first one that comes to my mind because he is a very very close friend and a relative as well, his name is Art Hill. Now Arthur Hill and my father were cousins yes but more than that they were tremendous friends and Art Hill started working for my father as a young man as a matter of fact I think we can say that my father and Don and I in later years were the only employers that Art Hill ever had. Art worked for the Leslie family for 47 years starting in just a couple of years after the business was founded and Art was a tower of strength and the right arm to

my father all those years particularly during the war. And Art was more than a first rate shoe salesman he was a good buyer he had good judgment and he was the bookkeeper and he did this so he had the banking and the books to do and this was these were jobs that you did when you could find the time now we have two full time office staff and we have the services of a chartered accountant. But we never used a chartered accountant in our business until our father passed away in 1952, so for all those years the booking and so on were done by Art. But it is not only the work that Art did but his interest in the business, the kindness that he showed to our father that ah we appreciate. Thetwo men were tremendous friends and they got together frequently outside the business as well as working together everyday. There was another young man from an old Belleville family by the name of Allan Lennix Of the four Lennix boys in the family three of them worked for my father at one time or another. Allan the oldest was a very bright young man and at a young age he caught my fathers eye here in Belleville, I don't know how my dad about him, but anyway My dad said to him one day, "Allan if I ever go into business for myself I want you to work for me." And when dad did go into business for himself he connected this Allan Lennix, and Allan Lennix started working for my dad as a parcel boy, he wasvery young I can't tell you how young but he was very young and he started working for my dad as a parcel boy the very first day my dad was in business. And he worked with my father and Art Hill through those years and through the thirties, then he left and went with another shoe chain in Canada and then moved to Florida, he and his

wife still live in Florida. Another man that just retired from his own business out at Latta his name is Arthur Hall he worked in those early years for my father and I could go on and on . But these are people that we and the family are tremendously indebted to because they formed the team with our dad in those early and most difficult years.

End of Side One

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Mr. Leslie

Well David as I mentioned early my days as a full time shoe salesman go back to 1938 and when I think of 1938 I think of just a year or two before that I believe it was 1936 when we had the flood in Belleville. And every living soul of the city of Belleville who was around at that time will always remember it. Remember the foot bridge going down the river and so much debris and not being able to get across the lower bridge. The water and big hunks of ice ~~was~~ jamed down in the lower end of Front Street. right across from city hall and the area of Clark and Miles and the Queens Hotel, I can remember them saying that the water was up to the door knobs in the diningroom of the Queens Hotel, I remember the lake of water and ice across the lower the lower bridge on the ~~at~~ intersection of Bridge and Coleman St. Where the Shell service station is I am sure the water must have been up to the depth equal to the top of the gas pumps there. The damage that was done to the Bell Shirt business ah building and so on. That flood did so much damage in the community and like any other disaster it seemd to meld people to gether. I can remember, recall being a teenager at the time any instances of people working together and forgetting the cost and helped clean up the mess or helped people through their problems. My dad had an awful time trying to get enough rubber boots to supply to the people and he was phoning the supplier in Toronto ah I was going to say a couple of times a day. And he would have a carter meet the train and bring the cartons of rubber boots from the station down to the store.

And rather than open them up in the warehouse and put them in stock in the normal fashion they just opened the cartons right on the floor of the store and just grabbed the boots out of the and it was not uncommon for people to come along yesterday and buy knee rubber boots and come back today and need hip rubber boots. The knee ones were not tall enough. I can recall the water just pouring in the basement of our store and every available hand whether he knew anything about the shoe business or not it wouldn't matter, We moved every pair of shoes in the store from the shelves from about three feet down, we moved these shoes in any old order upstairs to the second floor because we were sure that the water was going to rise to that depth. Fortunately the water got up to the top step of the basement, in other words the floor joice were sitting in the water and then it started to recede. It turned out to be a lot of work for nothing and it was a much bigger job getting the shoes back in order afterwards when the flood receded. But these are just little stories of the flood that I can remember. We were working long and hard trying to beat the weatherman. I can recall moving the cars from Boyce's garage, Boyce's garage up where B & M Motors are now. They had storage space down in the basement for cars and a ramp upstairs. Bob Boyce and I were at school together and I recall being there in the basement trying to get these cars out of the basement before the ice broke in the end of the building and flooded the basement So I think they will always remember the water and the ice

