



*a History of*  
**SARNIA'S**  
MAYORS SINCE 1857



**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The City of Sarnia would like to acknowledge and thank "The Observer" for its permission to reproduce the articles written by Dan McCaffery. Photo Credit to Paisley Studio

You might say he was the John A. Macdonald of Sarnia politicians. Or maybe the Richard M Nixon. Thomas Forsyth was the community's first Mayor, serving from March 28, 1857 until he was forced to resign under a cloud five months later.

The Sombra Township tavern owner assumed the top job after Sarnia's population passed the 800 mark, allowing it to move up from village to town status. Until then, the Head of Council had been a Reeve. His election was controversial from the start. Both Forsyth and Malcolm Cameron claimed they had won the top post but Forsyth got to the Inaugural Meeting and took the chair. Cameron resigned in disgust, later writing a letter to the editor in which he described Forsyth as an "ignorant and ungrateful man". Mayor Forsyth carried on as Head of Council until September when the courts ruled the results of the 1857 election invalid. After leaving Council he lost his job as Port Collector when it was alleged he admitted a large quantity of brandy into the country without collecting duty. The loss to the Crown was said to be \$2,400.00.

But despite the scandals, his cupboard of achievement was far from bare. In fact, under his leadership the community made rapid progress. Council decided to build a Town Hall, passed laws to widen Cromwell and Lochiel Streets and built sidewalks on Wellington, Christina and George Streets. So many downtown improvements were made during his five months in office that the municipal tax rolls skyrocketed. According to a contemporary newspaper story, taxes in Sarnia were the highest of any Town in the region.

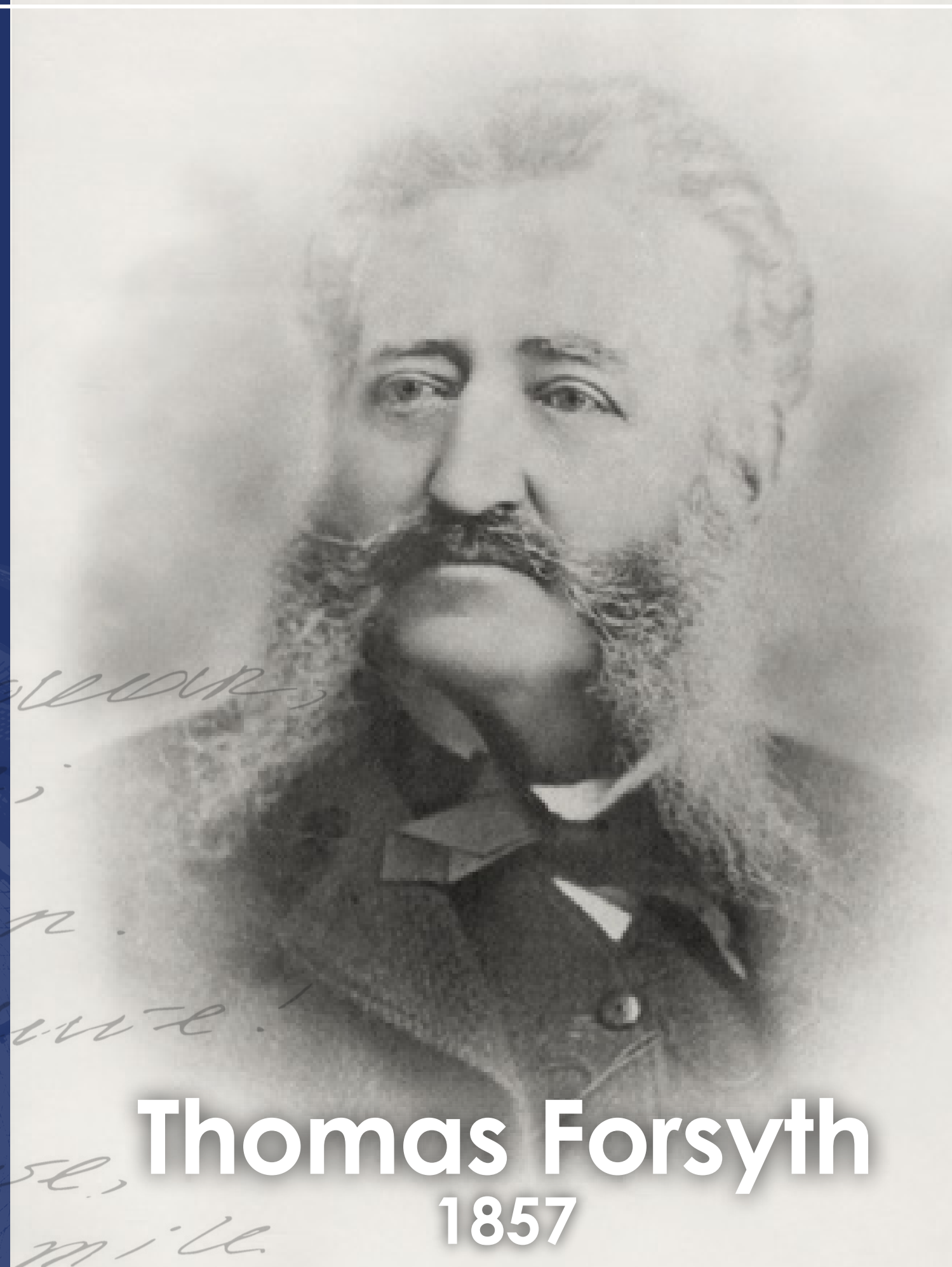
Mayor Forsyth may have been a 'tax-and-spend liberal' when it came to making downtown improvements, but he was a conservative when dealing with law enforcement. The Town hired a police constable under his leadership, and he played hardball with those who didn't obey Town Bylaws, helping to push through a motion providing imprisonment for anyone who failed to pay municipal fines.

There were problems with rowdy behaviour downtown that council tried to curb bypassing a bylaw to 'regulate and license houses of public entertainment'. He also helped Sarnia shed its frontier image, presiding over the passage of a bylaw making it illegal for horses to run at large.

Don Poore, who narrated a 1992 televised re-enactment of Mayor Forsyth's first council meeting, said "the issues in those days were the horrible state of the roads, dogs running at large, people coming out of bars causing problems... Some of those issues are still on Council's agenda today. I'm sure there is no solution to some of them".

Just as is the case today, he had to deal with a Council that wasn't always united. Indeed, The Observer noted in a May 7, 1857, editorial, "since the commencement of the year we have frequently alluded to the unpleasant and unsatisfactory state of our municipal affairs through the differences and dissensions among the Councillors".

He left Sarnia for good in 1864 and is believed to have settled in Detroit.



**Thomas Forsyth**  
1857

Call him the forgotten Mackenzie brother.

Hope Fleming Mackenzie, Sarnia's second Mayor, was a man whose considerable political achievements were completely overshadowed by those of a very famous sibling.

Indeed, his baby brother, Alexander, went on to become Prime Minister of Canada. Still, Hope's story is fascinating in its own right.

Born in Scotland on May 24, 1821, he immigrated to Canada at age 21, living for five years in Kingston before settling in Sarnia.

A carpenter and cabinet maker by trade, he also proved to be a handy shipbuilder.

In his youth, Hope was considered the family member most likely to succeed. Author Victor Lauriston, writing in the book 'Lambton's Hundred Year, 1849-1949', said Hope "seems to have been endowed with unusual gifts for public life, coupled with a certain reluctance to face its hard buffetings. His personality had a warmth, a charm, an appeal, lacking in his younger brother Alexander".

Elected to Sarnia Council in the late 1850's, he was appointed Mayor on September 4, 1857, to finish off the term of Thomas Forsyth, who has resigned.

Although he only served four months as Head of Council, Mayor Mackenzie proved himself a man of action. At his first meeting, for instance, Council voted to raise 900 pounds to erect a farmers' market downtown.

It was a minor fortune in those days, but the move resulted in the establishment of a thriving market at the corner of Lochiel and Victoria Streets that stood for 90 years. The market eventually left for Ontario Street.

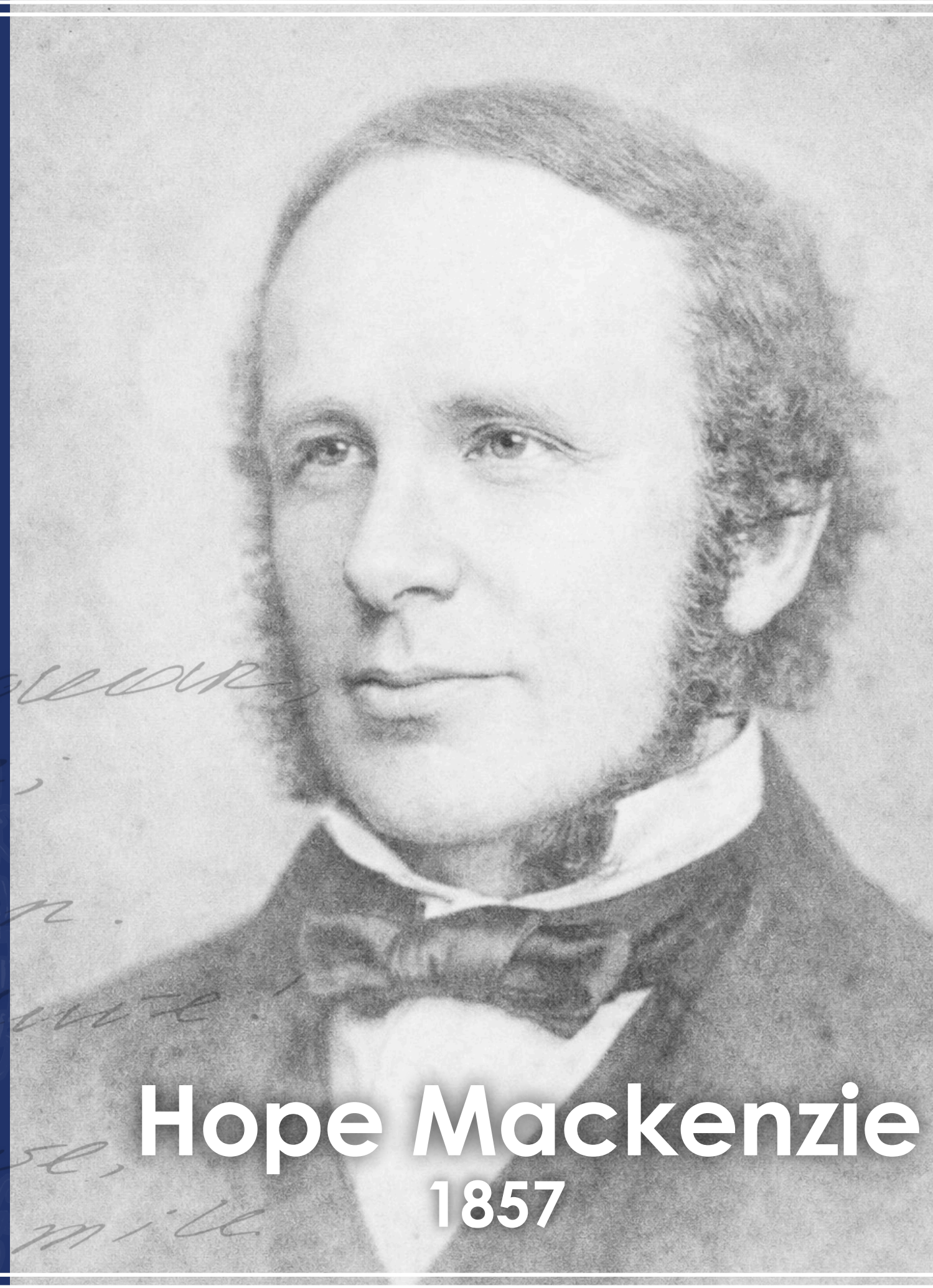
City Council has been trying to lure it back into the core in recent years, but modern politicians have not been able to match Mayor Mackenzie's feat.

Mackenzie left Council at the end of 1857 and was elected to Parliament in 1859, becoming the first member of his family to enter the House of Commons.

He was offered the Liberal nomination again in 1861 but turned it down to pursue his business interests. Alexander Mackenzie won the seat instead, going on from there to become the nation's second Prime Minister.

Hope was back in public life a few years later when he was elected MP for South Oxford,

He died on June 4, 1866, at age 46.



**Hope Mackenzie**  
1857

He was the man who helped open Sarnia up to the outside world. Henry Glass, the municipality's third Mayor, took over as Head of Council at a time when the community was extremely isolated.

The year was 1858 and Sarnia had to rely on slow steamships to connect it to Detroit, Chicago, Toronto and Buffalo. Those wanting to travel anywhere by land had to negotiate southern Ontario's deplorable roads system. A trip to London, by way of example, typically took 18 hours to complete.

Railroads had little interest in coming to Sarnia, which was a sleepy community of 800 people with five churches, two taverns and about a dozen stores. But partially at the urging of Mayor Glass and his Council, the Great Western Railroad agreed to extend a line from London to Sarnia that year. The move made it easier to get goods and people to markets in other parts of Canada and, as a result, Sarnia's growth was assured. Indeed, by 1861 its population had ballooned to 2,091.

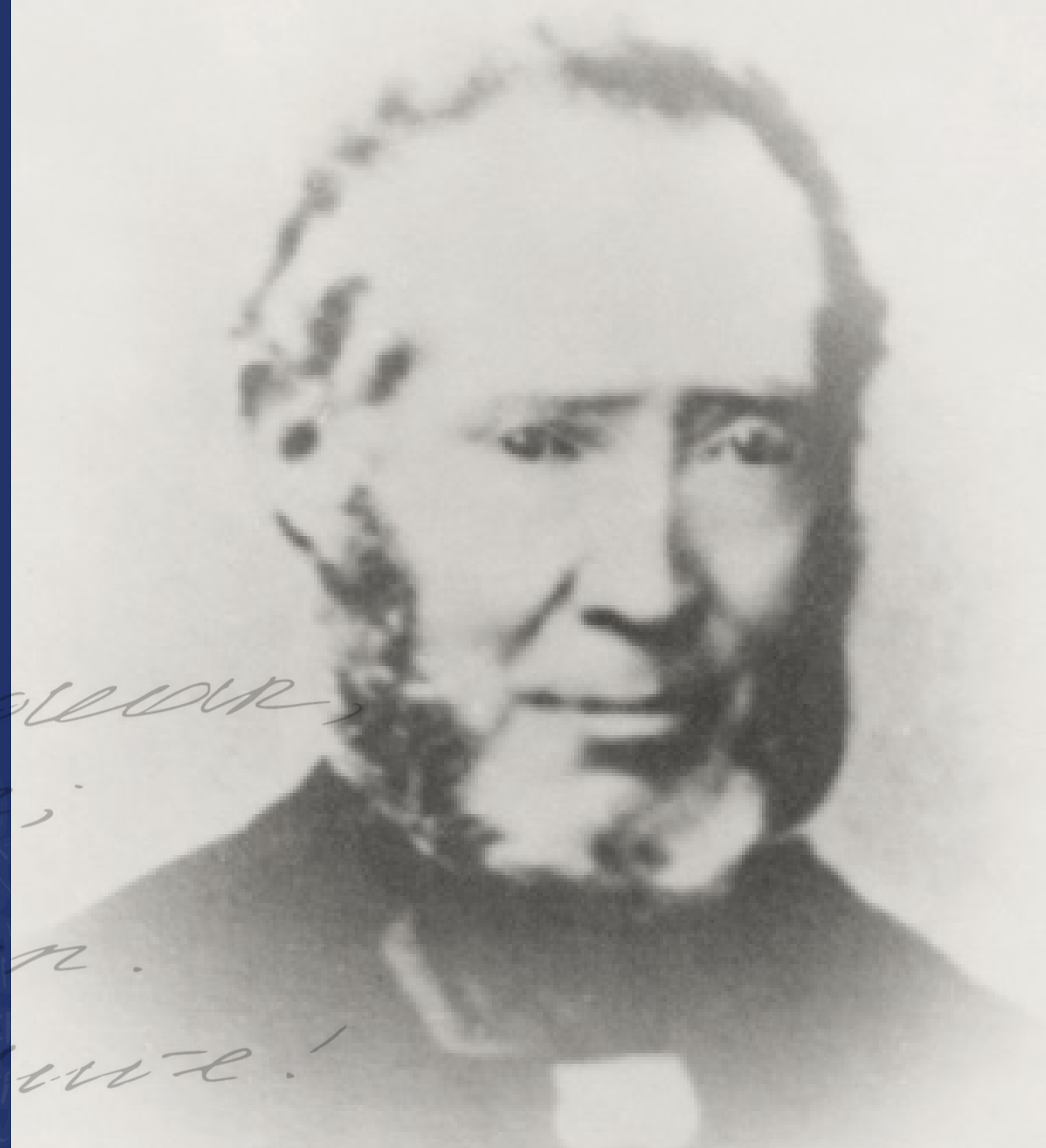
Born in Scotland in 1799 Henry Glass came to Canada at an early age. Settling in Lanark County. He came to Sarnia in 1847 and soon developed a reputation as an honest individual and a successful mercantile businessman. An 1866 copy of The Observer commented on the "general uprightness of his conduct and his straight-forward, off-handed tact and promptitude as a businessman". Shortly after he became Mayor, Council voted to extend Wellington Street to the riverfront.

Mayor Glass was ahead of his time on the environmental front, presiding over a Council that began planting shade trees on Town streets. Councillors were so committed to the program, minutes of a Council meeting show, that they passed a motion asking God to protect the new trees.

His Council also rejuvenated a demoralized Sarnia Fire Department by spending \$800.00 to buy a new fire engine. The old engine, according to the June 3, 1858, edition of The Observer, was "worse than useless". The situation was so bad that the Town couldn't find enough volunteers to fight some fires. Many volunteers were staying home because they felt it was useless to try to battle a blasé without proper equipment.

In addition to his service on Town Council, he was twice elected Warden of Lambton County. He was also County Registrar and served as an Officer with the local Militia.

He dies February 11, 1866, at age 67.



**Henry Glass**  
1858

In the early years of its history, Sarnia turned to a doctor to help cure its economic ills. Specifically, the community selected Thomas William Johnston was its fourth Mayor in 1859. And it chose the Irish native to head Council two more times, making him the first Chief Magistrate to serve more than one term. In fact, he was so popular that he was acclaimed to the top post every time he ran.

Born in Omagh, Ireland on March 24, 1813, Mayor Johnston moved to the United States at an early age, studying medicine in New Orleans before setting up shop as a Louisiana surgeon. He moved to Sarnia after that, becoming the doctor for the 4th Lambton Battalion.

During his years as Mayor, he helped usher in a period of unprecedented growth, and he did it partly by lowering taxes. Minutes of a Town Council meeting for 1860 show that under his direction annual license fees for downtown businessmen were slashed from \$60.00 to just \$40.00. The cuts were made, the minutes say, to help merchants battle "hard times".

Mayor Johnston was also interested in making life a little more enjoyable for ordinary citizens. His Council tried to lure circuses to Sarnia on a regular basis by dropping circus fees from \$100.00 to just \$30.00. It also loaned the then princely sum of \$100.00 to a local band so it could buy musical instruments. That may not sound like much money today, but it should be remembered that the Town's entire levy to Lambton County Council in 1860 was only \$870.00.

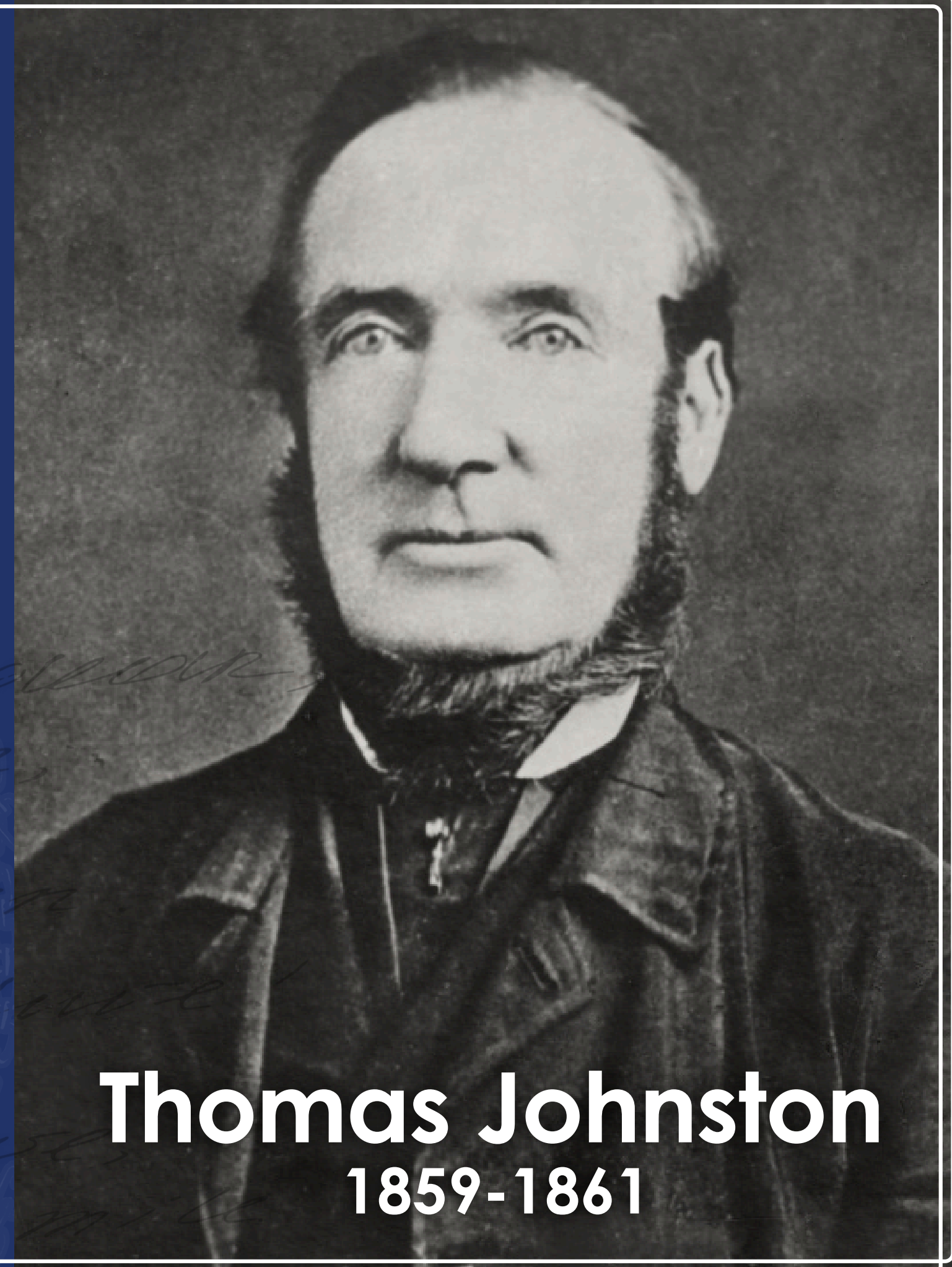
The Great Western Railroad had arrived a year earlier, connecting the Municipality to London, but the Grand trunk's arrival was even bigger news. A train station was built at the foot of Cromwell Street, helping to stimulate development downtown.

Despite his popularity, Mayor Johnston had his critics. In a scathing editorial, the Tribune newspaper accused him of wanting to keep the Mayor's chair "in perpetuity". It called on voters to turf him out of office at the end of his second term.

But The Observer came to his defence, declaring, "we look upon our present Mayor as one who considers his constituents as a part of himself, and studies to do his duty faithfully, without regard to party feeling or sectional interest, and who never yet has allowed one cent of the public money" to be wasted.

Mayor Johnston, who did not seek a fourth term in 1862 was appointed County Registrar in 1865.

He died March 12, 1876, at age 62 and he was buried in Sutherland Cemetery in Mooretown.



**Thomas Johnston**  
1859-1861

The public can be fickle. Joshua Adams, the first Sarnia Mayor to be defeated at the polls, found that out the hard way.

Mayor Adams, who was elected the community's fifth Chief Magistrate in 1862, started out as an exceedingly popular politician. But he was turfed out of office at the end of his second term after becoming embroiled in a road building scandal. Not much is known about his early life but Mayor Adams, a lawyer by profession had a good reputation when he was first elected.

In fact, The Observer gave him a ringing endorsement when he ran for Mayor after two years on Council. "The only name we have yet heard mentioned in connection with the Mayoralty – that is the only one whom we would consider qualified to perform the duties satisfactorily – is that of Joshua Adams," it said.

"He held the office of Councillor for the middle ward in 1859 and 1860; and we have no hesitation in saying, that a better Councillor there was not in the lot. He made a point to attend to the duties of the office regularly and was a thorough economist in everything relating to the financial affairs of the Town". Mayor Adams won the election handily, beating Alfred Fisher, a doctor, by 146 votes to 68.

Soon after he took office, the new Mayor was faced with something of a law-and-order crisis. According to The Observer, the community was being terrorized by "the disorderly conduct of gangs of young ruffians, who have made it their business to annoy respectable people. Especially females, who have occasion to be out after dark. The conduct of the young vagabonds has been so outrageous of late, as to render it necessary absolutely that it be put to a stop to".

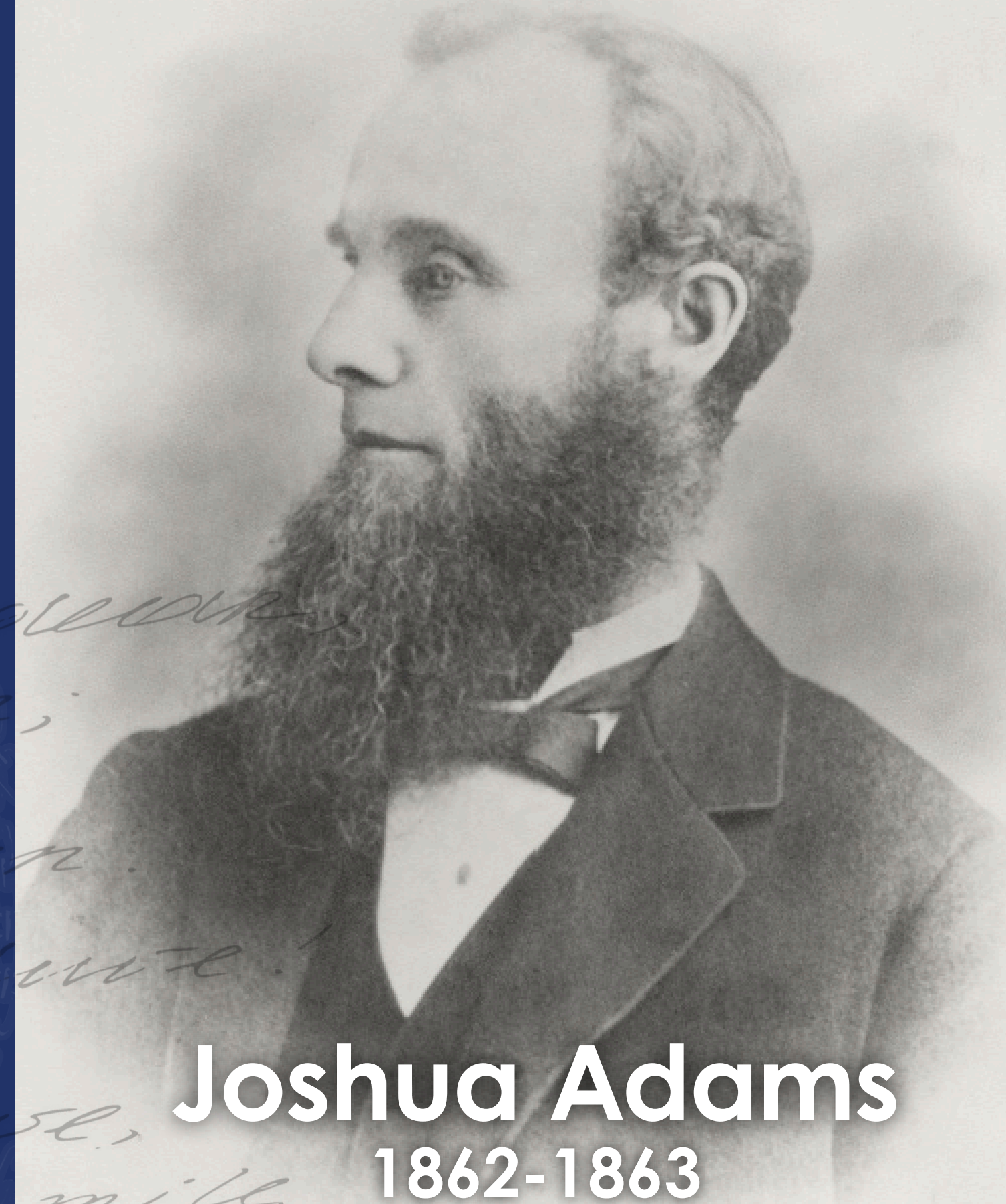
Mayor Adams and his Council moved quickly to take back the night, hiring a police constable specifically to patrol the streets after dark. Following that, Council hired a Town Marshall, agreeing to pay him \$100.00 a year.

Next he tackled the problem of dogs roaming the streets by giving police the authority to shoot unmuzzled canines seen running at large. The measure may seem harsh today, but The Observer backed him, saying "it cannot be denied, even by the most inveterate dog-fancier, that the hordes of useless curs which infest our streets are a positive nuisance".

Mayor Adams fell out of favour when he ignored Council's instructions about who to appoint to a Board responsible for upgrading Town streets, deciding instead to select his own people. In a letter to the editor, a ratepayer said the Mayor was attempting to have Mitton and Lochiel Streets planked in order to benefit a small number of rich people.

The Observer joined in the outcry, accusing Mayor Adams of "illegal" conduct. He lost the 1863 election to Robert Mackenzie by 170 votes to 90.

Mayor Adams lived in Sarnia, along with his wife, the former Harrietta Carmon, for nearly 30 years after leaving office.



**Joshua Adams**  
1862-1863

If you live downtown and are bothered at night by the sound of trains along the waterfront, you can blame Mayor Robert Mackenzie. That's because the community's sixth Chief Magistrate presided over the Council that agreed to allow tracks to be laid along the St. Clair River from Sarnia to Point Edward.

Mackenzie, who was born around 1820 in the Scottish Highlands, emigrated to Canada as a young man, settling first in Kingston before moving to Sarnia. He came from a family noted for successful politicians. Indeed, his brother, Alexander, became the Second Prime Minister of Canada. Another brother, Hope, had been Sarnia's second Mayor.

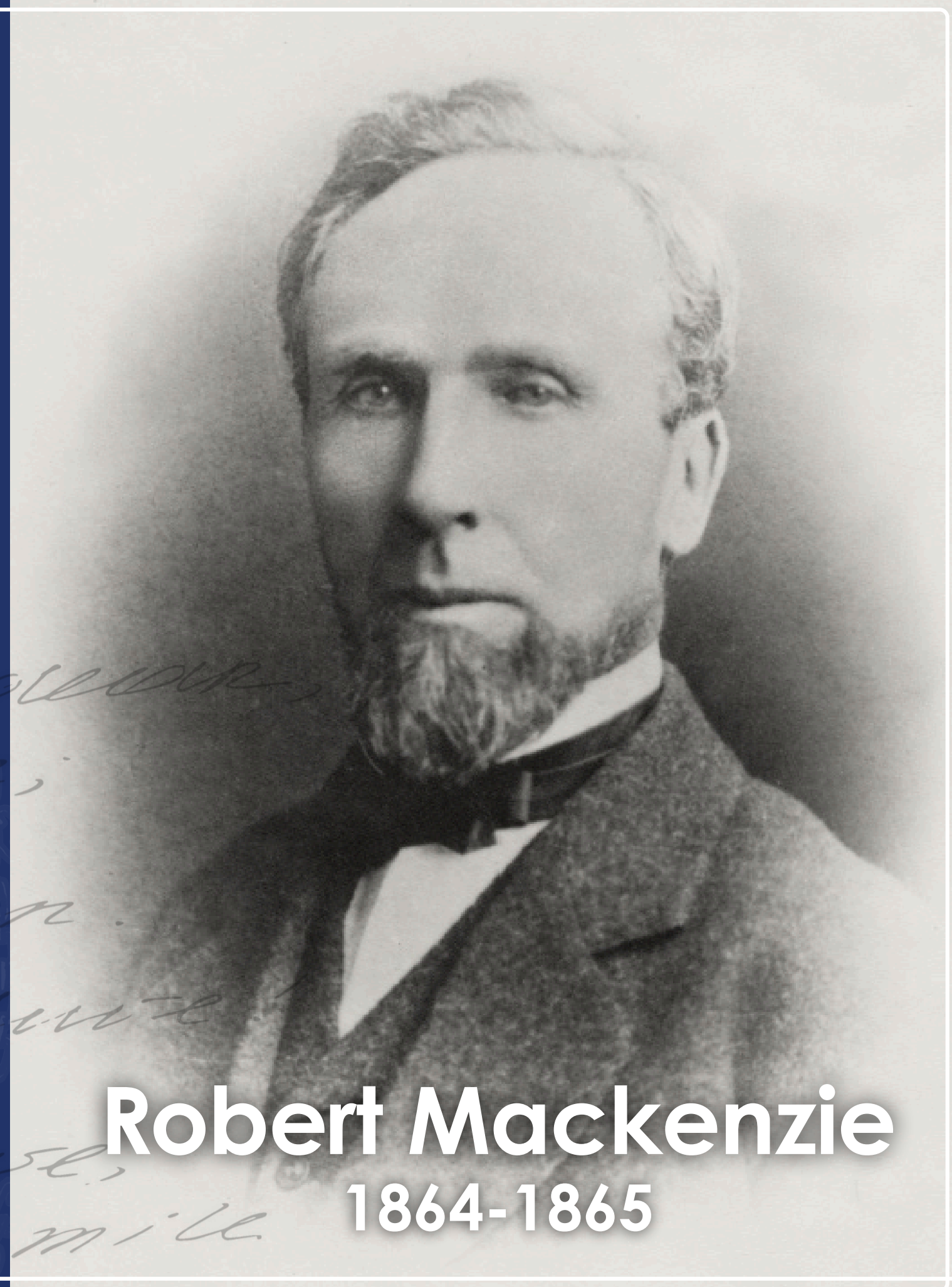
At first, however, Robert made his name in the business world. The Observer described him as being "reserved in manner and unambitious of public honours, yet of high intelligence and good business capacity". He was also, 19th century readers were told, a man who was "public-spirited in a high degree".

