

LAWRENCES IN BRAMPTON: From Flower Town to Multicultural Metropolis

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“Mentor: an experienced and trusted friend and advisor”

Webster’s Dictionary

When I think of Bill Lawrence, the word “mentor” immediately comes to mind. He has had a major impact on so many lawyers who have worked at Lawrence, Lawrence, Stevenson LLP over the years since he joined his father’s firm in 1957. Bill’s example of skill, integrity, practical common sense and client service is one from which I have certainly benefited during my 22 years of practice. It was a pleasure to talk with my mentor about Lawrences’ success over its 85-year history, and the changes Bill has seen in the practice of law and in the City of Brampton during his 53 years in practice.

Lawrences’ Origins

Bill’s father, Harold Lawrence, originally founded Lawrences with his partner, Gordon Graydon, in 1924. Brampton, with a population of 4,551, was the centre of a prosperous agricultural county and had become known as the “Flower Town of Canada” due to the success of the hothouse flower industry in the area. The largest of the almost 50 nurseries was the Dale Estate, located at the northern limits of the town occupying both sides of Main Street, with greenhouses stretching east to the Etobicoke Creek and west to the CPR rail line. Dales’ roses and orchids enjoyed international success and the company employed over 350 people in its Brampton operations. Local dairy farms were also renowned and our founders prospered as they travelled throughout Peel County to see their rural clients in their “branch offices” in Bolton, Palgrave, Malton, and Streetsville.

Gordon Graydon became the Member of Parliament for Peel in 1935. Harold Lawrence continued his sole practice in Brampton for the next couple of decades, through the Great Depression, World War II and the flooding of the Etobicoke Creek in 1948, which sank downtown Brampton under four feet of water. Harold served as Mayor of Brampton from 1949 to 1951, during which time the Town Council learned from the lesson of the flood and caused the diversion channel to be built around downtown Brampton. The channel, which officially opened in 1952, withstood Hurricane Hazel on October 15, 1954, and still stands today.



This was how Main Street looked in March 1948, during the worst flood in Brampton’s history. The Town Council, led by Lawrences’ founder Harold Lawrence who was the Mayor of Brampton at the time, learned from the lesson of the flood and caused the diversion channel to be built around downtown Brampton. The channel, which officially opened in 1952, withstood Hurricane Hazel on October 15, 1954, and still stands today.

Photo courtesy Jack Gougeon Collection

The Second Lawrence

Bill Lawrence was born and raised in Brampton. When he graduated from Osgoode Hall Law School in 1956, he did not immediately join his father’s practice as Harold had hoped he would. As the top student in his class, Bill was invited to clerk for Chief Justice James McRuer. This was a very prestigious position for the young lawyer, who was the first to be offered such a clerkship in Ontario. How could Bill refuse? However, after a year, Harold’s practice became so busy that Bill came to join him and two years later asked his friend and classmate Basil Stevenson to join them. Bill took over the management of the firm with Basil’s assistance and its growth as “Lawrences” began.

Bill recalls that in his childhood, Brampton was a small town for retired farmers, with business services available that were appropriate for that community. This rapidly changed as industry and immigration opened up new opportunities for Brampton. The aircraft industry that flourished during and after World War II brought many workers to Brampton,