I think to those of us who are old enough to remember that flood will remember how every body got together and worked together. And keep in mind that flood almost cut the city in two, in other words for a few days as I recall if you wanted to get from one side of the river to the other you had to go around by Cannington road. I am sure I recall that the upper bridge was cut off while it wasn't damaged just for safety reasons you couldn't use it of course the lower bridge was out and the footbridge gone. So this presents all kinds of problems. I have seen many changes in downtown Belleville and one of the biggest changes when I look back, is there are fewer and fewer privately owned family business and I suppose this is just of this interview today but I have already mentioned that in the shoe business in Belleville there used to be Vermylea shoe store there was McKewons shoe store and Haines shoe store and another one I can recall by the name of Adams and these were all privately owned and one by one they all have gone in some cases they have been bought out by a chain in other cases they have just disappeared where we are the only shoe store only independant shoe store in Belleville. Now this is true right across the country there is nothing significant here we are just the same as every place else but it is not just the shoe business it is the grocery business, downtown Belleville used to have all kinds of independant grocery stores, independant merchants in every line of business and one by one they disappeared and one by one the chains took over. This is not knocking the chains I do not mean that at all, I just mean that this is part of the change of the business ^{community} over the years

and if you go down Front Street today go down one side and up the other and you just stop and think about this and you will see what I mean. Take drug stores for example, I think I stand to be corrected here but I believe we used to have 7 independant locally owned drug stores on Front Street alone. Times change and we don't have them anymore and were down to possibly the oldest business of any kind in Belleville Geen's Drug Store. If There is an ~~older~~ business that has been consec. . . . operated connectutively by one member of the family after another I don't know what it would be. But we have MacIntoshes is an other old family business and if I can be personal here for a moment MacIntoshes and ourselves are business nieghbours we have been side by side all these years and MacIntoshes and ~~THE~~ Leslie's family where my mother still lives are neighbours right across the stree, so the relation^{SHIP} there has been very very close. Joe Blackburns manager of Stouds operates another old long established business in down town Belleville and I have often noticed while we don't have as many hardware stores downtown as we used to have theones we do have are still independant. This seems to be locally the exception of the rule and I am very happy for this, again not let me give anyone the idea that I am knocking chains, I don't mean that way at all, but I think that while business people who have the~~ir~~rown business particularly if it has a little bit of history if it goes back some time I am afraid we are a little bit proud. Maybe I should appologise for it but I don't. I think this is again through a lot of hard work and sacrifice in Years gone by and I think it is a great thing for a community. Because I think business people who own their own businesses are particularly interested in h

the community they are invaribaly good community workers they are in church, service clubs, politics you name it. I think that you will find if you think about this that over theyears that business people have paided a pretty good contribution whether it's canvassing for a worthy cause or it is running for mayor of our city. And this isn't to suprising when youn think about it because business people when they own their own ^{Local} businesses are really well anchored in that community and when they want to buy something they buy it in their own community. I know in our family that you wouldn't think of buying anything outside of Belleville that you couldn't buy in Belleville. Now I am going to get back to this in a moment because it leads to another venture that we got involved in. But to get back to my, to pursue this point and get back to my father's day He made sure that each member of the family went to a different barber to get hâs hair cut becuase these people were all customers at the store. I can remember ~~one~~ when we would when we had several dairys in Belleville, my brother would get milk from one dairy and my mother and father froma second dairy and my wife and I from a third dairy. In other word s we did all this, these people were all our customers and we wanted t to recipricate we wanted to keep the business in Bellelville. Whether it was buying a suit of clothes or coal or oil or milk or gettin your hair cut. We worked together we're thinking of the community we want the community tð grow we want it to be prosperous. I said that this would lead me to another thing. It just so happens that my brother Don and myself and our families are skiers, we enjoy the sport very much. And because of circumstances six and seven years ago their was a

time when we couldn't buy good quality sky ~~equipment~~ clothing and mainly equipment in the city of Belleville. Now ~~if~~ we

had not been skiers we would not have been aware of this but it was the result of a fire that Booths had and they had to change locations and while they had an excellent sky department in the old location they didn't have room for it in the new. And it was during this period that Don and I and other skiers found that if you wanted something particularly of good quality we had to buy it out of Belleville. And I can remember

Don and I being in Montreal on business in the fall of the year and we both wanted skis new skis and of course we wanted the best and we each bought a pair of high priced skis in Montreal and had them shipped home. Well this was just unheard of in our family practice but there was no place in Belleville

that we could get them so this got us to thinking that there must be an opening in the city of Belleville for a ski shop.