Mackenzie was elected Mayor in 1864, knocking off incumbent Joshua Adams. During his second year in office, Council decided to allow tracks to be built along the riverfront. Several Councillors wanted the tracks directed away from the water, but Council agreed to the scheme at the insistence of railway men. In the end, the move proved to be beneficial to downtown businesses.

As controversial as the decision may have been, it didn't get Mayor Mackenzie into nearly as much hot water as what became known as "the goose question". According to newspaper accounts of the year, Sarnia was being besieged by "flocks of geese which are continually infesting the public streets and sidewalks". To tackle the problem, a bylaw was passed requiring goose owners to confine their animals to their premises. The edict was so unpopular that several incumbent Councillors were defeated in the next election.

Whether Mayor Mackenzie could have withstood the anger of miffed goose keepers isn't known, because he didn't seek a third term.

He died in March 1897.



**Robert Mackenzie**

1864-1865

He was the Mayor who through the biggest party in Sarnia's history. Frederick Davis, who served as the community's seventh Mayor, was largely responsible for the huge bash held to mark the first ever Canada Day, or Dominion Day, as it was called in the 19th Century.

Davis, who was elected Mayor in 1866 and again in 1867, convinced Council to spend \$200.00 to stage an elaborate celebration when the Country was born on July 1, 1867. At his urging, Lambton County Council agreed to chip in another \$300.00. The money doesn't sound like much today, but it was enough to stage quite a show during that time. In fact, the festival turned out to be one of Sarnia's first major tourist attractions.

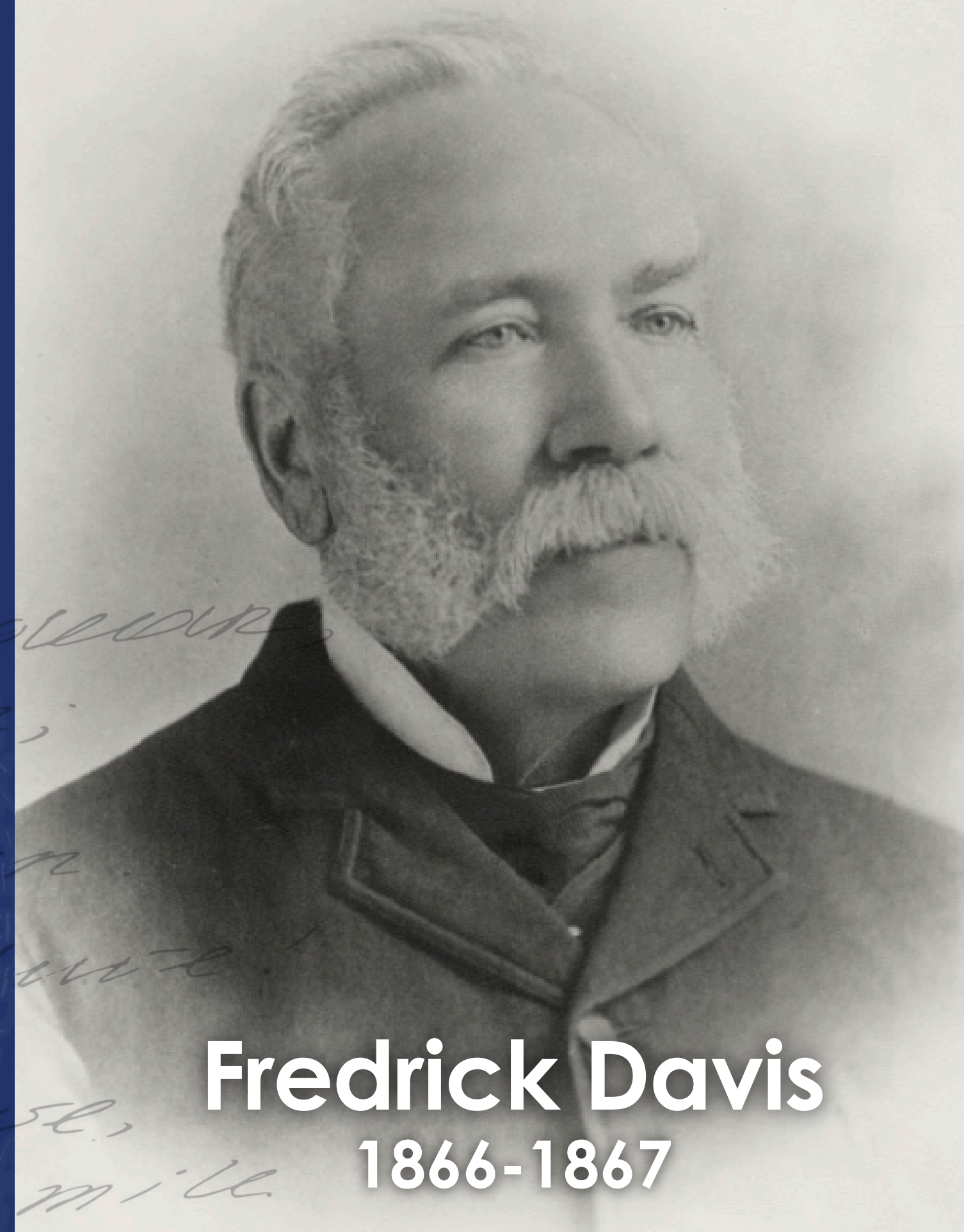
The Observer noted throngs of people flooded into Town. "There was a larger influx of strangers than was ever before, except on the occasion of the visit of the Prince of Wales," the newspaper reported. There was a spectacular parade down Front, Christina and George Streets, complete with colourful bands, marching Veterans from the War of 1812, fire engines from both Sarnia and Port Huron and a carriage carrying four young virgins dressed in white (one to represent each of the founding Canadian Provinces).

Many had been critical of Confederation, but Mayor Davis predicted the new Country would prosper. In a speech to the crowd, he said Canada's "boundless minerals, agricultural wealth and rapidly increasing population" would soon make it the envy of the world.

During his two years as Mayor, Council was heavily involved in road work including the widening of Cromwell, Lochiel, George and Davis Streets. It also purchased a steam fire engine and worked out a mutual aid deal in which firefighters from Sarnia and Port Huron would help one another in the event of major fires. But there was concern that his administration was spending too much money. At one point, the Town's debt had swelled to \$2,680.00.

Davis, who was born in Ireland in 1828, came to Canada as a seven-year-old. He practiced law in Sarnia, serving as local Crown Attorney in 1858 and later as Lambton County Solicitor. After leaving politics he became a Judge in Middlesex County.

He died in London on August 5, 1893, at age 65. His body was returned to Sarnia for burial in Lakeview Cemetery.



**Frederick Davis**  
1866-1867

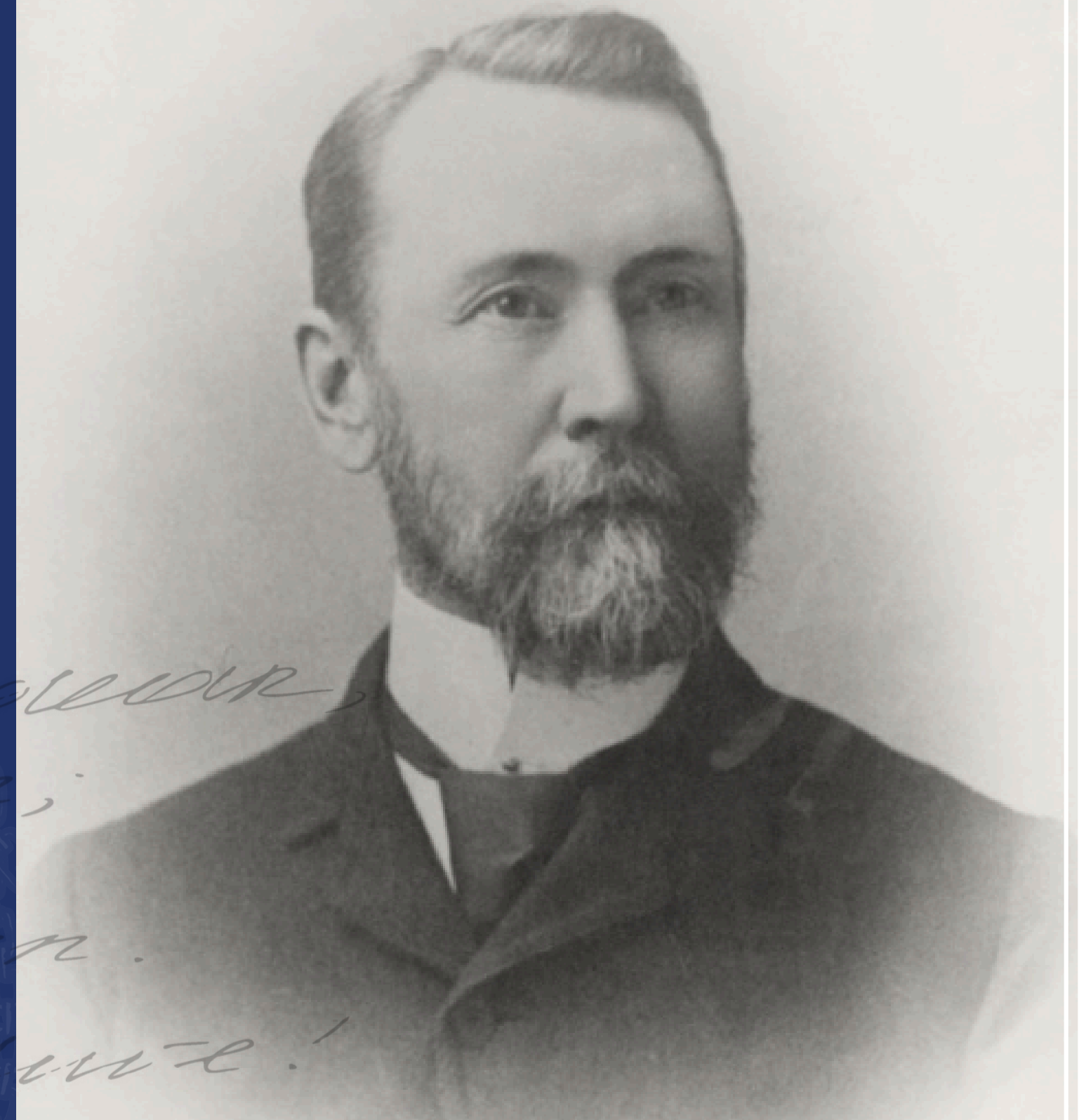
Our first crusader against immorality. Robert Sinclair Gurd, Sarnia's eighth Mayor, took over as Head of Council at a time when prostitution and public drunkenness were rife on the streets of what was still a very young community.

The lawlessness apparently stemmed from the rapid growth Sarnia was undergoing in the late 1860s. According to a story in *The Observer*, written shortly after Gurd took office, "At no time in the past 15 years has there been so much stir in the way of building, as there is in our Town this year". The newspaper railed against immorality, declaring downtown tavern owners were routinely breaking the law by selling liquor on Sundays. And, the editor added, there was more than one local house of prostitution.

In the summer of 1868, there were several tales of drunken brawls in the central business district, including one in which a tavern owner and a prostitute were caught fighting on Front Street Under the headline 'Breaches of Public Morality', *The Observer* decried the Town's declining moral standards. "Only two or three Sundays ago a scene of drunken carousal took place in one of our hotels which would have been disgraceful in any well-regulated Inn on any weekday, but was certainly far more so on the Sabbath", the newspaper declared. "It is no secret that some left that house on the day in question in such a state of intoxication that they were unable to go to their homes without assistance".

The situation came to a head when a local man was shot in the face during an altercation in a house of ill repute. Gurd, a lawyer who had been acclaimed Mayor at the beginning of 1868, ordered police to vigorously enforce the ban on Sunday liquor sales.

Minutes of the Council meetings show he also left the choir to push through a bylaw to "prohibit the sale of the *National Police Gazette* and other immoral publications, within the Town limits".



**Robert S. Gurd**  
1868-1869

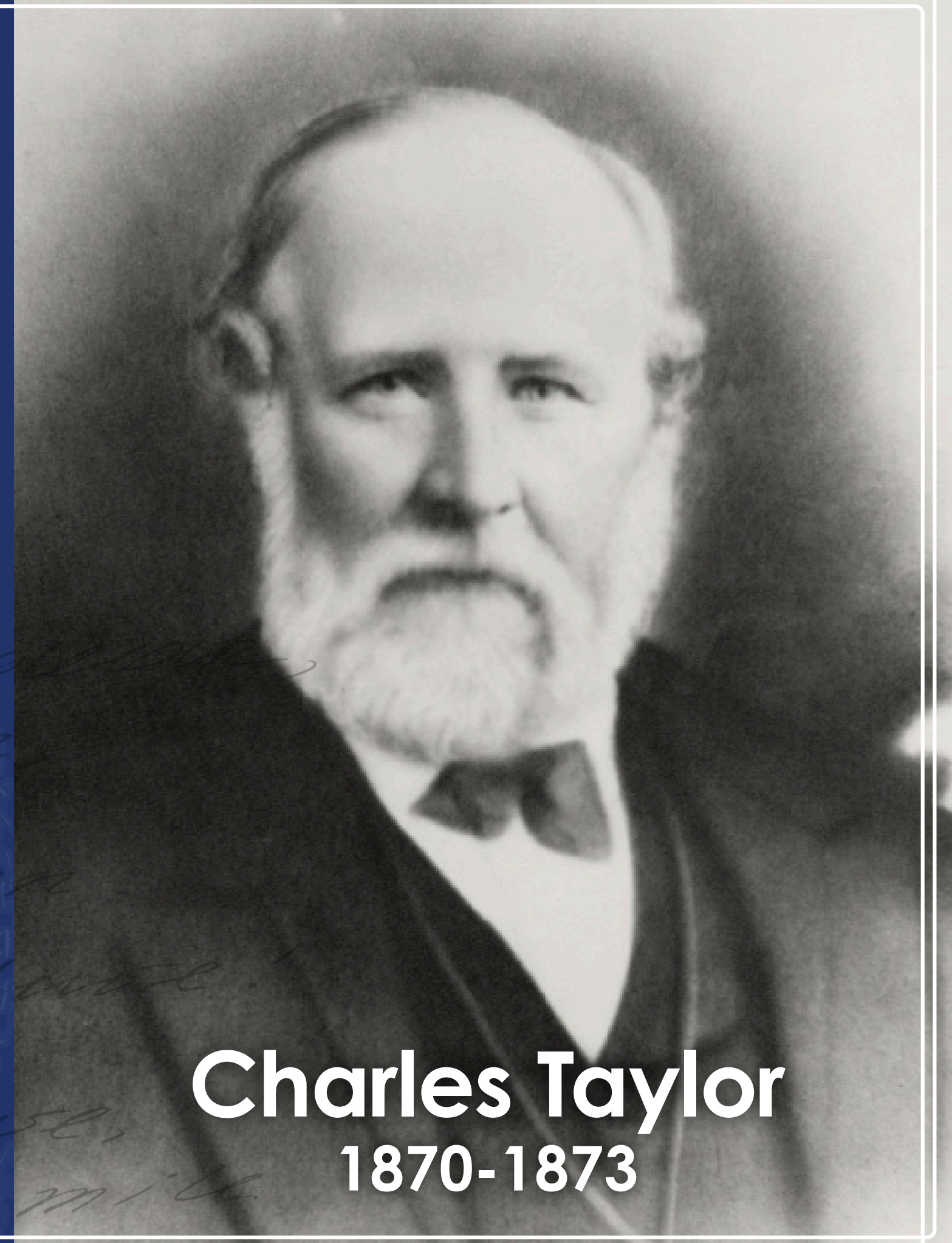
It wouldn't be too much of a stretch to call Charles Taylor the father of the Chemical Valley. That's because Sarnia's ninth Mayor was at the Head of Council when it gave the Bushnell Oil Company permission to build the community's first oil refinery.

Taylor, a local businessman, was acclaimed Chief Magistrate in 1870. At his urging, Bushnell built its refinery within Town limits just one year later. It was a small operation, even compared to the Imperial Oil refinery that would appear a couple of decades later, but it was a start. And it heralded a growth period for Sarnia.

Oil had been discovered in Enniskillen Township a few years earlier but, until Mayor Taylor came along, all the benefits from the local black gold had flowed to central Lambton County. Although he lobbied hard to get the Bushnell refinery, his popularity didn't take off until after Council agreed to repair a dock at the foot of George Street, thereby allowing residents to get their pails into the St. Clair River. The move, which seems so trivial today, made a real difference in an era when Sarnians still lacked indoor plumbing.

Taylor became so popular, in fact, that he was acclaimed three more times, becoming the first Mayor to serve four years. During his administration Council spent much of its time installing sidewalks on London Road, Wellington Street and Front Street. The municipality also agreed to let the Town Hall be used as a high school because, minutes of a Town Council meeting show, educators had "not been able to find any other suitable place".

Taylor, who didn't seek re-election in 1874, died at his Sarnia home on August 20, 1906. He was 77.



**Charles Taylor**  
1870-1873

Every time you hop on a bus or flush a toilet, you can thank George Stevenson. That's because Sarnia's 10th Mayor was the father of Sarnia Transit and the man who brought indoor plumbing to the municipality.

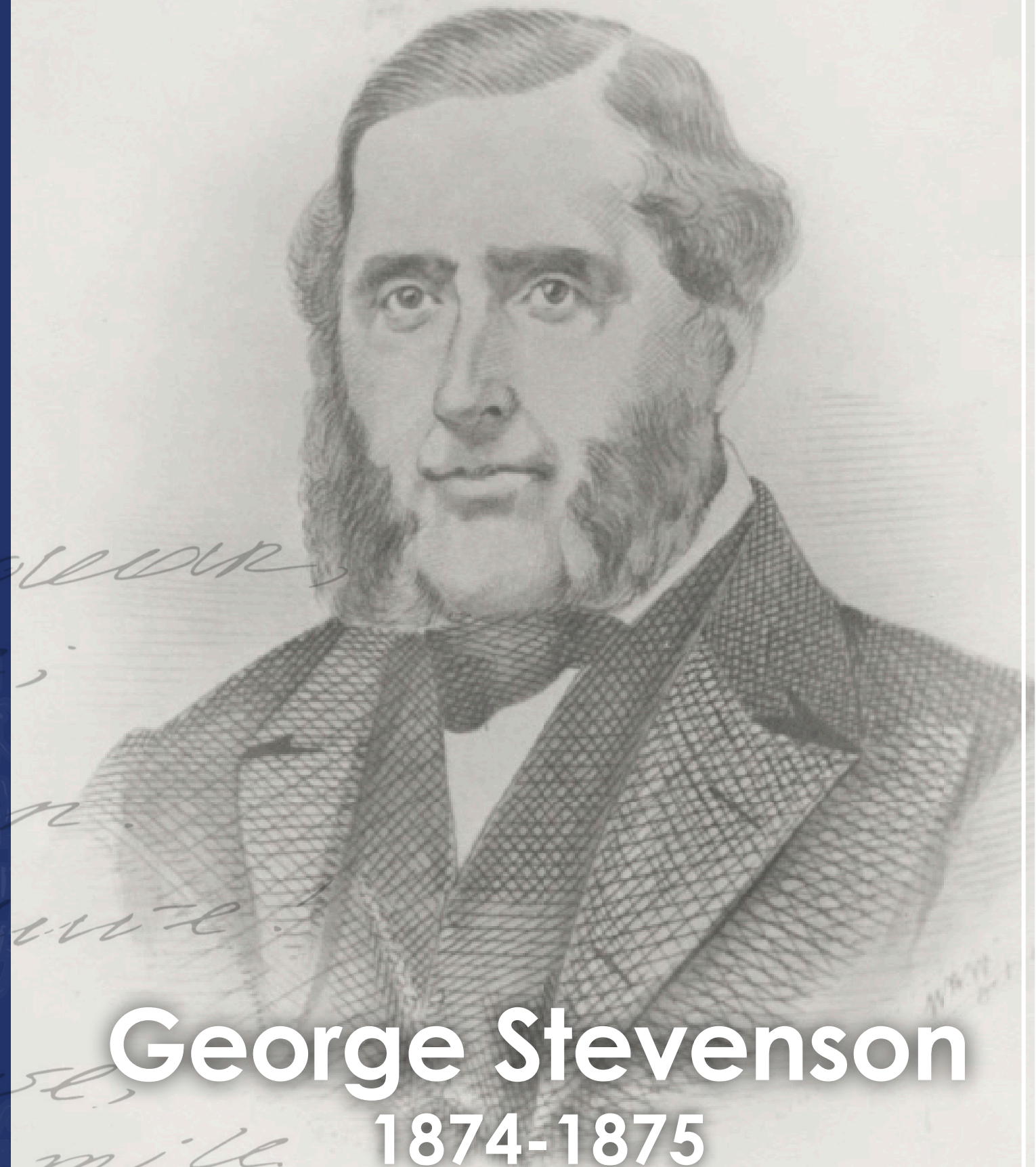
Stevenson, who was born in Glasgow, Scotland, headed Council in 1874 and 1875. During his leadership, Council took actions that would dramatically alter everyday life. Specifically, it launched the Community's public transit service and installed its first waterworks system. Until then, Sarnians got their drinking and bathing water out of wells, or by dipping their buckets in the St. Clair River. In fact, prior Councils had set up a small dock at the foot of George Street so residents could get their pails into the water. But under Mayor Stevensons all that changed.

The municipality began installing the waterworks system during his second year in office. Intake pipes were put in place, and a pumping station was erected at the foot of George Street. The results were revolutionary. People had indoor plumbing, lawn watering was possible for the first time, and the volunteer fire department finally had enough water to battle large fires. Horse troughs on downtown streets were soon full to the brim. Citizens celebrated the opening of the new system by firing a cannon and holding a festival downtown.

Mayor Stevenson and his Council brought the waterworks project in \$18,000.00 under budget and the leftover money was used to pay for a new Town Hall that stood at the corner of Christina and Lochiel Streets until 1954.

Horse-drawn streetcar service was instituted during his term as well, replacing stage coaches. Years later, the street cars were electrified, and the transportation service was expanded, taking people to the beach at the end of Colborne Road.

Stevenson, who was a local businessman, lived in Sarnia for more than 30 years. He died at age 65, in August of 1876.



**George Stevenson**  
1874-1875

A century before Marceil Saddy launched his annual Mayor's Honour List, George Leys was recognizing the achievements of outstanding Sarnians. Just days after being sworn in as Sarnia's 13th Chief Magistrate in 1880, Mayor Leys held a reception at his 171 Lochiel Street home to honour local sailors involved in rescuing shipwreck victims on Lake Huron.

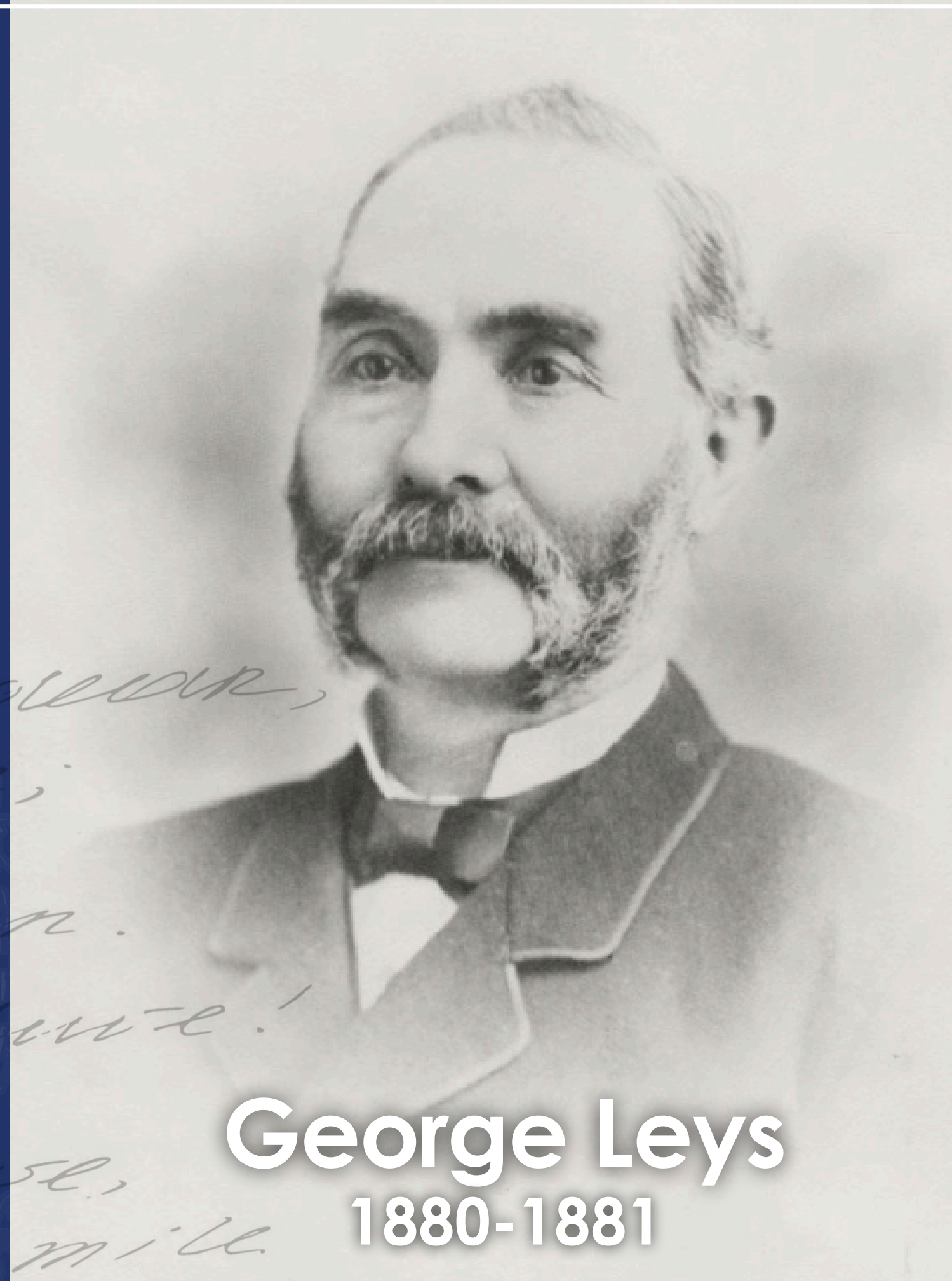
Leys, a Division Court Clerk and insurance salesman, also headed the Council that passed bylaws regulating public morals. Before long, Council had a bylaw in place that made it illegal to "profanely swear or utter any obscene or blasphemous or grossly insulting language". Council also banned swimming unless bathers were wearing "suitable bathing dress".

Mayor Leys presided over a badly fractured Council. At his first meeting he called on Councillors to be "kindly and decorous" towards one another. But before the session had adjourned for the night, three Councillors had served notice that they weren't happy with his leadership. Specifically, they accused the Mayor of attempting to keep them off important Council Committees. He had, they said, held a secret meeting the week before in which he plotted to appoint political allies to various Council committees.

Council soon became so bogged down that it was seldom able to complete its agenda. One Observer headline referred to a Council meeting as "Another Night of Nonsense". Mayor Leys was eventually able to get control of the situation by ramming through tough new rules of order.

During his two years in office, Council helped stimulate the economy by eliminating fees for farmers selling goods downtown and by lowering license charges for hotel keepers and grocers from \$150.00 a year to just \$120.00. Council was less generous on other fronts, refusing a request for \$500.00 to help fend off starvation in Ireland. Mayor Leys, who was absent due to illness when the request was rejected, donated \$20.00 of his own money to the Irish Relief Fund.

He died at age 80 on December 2, 1910 and is buried in Lakeview Cemetery.



**George Leys**  
1880-1881

A century before the local Economic Development Commission was established, Mayor Joe Lowrie was actively urging new industries to locate in Sarnia.

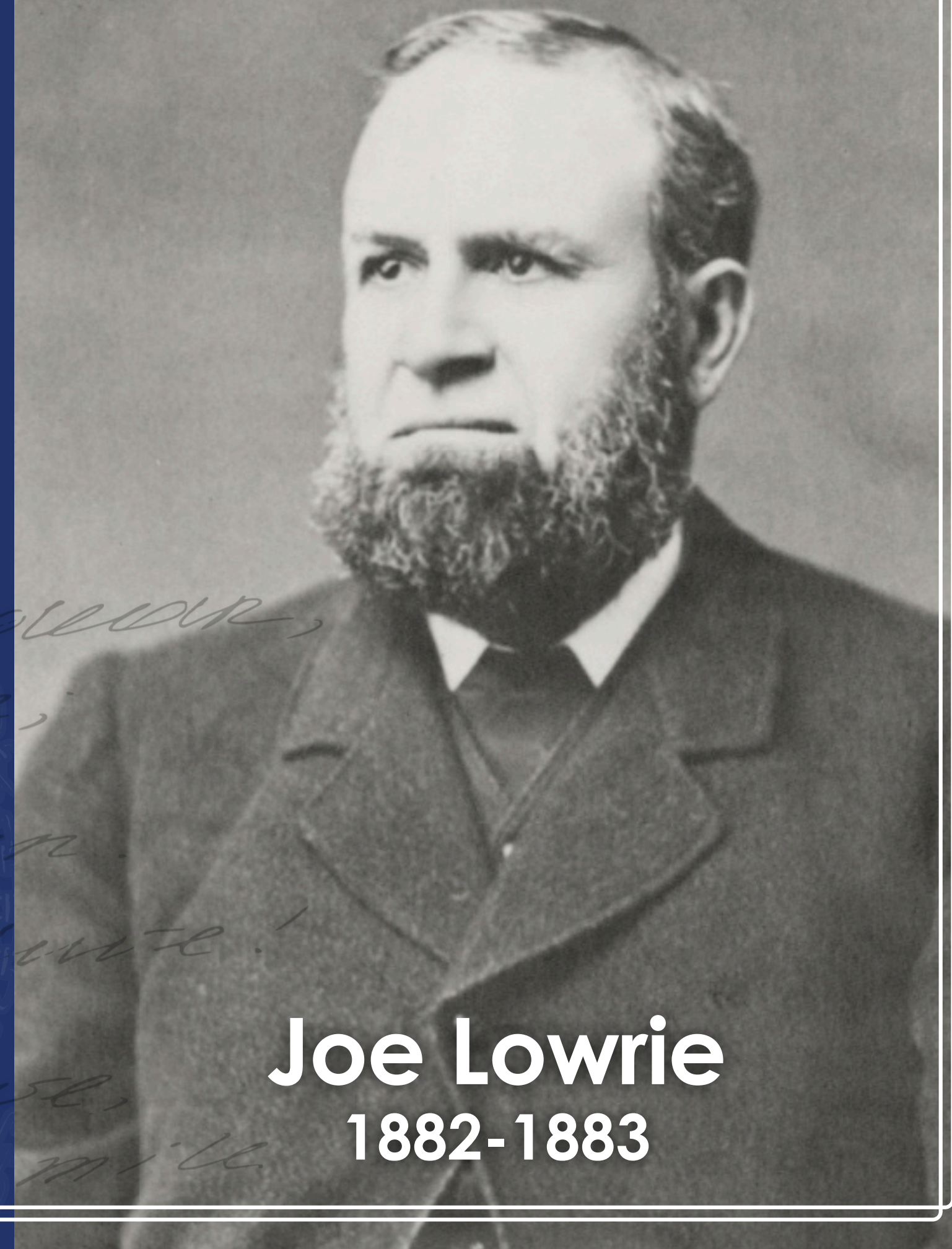
Lowrie, who was born in Berwickshire, Scotland, came to Canada in 1852 and immediately established a Blacksmith shop on Victoria Street. Later, he added a wagon and carriage factory. He ran for the Mayor's chair in 1882 on a platform of bringing new industry to Town. After defeating fiery newspaper editor G.P. Gemmill 398 votes to 207, Sarnia's 14th Chief Magistrate set about to do just that.

One of his first acts was to set up a committee charged with seeking out companies interested in expansion. The Observer praised the move, noting Stratford and several other Ontario Communities were doing the same thing.

Before long Sarnia was booming. The Goodison Threshing Company opened its doors during his first year in office staying in business until 1951. It was a major employer, churning out 300 machines a year during its peak. The Doherty-Barton stove foundry also opened in 1882, and Sarnia Woolen Mills was given the go-ahead to begin construction of a mill which opened in 1884. A number of lumber companies also sprang up at this time.

Mayor Lowrie, who was acclaimed to a second term in 1883, also convinced Council to hire extra police officers after gangs of thieves began breaking into local businesses and homes.

He died on February 12, 1914, at age 83.



