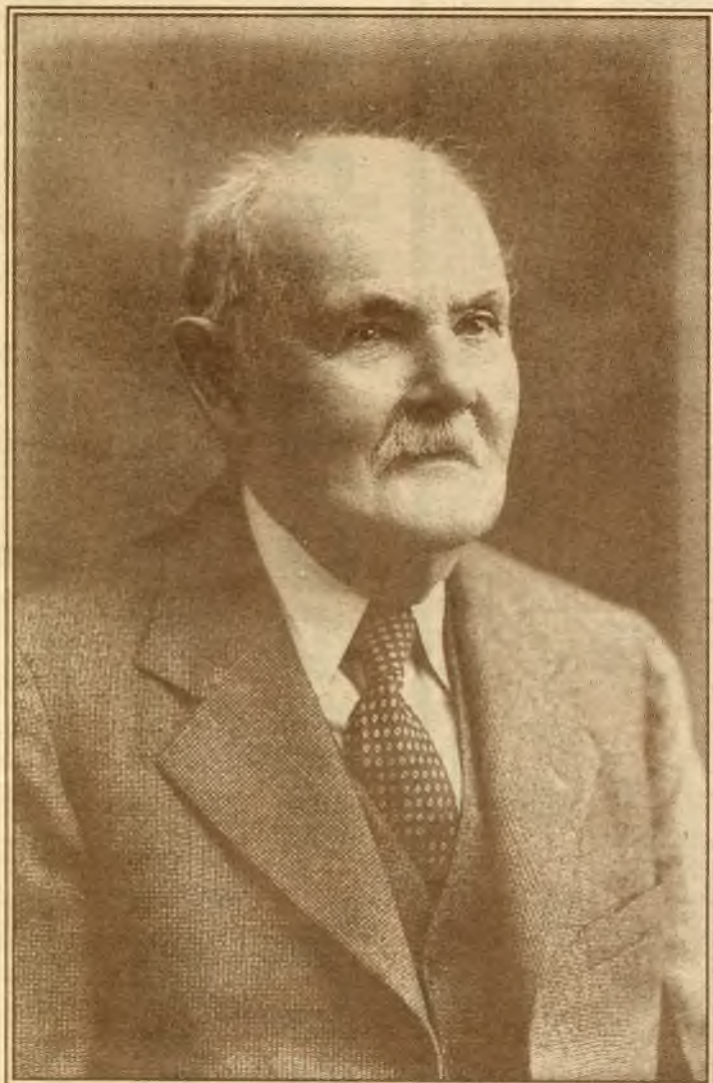


Sowing the seeds



Charles E. Bishop, founder of Bishop Seeds.

Like the seed he sold, Charles E. Bishop's business began small but soon grew into something substantial.

Bishop started his company in 1890. After hawking his goods at a couple of locations, he settled into a shop across from city hall on Front Street, Belleville. By then his son, Charles F. was running the company. Unfortunately, he does not have appeared to take into account a cardinal rule — too much water is not good for seeds. Then came the flood of 1936, when the railway bridge caused ice to back up and sent water teeming over the river's banks.

"The river came in the back door and right out the front," recalls Charles F.'s son, Bruce, who, with his son Mark, now operates Bishop Seeds on the Loyalist-Wallbridge Road. Bruce's brother, Bill, is retired from the business and his daughter, Mary Lou Walsh, also works there.

Charles F. frantically hired workers to carry his inventory to drier ground. Bishop poured each one a shot of liquor and his mother made sandwiches while the men hefted 150 lb. bags out the door.

"As the water got in there and the seeds expanded, you could hear the bags exploding like rifle shots," recalls Bruce.

Then, as Bishop was watching his means of living wash away, employees from his competition, MacKenzie and Co., arrived in trucks and began helping. Although MacKenzie and Bishop were rivals and not exactly friends, they shared a mutual respect for each other as businessmen.