And I give most of the credit here to my brother he took the initiative on this idea also he he was recovering from knee

surgery at the time and he wasn't able to get up and down off the fitting stool so he made good use of his time travelling around the country and exploring the possibility of opening a ski shop and this was about six years ago. And he did a good scouting trip around the country and he came back with all kinds

of information and pictures and one thing and another and we sat down and had a good chat and decided that we have got space on the second floor that we are using but we are not using to good advantage lets open a ski shop. The overhead would be minimal to begin with because to begin with because it

wouldn't affect rent it wouldn't affect heat and it wouldn't ~~make much difference~~

make much difference in the hydro bill, most of the built in expenses of a business were already being met by the shoe store. The big difference up there would be to fix the place up and ah ski shop of some sort put in the inventory and some staff. And I don't mind telling you that when we decided to give this a try we were thinking in terms of just being open in the winter for a ski shop and close it in March and open again the next fall and now that I have told you that you can probably understand why we call the business the Ski Den. And we did not choose that name by the way, we... very happy to use the services of an advertising man an independant advertising man by the name of Karl Kidd in our shoe store and when we told him we were going to open the ski shop we asked him to come up with a name. And he came up with the name; Ski Den which at first we didn 't like but he was a good salesman and he talked us into it and we have been glad ever since, then, that he did talk us into it because while the name does not imply what is for sale in the ski den it is a name that has clicked, people seem to remember the name Ski Den and ah so there is a case where we solicited advice, we didn't particularly like the advice but we ah listened to it and sometimes I am afraid we don't listen to it and afterwards we wish we had. This man is a professional we paid him and we asked him to do a job and he did a good job and ah we have been very happy with the name Ski Den. WHILE there is nothing about the name Ski Den that iminates that it sells swim wear and tennis rackets and athletic shoes and a host of other things in that shop on the second floor. We got around this through advertising and Ski Den has been running now for about five years and it has been very refreshing for us hum its so different from the shoe

business and I think that we have enjoyed being involved with the ski den hum because it is so different from the shoe business the main part of the shoe business is the hardest part to learn for a biggener is how to fit shoes and I often laugh over the years , I couldn't count the ^m number of people who walk into the store and look around particularly the way the stoe used to be layed out and they'd see all these boxes and they'd say how in the world would you find what you are looking for, or how many thousands of pairs of shoes do you have , well actually for a newcomer to come into the store it is suprising how ^{QUICKLY} he or she will learn how to find the shoes he is looking for because there is a system, you learn the system, when you learn the system then there is not much trouble to find the particular pair you are looking for... but was, but was , but does take a long time is how to learn how to fit shoes properly and we have a training program of our own that we have put each employee through, there is a national study course built by the shoe manufacturers assoc. in Montreal that is one of these correspondence courses but it is very good and when we think a new employ is progressed far enough well then we enroll them in this course and ah theytake it and I am happy to say up to this point every one who has tried the final exams has passed. If there is any one area of our work that we try to be more concienous about than any thing else it is the fitting of shoes and a particularly childrens shoes, now I don' t now how many adults ever stop to think how easy it would be to do permanet damage to a pair of babys or infants feet if they were not properly fitted with shoes because the cartilage in the feet can be molded to almost