**Joe Lowrie**  
1882-1883

He was the first Sarnia Mayor who had to deal with a genuine terrorism crisis. Dr. Arthur Poussette, who became the Municipality's 16th Mayor in 1886, found himself in office at a time when the community was badly torn by the prohibition issue.

There was a widespread talk of banning the sale of alcohol in the Town and debate was ugly. So ugly in fact, that bombs were placed in the homes of two of the leading proponents of abolition. One of the houses was destroyed in a shattering explosion but no one was hurt.

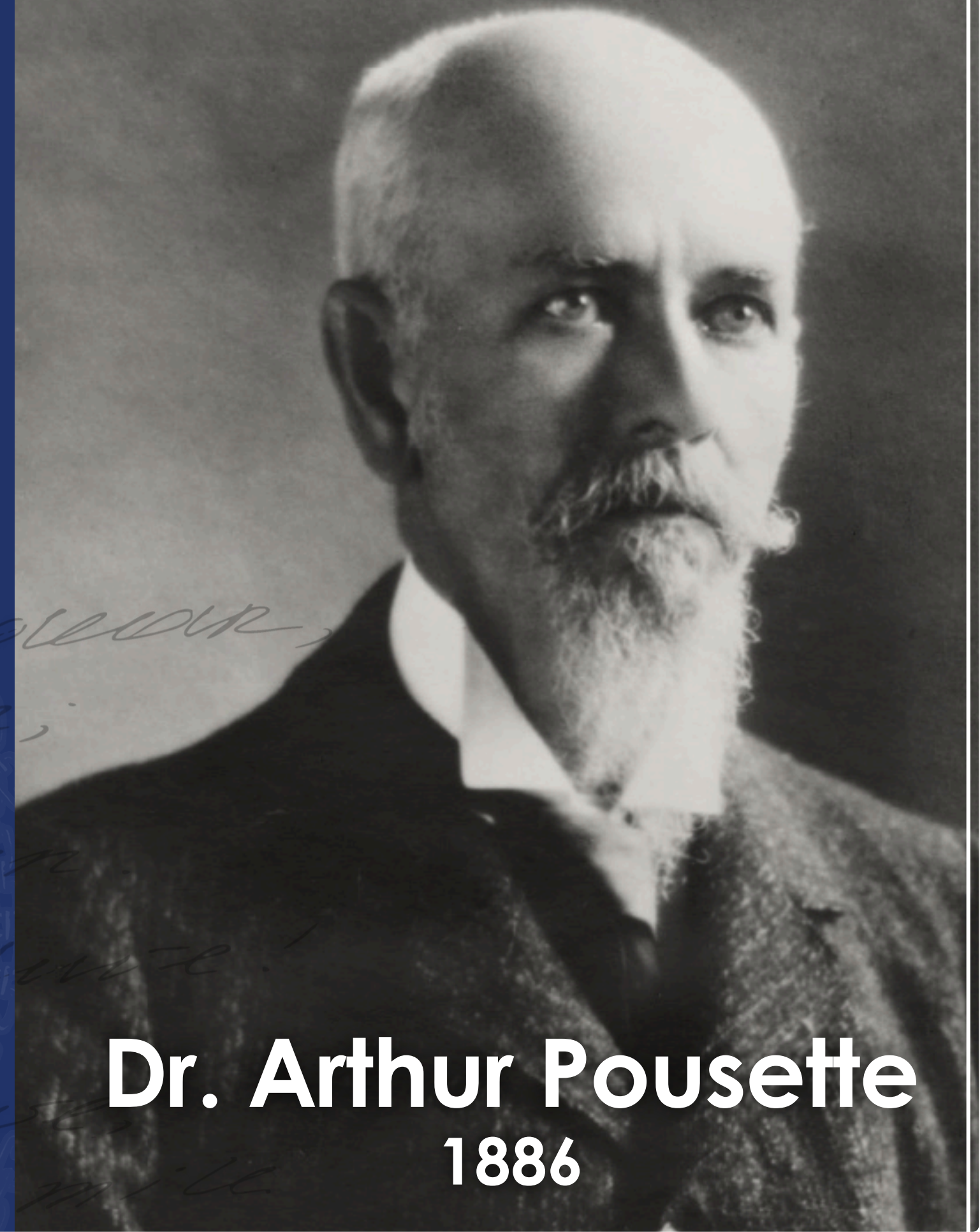
The crime created a sensation that was reported in newspapers across Canada. One paper referred to it as "Sarnia's dynamite outrage". Needless to say, Town Officials were under enormous pressure to solve the case.

Mayor Poussette moved swiftly. Convincing Council to put up a \$200.00 reward for information leading to the arrest of the culprit. He also talked Lambton County Council into offering another \$250.00. It was an enormous sum of money in those days, and a suspect was quickly arrested. However, the alleged bomber was found not guilty after the credibility of the Chief Investigating Officer was called into question. There were no further bombings, possibly because the culprit knew if he struck again the Mayor and Council would spend a small fortune in a bid to bring him to justice.

Mayor Poussette also led the Council that banned cows from Town streets. It was a controversial move in a community that had 5,228 people and 144 cows. But The Observer backed the Mayor, declaring cow owners had no right to turn their animals "loose on the streets and upon their neighbours' gardens".

Mayor Poussette, who was born in London, England on December 7, 1835, was one of Sarnia's pioneer settlers, coming here in 1839 when the community was still a Village called The Rapids. As a young man he studied medicine at McGill University in Montreal before setting up his own practice in Mooretown. He moved back to Sarnia in 1863.

Dr. Poussette and wife, Atecia, lived at 215 Lochiel Street and had four children. He ran for re-election in 1887, losing by 82 votes to Dr. Charles Vail. After leaving politics he became local Medical Health Officer in 1905. He died in March 1919, at age 88.



**Dr. Arthur Poussette**  
**1886**

He was Sarnia's first 'Green' Mayor. A century before the environmental movement began, Mayor Charles Vail was taking concrete steps to battle pollution.

Vail, a doctor who was elected the Municipality's 17th Chief Magistrate in 1887, presided over the Council that passed a bylaw compelling every property owner in Town to make connections to the Municipality's sewer. Under his leadership, Council also spent a small fortune – by 19th century standards at least – to install sewers. On Christina Street alone the bill came to \$6,000.00.

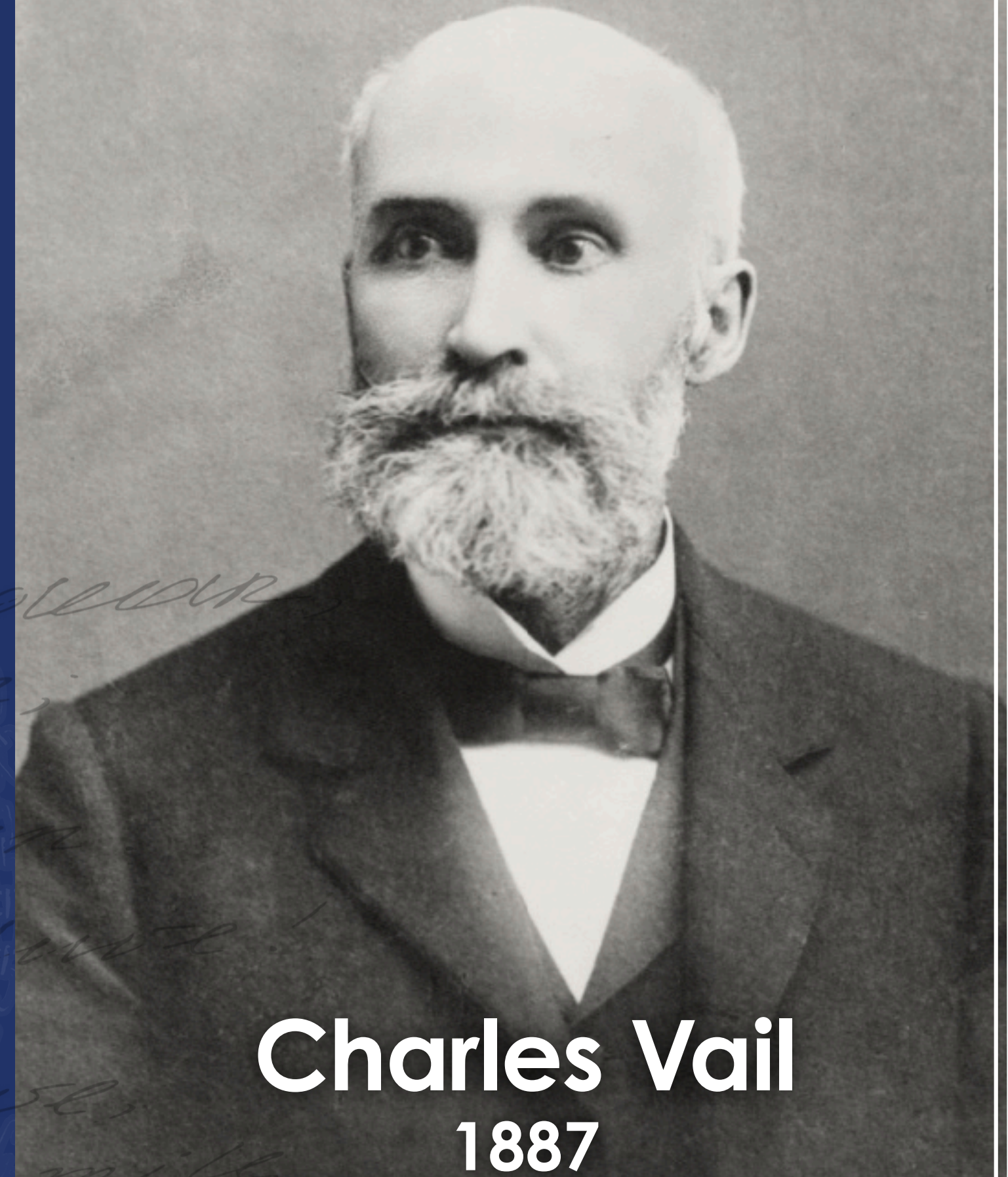
There was widespread opposition to the plan from what The Observer called "sewer soreheads", but Mayor Vail won out in the end, convincing Council his plans were essential in order to protect the public from disease.

Vail, who lived at 198 George Street was also in office when preliminary excavation work began on the original St. Clair River Railroad Tunnel. The project, which was hailed as one of the wonders of the world, virtually wiped-out local unemployment.

Mayor Vail was also successful in convincing Council that he should not have to preside over police court. A politician had too many conflicts to be an effective Chief Magistrate, he said. He noted that during his first four months in office he had tried 40 cases and sent 35 people to jail.

During his one year at the helm, Council also lowered taxes slightly, despite the costly sewer program. In fact, when he retired The Observer noted, "the state of taxation at present is lower than it has been in many years". The newspaper, which was often savagely critical of 19th century politicians, was kind to Mayor Vail, saying "his administration has been marked by good works and a clean record. The public business was carefully, faithfully and honestly transacted. Harmony of action and a businesslike way of disposing of all questions that came up marked the Council procedure during the year".

Vail died on August 22, 1899, at age 64.



**Charles Vail**  
1887

He's long forgotten today, but Mayor James S. Symington played an important role in the construction of the original St. Clair River Railroad Tunnel. Born in rural Lambton County in 1844, Symington moved to Sarnia as a boy, later becoming a successful local businessman and banker. Elected the Municipality's 18th Mayor in 1888, he moved swiftly to knock down barriers standing in the way of the tunnel project.

Preliminary work on the tunnel had started before he took office but Mayor Symington helped speed the job along by convincing Council to permanently close a handful of streets in the Town's south end. Drilling got underway in earnest during his second term in office, creating an economic boom.

Mayor Symington's administration also stimulated the local economy approving the construction of several grain warehouses. The move, according to a contemporary newspaper report, made Sarnia "a more attractive market for the farming community". He also fought to stamp out gambling, ordering police raids on a number of suspected gambling houses. In fact, several arrests were made within days of his election.

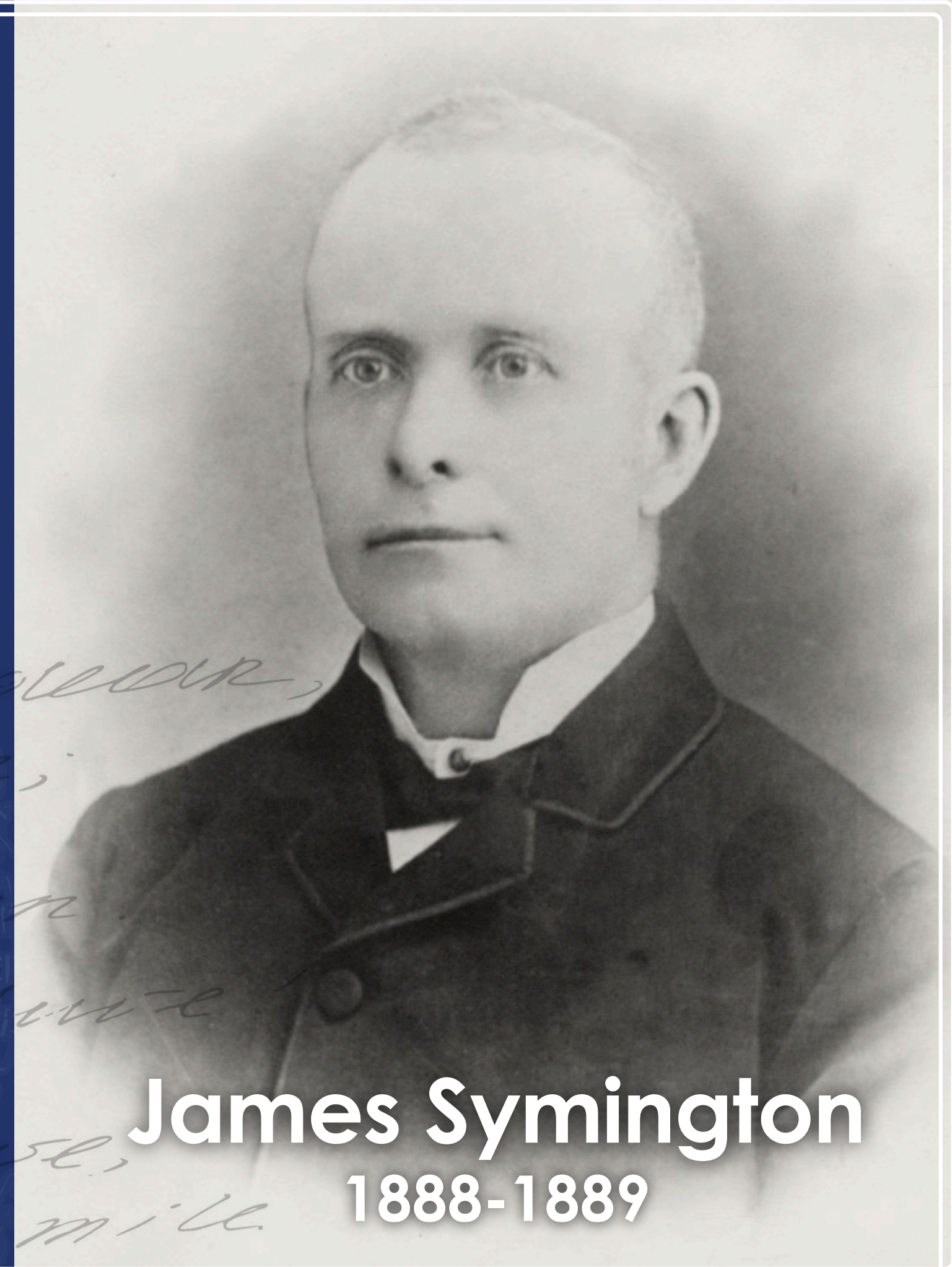
The Observer supported the crackdown, saying, "the police must use their utmost endeavors to break up the gambling houses and drive the keepers of them out of Town. Mayor Symington will deserve the gratitude of the community if he succeeds in ridding Sarnia of this evil". But he was in hot water two months later when a developer cut down a number of shade trees on Maxwell Street. The newspaper called it "a case of official vandalism" and suggested Maxwell's homeowners should sue Council.

Nevertheless, the Mayor had no problem getting re-elected in 1889, winning by a 134 vote margin over former Mayor Joe Lowrie. A year earlier, Symington had beaten Lowrie by a scant 19 votes.

During his second term he concentrated on acquiring parkland and forging ahead with an important sewer project. Mayor Symington didn't seek a third term, deciding instead to spend more time with his growing family.

The Observer was pleased with his overall performance, declaring "he was one of the most efficient members that ever sat at Council. His name is prominently associated in connection with the acquisition of Bayview Park and the construction of the main sewer – two enterprises that have been of essential benefit to the Town".

He died in August 1900, at age 56, leaving behind a wife and seven children.



**James Symington**

**1888-1889**

His name was Ebenezer, but he was no Scrooge. In fact, when it came to caring for the sick and the poor, Sarnia Mayor Ebenezer Pool Watson never asked, “are there no workhouses? Are there no prisons?”

Instead, the Community’s 19th Chief Magistrate, was forever asking why there wasn’t a public hospital in a Town with a population of 6,000 people.

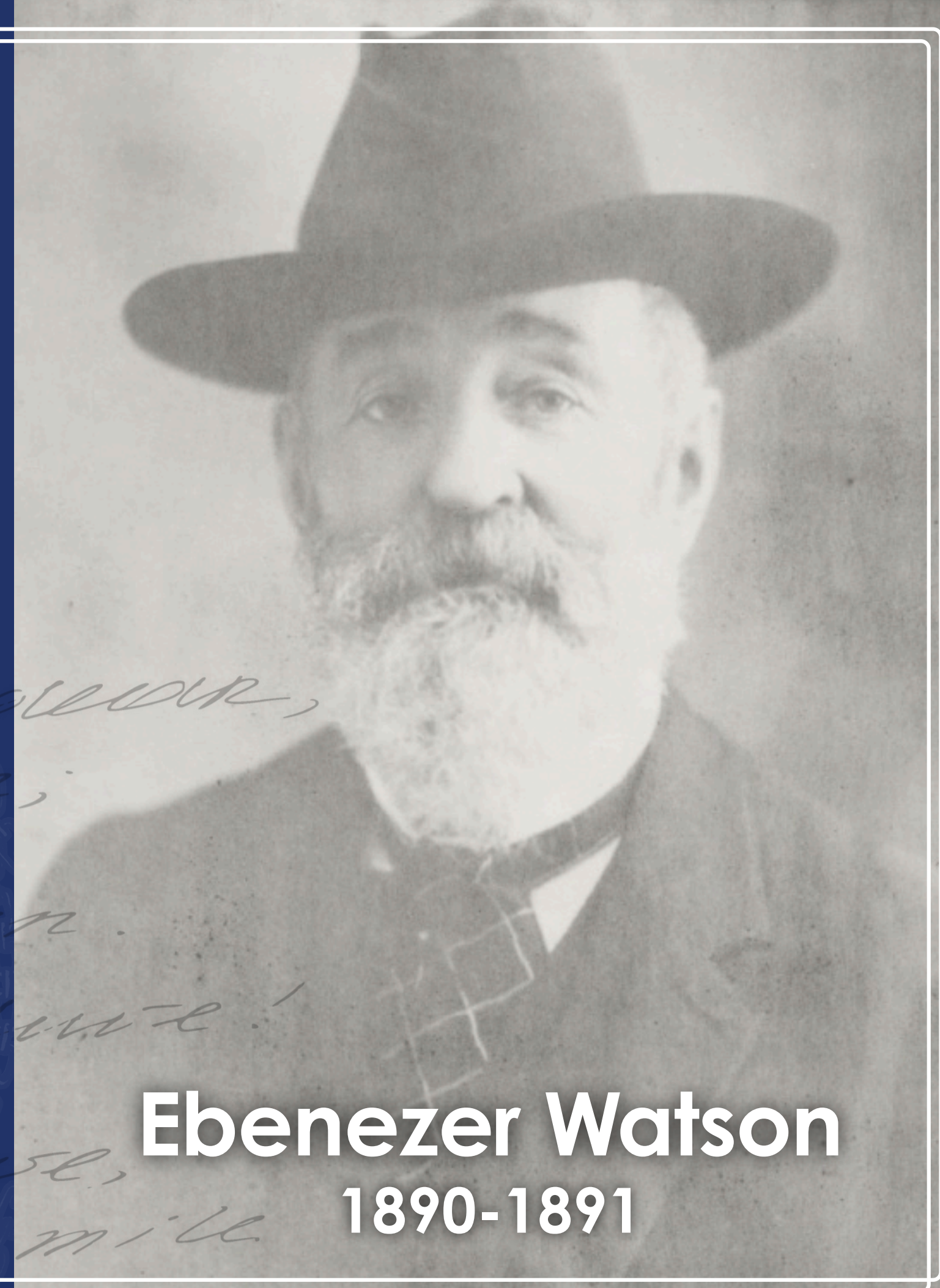
Born in 1831 in Lincolnshire, England, Watson came to Canada at age 20, Settling in Sarnia. He was elected to Town Council soon after that, serving a record 34 years before finally leaving municipal politics. Watson was a crusty, colourful character. After winning the 1882 election he declared, “I’ve done more for the Community than all those old roosters who opposed my election”.

A plumber by trade, he won the Mayor’s chair in 1890, defeating merchant Richard LeSueur by 637 votes to 347. The 290 ballot margin of victory was considered a major landslide in those days. Unlike Ebenezer Scrooge – the miserly penny-pincher in author Charles Dickens’ ‘A Christmas Carol’ – Ebenezer Watson was a man who cared for his fellow human beings from the start. Indeed, within days of taking office he was pushing for creation of a public hospital. There were several doctors in Town but anyone needing hospitalization had to travel to London.

Six months after his election, in July 1890, a public meeting was held in the Town Hall to discuss the hospital issue. As a result, a fundraising committee was set up and by 1895, some \$13,000.00 had been donated. A year later, Sarnia General was officially opened.

Mayor Watson also beefed up the fire protection and launched a crackdown on drunks downtown during his two years at the helm.

The father of eight children (including a son, Fred, who became Sarnia’s 24th Mayor) left public life at the end of 1891. He died in September, 1899, at age 68.



**Ebenezer Watson**  
1890-1891

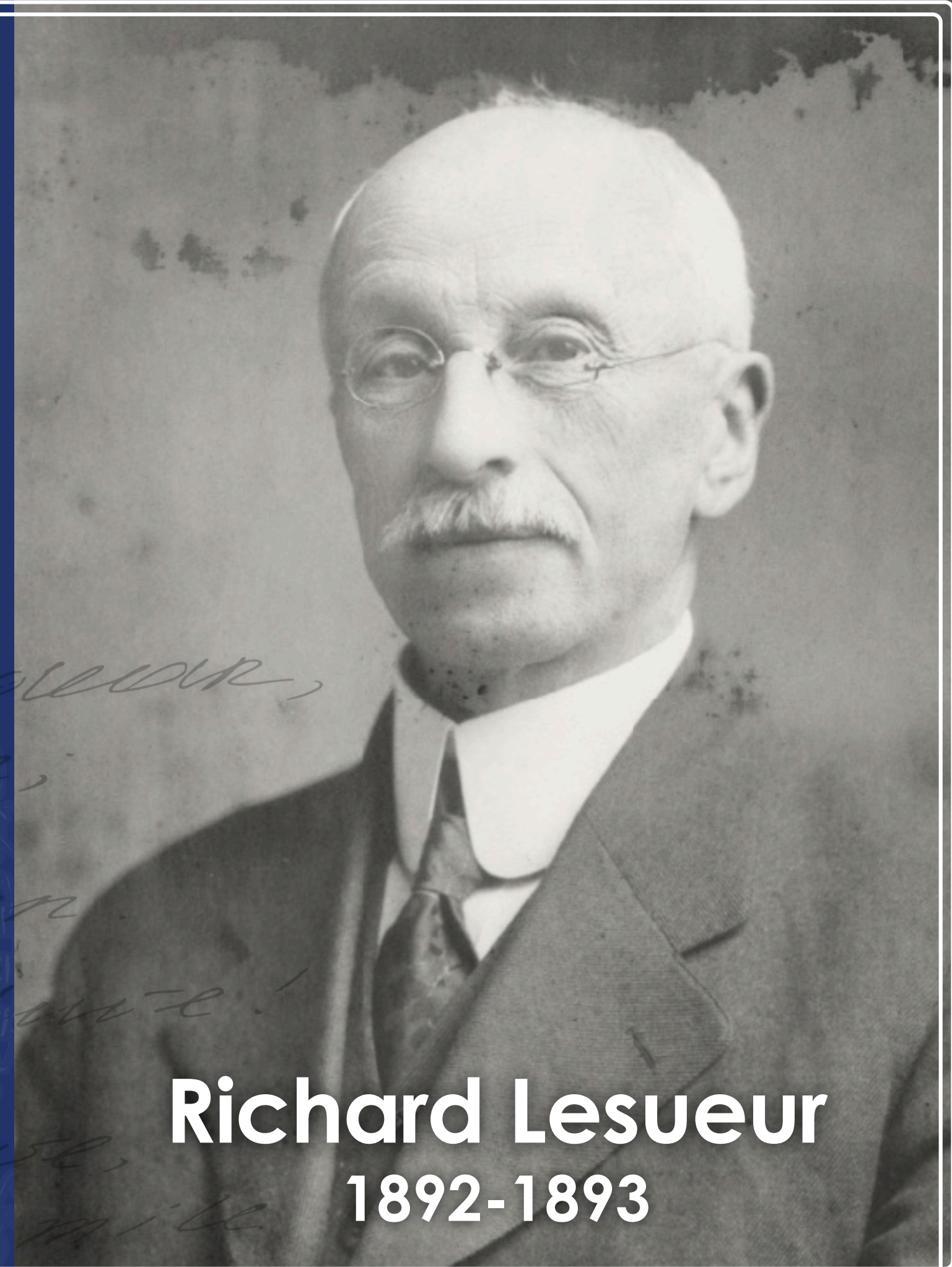
He helped launch the local tourism industry and gave Sarnians direct control over their Police Department. Those were among the major achievements of Mayor Richard LeSueur.

Born in Quebec City in 1850, LeSueur settled in Sarnia, becoming a shoe merchant and County Registrar. He ran for Council in 1884, serving for several years as an Alderman before being elected the Community's 20th Mayor in 1892.

The new Chief Magistrate soon proved to be a forceful Chair. In fact, he twice caused a public uproar by refusing to allow delegates to address Council on a controversial parks issue. In one case, a former Mayor was barred from speaking. In the other, the muzzle was applied to a prominent Parks Commissioner. The Observer was highly critical of LeSueur, declaring, "if the Mayor's ruling is to hold good in future any cantankerous Member has it in his power to prevent a citizen or deputation of citizens from laying their grievances orally before Council".

Members of Council, it was added, were "putting on airs of supremacy and torturing the rules of order to sustain swelling importance". But the Editor had to admit Council carried out major improvements to Bayview Park during Mayor LeSueur's first term at the helm. And that led directly to the Community's first real tourism boom.

Mayor LeSueur was also responsible for the formation of the Sarnia Police Committee, which was the forerunner of the modern Police Services Board. The organization gave civilians direct control over the Police Department for the first time. The Observer called the move "a radical departure from the old order".



**Richard Lesueur**  
1892-1893

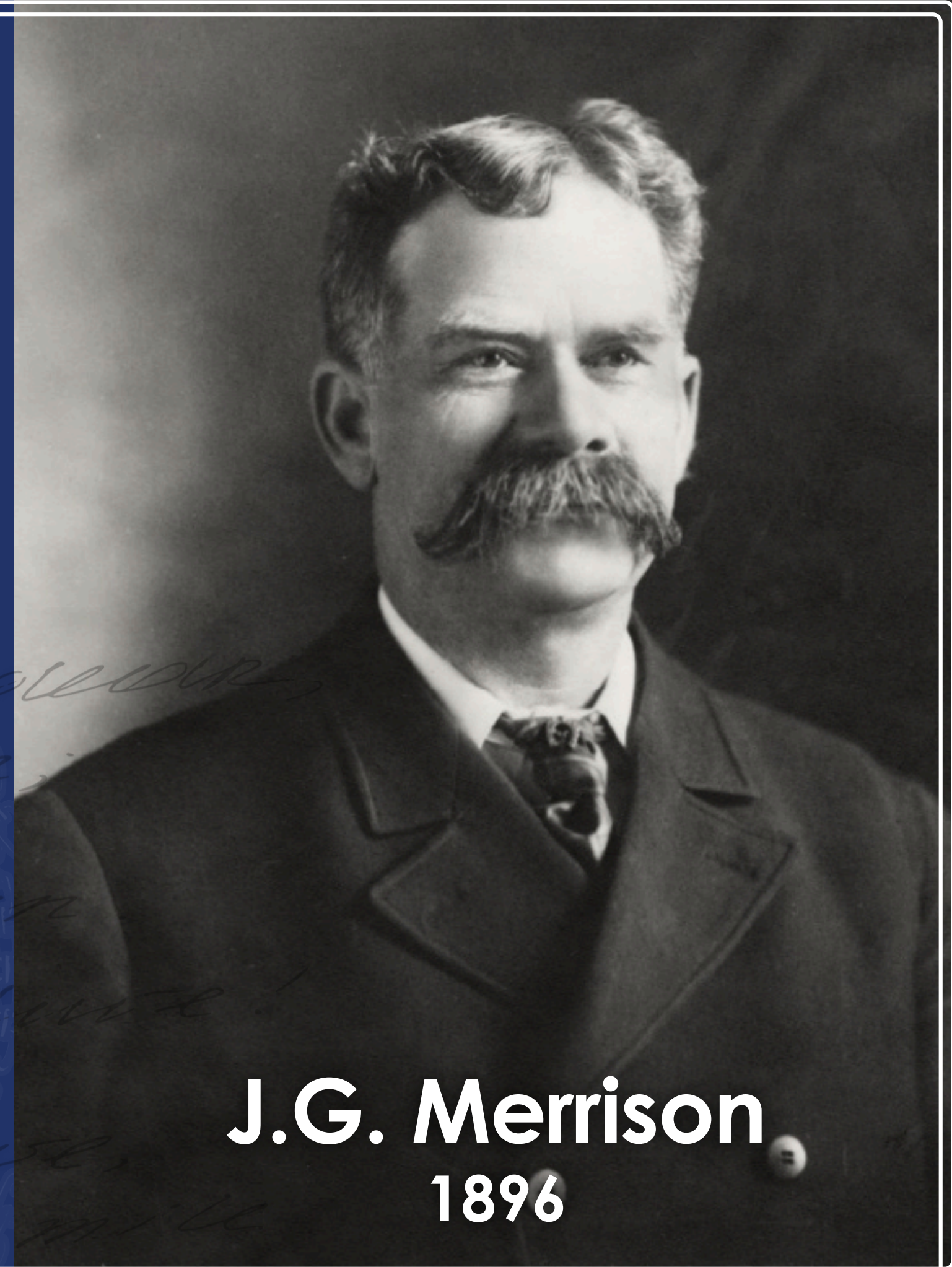
Ebenezer Scrooge may not have been the only 19th century figure to be visited by the ghosts of Christmas. The faded yellow minutes of a December 15 1896, Sarnia Council meeting suggest celebrated author Charles Dickens's apparitions may have come calling on Mayor J.G. Merrison too. For until that fateful session the community's 22nd Mayor had a reputation as a hard-nosed, no-sense Chief Magistrate.

Indeed, during his one year at the helm he instructed police to lay charges against those caught swimming without "proper bathing suits". And he talked about banning what he called "Sunday excursions". It isn't exactly clear what he meant by that, although it seems likely he was opposed to social outings on the Lord's Day.

Mayor Merrison also had a Scrooge-like attitude when it came to conditions in the Town's jail. In fact, he refused to do anything about complaints that the lockup was filthy, declaring it wasn't possible to keep it "perfectly clean". In addition, his Council passed a bylaw making it illegal for people to ride their bicycles on sidewalks. On top of all that, he came under fire after the Municipality purchased a water wagon from a London supplier without bothering to tender locally.

Still, it would be a mistake to suggest his administration was without its achievements. Under his leadership Council gave Bell Canada permission to erect telephone poles, expanded the Fire Hall and upgraded roads and sidewalks all over Town. And there's no indication that he was a Scrooge in his private life. While the central figure of A Christmas Carol was a lonely old businessman, Merrison was a medical Doctor in an age when physicians routinely made house calls. He was also a married father of two.

But the perception of him as an ogre might have remained intact if not for the very last motion passed at his final Council meeting. At that session, held just 10 days before Christmas, Mayor Merrison showed his compassionate side when he talked Council into going along with a Lambton County Council proposal to open a permanent house of refuge for the poor.



**J.G. Merrison**  
**1896**

The Mayor who did so much to prepare Sarnia for a new century. T.G. Johnston, the community's 23rd Chief Magistrate. Was in office when Council lured Imperial Oil to the Municipality. The move would transform a sleepy little 19th century market Town of 6,000 people into a booming 20th century metropolis.