"He sent all his men and trucks up there to move us and he wouldn't take a cent. He wouldn't even take thanks," says Bruce.

Prior to the store's evacuation, Bruce's father was so desperate that he and some local businessmen were considering

blowing up the railway bridge to free the ice and save their shops. At one point the ice threatened to do the job for them but the CPR put a train on the bridge to keep the structure from washing away. Whether the presence of the train changed their minds, we'll never know. Perhaps if the dynamite was used, the train would have fallen into the river and blocked the ice, or maybe the threat passed. Whatever, the plan to dynamite the bridge was discarded.

Three years later the war broke out and Bruce, at 15, was allowed to leave school and get a driver's licence to help his father's business. This was only allowed because the company was considered part of the war effort. Bruce remembers people were encouraged to grow food in their own "victory gardens," allowing farmers' food to go to the military.

In the early days, founder **Continued on Page 3.**



Inside Bishop Seeds with Charles E. Bishop behind counter, likely on McAnnany Street.

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Test Your Heritage Knowledge

The Quinte region's past is loaded with fascinating people who have contributed to the area's past and left many lasting reminders. Some of these people have made their mark in the entertainment field while others pursued business endeavors or sports activities that have added greatly to the community. There are also buildings and landmarks, some now gone, of historical interest. See how much you know about your community.

1. What year was Belleville incorporated as a town? 2. Where does Beleville's Ponton Street take its name from? 3. What was the Marchmont home at 193 Moira Street West, Belleville, once used for? 4. What did the brick building on Coleman Street, Belleville, house before G.T. Lanning Ltd? 5. How old is the city's 'lower' bridge?

1. 1849. 2. William H. Ponton, mayor of Belleville from 1851 to 1853. 3. It was a home for orphans. 4. Deacon Bros. clothing company. 5. Sixty-three years old.

Remember when

Sunday June 20, 1993



Charles F. Bishop and Isobel Winter in Front Street store between 1910 and 1920.

Schooners, rails, trucks...

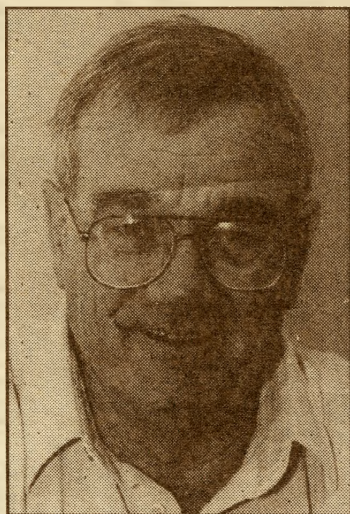
Continued from Page 2.

Charles E. Bishop shipped goods by schooner, and loading was sometimes combined with imbibing. Bruce's father told him about wagons filled with barley lined up on Front Street with farmers waiting to load it onto ships. Charles F. was then a young boy and he tended the farmers' horses while they wet their whistles at nearby establishments. With at least 20 hotels and bars on Front Street (his father recalled 29), many of the farmers had their fill of barley products by the time they arrived at the government dock.

Somewhere along the line, Bishop must have been convinced that rail shipments made more sense (cents?) than schooners, and he switched.

Business was good and Charles F. developed a thriving trade through mail-order

purchases. With advertisements in publications such as *The Farmers Advocate* and *Maritime Farmer*, the railway spread seed as far west as Sault St. Marie and east to the



Bruce Bishop

Maritimes. This sales method ended in the 1970s when the cost of shipping by rail became too expensive and rail service to small communities diminished.

Today, Bishop Seeds employs salesmen who sell direct to farmers while trucks deliver the product.

More than 100 years after the company's inception, Mark represents the fourth generation of Bishops. When Bruce goes on trips with salesmen to the Maritimes, he often meets farmers who have been buying from Bishop Seeds for 40 or more years. And although the number of farmers in society has dwindled, Bishop Seeds' share of the market has increased, ensuring they will be around for many more years.

Farmers wet their whistle while loading the barley

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