any shape you want in those early days and if the person does put on the wrong pair of shoes as I say he can have permanent damage. Just like any of us at any age can injure our feet by getting ill fitting shoes but it is a little different, as far as adults are concerned, adults can communicate with the shoe salesman when they are having a problem a small child can't do this of course but while this is the most difficult part of the shoe business the fitting of shoes it is also the part that gives the shoe fitter not just the owner but the shoe fitter on the fitting stand the most amount of personal satisfaction and I hope the day never comes when the shoe man doesn't get up of the fitting stand having completed a transaction and be properly satisfied that he has done a good job with the customer. Over the years many times people have been very kind and say something complimentary about our business and when they do we appreciate this because naturally like any business person we get lots of complaints to but I try to make a point of ah telling these kind of people that our biggest asset is our staff. We are difficult people to work for in some regards I hope not in every one. But I know that we demand a lot of our staff, first of all they must be high caliber people and if they aren't they just don't seem to fit into our way of doing things, secondly they have to be willing to learn to do things our way and I apologize for that to a point on the other hand as I mentioned before we are the only independent shoe store in Belleville and there are many many real good chain shoe stores don't run them down they are good. Look at the history of Maher and Agness Surpass and Bata and on and on, these are excellent companies but if we are going to survive as a little

drop in the puddle with this type of competition we have got to have something that they havn't got. And it isn't in the shoes

themselves, there are very few shoes in our store that these other chains couldn't buy if they wanted to buy and many of

them they do have right here in Belleville, but because it is a privately owned family business with long history and we have

the.. and we have our own way of training salesman and they to soon become just as interested in the business as we are and

these are the people that do the job. Sure we sell all kinds

of shoes but when you stop and think of it my brother and I only sell a small percentage of them, the percentage is sold

by our staff they are the people who do the job they are the

ones who do the jobs they are the ones that do the good fitting

they are the ones that deserve the credit and this why I say

that our staff is our finest asset. I often said to new

travelers when they call on us, you now they come into the store

and they don't know the ropes and they have a couple of names

there are a couple of Leslie brothers these are the fellows

that work so hard and do the buying and do the selling and

a little bit of everything and ah and they start off by giving

us all their attention in hopes of getting a good order and

more than once I've said look I don't want to tell you how to

run your business but if I was in your shoes I would pay less

attention to the bosses of this organization and I would pay

more attention to the staff, get to know them get to know their

first name find out if they are married or single, how many

children they have, how old are the kids is there any sickness

in the family and show that your interested don't just give

them lip service. But these are the people who sell the shoes if you want your line of shoes to be successful in our store ah these are the people who sell them and we the so called bosses will buy what our staff want to sell within reason and ah i t think that this is a point that ah some of us often over look we don't always the credit or the blame particularly where it is called you know when I am speaking of blame we have lots of complaints to the shoe business it's a way of life with us we deal with them the best we can and some of them are very frustrating and some of them aren't but one little point that is often over looked is that we didn't make the shoes in the first place just like we have an automobile that is attacking up, we are having trouble with it ah we go back to the dealer and maybe we go back several times and when we start to give the service manager a real rough job i often wonder if we shouldn't just stop and think, well gee that guy didn't make the car or any part of it but he is the handies person in the chain so we blamed him.

END OF SECOND HALF OF FIRST TAPE

* * * * *

D: Could you tell us ah, about the changing in styles: like what the styles started out with with your father and what when you came into the business and what's it like now?

L: Yes, I'd be very happy to do that David. As a matter of fact I was talking f about this just the other day to a new employee at the store. All of us are well aware of the fact that styles per say go in cycles. They come and go. As a matter of fact, just this morning I was in a shoe factory in our area, and the factory superintendent saying...well as a matter of fact he was asking me if I thought of the pointed-toe shoes coming back. I said I hope not and I can't actually see it yet. He said, well he's just beginning to wonder and he's wondering because he knows that styles go around in circles. Well what I was really talking about to the new employee the other day was that we have come a long, long way in the fitting of shoes. And believe me it is difficult for the manufacturers to combine style and comfort. That... and I give them pretty marks for doing a pretty good job. Some people have the idea that we, the consumers buy what the manufacturers want us to buy; what they want to make and I think this is the cart before the horse. Actually the manufacturer is willing to make what the people want to buy and because he wants to make whatever it is in quantity and he has to make it at a profit and the more often he has to change his equipment and patterns, the more costly it is to make the footwear or dresses or whatever it happens to be. We all know because we read in the paper what it costs for a car manufacturer to retool for a new model; they don't stop and think that when the style changes for a pair of shoes, sure it's petty by comparison but it's a costly thing in a pair of shoes for new lathes and new patterns. And so the styles do go around in a cycle; the cycle doesn't always travel at the same rate of speed. We were, a few years ago in the pointed-toe shoe which shoe fitters do not like; I think we all agree on that. On the other hand