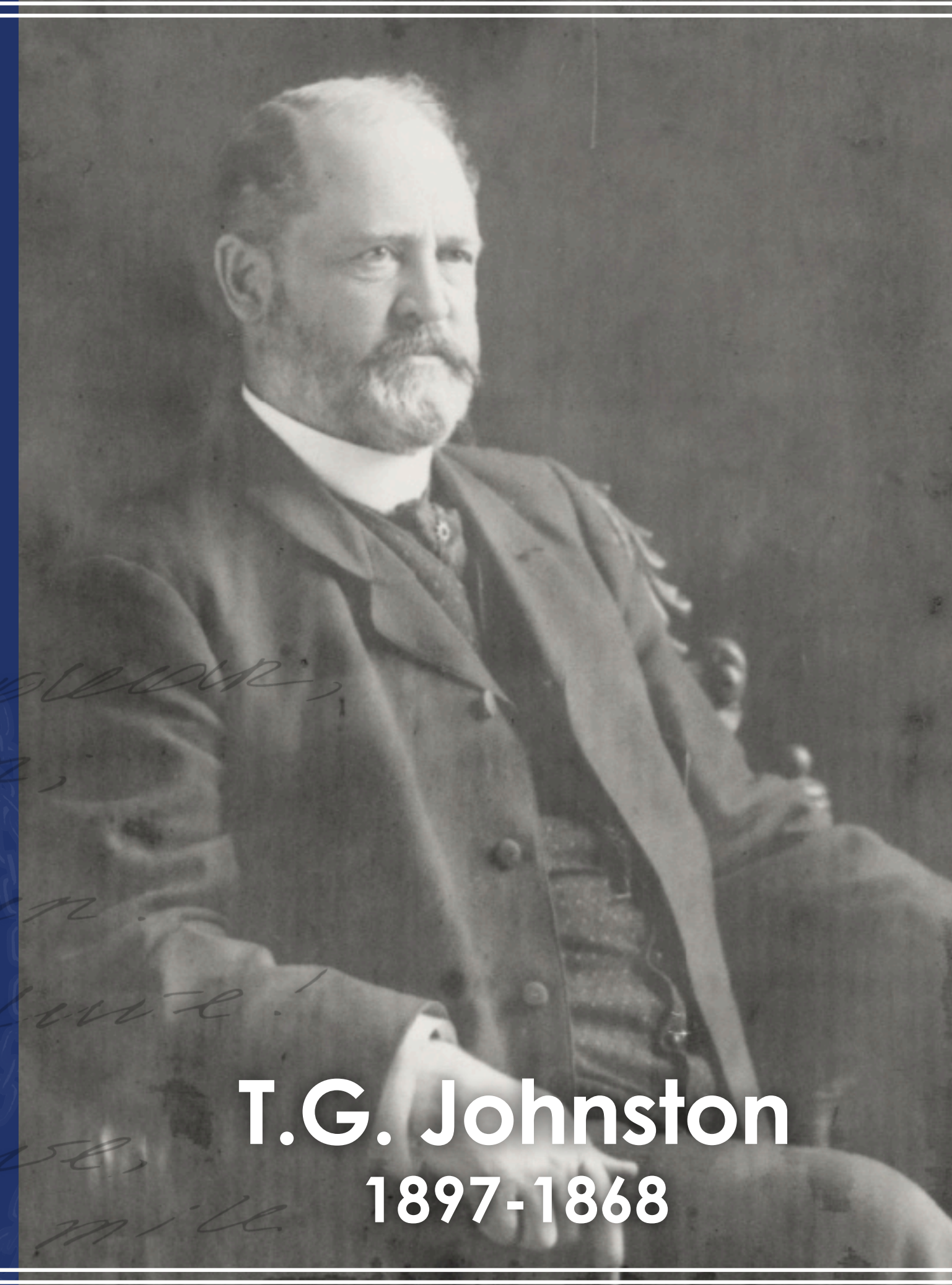
It all started when Imperial Officials appeared before Council in 1897 proposing to build Canada's largest oil refinery in Sarnia. The deal sounded goof but there was a catch – the oil men were demanding a five-year tax exemption. And that would cost the Town \$2,200.00 in lost taxes.

It was a lot of money in those days but Mayor Johnston pushed his Aldermen to accept the offer. Noting that Imperial planned to spend at least \$200,000.00 to expand and upgrade the existing Bushnell refinery on Christina Street. He told Council, "there is no doubt that these men represent a Company capable of carrying out their promises". Council granted the exemption, but only after receiving written assurances that Imperial would hire a large number of employees.

The Observer praised the deal, declaring it would mean "the employment of a large force of men to operate the works, all of which will add to the wealth and importance of the Town. It means also the transfer to Sarnia of a large share, if not the major portion of the oil business in Canada".

Imperial soon built a pipeline from Sarnia to Petrolia's oil fields and by 1900 the old Bushnell refinery's output had doubled to 900 barrels a day. The company also moved its head office from the Hard Oil town to Sarnia.

Mayor Johnston, a Doctor by trade, was unbeatable after that. He was acclaimed to a second term as Mayor in 1898. Later, he was elected MP by a landslide vote.



**T.G. Johnston**  
1897-1868

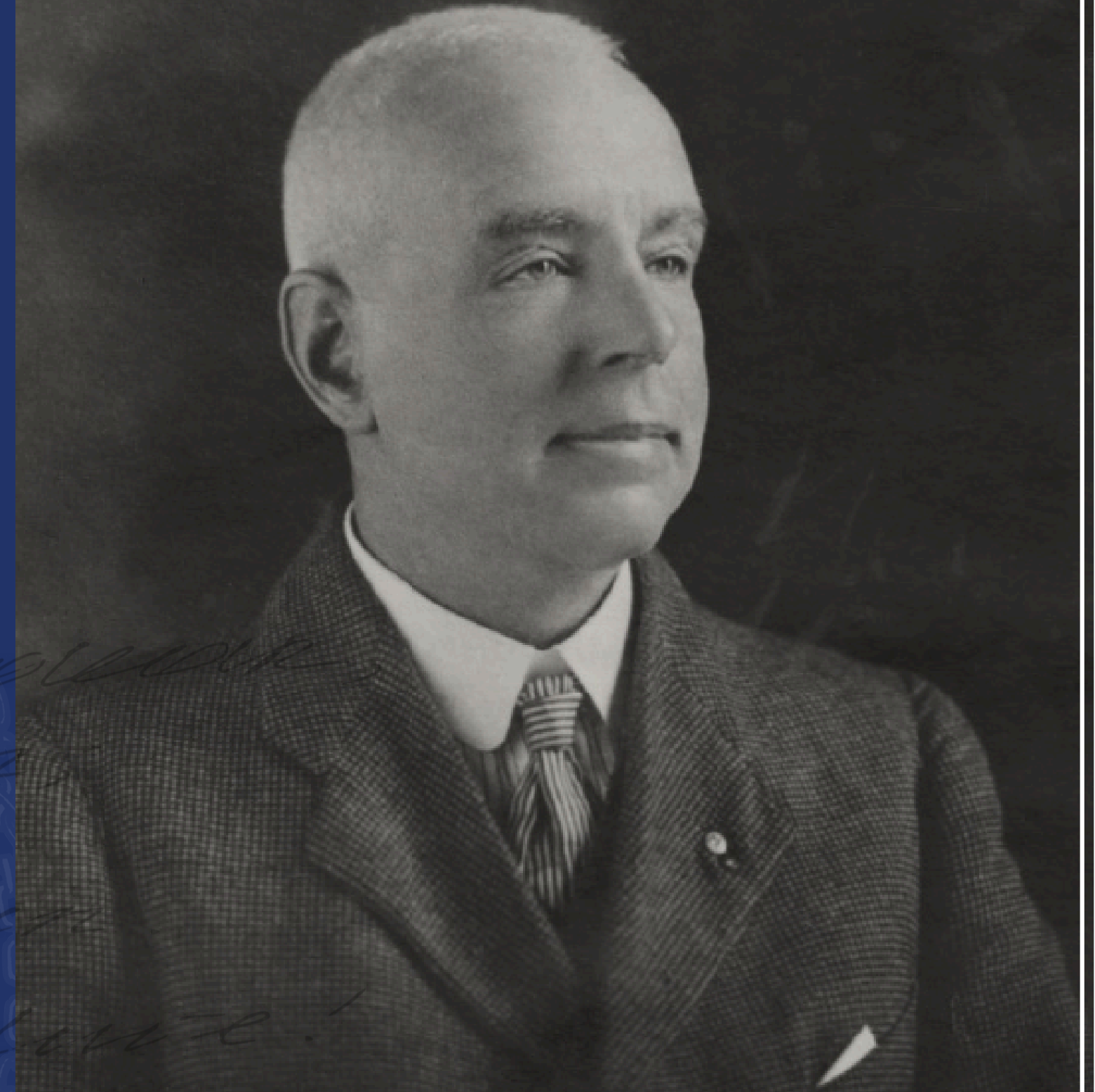
Fred Watson may have been too nice a man to be a great Mayor. The Community's 24th Chief Magistrate was popular with voters but, once in office, he had a difficult time dealing with an unruly group of Aldermen. In fact, according to contemporary newspaper accounts, he just wasn't a very good Chair.

Born in Sarnia, Watson was a successful banker, a real estate agent and the father of four children. He was inspired to run for office by the example set by his father, Ebenezer, who was Sarnia's 19th Mayor. Elected Mayor in 1899, Fred Watson presided over the Council that began replacing the Community's wooden sidewalks with concrete footpaths. It was also during his administration that Sarnia's first paved streets appeared, replacing the muddy roads of the 19th century. The achievements were fairly modest, but voters gave him a second term in 1900.

Unfortunately, his second year was marred by continuous bickering among Aldermen. Mayor Watson tried hard to get Council to electrify the Town's street cars, but the plan was not approved during his time in office. After that, the atmosphere on Council was so poisoned that the business of the Municipality almost came to a halt at times.

Indeed, The Observer judged his administration to be a failure, mainly because he couldn't handle a badly fractured Council. "Mayor Watson has had a discouraging time of it in dealing with a body so intractable and unbusinesslike in its ways as the late Council has been", the newspaper said as he stepped down. It added his Council had left behind a "barren record".

Watson lived in Sarnia all his life, residing at 272 Christina Street. He died at age 59 in November, 1918 and is buried in Lakeview Cemetery.



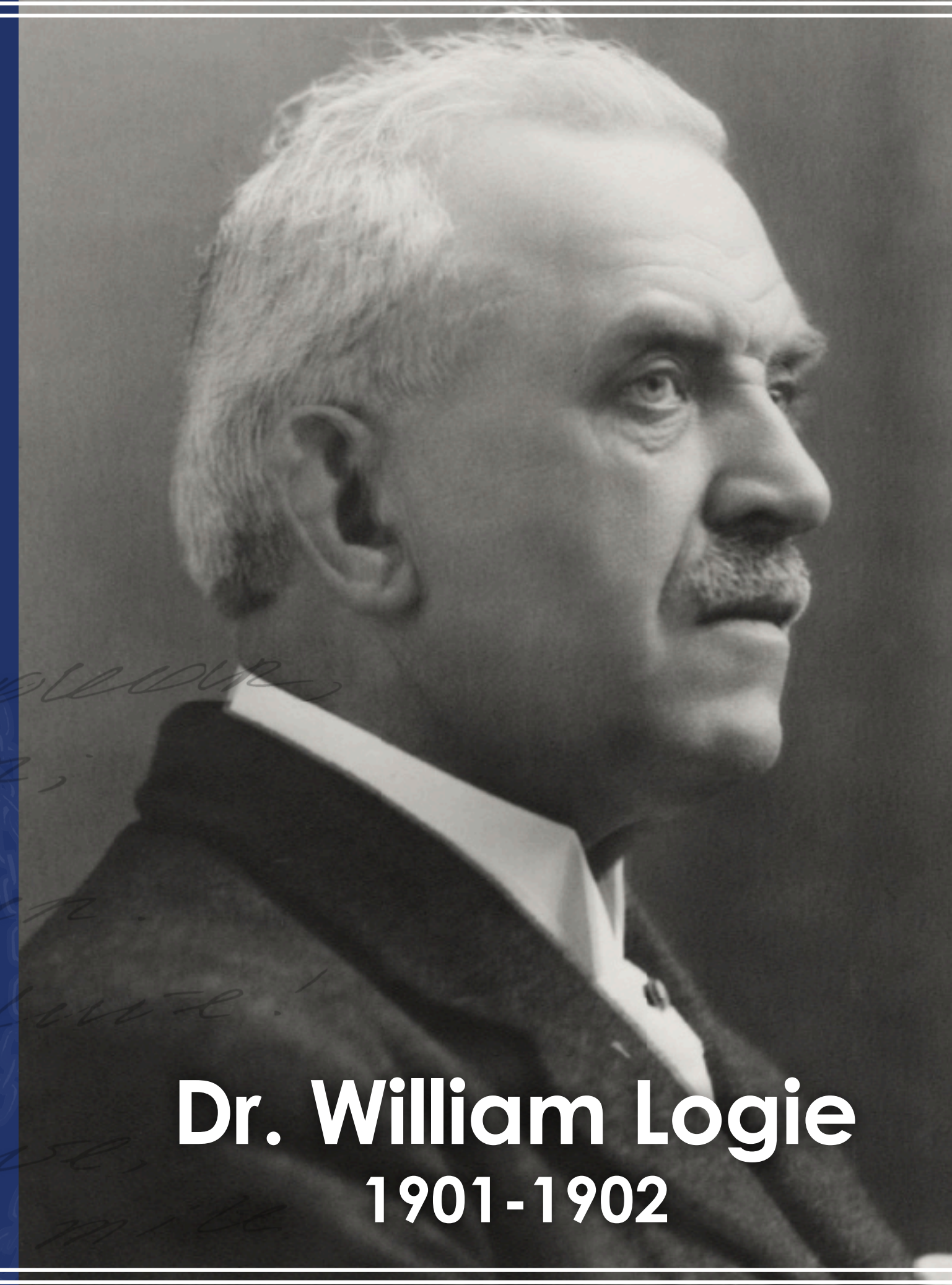
**Fred Watson**  
1899-1900

William Logie's claim to fame is that he was Mayor of Sarnia when Council decided to build the Community's first Public Library. In a way it was fitting because our 25th Chief Magistrate was something of a book worm. Born in Hensall Ontario, he taught school for a time in Dorchester.

Later, deciding a teaching career wasn't for him, he went back to school as a student studying medicine at the University of Western Ontario. Graduating in 1896, Dr. Logie moved to Sarnia to set up a private practice. Not long after that he became interested in politics and was elected to Council as an Alderman.

After four years on Council he took a stab at the Mayor's chair in 1901. The election was close, with Logie edging out R.S. Oliver by a scant seven votes. Once in office, he set about to upgrade Sarnia's streets. In fact, during his first term Council spent the unheard of sum of \$10,000.00 on road repairs. There were complaints that he was [plunging the Town too far into debt but ratepayers like what they saw, returning Mayor Logie to a second term by a 100 vote margin.

During his second year Council decided to build a library with the help of a \$15,000.00 grant from the great American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. The town also grew industrially with the Cleveland-Sarnia Saw Mills Company appearing on the scene in October 1901. It would remain a major local employer for nearly three decades.



**Dr. William Logie**  
1901-1902

His forte was attracting new industry. That best sums up the story of Thomas Cook, who served as Sarnia's 26th Mayor in 1903 and 1904 and as the City's 41st Chief Magistrate in 1923. Born in the Huron County community in Varna on March 15, 1864, he moved to Sarnia as a teenager. Over the years he became a successful banker, real estate agent, insurance salesman and landlord.

Elected to Council as an Alderman in 1896, he ran for the Mayor's Chair eight years later, easily defeating R.S. Oliver. Once in office, the new Mayor immediately set out to attract more industries to Town.

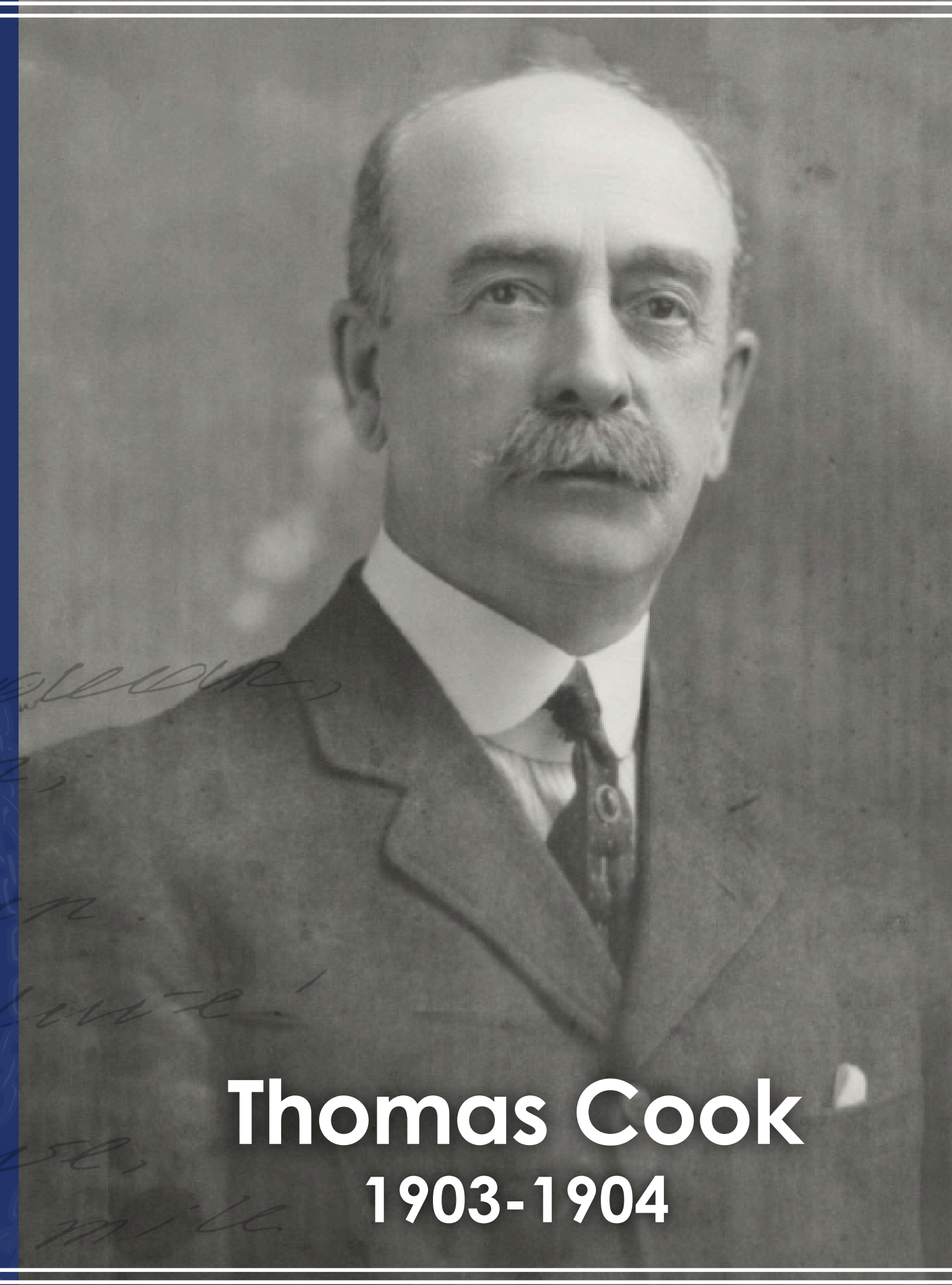
His greatest success came during his second year at the helm when the Empire Salt Company, later known as Dominion Salt, opened its doors. The company stayed in business until 1965.

That same year Council also extended streetcar tracks to Lake Huron near Colborne Road so bathers could get to the beach more easily.

After he left office at the end of 1904 The Observer noted Mayor Cook "has been successful not only in attracting new industries, but in securing new men and fresh capital to keep in operation the Crosby Works."

In a surprise move, he came out of political retirement in 1923 to win his third term as Mayor. During the following 12 months the Dominion Alloy Steel Corporation announced it would build a plant in Sarnia and a record 108 new homes were constructed in the city.

Mayor Cook, who lived at 286 Vidal Street N. with his wife, Lucie, and their four children, died in J



**Thomas Cook**  
1903-1904

He lit up our lives. Mayor David Barr, Sarnia's 27th Mayor, headed the Council that installed 100 electric street lamps in the Municipality.

Barr, a prominent local watchmaker and jeweler, was elected Mayor in 1905 after serving several years as an Alderman. He soon proved to be an active and progressive Chief Magistrate. During his first term Council rebuilt and expanded the Municipal waterworks system so it could meet the demands of a growing Town. At least partly as a result of that, Sarnia's population grew in short order from 9,000 people to almost 10,000. Council also paved and widened Christina Street that year. In addition, it was heavily involved in the installation of new sewers and sidewalks.

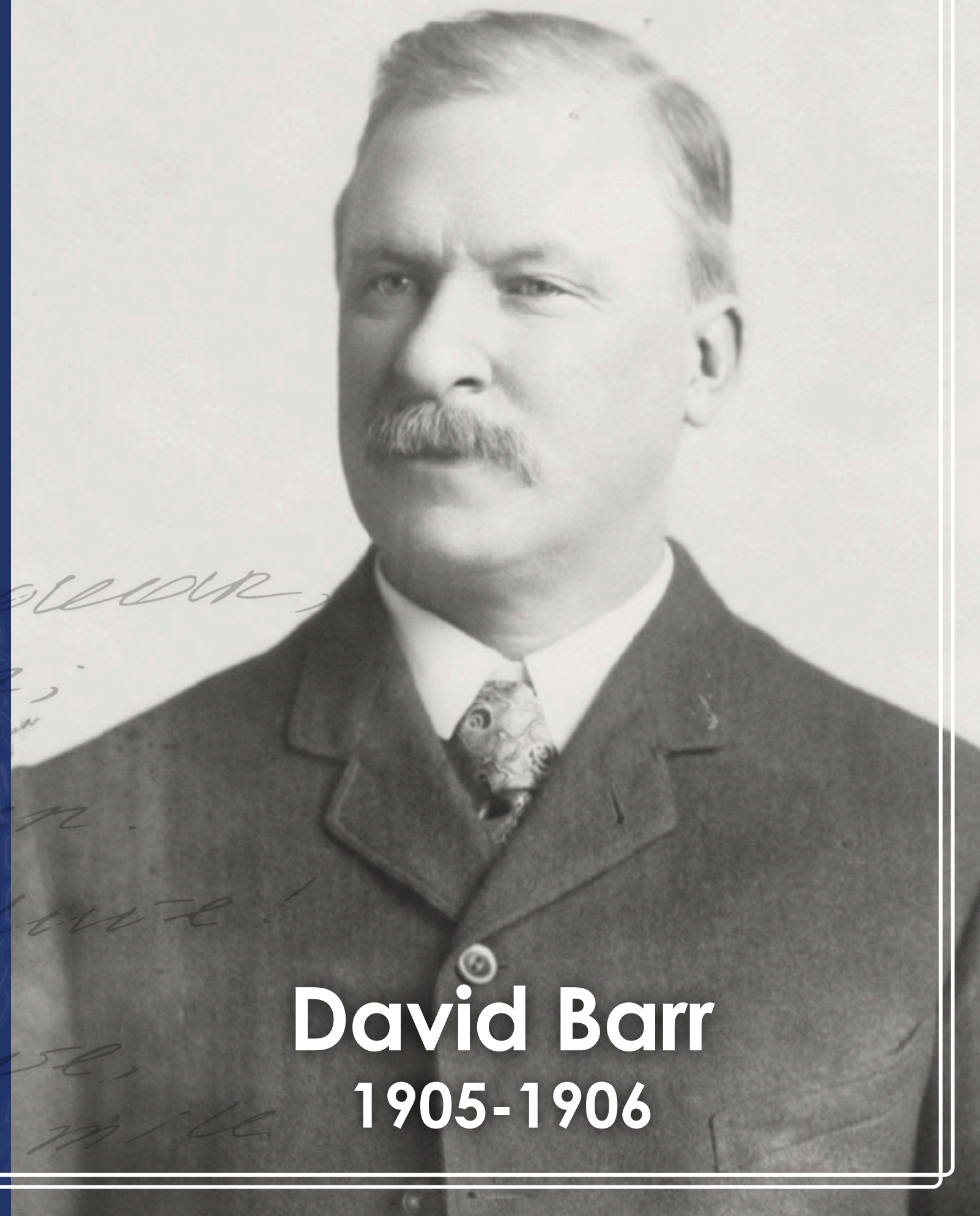
The Mayor created some controversy by signing a petition urging Parliament to allow married women who owned property to vote. There were predictions that female voters would select grossly incompetent Councillors but Barr's decision to sign the petition doesn't appear to have hurt him at the ballot box.

In fact, he was returned to office in 1906 and immediately set out to expand the Police Department. Five new constables were hired and the Chief was ordered to make sure at least one policeman patrolled residential districts at night. Prior to that, both officers on the night shift spent all their time guarding commercial districts.

The move was widely applauded but it was with his street light program that Mayor Barr really made his mark. He convinced Council to begin a program of installing electric lamps all over the Municipality, starting with 100 in 1906. The program, he was convinced, would do more to ensure safety than extra police patrols.

Mayor Barr, who served on the Parks Board for years, also presided over the Council that bought \$200,000 worth of benches and fountains for local parks. It was a lot of money in those days but the Mayor was a firm believer in upgrading parks.

He left Council at the end of 1906 and died three years later, in December, 1909, at age 62. His funeral was one of the biggest ever seen in Sarnia. David Barr, whose son James went on to become Sarnia's 43rd Chief Magistrate, is buried in Lakeview Cemetery



**David Barr**  
1905-1906

George Proctor would likely have gone down in history as a great Sarnian even if he'd never been elected Mayor. That's because, in addition to being the Community's 28th Chief Magistrate, he was a successful builder, the first President of the Sarnia Humane Society, and one of the founders of the local Children's Aid Society.

If all that wasn't enough, he also served as Warden of Lambton County Council and as Chair of the local Public School Board.

Born in Moore Township on November 24, 1842, Proctor got his first job in his father's Corunna saw mill.

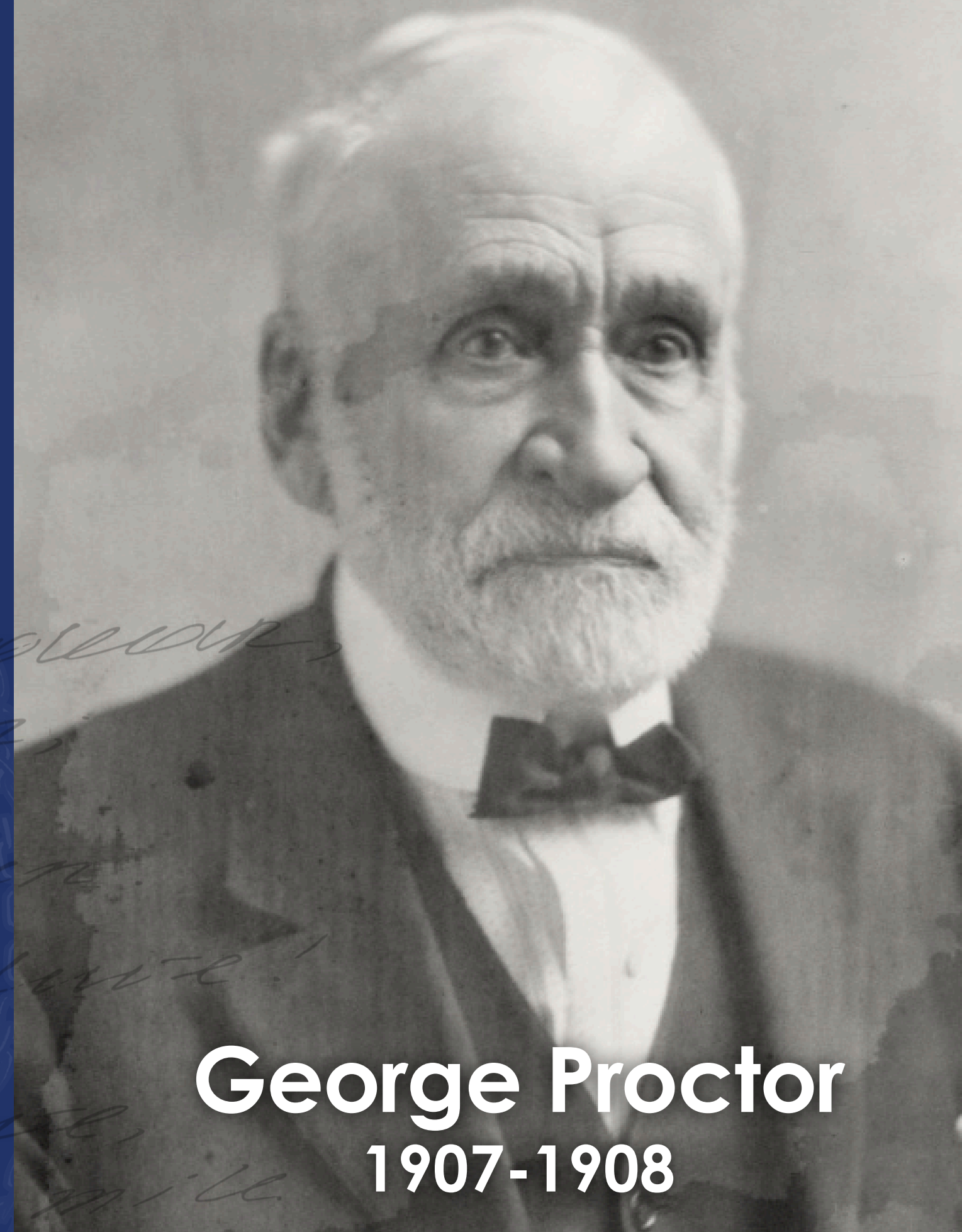
Moving to Sarnia in 1876, he became a highly successful contractor and builder. In fact, he was involved in the construction of literally scores of important public buildings in Sarnia and across the Province.

According to a contemporary newspaper account, in Sarnia alone Proctor "constructed St. George's Church, Sarnia General Hospital, the Devine Street School, the old Collegiate Institute and the Railway Station".

Elected to Town Council in 1880, he served for parts of two decades as a Councillor. In 1901, while sitting on Lambton County Council, he was elected Warden. Proctor ran for Mayor in 1907, beating out D.B. Bentley by 105 votes. He quickly gained a reputation as a forceful Chair who wouldn't allow bombastic Aldermen to engage in long-winded speeches. The Observer reported he routinely wrapped up sessions in short order.

Under the headline "Mayor Proctor a Record Setter," the newspaper noted he had become the first Mayor to complete a regular Council Meeting in less than an hour. "Nevertheless a large amount of Town business was transacted," it said. Mayor Proctor presided over the Council that attracted two new industries (a match factory and a chain-making company) to Town.

He was re-elected Mayor in 1908, beating out the luckless Bentley by a scant 21 votes. After leaving Council, Proctor served as Chair of the Public School Board for five years. During that time, the Board built Lochiel Street School and Confederation Street School. Plans were also laid for a new Sarnia Collegiate building.



**George Proctor**  
1907-1908

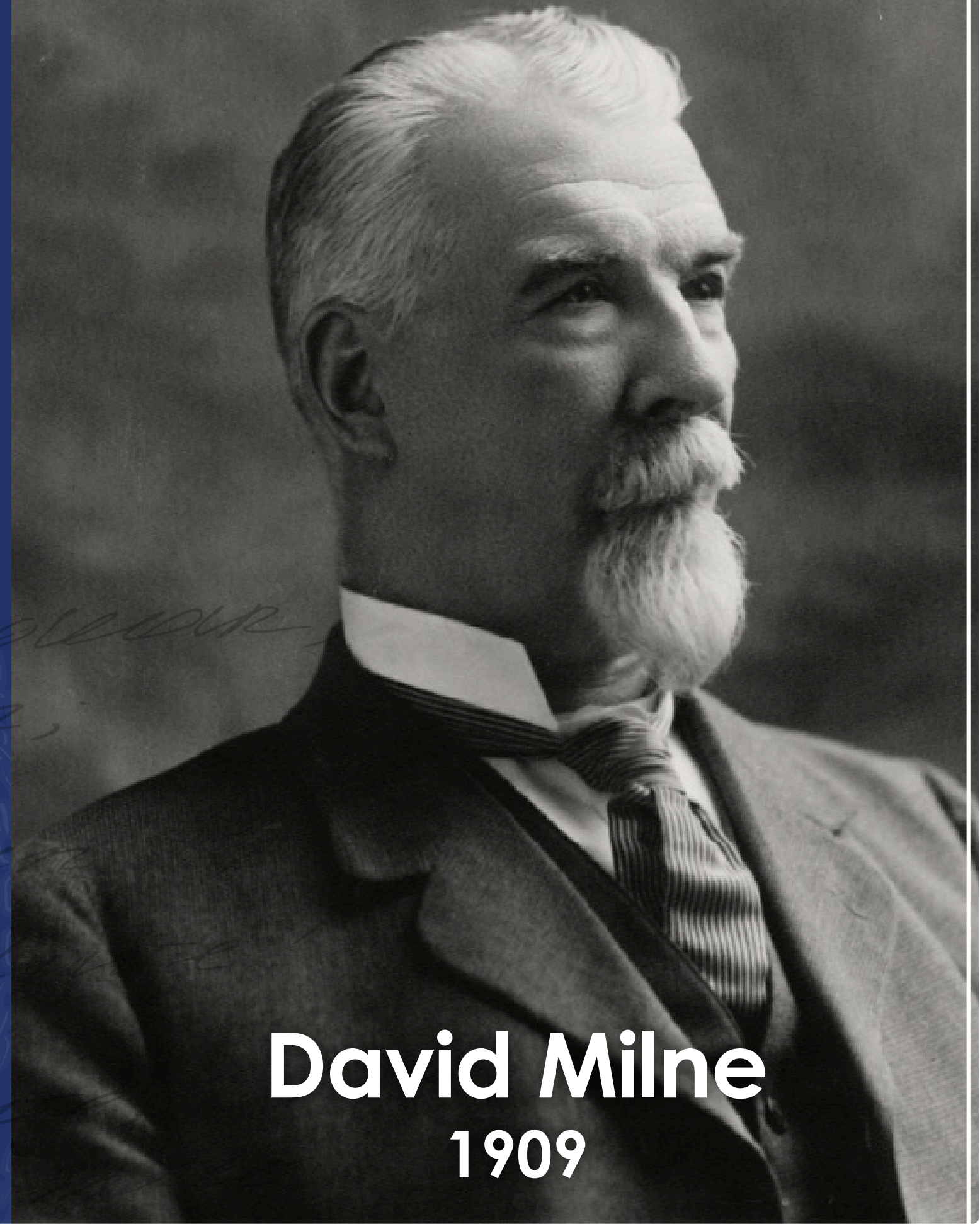
In 1996, when Sarnia Councillors debated whether to regulate sexually explicit movies, some of them may have thought they were breaking new ground. But in reality they were only carrying on a tradition started 87 years earlier by Mayor David Milne.