this is what the people wanted; this is what the manufacturers were making and this is that we had to sell, and keep in mind that the style people were saying that this is what you wear to be in vogue. So then we...slowly but surely, we went from the pointed toe to the wider and then we reached quite a wide square foot toe: all kinds of names for them but they still went to the opposite extreme in my humble opinion. And then in the last few seasons we slowly started them going back again and I think now that now shoes are probably looking the best as far as shape is concerned as they have in a long time. I'd be quite happy to live with the present trend of what we call "last" you would call shape of shoes generally. They're narrow enough to look good and they're wide enough to give the toes lots of wiggle room as we say and we are having the minimum amount of fitting problems as far as the shape of the toe is concerned. Now when we are buying shoes we not only have to decide on the shape of the toe and lots of other things but the size and the height of the heel. Ah, the height of the heel is determined by the length of the ladies dress. As the hemline comes down the heel goes up. As the ~~hemline~~ hemline goes up, the heel comes down. And that seems to be the way the law of gravity works as far as the heels and shoes are concerned. Secondly, as to the size of the heel, you well will remember back in the days of the pin toes shoes; the real pointed toe shoes, we had what we called stielado heels. They were extremely small, and, very fine. And then back in the recent seasons where the toes were so wide bulky and clunky looking, we had the big heavy heel, and again the rule of thumb is that the narrower the toe, the smaller the heel. Wider the toe, the heavier the heel. so these are just some little rules that go with the game to make the shoes look in balance. It isn't necessary that we want to buy them that way but if could picture a pointed toe shoe with a clunky heel or vica versa, obviously it just wouldn't work. The...every once in a while the young crowd: the teens and

the pre-teens will go for a style that isn't all that practical. This is disturbing to us. Now you may question that remark, saying sure well, Leslie's want to sell all the shoes they can sell and if the young people want to wear shoes that don't wear all that well, what are they complaining about: Leslie's should be selling more shoes. It doesn't work out that way. It certainly adds to the complaints but I will...I must say that the styles that the young people have chosen the last few years are far better, quality wise and comfort-wise and health-wise than they were earlier. Now in case this tape is dated and someone happens to mention minus heels and I said that young people were wearing the best health-wise, ah, but they've worn them a long time, I am excluding minus heels and I'm not going to get involved in that: I don't like them personally and I'm happy to say the fad is rapidly disappearing so it isn't worth dwelling on, but the young people have been wearing heavier types of footwear, thicker soles: sure many of them are man-made materials and I don't knock man-made materials as far as soles are concerned; I don't like them as far as the uppers are concerned. I had a discussion this morning at this shoe factory I was telling you about on this same subject. I said to 'em: "Are you using any man-made materials for the upper parts of shoes because I knew that a year ago, six months ago, this company was using too many of them in my humble opinion and I was happy this morning to find out they've swung back almost back to leather and on the other hand I don't knock these unif soles as we call them, particularly for young people's shoes. They can get the styles; they can make them thick or thin; they wear well and they're reasonably comfortable and leather is ideal material for the soles or uppers or any other part of the shoe but leather is also expensive and there is a world shortage of leather. We were told maybe ten years ago that the day was coming when there wouldn't be enough leather to make all the

shoes that would be required. And none of us took this too seriously because it seemed to be way off in the future somewhere. All of a sudden a couple of years ago we found ourselves...by we I mean everyone in North America and Europe in the shoe business...found ourselves in the position where there was just not enough leather to make enough shoes, and the leather that was available was naturally very costly. So we were forced into using a man-made material. And man-made materials used to be considerably less expensive. But most of them have an oil content and so we become...we have an oil shortage around the world, so your soles start to go up and up in price: man-made materials go up in price and now we find in buying shoes, often there is very little in price between the cost of a shoe with a leather upper and a man-made upper. Still there's a substantial difference in the cost of sole material. This is why I don't knock...one of the reasons I don't knock man-made soles: unit soles. If I may say so, you have them on your shoes. You are wearing what I'd call an ideal pair of shoes for a young man of your age. They have leather uppers and they have unit soles and they look as if they're comfortable on you, they're moderately priced, they're not cheap shoes; they're not expensive shoes. They go with your age well and I ~~xxx~~ never looked at them until right now and this is a typical example of what I said: the young people today are wearing very sensible footwear, in the main, not all of them. There's a strong trend with young people with what we call jogging shoes and the vast majority of them are not used for jogging; they're just worn as ordinary shoes, but they're very sensible shoes; they're practical shoes. Sure they're a fad to a point: that's good. I don't knock fads at all. We're all style conscious to a point. But these are good practical shoes and I think that while they cost more today like everything else than they did say for or five years ago, young people today have much better choice