In fact, our 29th Chief Magistrate launched an offensive against what he called “disgusting” movies as far back as 1909. Milne, who was born in Scotland on April 19, 1848, feared the Community’s first-ever movie theatre would corrupt young children. Youngsters could afford to get into the Theatre, he noted, because it charged an admission fee of just five cents.

The Mayor couldn’t talk Council into regulating movies but he did convince the Theatre’s Manager to agree to bring in more wholesome products by threatening to revoke his business licence.

Milne, who came to Canada at age 23, worked briefly in Montreal and Toronto before settling in Sarnia in 1872. He married Mary Leys, had two daughters and became the President of his own hardware business.

After serving five terms as an Alderman, he won the Mayor’s Chair in 1909, defeating Joe Dagan by 369 votes. In addition to his crusade against what he considered to be immoral movies, the new Mayor tried to reduce the number of drunks wandering Sarnia’s downtown streets.



**David Milne**  
1909

When Albert Johnston was elected Sarnia's 30th Mayor, the Community was still attempting to adjust to the 20th century. It was 1910, a time when The Observer could report in the same issue that an automobile manufacturing company was considering coming to Town and that a runaway horse had smashed through a plate glass window on Front Street.

Born in rural Lambton County in 1869, Johnston taught school for a few years before moving to Sarnia to become a Pharmacist. He set up his own business at the corner of Front and Cromwell Streets that became known as the White-Front Drug Store.

Elected to Town Council in 1904, he served six years as an Alderman before beating Fred Watson out for the Mayor's Chair. Watson was a popular former Mayor but Johnston defeated him by 325 votes.

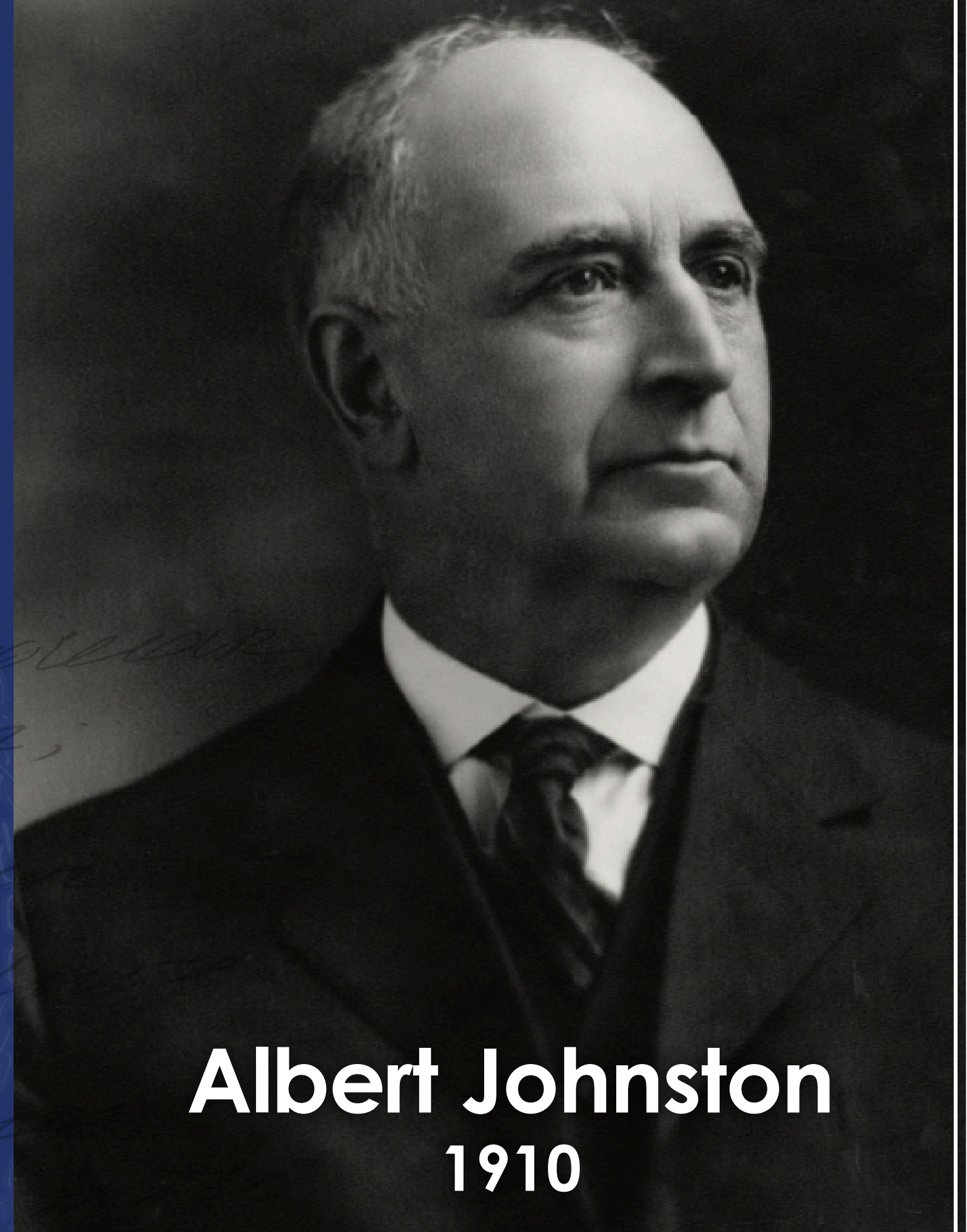
Johnston had no sooner been sworn in than he was faced with what The Observer called the "mad dog" crisis.

Under the headline "Sarnians Beware of Mad Dogs", the newspaper noted "In Sarnia we have hundreds of useless curs, most of them allowed to run at large. Only yesterday a big hound seized a child by the face and throat and sunk its fangs half an inch deep into the child's throat." Another citizen, the story added, had just left for the United States to undergo rabies treatments.

The new Mayor moved swiftly to tackle the canine problem, pushing through bylaw prohibiting dogs from running at large without a muzzle. Council also imposed a tax on dogs, charging owners \$2.00 for a male and \$4.00 for a bitch.

Also during his one year at the helm, Council convinced Bell Canada that it should modernize the Town's phone system, which consisted of 600 telephones.

Johnston, who lived at 183 Christina Street S. with his wife Jessie Louise and their two sons, did not seek re-election in 1911.



**Albert Johnston**  
1910

Tradesmen who find work repairing the many ships that berth in Sarnia each winter can thank Mayor Bill Henderson for their jobs. That's because the Community's 31st Chief Magistrate talked the Federal Government into creating a winter harbor here in 1911.

Born in Scotland in 1871, Henderson was a medical Doctor who settled in Canada as a young man. He served as an Alderman for several years before defeating former Mayor Fred Watson for the Town's top political post.

During his one year at the helm, the Federal Government agreed to dredge Sarnia Bay and to create a harbor so ships could berth here once ice began forming in the Great Lakes.

Ottawa took the action after Town Council promised to extend Exmouth Street and put in a new road along the east side of the proposed harbor. It also agreed to extend watermains and street lights to the new facility.

It was also during Mayor Henderson's term that Council stepped up a program aimed at replacing wooden sidewalks with cement footpaths.

On top of that, he led a successful fight against Bell Canada, which wanted to increase long distance phone rates from Sarnia to Detroit. Under Bell's plan, the cost of such a call would have gone from 40 cents for three minutes to 50 cents. Council objected to the idea and sent a lawyer to Toronto to argue its case at a special hearing. The government ruled in Sarnia's favour.

Mayor Henderson, who lived at 142 Davis Street, was a man with a strong sense of duty to both the Community and his adopted Country.



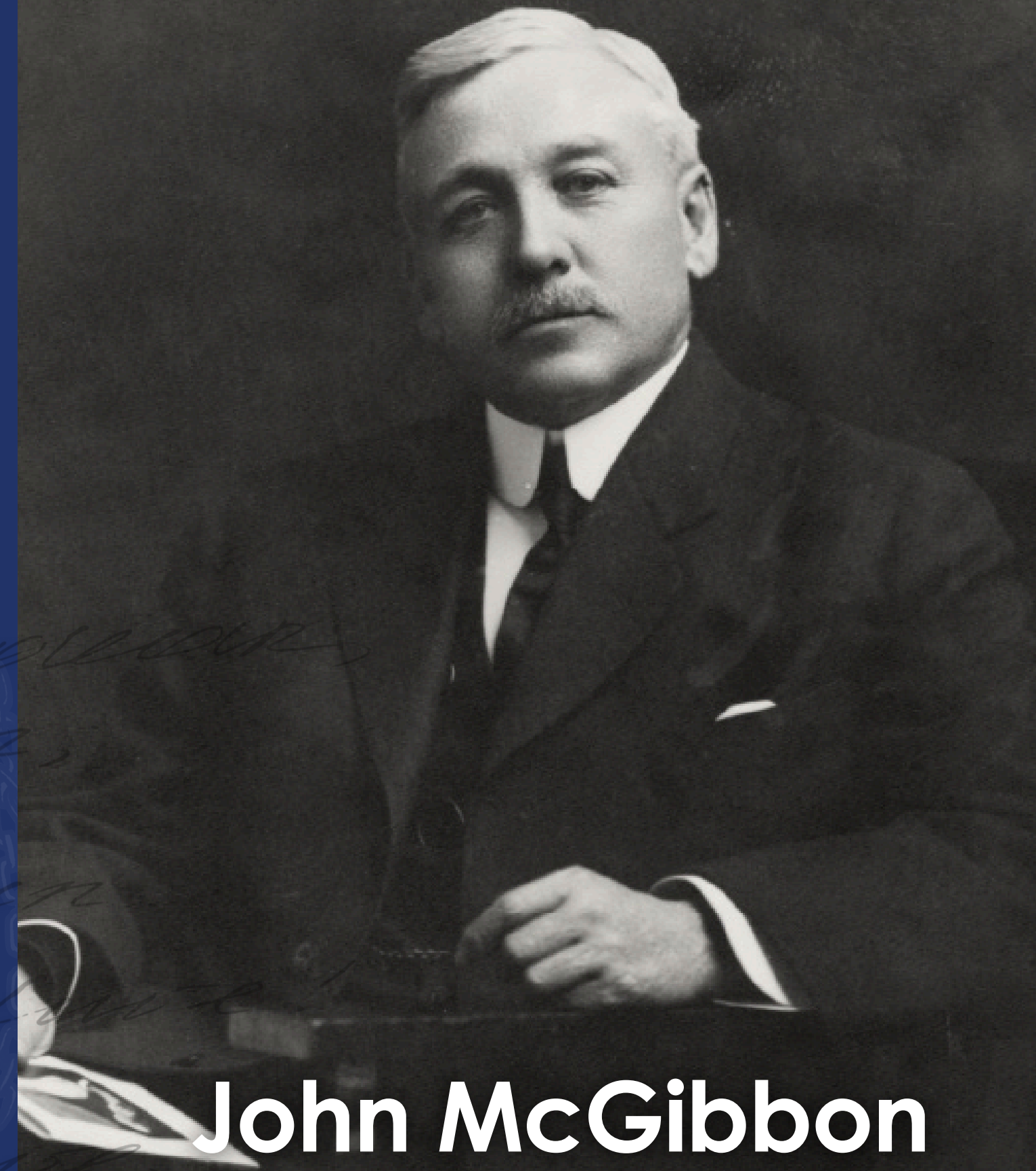
**Dr. Bill Henderson**  
1911

No Mayor in Sarnia's history faced a crisis comparable to the one that confronted John McGibbon in 1912.

McGibbon, who was born near Milton in 1859, became Chief Magistrate at a time when the Municipality was reeling from outbreaks of diphtheria and scarlet fever. Within weeks of his election the situation had become so serious that authorities were forced to quarantine nearly 50 homes. At least one person died and there was widespread panic. The outbreaks, according to Provincial Government Officials, could be traced directly to the fact that local drinking water was unsanitary.

At the time, Sarnia's tap water was drawn from the St. Clair River by a 40-year-old pumping station on George Street that was literally falling to pieces. The River, then as now, was not the cleanest body of water in the world. Indeed, the Observer reported "experts from Toronto were brought here, looked at the River, and condemned it as a polluted stream".

To get around the problem, Mayor McGibbon worked with Point Edward officials to have a new pumping station built on Lake Huron. The facility, which opened in 1913, featured more modern pumps and purifiers.



**John McGibbon**  
1912

He was the father of secret meetings at Sarnia Council.

Joseph Alexander Bell was the first Mayor in the Municipality's history to conduct a "closed door" session of Council. It happened on April 21, 1913, and it created an uproar.

Mayor Bell asked Councillors to ban the press and public from the Council Chambers that night so Councillors could debate a "sensitive issue" in private. Alderman William Proctor was outraged. "I am opposed to this star chamber way of doing things," he said. "The Public has the right to be here and listen to any business this Council has to transact." Proctor asked that newspaper reporters be allowed to stay but Mayor Bell rejected the idea, declaring, "the people will get a full report if they come to the next meeting of Council and hear the minutes read". Council voted 10-6 to support the Mayor.

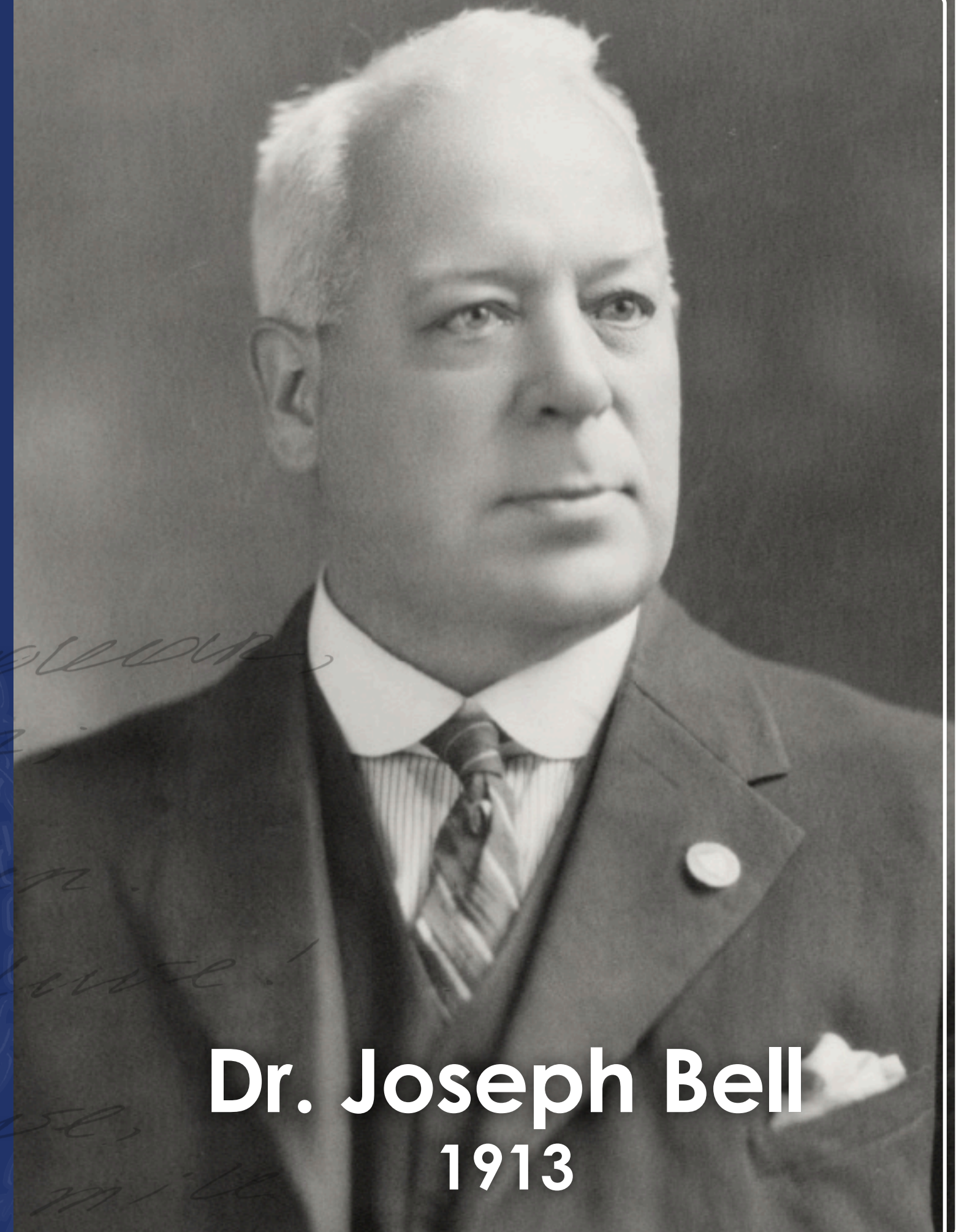
The Observer was highly critical, declaring "to the discredit of Mayor Bell the closure was enacted for the first time in the history of the Sarnia Council. Citizens were excluded, leaving the supposed servants of the people free to transact the Town's business behind closed doors".

Quoting unnamed sources, the newspaper provided readers with a blow-by-blow account of what went on at the closed meeting. It turned out Council had spent 90 minutes secretly debating how to best enforce liquor laws.

Bell, who was born in Strathroy in 1869, moved to Camlachie as a young man in order to become a teacher. After graduating from medical school he became a Sarnia Doctor.

He may not have appreciated the value of an informed electorate, but Bell was a dedicated public servant. When the First World War broke out in 1914, the 48-year-old joined the Canadian Army Medical Corps, went to France and treated wounded soldiers just behind the front lines.

After the war he became local Medical Officer of Health. He died on April 12, 1937, at age 68, leaving behind a wife and three children.



**Dr. Joseph Bell**  
1913

Mayor Joe Dagan was a man who thought big. When he was elected our 34th Chief Magistrate in 1914 Sarnia had been a “Town” for nearly six decades. In fact, its status hadn’t changed since 1857, the year the Municipality finally shed ‘Village’ designation. But Dagan planned to change all that.

He dreamed of creating an important industrial City on the banks of the St. Clair River. Unfortunately, there was a major obstacle in his path. In order to achieve Cityhood a community had to have a population of at least 10,000 people and, in the early years of the 20th century, Sarnia was a few hundred citizens short of the magic number. All that changed shortly before the 1914 election.

It happened after Council – at the urging of then Alderman Dagan – agreed to give the Mueller Brass Co. a \$30,000.00 grant if it would build a local plant employing at least 150 men. The facility, which opened its doors in June, 1913, attracted the extra people Sarnia needed to bring its population up to 10,000.

Dagan, who was elected Mayor six months after Mueller opened its doors, didn’t waste any time taking advantage of the influx of new citizens. Within days of taking office he called on the Ontario Government to elevate the Municipality to ‘City’ status. He knew the change in classification would be of more than just symbolic importance. As historian Edward Phelps noted “as a City Sarnia would be far more appealing to new industries looking for a base in Southwestern Ontario. City status also meant a significant saving in revenue as a result of various rights conferred upon Cities over Towns”.

The elevation to Cityhood was a triumph. Over the next two decades several more industries located in Sarnia, raising the City’s population. But Dagan’s term in Office wasn’t without its disappointments. In fact, he came under heavy fire for raising taxes. But The Observer felt he was a sound manager of the tax dollar. In an editorial, it said “complaints have been many and pronounced on the increase in the tax bills, but these increases are due to Mayor Dagan’s desire to put an end to the vicious system that has prevailed in the past of under-estimating the expenditures and meeting deficits by overdrafts on the banks. T his method of shoving over the debt to their successors was done to gain credit for ‘keeping down taxation’, when in fact it had the opposite effect by piling up indebtedness, upon which large sums in bank interest were paid”. “Mayor Dagan is entitled to credit for an honest effort to meet the City’s obligations fully as they fall due.”

Dagan was born in Port Hope but settled in Sarnia as a young man in order to establish his own tailoring business. He died on April 19, 1930, at age 71, leaving behind a wife and two children.



**Joe Dagan**  
1914

He was the first Sarnia Mayor to face an international crisis. William Robert Paul became our 35th Chief Magistrate in 1915, just as the First World War was beginning to heat up.

Warfare isn't normally considered a municipal matter but with more than 1,000 of the City's 10,000 residents headed for the meat grinder that was the Western Front, Mayor Paul decided something had to be done to ensure the economic security of the loved ones they left behind.

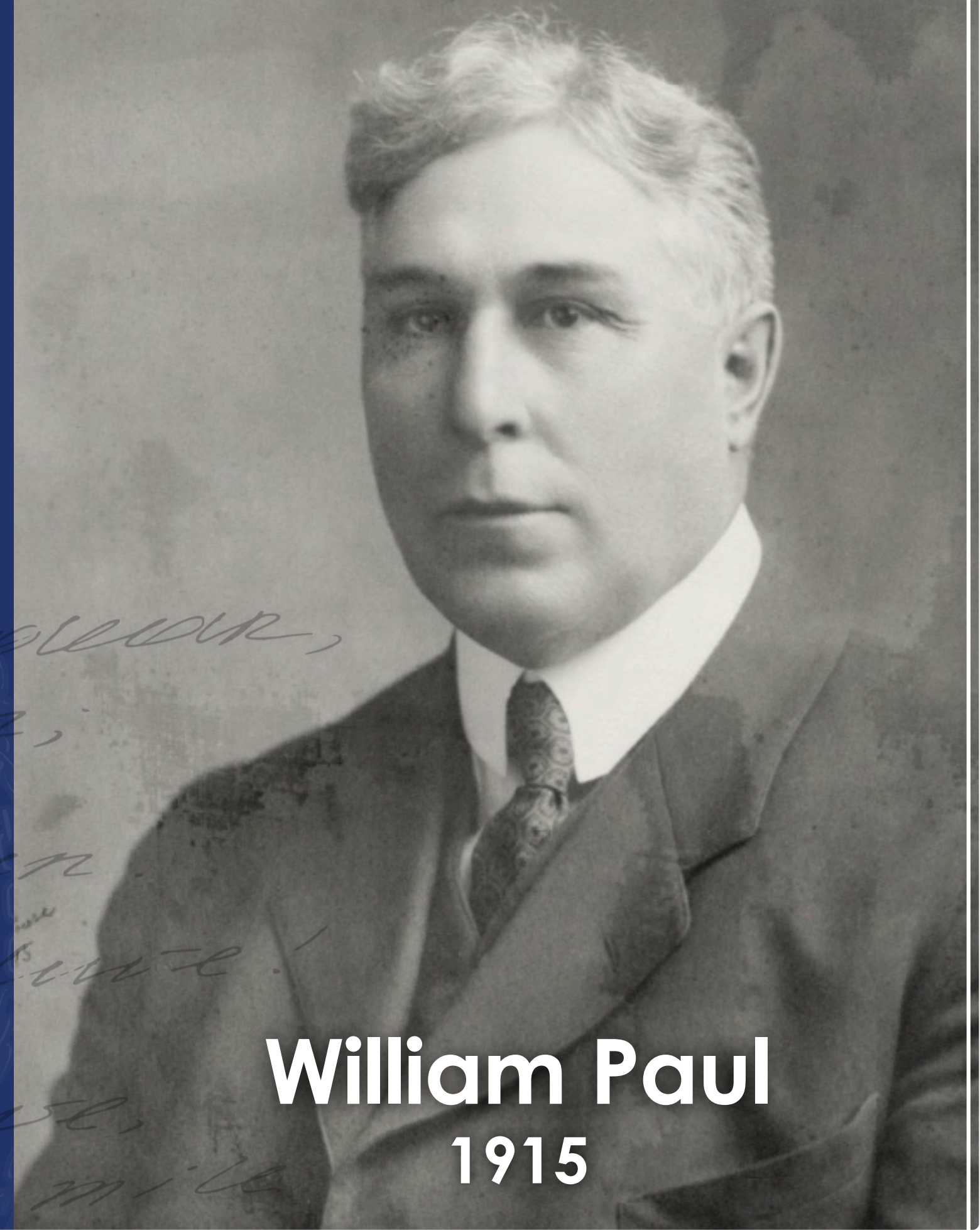
Specifically, he decided the Municipality should buy life insurance for every Sarnia soldier.

Council went along with the proposal and a deal was struck with the State Life Insurance Company of Indianapolis. Tragically, the insurance soon came in handy for scores of local families. Some 102 of the City's young men were killed in action before the war ended and State Life paid out thousands of dollars to their dependents.

Other local families needed help not because sons and husbands had been killed, but simply because they were overseas for three years and could not help with the day-to-day costs of running a household. To get around the problem Council granted an allowance of \$10.00 per month to the wives or mothers of enlisted men. Families also received \$2.00 per month for each child of a soldier. In other words, if a young soldier had a wife and two children, his family would receive \$14.00 a month from the City. If he wasn't married, his mom would get \$10.00.

It may not sound all that generous today, but in 1915 it was a significant amount of cash. And the City was under no obligation whatever to provide such assistance.

He did not seek re-election in 1916.



**William Paul**  
1915

He may have been the most intriguing character who ever wielded a gavel at Sarnia City Hall.

Thomas Doherty, who was elected our 36th Mayor in 1916, was nothing short of a genius when it came to the creation of mechanical devices. Indeed, he was a member of the Parisians Inventors' Academy, a self-taught engineer and a pioneer car builder of note.

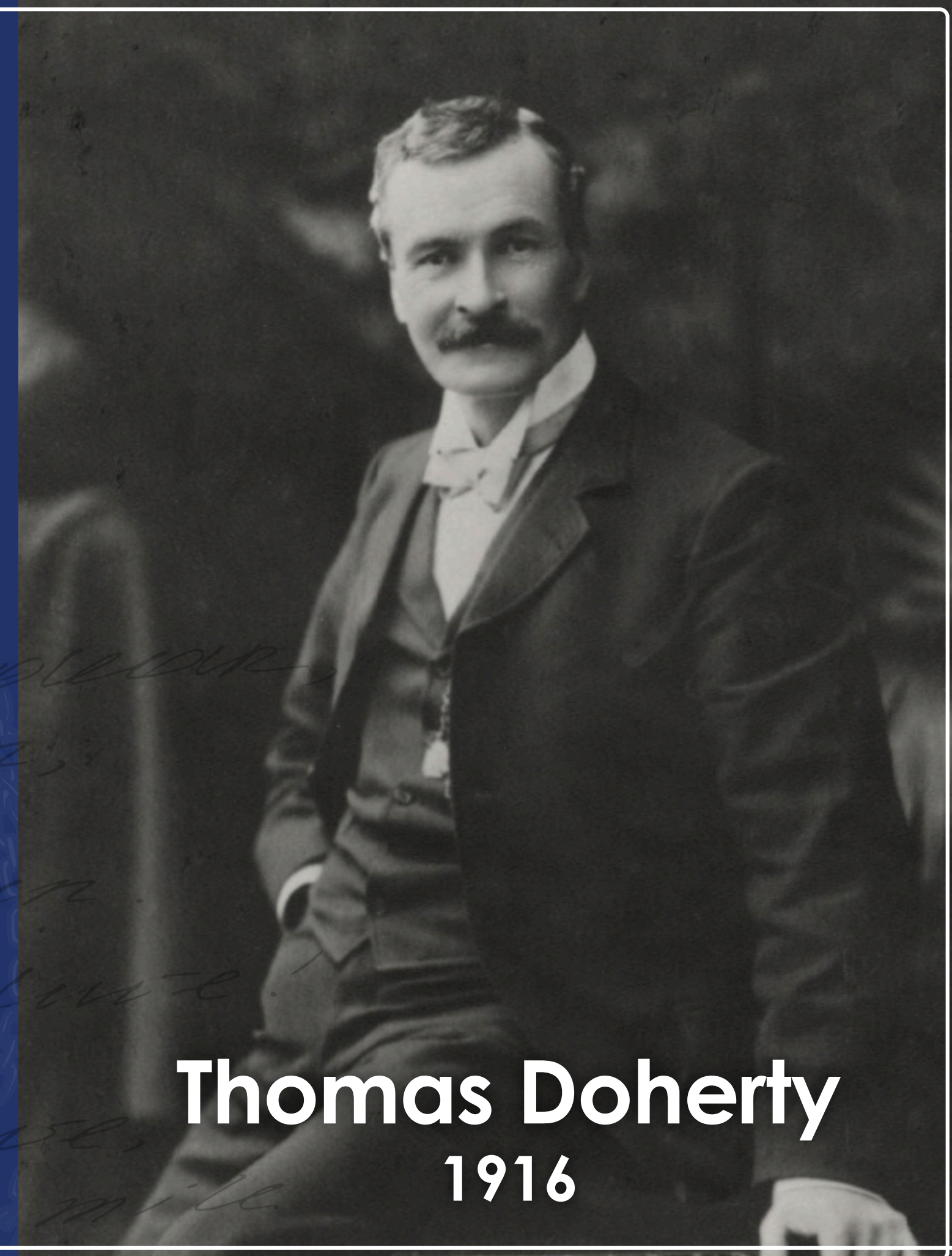
Along the way he also found the time to create devices that helped with everything from home heating to farm work. During the last years of the 19th century he modelled and constructed his own automobile. Powered by a coil spring, it was one of the first cars ever seen in Canada. A few years later, in 1901, he introduced Sarnia's first gas-powered auto. Unfortunately, the "horseless carriage" frightened local residents so much that Council ordered it banned from the streets.

Born in Perth in 1843, Doherty moved to rural Lambton County with his family at age six. As a young man he set up his own factory in Watford, where he built state-of-the-art agricultural equipment.

Moving to Sarnia in 1882, he set up a stove-building foundry and designed a hot water boiler that dramatically improved home heating systems. He was also responsible for the development of a new iron casting process that led to the construction of more durable stoves. After serving on the local Board of Trade, Doherty was elected Mayor in the middle of the First World War.

Once in office, the innovative Doherty set about to bring hydro-electric street lights to the City and to find solutions to a nagging problem with the Municipality's waterworks. Indeed, new pumps were installed at his suggestion in a bid to make the waterworks system more effective.

Tragically, the 73-year-old father of eight became the Community's first Mayor to die in office, dropping dead on September 7, 1916, moments after delivering a speech at the opening of a new Sunday School.



**Thomas Doherty**  
1916

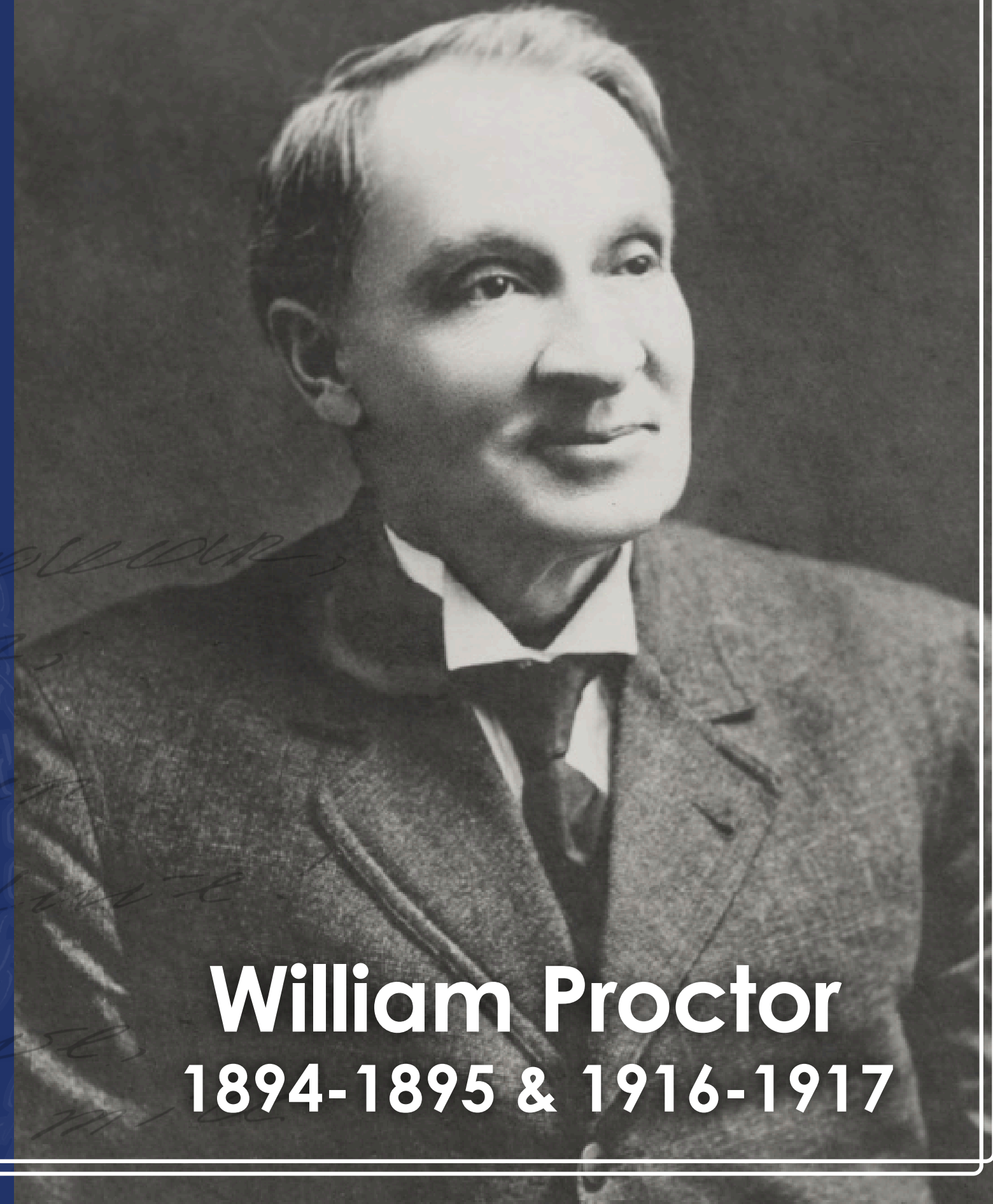
He was a politician who hated politics.