of style and getting better value for their dollar what they're buying now. Now it used to be considered that the only style in the shoe business was in the women's end of it. Children's shoes were basic and they didn't change very much. You had...a child had to wear a pair of boots until they were at least three years of age. Then they wore brown oxfords for the next ten or fifteen years. Well that's all passe. We used to say that well, men's shoes didn't change. We referred to the styles as being quite basic, whether it be a young man like yourself or an older fellow like myself. And this all gone. It is an actual fact that it's just as difficult for us to buy ~~men~~ men's shoes today as women's. By difficult I should say that the styles are changing just as rapidly for men as they are for women. And this keeps us on our toes. We have to be awfully careful because styles can change so rapidly. I was away from the business for about six months and when I came back early this year, I was surprised to see the minus heel, as a fad. Call them "terra firmas", some of them are known as earth shoes which is a trade name. I didn't like them. I couldn't understand why anybody wanted to wear them but when I was shown the figures at the store that they were selling I had to stop and think. Well now maybe this is what young people want. And it was something about those shoes that most of thought that they just would not last. Style-wise; fad-wise. And I believe that in Toronto and in Kitchener, the medical profession started knocking them and I don't know whether that was a factor or not. But all of a sudden they're rapidly disappearing. And I'm awfully glad that we have very few of them left. We have not bought any for next season: not a single solitary pair. We cut off buying them back a few months ago and what we have now gone, that will be end of it as far as we are concerned. So here was a fad that came along that possibly was not a good one health-wise so the young people are smart enough to take advise from the medical profession and their others to not stick with it, and I'm very happy about this. The...it has been a little bit confusing,

particularly with men. In seeing just where the styles are going. I'm not talking about teenagers. I'm talking about people more middle-ages than younger people. We have become such casual dressers that we're wearing much more casual footwear. And this adds. A person would feel a little silly going down Front Street with a pair of dressy black, what we call bal shoes on with casual clothes. But it is not easy to see just what direction we're going.. Ah, some men are going for the casual look seven days a week and others are going at it half-heartedly. And you can see this in clothing. You see we...shoes are always an accessory and we get our direction from clothing industries. And like the Johny Carson suit which looks smart and yet everybody isn't gonna wear a Johny Carson suit and the...there are fewer men wearing the dressier type of shoes. And wearing more casual shoes and you get involved in colour. You have casual shoes you're not as particular about the colour matching each particular outfit as you are when you're talking about dress footwear. This is just the way the ball bounces. I would say that the last year or so has possibly been a little trickier more difficult to buy for men than it has been for women, and a few men made the statement (if a shoe man made that statement) everyone would know he was off his rocker but that just shows you how things have changed. Now, there's another underlying factor. We're going through a period of inflation. Prices keep going up and up and unfortunately, if a woman's shoe goes up one dollar, a man's shoe will go up two or three, and it's got to be that way and it's difficult for the consumer to understand. It's only people that are in the industry. Like this morning I was in this shoe factory in our own area. One hundred and thirtyseven people in this plant, making fourteen hundred or maybe fourteen fifty, it varies from day to day, but ah, pairs of shoes a day. Now you work that out and you'll see that's there's a lot of labour involved in making the shoes and that is just a minor factor there. The

raw materials are handled in another plant; the head office is in another plant; the shoes that the factory I was in this morning: they all go to a central warehouse so they all have to be handled there, the invoices and what have you, the travellers, and many more manpower, manhours; go into the handling of these shoes before we see them. But I just mention this little experience I had this morning; I'm in factories all the time and ah, to see what's new and what's going on and these figures just happen to be fresh in my mind because I'm interested in this angle. So there's much more work in making men's shoes; there more material. There's more leather used and I've already said that leather is expensive but it's still the very best and so when a man wants to buy a half decent pair of shoes today he's ...well he might as well think of fifty dollars. Sure there's some in the forties but they're more in the fifties and this is a lot of money so if he can, rather than pay fifty dollars for a pair of black dress shoes, and then fifty dollars for another pair of brown dress shoes, another forty/fifty dollars for a pair of white shoes and so on, ~~actually~~ naturally he has to stop and think, "now how much of the family budget can I spend of shoes?" And I don't argue with this. Every family has to work out their own personal budget and yet when we stop to think that they're not costing any more proportionally than anything else. For example you asked to talk about the early days of the shoe business which I did if I can go back to that for a few minutes, I can remember when the popular selling make of shoe in our store was six dollars. I'm talking about when I was working full-time. I can remember in 1938, my dad had the chance of buying a high grade of English shoes called Leez, and they would have to sell at ten dollars a pair. And he thought that over very very seriously because up to that time he had not had a pair of shoes at a ten dollar bill in the store. And I'm talking about 1938. So he finally decided to put them in. And they sold well: better than he

had expected. Then along came World War II and of course he couldn't get them during that period. And I can remember when I came back from overseas in 1945 our most popular women's shoe, was a trade name called "tread-easy" was a company that's out of business now (there's two of the family businesses gone) They were excellent shoes and they sold for eight dollars and fifty cents. And they were comparable to what we'd sell for thirty dollars today. Now I'm well aware of these prices but there's not much we can do about it and I don't apologize for them. I was telling a friend the other day I have always associated the price of a pair of men's shoes with the price of a pair of pants in a made-to-measure suit. And if you go and buy a made-to-measure suit: twopiece suit, you will find that the trousers are approximately one third of the price of the suit. And you think back you'd get a suit for around a hundred dollars, you could buy a good pair of shoes for around thirty. But now you go in to buy a good made-to-measure suit you have to pay, to think in terms of two hundred dollars and a third of two hundred dollars is sixty-some dollars right? So when we say that men's shoes are fifty and sixty dollars we're still in line. I'm just using a suit; I'm not picking on a suit of clothes; this is just a typical example. Like I bought a short-sleeved summer shirt the other day: thirteen dollars, and I'm sure I got my money's worth at today's prices but it doesn't seem to be too long ago that I could get a short-sleeved summer shirt for six or seven dollars and so it's how it goes. And so the...

To conclude what we were talking about in these materials I would just like to say that we can't knock man-made materials too hard because in the future it's going to be necessary to use probably more of them than we are right now. But those of us who are really conscientious about foot health would like to see synthetic materials, man-made materials, whatever you want to call them

confined to the bottoms of shoes and not the uppers and the leather that is available for footwear be used for the uppers for the simple reason that leather breathes and man-made materials: some of them are advertized as such but really no man-made material that I have ever seen breathes like leather. And this is not just for foot health and if one is inclined to have a warm foot, well then their feet are much warmer than man-made materials because...another factor too that goes with the man-made materials. In large they're not reparable and leather of course is, but I can see the handwriting on the wall. The day is coming when there there'll be no such place...no place to get your shoes repaired. The young people today are not interested in shoe repairing. It is hard work; it is dirty work, and it hasn't been all that rewarding and they...every community, including Belleville, fewer and fewer shoe repairists and so we're not going to get shoe's repaired as often. We're not now. We're not spending near the money on shoe repair now as it used to be. And as time goes on, we're going to be spending less, so this one think in favour of man-made materials.

END OF THE SECOND CASSETTE

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Windy. Low near 14. High near 28.

Wednesday sunny except for afternoon cloudy periods and the chance of a thunderstorm. Low near 15. High near 28.

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Bryson Leslie, a prominent member of the long-established family firm that founded Leslie's Shoe Store, died Friday at Belleville General Hospital. He was 70.

Mr. Leslie was the son of the late William Malcolm Leslie and Bertha Jeanette Leslie. His father founded Leslie's Shoe Store in June, 1919.



Bryson Leslie

Born and educated in Belleville, Mr. Leslie enlisted in the Canadian Army in 1940 and was sent overseas where he trained as one of a small group of Canadians to attend Sandhurst Military College, in England. In 1944, Mr. Leslie received his commission after completing training at Sandhurst and served with the Governor General's Foot Guard Regiment.