William J. Proctor, who served three terms as Sarnia's Mayor, was a man who never campaigned for the job. He wouldn't give speeches, kiss babies, distribute pamphlets or do advertising of any kind. According to a contemporary newspaper report, Mayor Proctor simply had no enthusiasm for political campaigns.

"At no time during his career did Mr. Proctor solicit votes or indulge in any publicity common to politicians, but merely accepted the nominations and allowed the electors to do the rest," The Observer reported in 1918. Amazingly, he somehow managed to win three of four elections, serving as the Community's 21st Mayor in 1894 and 1895 and as its 37th Chief Magistrate in 1917. His refusal to mount any kind of campaign finally caught up with him at the end of his third term when he was defeated at the polls.

During his time at the helm he was noted for keeping taxes down and for heading the Council that installed a new sewer on Lochiel Street. The achievements sound modest enough but after his ouster, The Observer printed a glowing tribute. "During his tenure he has exercised sound judgement upon all matters with which he has had to deal," the paper said. "Efficient economy was a watchword with him during the year 1917 and the Councillors looked to him as a guiding hand in times of strife".

He was, the newspaper added, an honest and hard working Mayor. Born in Froomfield, he lived in Corunna before moving to Sarnia to establish a dry goods business. In addition to his work as Mayor, he served nine years as Chair of the Board of Works and a number of years on Council's Finance Committee.



**William Proctor**  
**1894-1895 & 1916-1917**

In 1996, when Sarnia Councillors voted to impose special fees on automatic teller machines, they were accused of setting a dangerous precedent. In fact, Mayor Mike Bradley and his Aldermen faced so much criticism from the banking community that they quickly reversed themselves. But the truth is 1996's Council was not the first to look for controversial new ways to raise money.

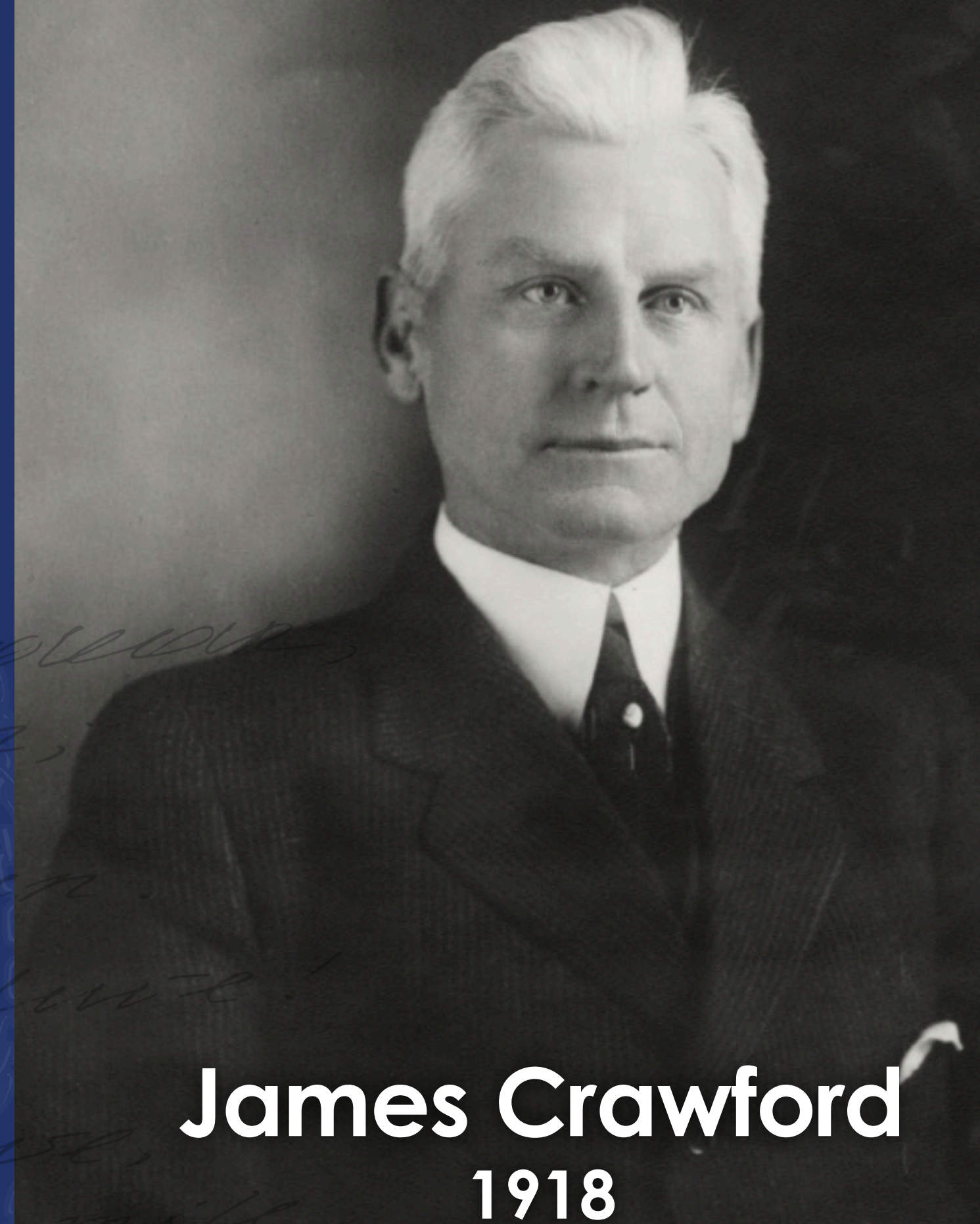
Indeed, the crew led by Mayor James Crawford 78 years ago went so far as to impose a special levy on merry-go-rounds. Born in Kingston in 1864, Crawford moved to Point Edward with his family as a five-year-old. Life in those days was no piece of cake and Crawford found himself working as a Fireman with the Grand Trunk Railroad at the tender age of 12. Later, he became an Engineer.

He moved to Sarnia in 1900, developed an interest in local politics and was elected to Council as an Alderman in 1915. Three years later he became our 38th Mayor. The new Chief Magistrate proved adept at getting local industry to help finance special municipal projects. He even talked Imperial Oil into paying the full cost of paving Mitton Street. But he earned the wrath of the business community when Council decided to impose or dramatically increase licence fees on theatres, pool rooms, bowling alleys, laundries, second hand stores, milk vendors, restaurants and other businesses.

Some rates were doubled and new levies were placed on firms that had never faced fees before. There was even a special \$10.00 fee for stores that sold tobacco. Merry-go-round operators were hit with a \$20.00 charge. Despite the outcry, however, Council stuck to its guns and raised the extra revenues it was looking for.

Mayor Crawford proved to be ahead of his time when it came to the hiring of women. Indeed, he gained considerable attention by suggesting Sarnia Police Department hire a female constable. The idea didn't catch on during his administration but lady officers are a common sight in local police cruisers today.

The father of two died on December 10, 1956, at age 92.



**James Crawford**  
1918

William Nisbet led what may have been the most unpopular Council in Sarnia's history. In fact, eight of his nine Councillors were swept from Office by angry voters fed up with high taxes.

Nisbet, who was elected our 39th Chief Magistrate in 1919, actually started off his political career on a strong note. The City grew rapidly during his administration, with close to 1,000 building permits being issued during his two years at the helm. The value of new construction in 1920 alone stood at \$712,000.00 or about \$100,000.00 more than was normal for the era.

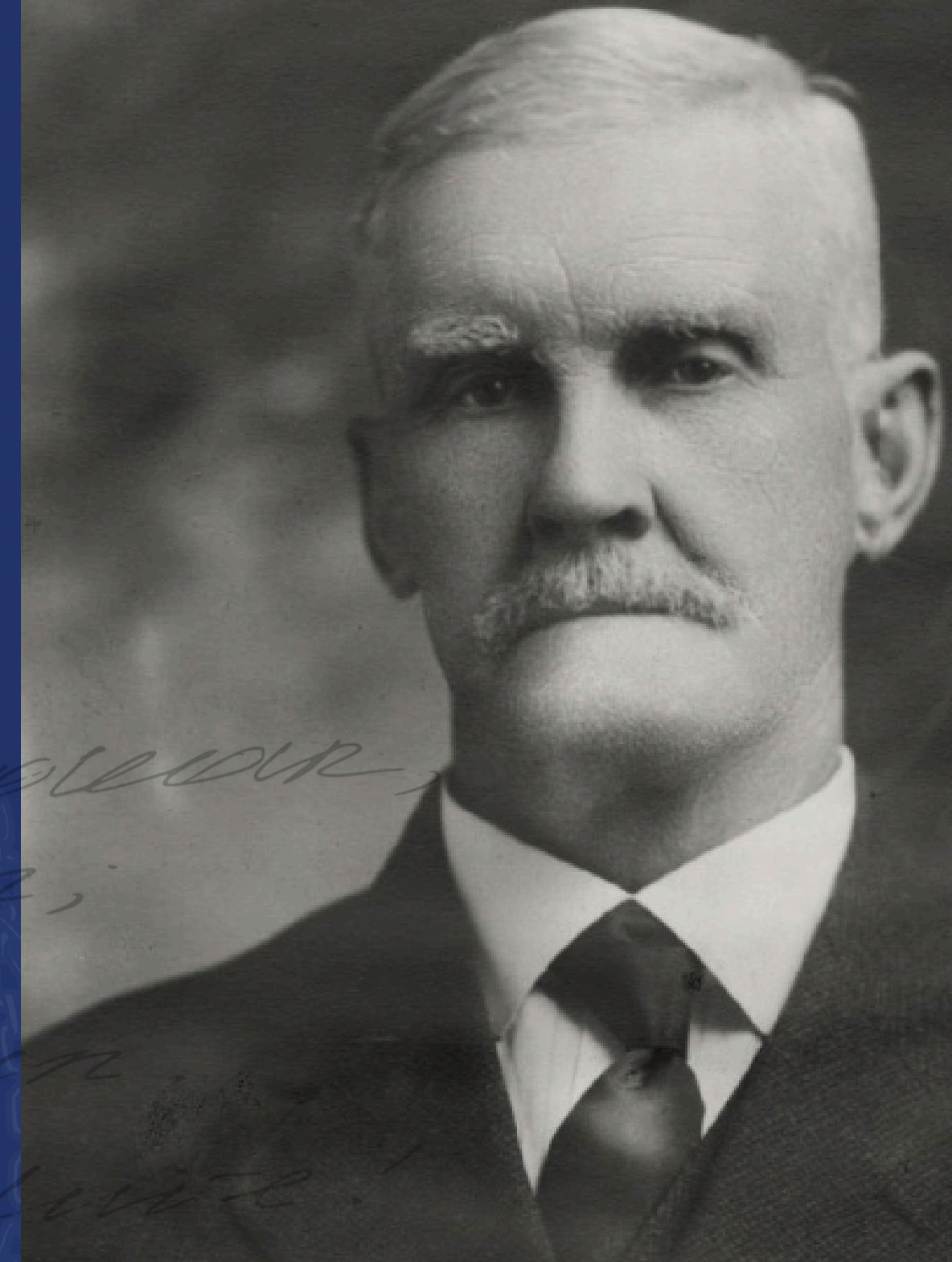
Impressed with his performance, voters granted him a second term, making Nisbet the first Mayor in a decade to serve more than one year at the top. But his popularity didn't last. As the community grew, Council was forced to spend more and more money on new roads, sewers and watermains. Taxes were soon on the way up and Mayor Nisbet's popularity was on the way down.

By the end of his second term the City was said to have the highest municipal tax load in Western Ontario. Records show many Sarnians were having trouble paying their taxes. Total tax arrears at the end of 1920 stood at \$8,700.00 or just \$2,000.00 less than was the case for the much larger City of Kitchener. There were disappointments on other fronts as well. Mayor Nisbet strove hard to get the Ontario Government to build a highway between Sarnia and Toronto but the project was not approved.

During the 1921 election campaign a whole host of new candidates came forward, demanding change. Several of the challengers were young men just back from the First World War and they were anxious to take charge. Election advertisements in The Observer show the incumbents, including Mayor Nisbet, were mostly elderly gentlemen who had served on Council for years.

On election night it was a bloodbath. Eight of nine Aldermen went down to defeat. Only Alderman George Crawford escaped unscathed by running successfully for Mayor. The Observer reported the old pros were "swept away by a veritable avalanche of votes".

Mayor Nisbet, perhaps sensing the looming disaster, evaded the wrath of voters by not seeking a third term.



**William Nisbet**  
**1919-1920**

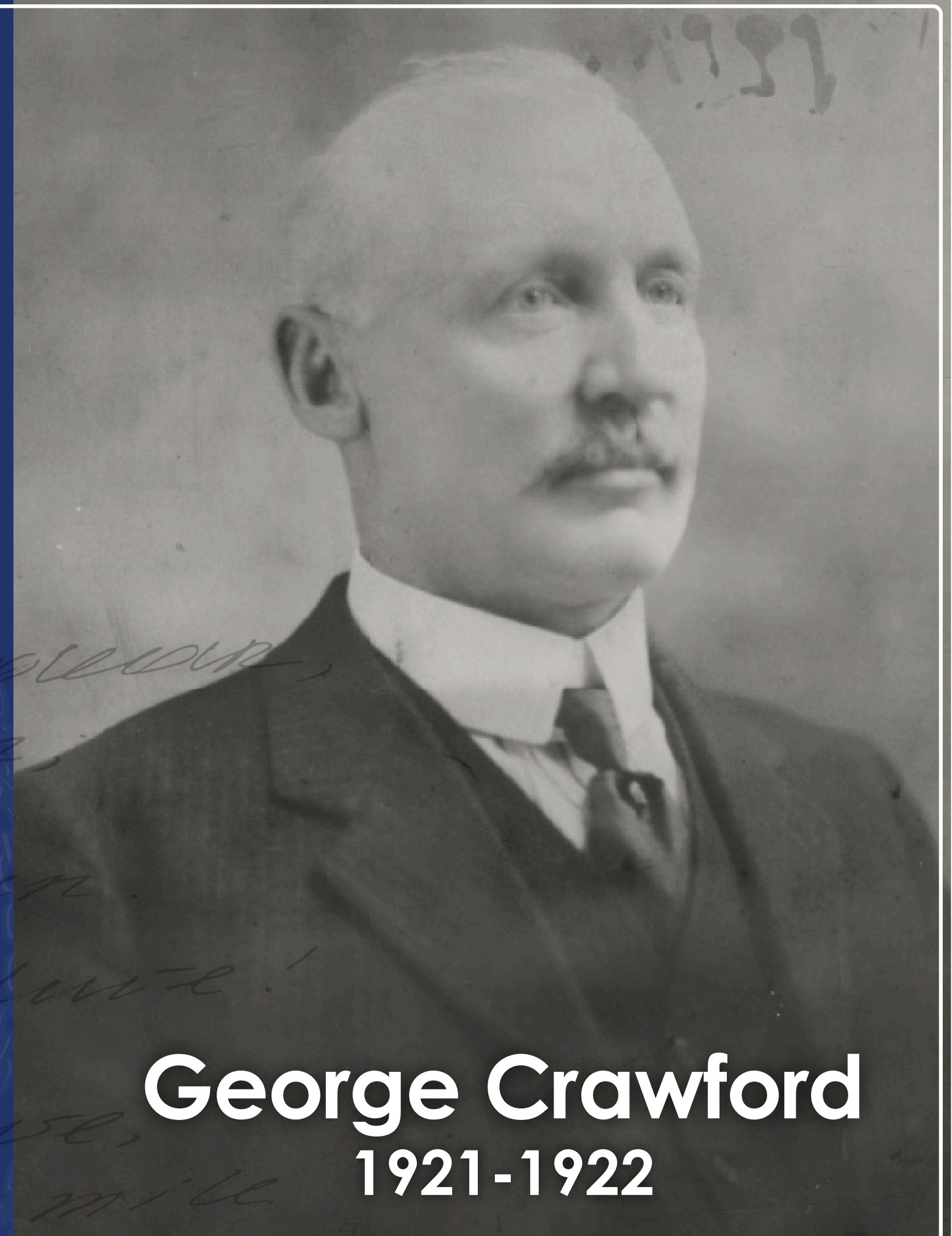
He was an environmentalist half a century before anyone even heard of that term. George Crawford, who served as Sarnia's 40th Mayor in 1921 and 1922, was the Chief Magistrate who helped preserve the City's most treasured wilderness area.

Born in Kingston on May 28, 1862, he moved to Point Edward as a boy. After serving on the old Village School Board, Crawford moved to Sarnia in 1900. He worked for the Grand Trunk Railroad for 43 years, serving most of that time as an engineer. Popular with co-workers, he was named Chief of Local Railroad Engineers.

Elected to City Council in 1920, Crawford served one term as an Alderman before moving up to the Mayor's chair. Once in office he strove to prevent overdevelopment in an area that would later become Canatara Park. In fact, The Observer reported Mayor Crawford "devoted a great deal of effort to have Lake Chipican set aside as a bird and game sanctuary".

Today, the lake remains in a pristine state. Through the years City Council has followed Mayor Crawford's example, steadfastly resisting any efforts to change its character. In fact, in 1996 Council approved a master plan for Canatara that called for protection of Lake Chipican's special plants and animals. And in 1994 Council refused to allow an entrepreneur to operate paddle boats in Lake Chipican because it feared such a business could disturb wildlife.

Mayor Crawford also took action to honour Sarnia's war dead, presiding over the Council that erected a soldiers' memorial in Victoria Park. The monument, The Observer reported, was "brought about largely by the earnest efforts" of the Mayor.



**George Crawford**  
1921-1922

Six years after he helped defeat the Red Baron and his cohorts, George Andrew was called upon to shoot down Sarnia's economic troubles.

Andrew, who served in the Royal Flying Corps during the First World War, was elected our 42nd Mayor in 1924. It was a time when the City was reeling from both a burdensome debt load and high taxes. The new Chief Magistrate moved quickly to implement his own "common sense revolution," dramatically cutting municipal expenditures. In fact, Council refrained from approving any large capital projects during his time in office.

In a move that would be copied seven decades later by Ontario Premier Mike Harris, Andrew gave ratepayers a modest tax break. Possibly as a result of these actions, Council was able to collect \$76,000.00 in tax arrears during his one year at the helm. The Municipality also grew industrially, with the Dominion Alloy Steel plant starting work on a \$3 million plant that year.

According to The Observer, Mayor Andrew delivered a farewell speech to Council in which he "called attention to the reduction in taxes which had been made this year and declared that the finances of the City were in as good shape as those of any other community of a similar size in Ontario".

In an editorial, The Observer agreed the Mayor had put the City's financial house in order. "Sarnia has the good fortune to be a going concern that is making money," it said. "The debenture debt is being paid off at an average rate of \$130,000.00 a year". Mayor Andrew did not seek re-election in 1925, deciding instead to serve on the local Public School Board.

A native of Mooretown, Andrew worked as a farmer, contractor and harbour master before retiring. He was married to Elizabeth Venum and they had five children, two of whom were killed in action during the Second World War.

Andrew died on May 17, 1952, at age 70.



**George Andrew**  
1924

He was arguably Sarnia's greatest Mayor. James C. Barr, who served two terms as the Head of Council, played a key role in the establishment of Canatara Park — the crown jewel of the City's parks system. He also pushed through a motion that dramatically reduced the size of Council, making local government less costly and more efficient.

Born on Christina Street in 1876, he was the son of former Sarnia Mayor David Barr. As a young man James worked for his father in the family jewelry store, taking over the business himself in 1909. He won a seat on City Council in 1921 and quickly gained a reputation as an Alderman with a fantastic memory for figures.

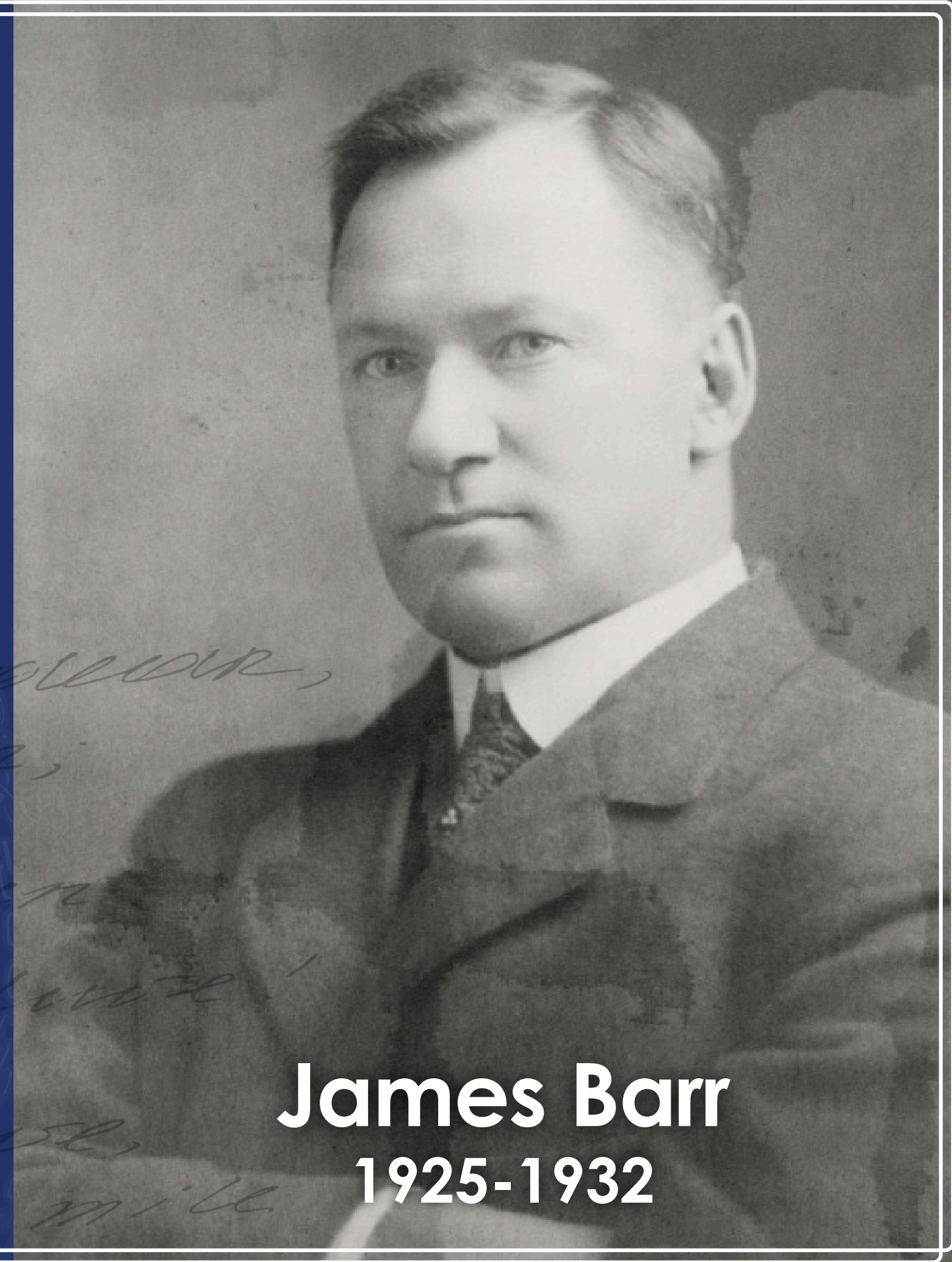
Elected Sarnia's 43rd Mayor four years later, he was instrumental in reducing the size of Council from 14 Aldermen to just eight. The move has saved the City hundreds of thousands of dollars over the years. But it was in his second term as Mayor — in 1932 when he was elected the City's 49th Chief Magistrate — that he really made his mark.

It was the year that negotiations for the Canatara Park project were started. At the time, the Great Depression was underway and the City couldn't even afford to pave crumbling downtown streets. There was widespread criticism of the plan to buy land on Lake Huron for a park, but Mayor Barr pushed hard for the project, arguing the property was the only open space left on the lake within City limits. If it was lost, he said, City residents would be denied easy access to the lake for all time.

It looked like an impossible task but when Mrs. W.J. Hanna agreed to contribute \$10,000.00 if the City would find the balance of the cost, Mayor Barr convinced Council to do just that. In a cabin near the park's popular animal farm, there's a picture of Mayor Barr with an inscription that notes he "resolutely provided the political leadership to acquire the Canatara Park property in 1932". At the time, however, some referred to the purchase as "Barr's folly". Today, it's impossible to imagine the City without Canatara Park.

After leaving Council he served on Sarnia Hydro Commission for 19 years. In a 1955 editorial, The Observer noted, "there is probably no Sarnian living who has given more of his time and talent toward the betterment of Sarnia than has Mr. Barr".

He died on November 2, 1962, at age 86.



**James Barr**  
1925-1932

If all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, Sarnians can be grateful George Galloway was elected Mayor in 1926. That's because our 44th Chief Magistrate was a sports-minded politician who helped develop both Norm Perry and Tecumseh Parks.

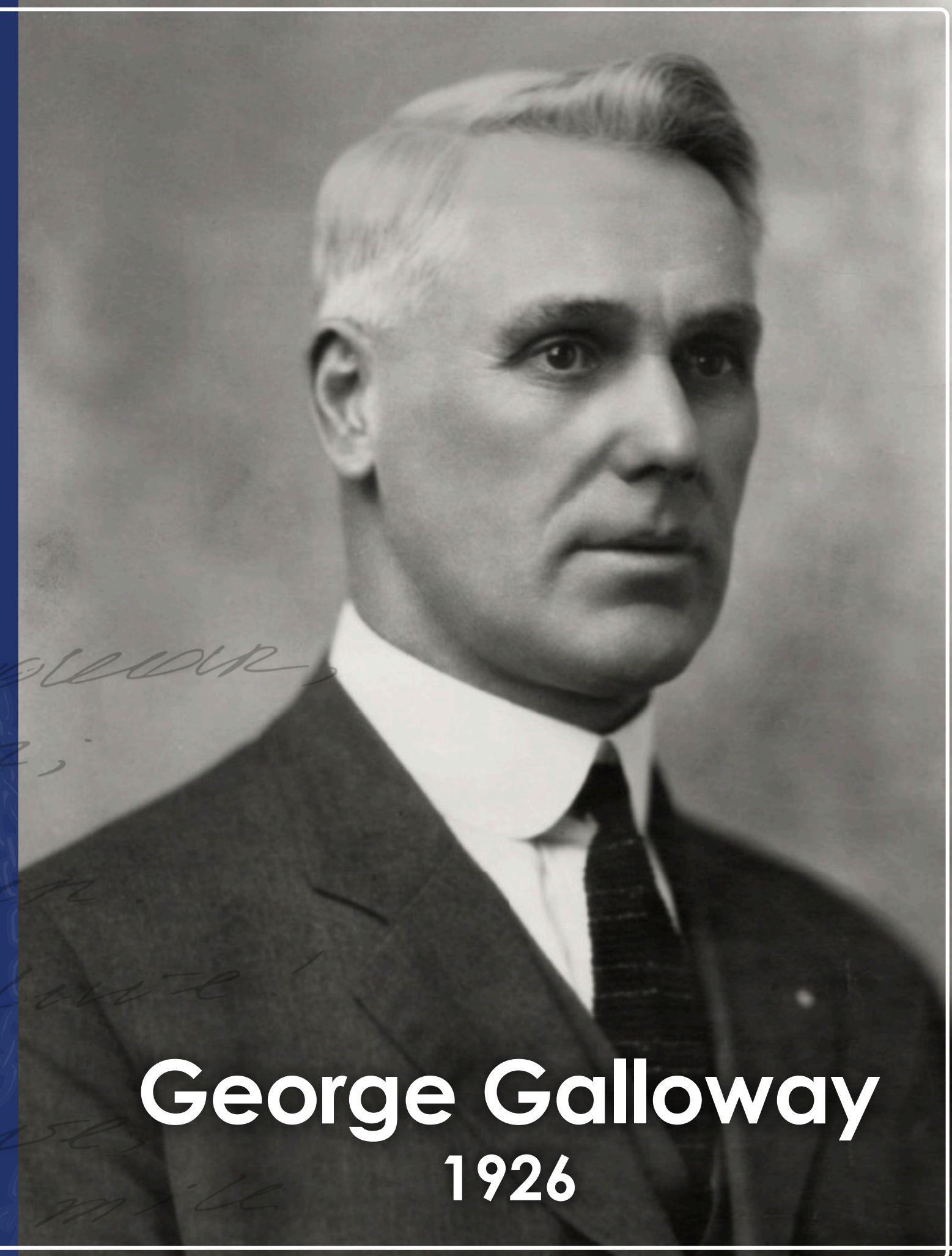
Born in Bothwell in 1877, Galloway was a railroad engineer who moved to Sarnia as a young man. Elected to Council as an Alderman in 1921, he took over the Mayor's chair five years later. Shortly after taking office, Mayor Galloway moved to secure the property that would later become known as Norm Perry Park. Council purchased 5.6 hectares (14 acres) of land from CN Rail for \$3,000. The price, which seems ridiculously cheap today, represented a considerable investment in the Roaring Twenties.

There was much criticism of the deal. Council was so strapped for cash that it couldn't afford to cut the grass on the new property. Instead, it allowed farmers to graze their goats on it. Nevertheless, the acquisition soon proved to be one of the steals of the century. The property, after all, stretched from Exmouth Street to the Sarnia Golf and Curling Club. It was cut in half a few years later when the Ontario government ran a highway through the middle of it. Still, there was more than enough land left over to build Athletic Park (which was later renamed Norm Perry Park).

The facility soon became Sarnia's main outdoor sports facility, serving as home to the Sarnia Imperials football club that won the Grey Cup in 1934 and 1936. In fact, the 1933 fall classic was played in Sarnia, with a crowd of 5,000 watching the Toronto Argonauts edge the Imps 4-3. The park still serves as Sarnia's main football and soccer field.

After leaving office, Galloway served for nearly a quarter of a century on the local Parks Board. In 1950, The Observer reported he was "largely responsible for the development of Tecumseh Park".

The father of two died on June 5, 1950 at age 73.



**George Galloway**  
1926

James F. Newton wasn't the type to let a little thing like the Great Depression stop him from moving Sarnia ahead economically. Newton, who was in the Mayor's chair when the stock market crashed in 1929, found an innovative way to keep the local economy booming.

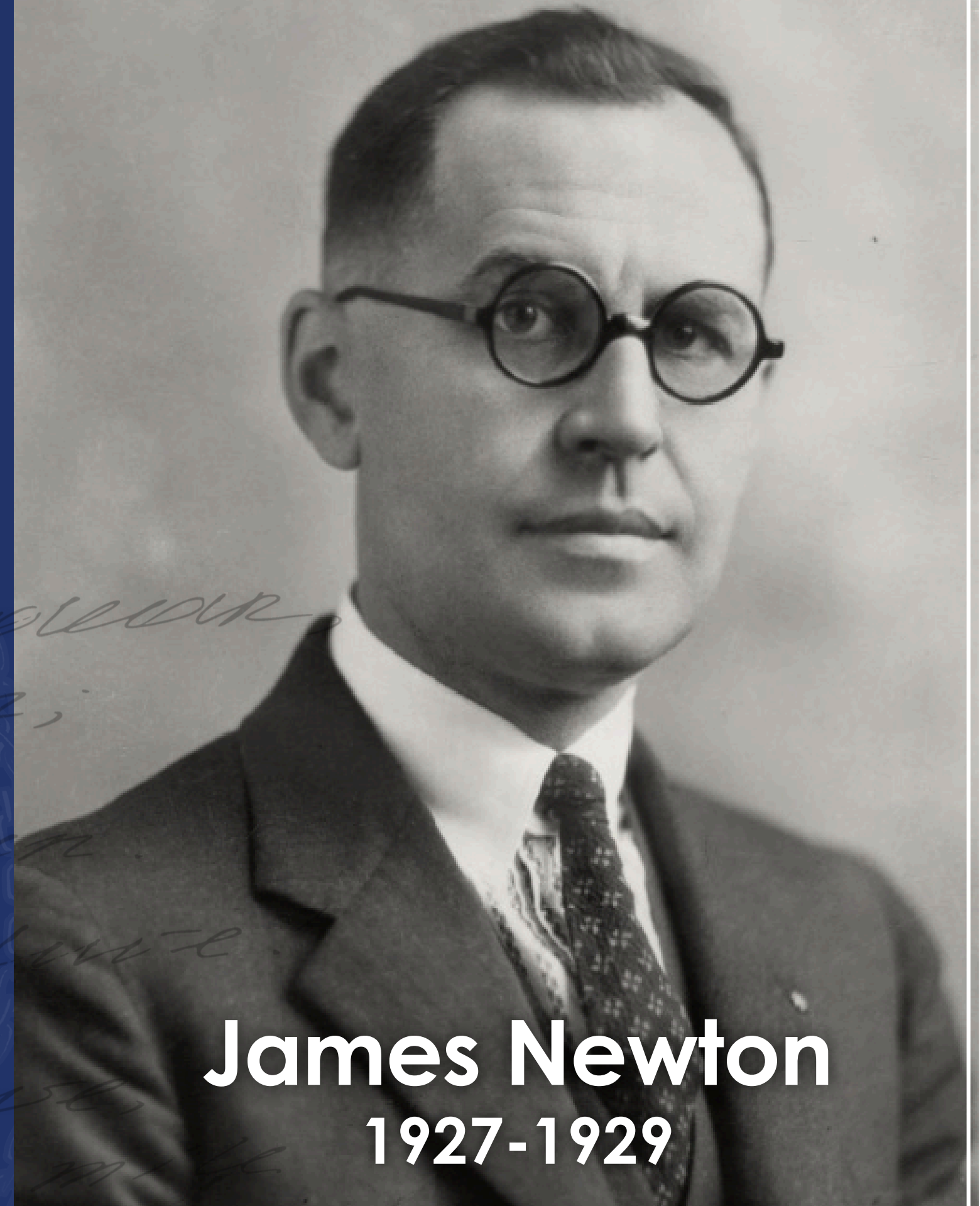
It was no easy task because, in addition to the Depression, the Ontario Government had passed legislation in the Roaring Twenties making it illegal for municipalities to lure factories with grants. But when Newton heard the Electric Auto-Lite Company of Toledo, Ohio wanted to build a plant in Canada, he got around the ban by talking local businessmen into offering money to the American firm privately.