In England, Mr. Leslie met and married Ardith Everett, a nursing sister during the Sec-

ond World War.

Returning to Canada in 1945, Mr. Leslie rejoined his father's business and later continued the business with brother Donald. Mr. Leslie's son, Bob, currently operates the family business as well as McIntosh-Leslie store.

Long active in many community activities, Mr. Leslie served as chairman of the congregational board of Bridge Street United Church, among other duties at the church; a member of the board of the Belleville Family YMCA and Salvation Army; past member of the board of governors of Albert College; a past director of the Belleville Cemetery board and past director of the Canadian Shoe Retailers Association.

Mr. Leslie is survived by his wife, Ardith, his daughter, Joan Pope and husband, Bruce, of Toronto; son Bob and wife, Carol, of Belleville; and son, Bill, and wife, Cathy, of Barrie. Nine grandchildren also survive, as does a brother, Donald, of Belleville; and sister, Margaret Trousdale, of Sydenham.

The funeral will be Monday at Bridge Street United Church, at 2 p.m. and burial will be in Belleville Cemetery. Mr. Leslie is at Burke Funeral Home, Moira Street West.

Due to the Pa
James Brys
LESLIE'S SHOE STORE
MACINTOSH LESLI
Will be closed for
MONDAY JUNE

FOR A SUM
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FELLOW
JOIN THE FAMIL
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LOOK AT US NOW...

The Intelligencer June 8, 1991, p. 2

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JAMES BRYSON LESLIE

Belleville

May 31, Parker, Lodge. y 29 at al. Hospital of the with ficating. tery. laughter Charles by hus- dived by lre and of St. ice Isen- larold of s Parker

A large crowd of people attended the funeral for prominent city businessman and resident James (Bryson) Leslie held from the Burke Funeral Home to Bridge Street United Church for service on June 10. Mr. Leslie, 70, of 217 Bridge St. East, died June 7, 1991, in Belleville General Hospital.

Born in Thurlow Township, he was a son of the late William Malcolm and Bertha Jeanette Leslie (nee Donaldson).

Surviving besides his wife, the former Ardith Beatrice Everett (nursing sister), are children Robert (Bob) Bryson Leslie and his wife, Carol, Belleville; Mary Joan Pope, and her husband, Bruce, Toronto; and William James Leslie, and his wife, Cathy, Barrie; grandchildren Sarah, Lindsay, and Craig Pope, Toronto; Kate-Anne, Heather and Jenna Leslie, Belleville, and Anne, Robert and Kate Leslie of Barrie; one brother, William Donald Leslie, Belleville, and one sister, Margaret Jeanette Trousdale, Sydenham.

As second generation of an established shoe retail business on Front Street, Mr. Leslie left the firm in August of 1940 to enlist in the army at Kingston and went overseas in November. He received his commission from Sandhurst Military College on April 8, 1944, and was discharged Sept. 18, 1945. Following his commission from being one of a small group of Canadians to attend a special course at Sandhurst, Mr. Leslie served with the Governor General's Foot Guards Regiment, before being discharged Sept. 18, 1945.

Returning to the family business, he also became involved in many community and church activities. These included being a past president of the Y's Men's Club, past member of the Lay Foundation for Student Ministers, past member of Albert College board of governors, a director of the Belleville Cemetery Board, past member of the Salvation Army Board, past director of the Canadian Shoe Retailers Association. An active member of Bridge Street Church, he had held numerous positions, including past chairman of the congregational board and chairman of the memorial fund.

* Rev. Dr. Harold Wilson officiated for the service, with Rev. Maurice McLeod also taking part. Active bearers were Peter Everett, Perry Everett, Brian Crabbe, David Leslie, John Trousdale and Rob Farrow. Honorary bearers were Gerald Hyde, Garth M. McCroary, Bob Hunter, Donald Leslie, Linton Read, Ross Booth, Rev. Donald Amos, Dr. James Loynes, Dr. Bruce Cronk, David Duffy, Douglas Ashley, Ernie Shortt and Irv Shulman.

Burial was in Belleville Cemetery.

WILLIAM LANTZ

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The Intelligencer June 15, 1991, p. 28