The Chamber of Commerce was approached and several dozen local businessmen came up with a combined total of \$50,000.00, which was offered to Electric Auto-Lite if it would agree to come here. That was an enormous sum of money in 1929 and the company quickly jumped at the inducement, opening a Sarnia plant in the winter of 1930. The move created 750 jobs, making Electric Auto-Lite Sarnia's second largest employer next to Imperial Oil Ltd.

Newton, who was born in rural Ontario, moved to Sarnia as a 22-year old. He became manager of Sarnia Woollen Mills, married Evelyn Morse and had one child. In 1925 Newton became interested in municipal politics, winning an Aldermanic seat on City Council. Two years later, he was sworn in as the City's 45th Mayor. He took a year off in 1928, but returned to the Mayor's chair in 1929, becoming our 47th Chief Magistrate.

Despite his success with Electric Auto-Lite, Mayor Newton had his critics. In fact, political opponents charged he neglected Sarnia's streets, leaving some in deplorable shape. Russell Street was so bad, one Alderman charged, that it was almost impassable.

Newton lived in Sarnia for 70 years, dying at St. Joseph's Hospital on March 31, 1976, at age 92.



**James Newton**  
1927-1929

William J. Scott's main claim to fame is that he played a role in the development of Ipperwash Provincial Park. Scott, who was elected our 46th Chief Magistrate in 1928, talked senior government officials into creating the popular — and controversial — North Lambton campground.

Born in Oxford County, he came to Sarnia as a young man in 1904 in order to set up his own bakery. Later, he became a well known real estate agent and insurance salesman. Developing an interest in municipal politics, Scott ran for City Council in 1921, winning a seat as an Alderman.

He served seven years on Council before moving up to the Mayor's chair. Scott succeeded his friend and next door neighbour James Newton, as the City's top politician. He took over at a time when land developers wanted to get their hands on 377 acres of Stoney Point Indian Reserve that would eventually become home to both a Canadian army base and Ipperwash Provincial Park.

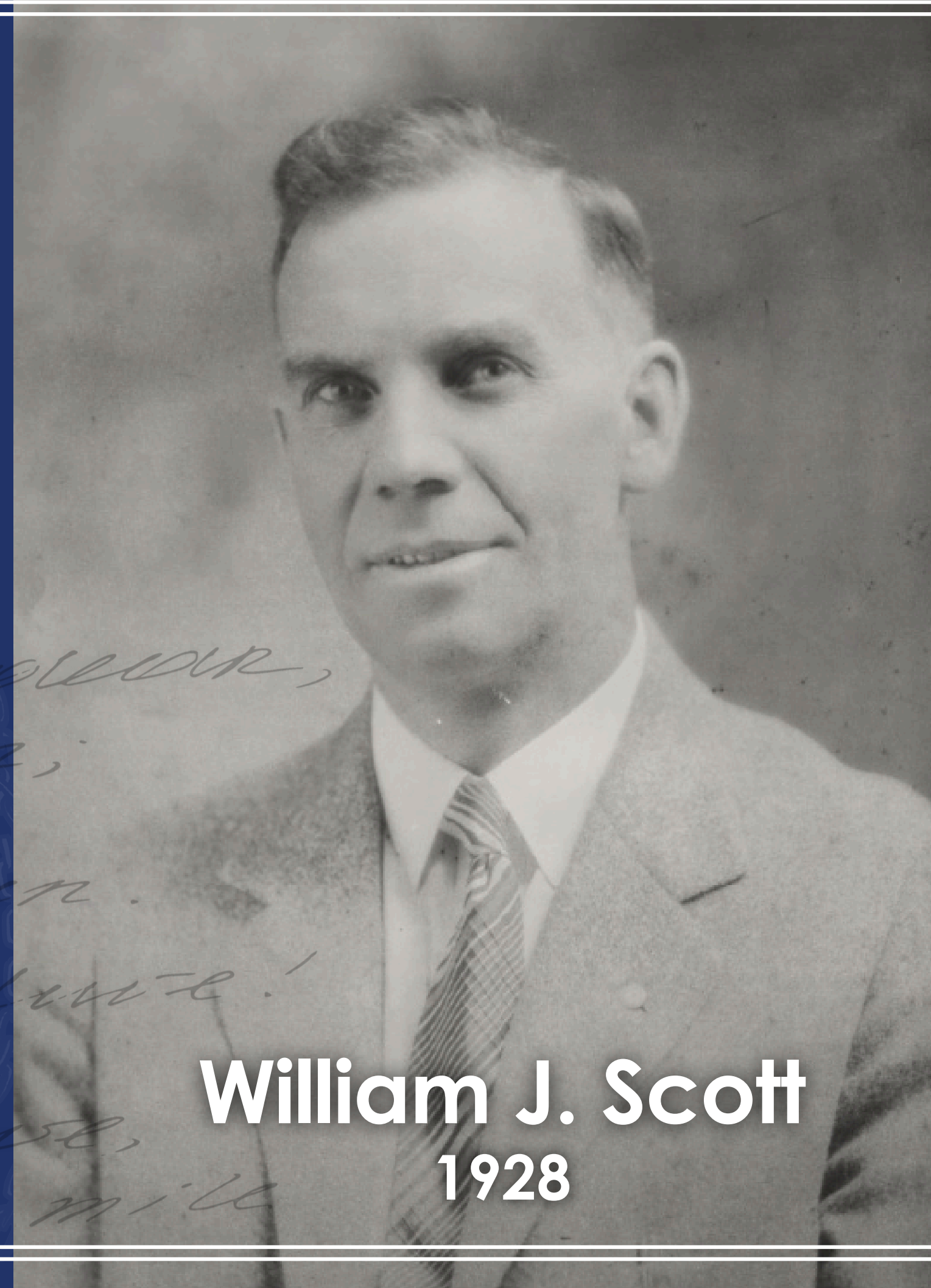
Part of the property was acquired by non-natives in 1928, paving the way for the 107-acre park, which opened in 1936. The rest of the land was expropriated by the Federal Government in 1942 for the creation of a military base. According to a 1952 story in The Observer, "Mr. Scott was very active in the development of the property at Ipperwash Beach and the opening of the Ipperwash Park. In these projects he gained the support of Ross W. Gray, the MP for Lambton and the Hon. Peter Heenan, then Minister of Lands and Forests".

Nearly 60 years after Ipperwash opened, it became the scene of a bloody clash between aborigines who said it contains a native burial ground and OPP. One man was killed in the altercation and two others were injured. The Park closed while authorities attempted to resolve the native land claim surrounding it.

During Mayor Scott's administration the City also began stressing the need for traffic safety. "During Mr. Scott's term of office as Mayor the first safety drive to be held in the City was launched," The Observer noted.

Scott, who was married to Mary Lockhart, was a member of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. In addition to his interest in politics, he was an avid golfer and curler.

Scott died in St. Joseph's Hospital on July 25, 1952.



**William J. Scott**  
1928

Six decades before Prime Minister Jean Chrétien introduced a national “infrastructure program” in a bid to combat high unemployment, Sarnia Mayor Arthur Kirby was doing the same thing at the local level.

Born in Yorkshire, England, Kirby came to Canada as a four-year old. He worked as a mechanical superintendent at Imperial Oil, married Ottelie Miller and had two sons. Elected to City Council as an Alderman in 1925, Kirby took over as our 48th Chief Magistrate five years later.

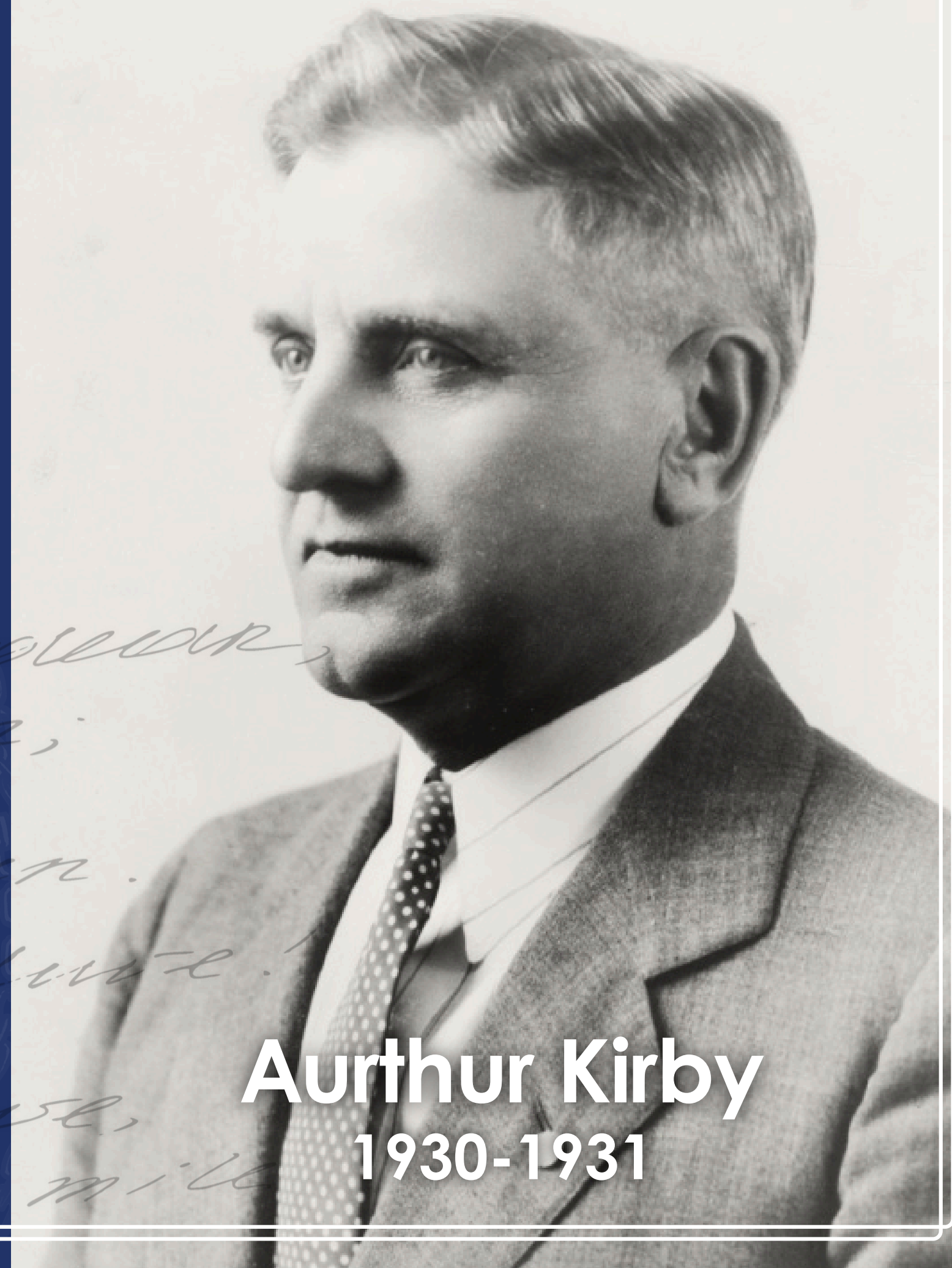
It was a difficult time to assume the top political post. The stock market had crashed just two months before he was sworn into office, plunging the world into the Great Depression. Sarnia was better off than most Canadian communities, mainly because the Electric Auto-Life Company opened a plant in the City in 1930. Nevertheless, the Municipality was hit hard by the Depression and unemployment lines soon swelled.

To help alleviate the suffering Mayor Kirby’s Council began upgrading the City’s infrastructure. Officially, City Fathers wanted to enhance roads and sewers but, unofficially, they were just as interested in the jobs such projects would create. Summing up Mayor Kirby’s achievements after he left office, The Observer reported “his tenure as Mayor was immediately following the world economic crisis of 1929” and it was his responsibility to find work for the hundreds of unemployed among the citizens of Sarnia.

It was during this period that the Exmouth Street sewer was constructed, Russell Street was paved, the Vidal Street bridge over the CNR tunnel cut was built, the Lochiel Street sewer was laid and the Municipal garden on Ferry Dock Hill was laid out”.

Mayor Kirby was re-elected in 1931 but then retired from politics for almost a decade. He made a comeback in 1940 when he was elected to Council as an Alderman.

Kirby died at his 338 Vidal Street S. home on January 17, 1945, at age 68



**Arthur Kirby**  
1930-1931

He introduced a form of “workfare” more than half a century before Ontario Premier Mike Harris came up with the same idea. Homer J. Lockhart, who was elected our 50th Mayor in 1933, headed the Council that forced unemployed people to work for what was known in those days as “relief”.

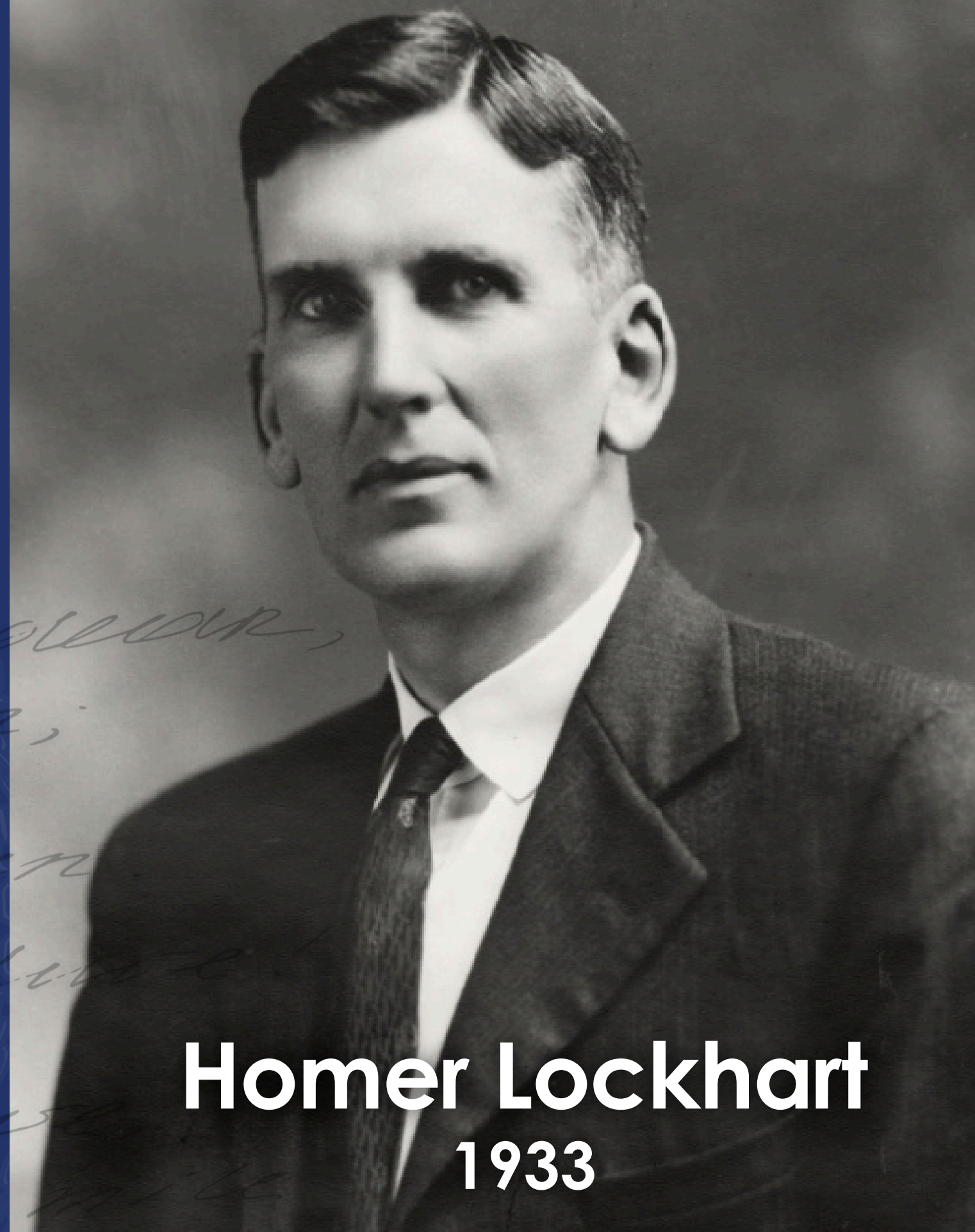
Born in Sarnia on July 21, 1888, Lockhart toiled in a local lumber mill as a teenager. After graduating from Sarnia Business College, he entered the insurance business, eventually becoming President of City Insurance. In 1930, Lockhart was elected to Council as an Alderman, holding that post for three years before winning the Mayor’s chair at the beginning of 1933.

There could hardly have been a more difficult time to be in office. The Great Depression was in full swing and almost 2,300 of Sarnia’s 18,000 residents were on relief. Mayor Lockhart’s Council increased the level of assistance to the poor by almost 200 per cent, spending \$30,000.00 on relief that year. At the same time, however, Council insisted that able-bodied men work for their cheques. As a result, they were soon shovelling snow, cutting wood and performing other chores.

Unemployed men were allowed to keep any of the wood they cut and Council also allowed them to grow vegetable gardens on vacant Municipal lots. Next, Mayor Lockhart turned to young people for help. Specifically, he visited every school in the City to ask students to donate clothing to the needy. Two days after he visited his last classroom The Observer was able to report “the response to the appeal for clothing issued by Mayor Homer Lockhart to the pupils of the public and separate schools has been gratifying and at noon today the receptacles in the various schools were filled”.

Despite the huge increase in relief spending that year, Council was able to cut taxes by reducing expenditures in other areas. In addition to his interest in politics, Mayor Lockhart served two terms as President of the local Chamber of Commerce and was President of both the Rotary Club and The Sarnia Golf and Curling Club.

He married Nellie Smith and they had three children. He died on December 21, 1963, at age 75.



**Homer Lockhart**  
1933

The story of Gordon Hodgins is more about what might have been than about anything he accomplished in the Mayor's chair. That's because our 51st Chief Magistrate committed suicide just 24 days after taking office at the beginning of 1934.

The tragic death of this young and talented politician stunned the City and put an end to an extremely promising political career. Hodgins, who was born in Sarnia on January 4, 1898, worked briefly in a bank before being hired by Imperial Oil in 1916.

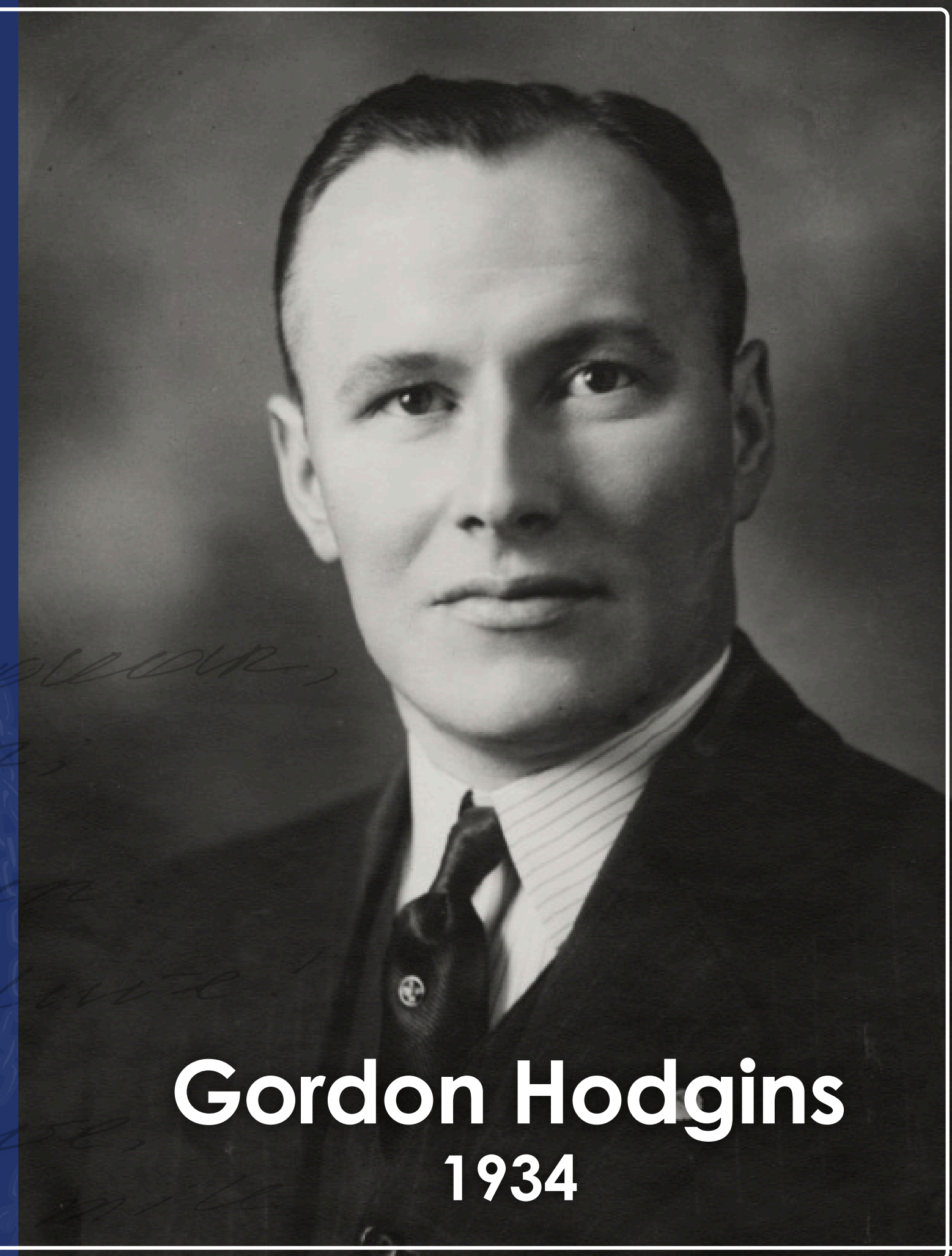
He ran for City Council in 1929 and soon proved to be an able and energetic Alderman. In fact, Hodgins was quickly named Chair of two of Council's most important bodies — the Finance and Welfare Committees. Needless to say, big things were expected from him when he was elected Mayor at the relatively youthful age of 36. Sadly, he would chair just two meetings.

Still, during that time Council established a community welfare house to assist unemployed residents. The home, which opened during the height of the Great Depression, included a workshop where men could do odd jobs and a room for women to take sewing classes.

Mayor Hodgins was driving home from London in the middle of a rain storm on January 21, 1934, when his car went into a ditch. He lay unconscious for three hours before being discovered, bleeding and bruised at 2 a.m. Released from hospital in mid-afternoon on January 25, the Mayor went to his Durand Street home and poisoned himself. A doctor summoned to the scene found him semi-conscious with a bottle of poison under his bed. He was rushed to hospital but died that afternoon.

The Observer reported doctors concluded he had died from "carbolic acid poisoning, self-administered". The newspaper added "it is known that for several days Mayor Hodgins' health had not been good, that he was distressed and that he had business worries".

He left behind a wife, a young son and an aching feeling that a potentially great Mayor had been lost.



**Gordon Hodgins**  
**1934**

Mayor Edward J. Blake headed the Council that was accused of trying to muzzle the press with “Nazi” tactics. Known to his friends as “Teddy”, Blake was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1879. He came to Canada as a seven-year-old, living in Montreal before his family moved to Point Edward.

As a young man he took up residence in Sarnia and got a job as a locomotive engineer. Later, the father of four went to work at the local Imperial Oil refinery. Blake entered politics in 1925, winning a seat on the Public School Board. Five years later, he was elected to City Council as an Alderman. When Mayor Gordon Hodgins died in office in early 1934, Council voted to replace him with Alderman Blake.

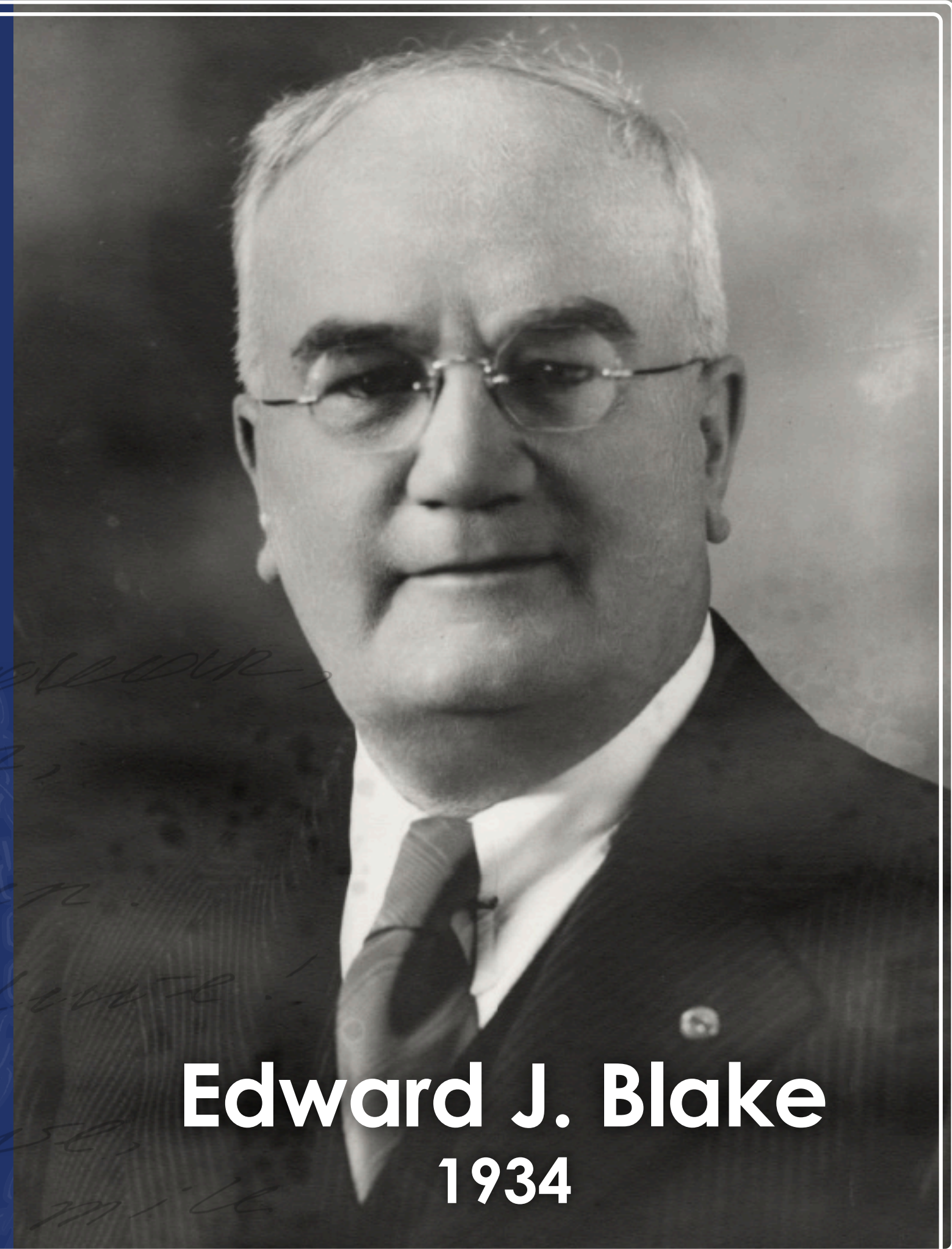
At first the City's 52nd Chief Magistrate was very popular, at least partly because he called himself a “working man's Mayor”. He openly declared he wouldn't be in his office every day because his day job came first. But the new Mayor soon got into hot water with the press. It happened when Council voted to ban reporters from a meeting unless they allowed Council to edit their stories prior to publication.

“City Council, which met informally last evening, displayed an element of Nazism when it contended that if the press were admitted to the meeting, the reporters should present their copy to the Council for censorship before publication,” The Observer reported in a 1934 story. Needless to say, the newspaper refused to allow politicians to edit its stories and reporters were allowed back into the next meeting.

Mayor Blake's Council was also capable of playing hardball with people who refused to pay their taxes. It proved that when it passed a motion declaring tax arrears would be collected through “garnishee, suit and seizure of chattels”. The action came at a time when ratepayers owed the City a whopping \$470,000.00. Some of the money had been overdue for eight years.

More than a few people thought the measure, coming in the midst of the Great Depression, was too harsh. Mayor Blake showed his compassionate side when he convinced Council to pay \$15.00 a month to doctors willing to treat sick people living on “relief”. The move allowed some of Sarnia's poorest residents to get medical attention they otherwise wouldn't have been able to afford.

After leaving Council, Blake was elected to the Sarnia Hydro Commission, serving on that body until his death, at age 68, on April 7, 1947.



**Edward J. Blake**  
1934

Mayor Edward Bedard gave Sarnians a tax break when they needed it most. Bedard, who was elected our 53rd Chief Magistrate in 1935, slashed taxes during the height of the Great Depression.

Born in 1885 in the tiny Huron County community of Holmesville, he taught bilingual school in Clinton before quitting in 1909 to become an engineering student at University of Toronto. After graduation he went to work for Imperial Oil in Saskatchewan and British Columbia before being transferred to Sarnia.

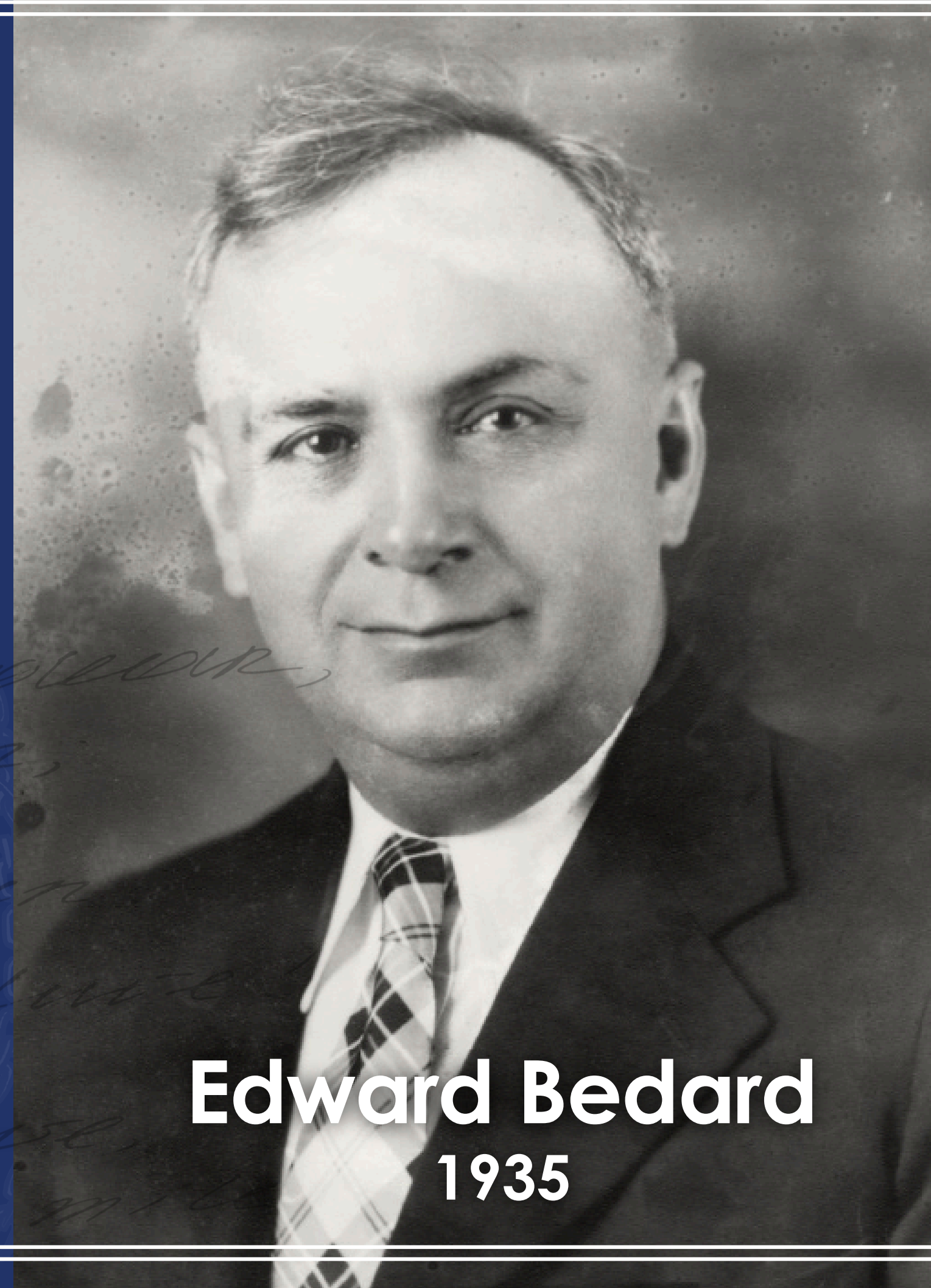
Bedard entered politics in 1925 when he was elected to the local Catholic School Board. Six years later he won a seat on City Council as an Alderman. After four years in that position he was elected Mayor.

Within three months of taking office he had engineered a major tax break, cutting expenditures by nearly \$17,000.00. Although that doesn't sound like much today, it was a great deal of cash. With the cut, Council was able to pass a Current Budget of less than \$1 million for the first time in several years.

Despite the reduction in spending, the Municipality still managed to carry out a good deal of storm sewer and road work. In fact, 41 men were hired for 100 days to complete the projects.

During the Second World War, Bedard went to Ottawa to become Superintendent of Naval Fuel Service for the Royal Canadian Navy. Returning to Sarnia after the war, he went back to work for Imperial Oil until his retirement in 1954.

Bedard, who was married to Blanche Bohanan, had four children. He died on May 13, 1962, at age 77 in St. Joseph's Hospital.



**Edward Bedard**  
1935

He lost the fight to have it built in Sarnia, but Mayor Fred Pelling did play a role in getting the Bluewater Bridge off the ground.

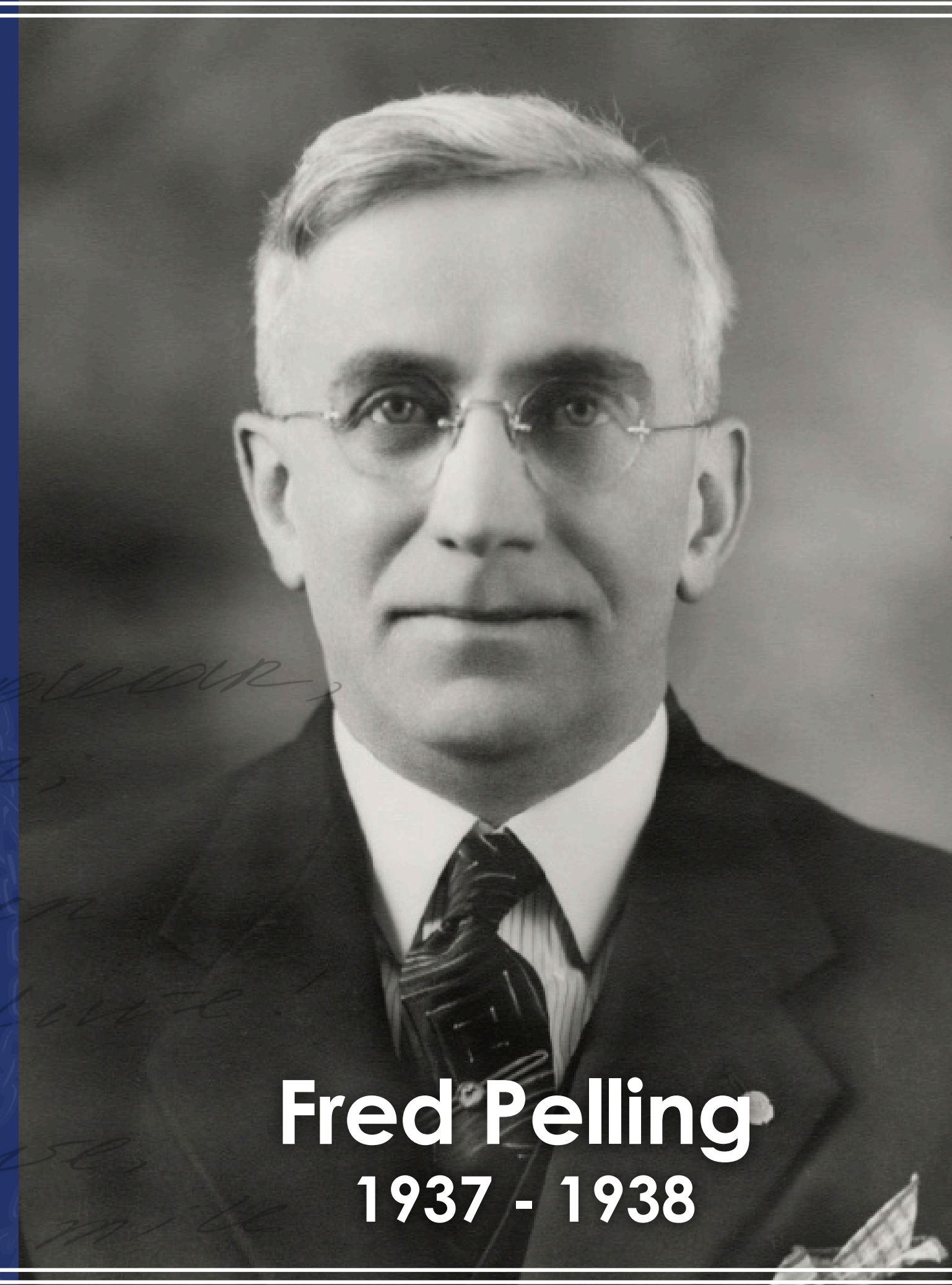
Born near Kitchener in 1890, Pelling lived in Brantford and Toronto before moving to Sarnia to take a position in the drafting department at Imperial Oil. He became interested in municipal politics during the Great Depression and was elected our 55th Mayor in 1937. Re-elected in 1938, he was in office when the bridge opened in October of that year.

“Pelling was deeply involved” in the bridge project, according to local historian Eric Poersch. But at first he wasn’t a big supporter of the scheme. He was Mayor when City Council refused to support the idea of building the bridge in Point Edward. Council wanted a car tunnel built instead, so American tourists could be easily lured into the City’s downtown.

When authorities balked at the \$7.5 million price tag for a tunnel, Mayor Pelling pressed for a bridge that would connect downtown Port Huron to Sarnia’s core. But senior officials insisted on the Point Edward site because a bridge could be built for \$3.3 million compared to \$4.8 million for the crossing City Council envisioned.

After leaving office Pelling remained active in the community through St. George’s Anglican Church and the Sarnia Lions Club. He worked at Imperial Oil for 30 years, retiring in 1954.

Pelling died on March 25, 1960, at age 70.



**Fred Pelling**  
1937 - 1938

He could run well in two fields.

Norm Perry, the legendary “Gallopig Ghost” of Canadian football, is best remembered as the fleet-footed halfback who led the Sarnia Imperials to a stunning Grey Cup victory.

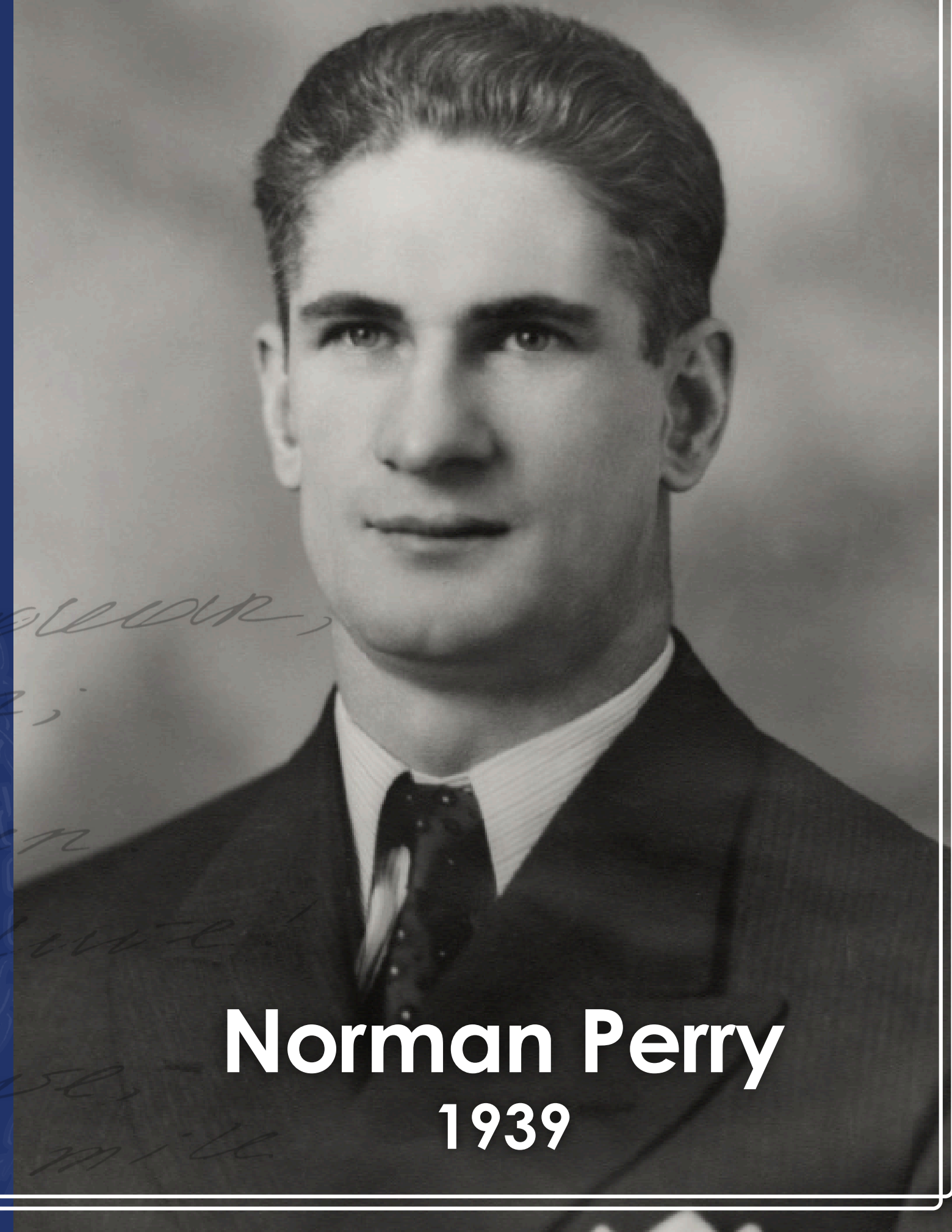
What’s been largely forgotten over the years is that he also had his day as a politician. In fact, after hanging up his cleats Perry became Sarnia’s 56th Mayor.

Born in Sarnia on June 1, 1904, Perry worked for Imperial Oil all his adult life. He came to national prominence in the 1930s as leader of the upstart Imperials football club. Known for his speed and smooth catching ability, Perry led the Imps to a Grey Cup win over the Regina Roughriders in 1934.

He quit football shortly after that and ran for City Council, easily winning an Aldermanic seat in 1936. Three years later, at age 34, he was acclaimed one of the youngest Mayors in the City’s history.

Despite the difficult times of the Great Depression and the looming Second World War, Perry pushed ahead with several projects. He supported construction of a recreation centre/arena complex for the city’s youth, but the plan failed when citizens voted against spending \$75,000 in a referendum. Despite that setback, his year as Mayor was successful: welfare rolls dropped, home construction reached a 10-year high, there was a small municipal budget surplus, and Christina Street was resurfaced.

The City also supplied water and electricity to the government docks, helping attract ships for winter berthing and stimulate local employment. Despite these successes he was defeated when he ran for re-election in 1940.



**Norman Perry**  
1939

Sarnians who think there's a shortage of hospital beds in the community can thank their lucky stars that John T. Barnes was elected Mayor in 1940. That's because the community's 57th Chief Magistrate played a key role in getting St. Joseph's Hospital built.

Born in Oil Springs in 1897, Barnes moved to Sarnia in 1918, finding work with the old Sarnia Bridge Company. He served as an Alderman from 1935 to 1939 before winning the Mayor's chair with a stunning upset victory over incumbent Norm Perry.

At the time Sarnia General Hospital was overcrowded. A plan to add a new wing had been rejected by voters in a referendum. Fearing a severe shortage of beds, Barnes turned to the Sisters of St. Joseph for help and asked them to build a new hospital in Sarnia. The Sisters agreed in 1942 and construction began less than two years later.

During his administration Sarnia also experienced major industrial growth, with Polymer Corporation and Dow Canada announcing new plants in the Chemical Valley. Barnes later served more than 30 years on the Sarnia Hydro Commission and played an important role in establishing the Lambton Generating Station near Courtright.

He died in St. Joseph's Hospital on December 22, 1979, at age 83.



**John T. Barnes**  
1940 - 1942

If Sarnia Sting fans thought the club's home rink was inadequate, they can thank their lucky stars that Carlyle W. Hipple was in the Mayor's chair half a century ago.

That's because under his guidance the City began planning for construction of the Sarnia Arena. And without the venerable old barn, there would not have been a spectator arena of any consequence in the Community.

Hipple, who was born in Sarnia in 1898, served overseas with the Canadian Artillery during the First World War. When peace came he got a job at Imperial Oil, married Laurabelle Wilson and had one son. He was elected our 58th Chief Magistrate in 1943 and was re-elected twice, becoming the first Mayor in 70 years to serve more than two years.

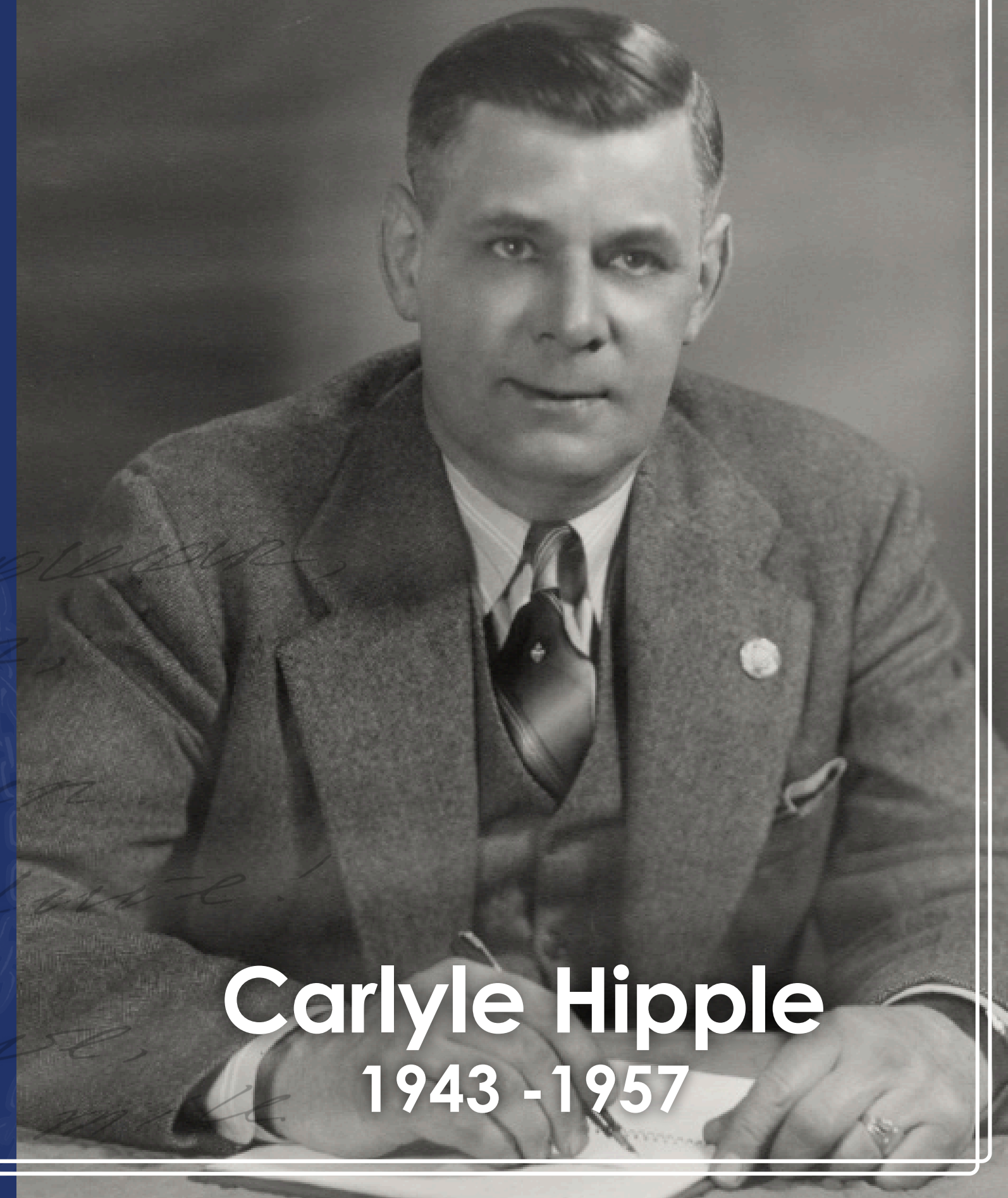
Council was handicapped during much of his time in office by a scarcity of building materials. With the Second World War in full swing, there weren't enough materials available for sewer construction or many other important municipal projects. But that didn't stop Hipple from planning for the future. Two years before the fighting ended, he unveiled a "post-war civic improvement plan" that included construction of a 2,000-seat arena.

Mayor Hipple was named chair of a committee charged with drawing up plans for a proposed "War Memorial Civic Centre". He also appointed a City Council committee to investigate the feasibility of the project. Critics said it would be too expensive but the Mayor predicted private citizens would pick up much of the tab.

The opening of the arena was delayed by lack of community interest, shortage of funding and outright opposition. But in 1948 five organizations spearheaded a campaign led by Carl Manore. In total, the arena cost about \$250,000 to build. The City contributed \$10,000 and residents raised the rest. The arena finally opened in January 1949, three years after Hipple left office. As a result, his name is seldom mentioned in connection with the project.

During Hipple's administration, Council also introduced pensions for City employees, including police officers and fire fighters.

He died on November 5, 1973, at age 75.



**Carlyle Hipple**  
1943 - 1957

He built modern Sarnia. Those four words probably best sum up the achievements of William C. Nelson, the City's 59th — and longest serving — Mayor at that point in time.

Born in 1885, he attended Durand Street School and Sarnia Business College. During his youth he developed the fighting spirit he would later show in many successful election campaigns by boxing with his brothers in a ring set up in his father's barn.

As a young man Nelson worked in a local sawmill before going into real estate. In that field he amassed a small fortune and was reputed to be the City's largest individual taxpayer.

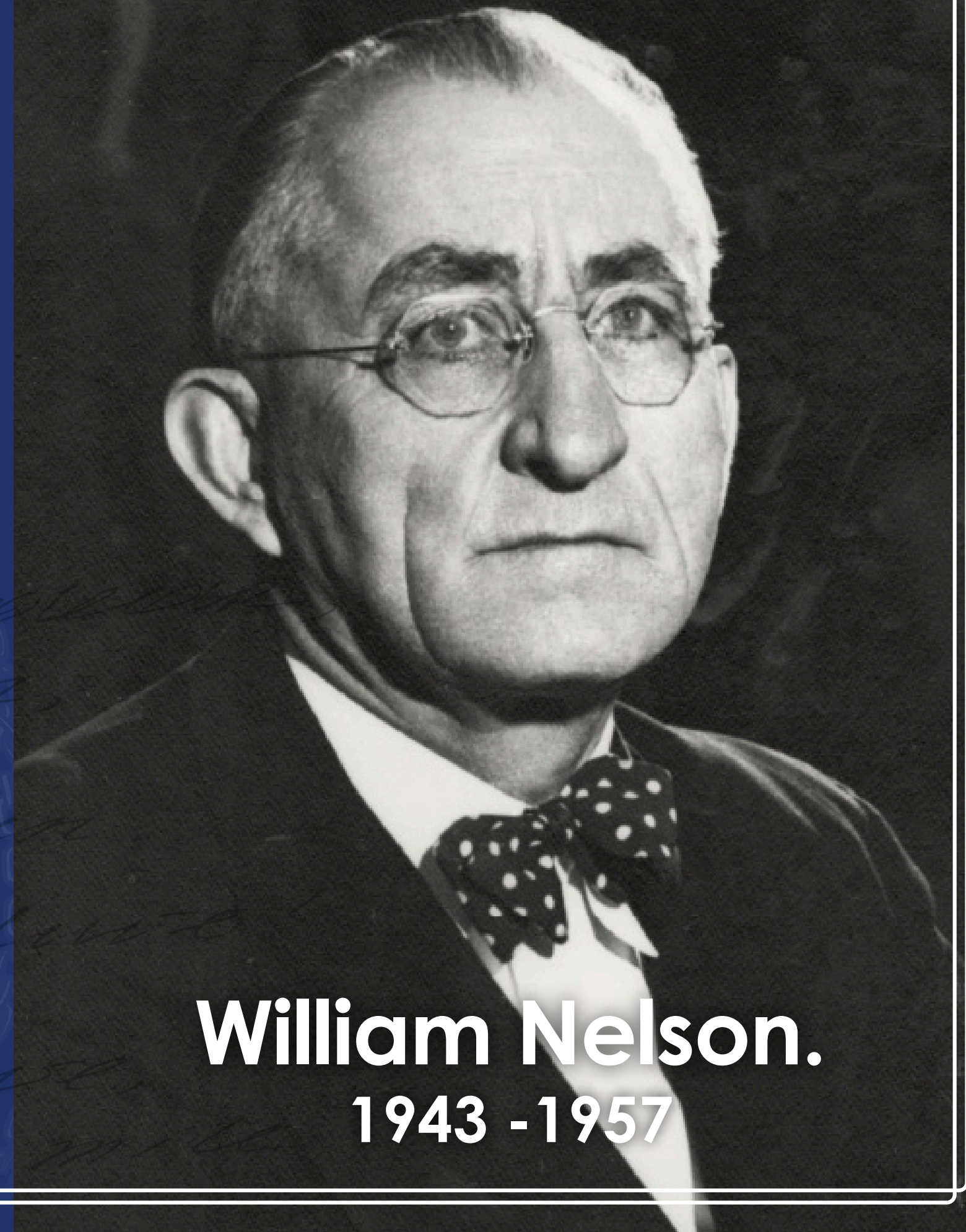
He was elected Mayor in 1946 and served nearly 12 years until his death in office on August 2, 1957. In fact, he had become so popular that in his last campaign he was acclaimed without opposition.

Mayor Nelson was in charge during the post-war construction boom that saw the Chemical Valley grow rapidly, creating thousands of new jobs. The City's population increased from about 25,000 to more than 40,000 during his years in office.

There were constant demands for new roads, sewers, sidewalks, street lights and parks. Council provided these services without going into debt. According to a contemporary newspaper report, Nelson had a "pay as we go approach to civic business." He was also Mayor when the City's boundaries expanded from East Street to Murphy Road.

By the time of his death, just days before his 72nd birthday, Sarnia had grown into a modern and prosperous community with the highest average wage in Canada.

Today, the fountain in front of City Hall is named in his honour.



**William Nelson.**  
1943 - 1957

Mayor Marshall Murphy Gowland was a man ahead of his time. A generation before Sarnia Council debated building a multi-use complex, Mayor Gowland advocated the establishment of a new civic centre.

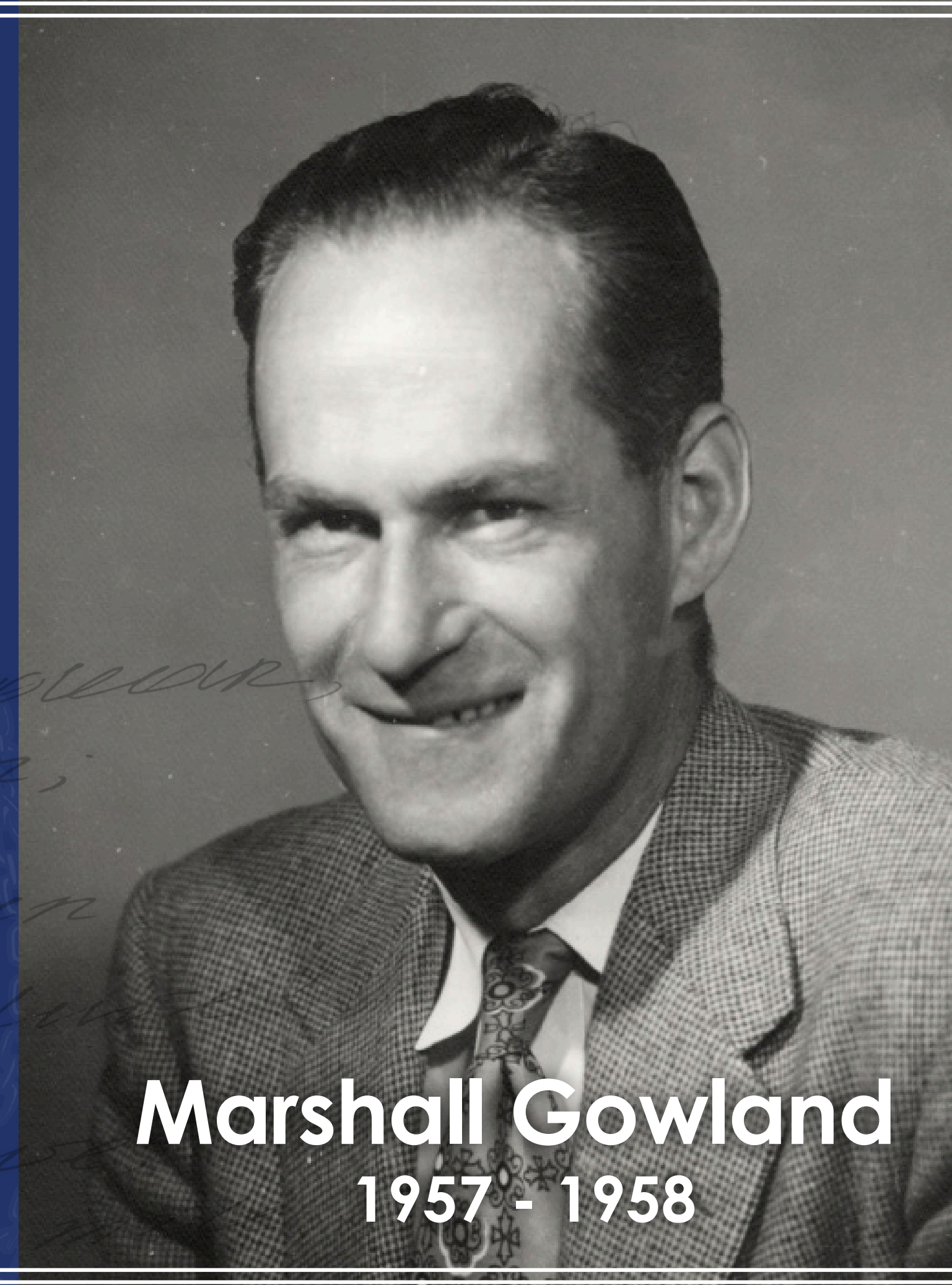
Born in Milton in 1913, Gowland studied medicine at Queen's University. During the Second World War he put his training to use at the War Emergency Hospital in Warwickshire, England. After the war he moved to Sarnia and quickly gained a reputation as an outstanding local surgeon. He also supported organizations such as the United Way, the Red Cross and the Cerebral Palsied Society.

Gowland was elected to City Council as an Alderman in 1952 and served more than five years. When Mayor Bill Nelson died suddenly in August 1957, Gowland was chosen by fellow councillors to finish the late Mayor's term.

The new Mayor strongly supported plans for a community centre. Under his leadership the City Planning Board spent 16 months drawing up plans for the project. Unfortunately the project never got off the drawing board and was eventually rejected by Council.

Gowland had better luck getting a much-needed sewage treatment plant started. Planning for the \$3.7 million project was completed before he stepped down at the end of 1958, and the plant was built the following year.

He died on September 26, 1966 at age 53. Marshall Gowland Manor on London Road is named in his honour.



**Marshall Gowland**  
1957 - 1958

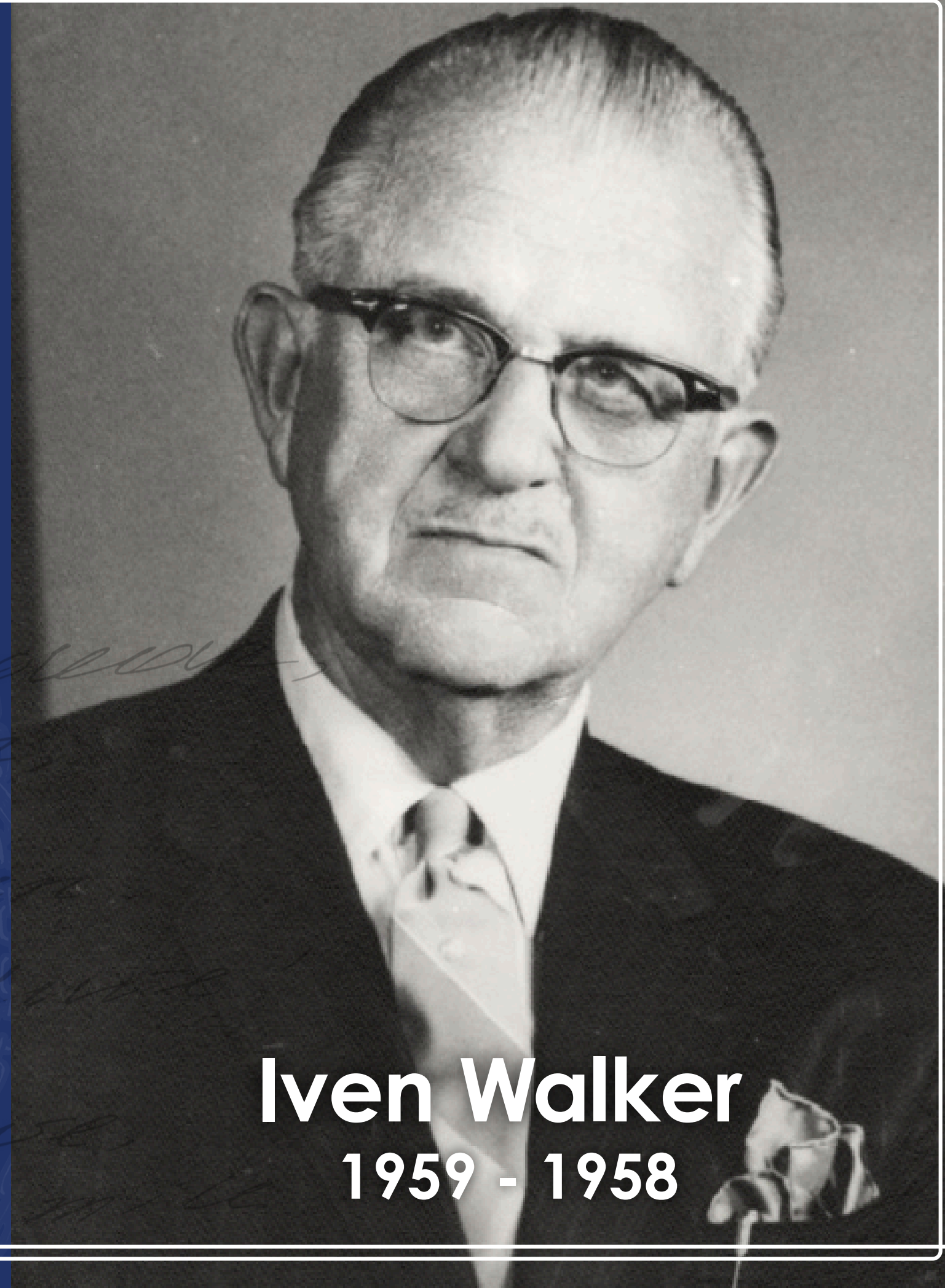
He paved the way for a Sarnia General Hospital expansion and had a hand in the creation of Lambton College. But Mayor Iven Walker is probably best remembered as the man who brought the Queen to Canatara Park.

Born in Petrolia in 1898, he lived in Sarnia most of his life. Along with his brother Fred, he founded the Walker Brothers store, a business that remained a community fixture for decades. He was also credited with helping pioneer the mall concept in local retailing.

Walker ran for Council in 1946 and won an Aldermanic seat. In 1959 he was elected Sarnia's 61st Mayor. One of his main goals was to expand Sarnia General Hospital, and he turned the sod to start the project. He also tried to bring a university to the City. Although that idea was rejected, Queen's Park later agreed to establish a Community College in Sarnia.

The highlight of his career came in July 1959 when Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip visited the City. The royal yacht Britannia sailed up the St. Clair River and docked at the Imperial Oil pier. Thousands gathered along the waterfront and in Canatara Park to welcome the Queen.

Walker served four years as Mayor before stepping down in 1962. He retired in 1973 and died on October 2, 1990 at age 92.



**Iven Walker**  
1959 - 1962

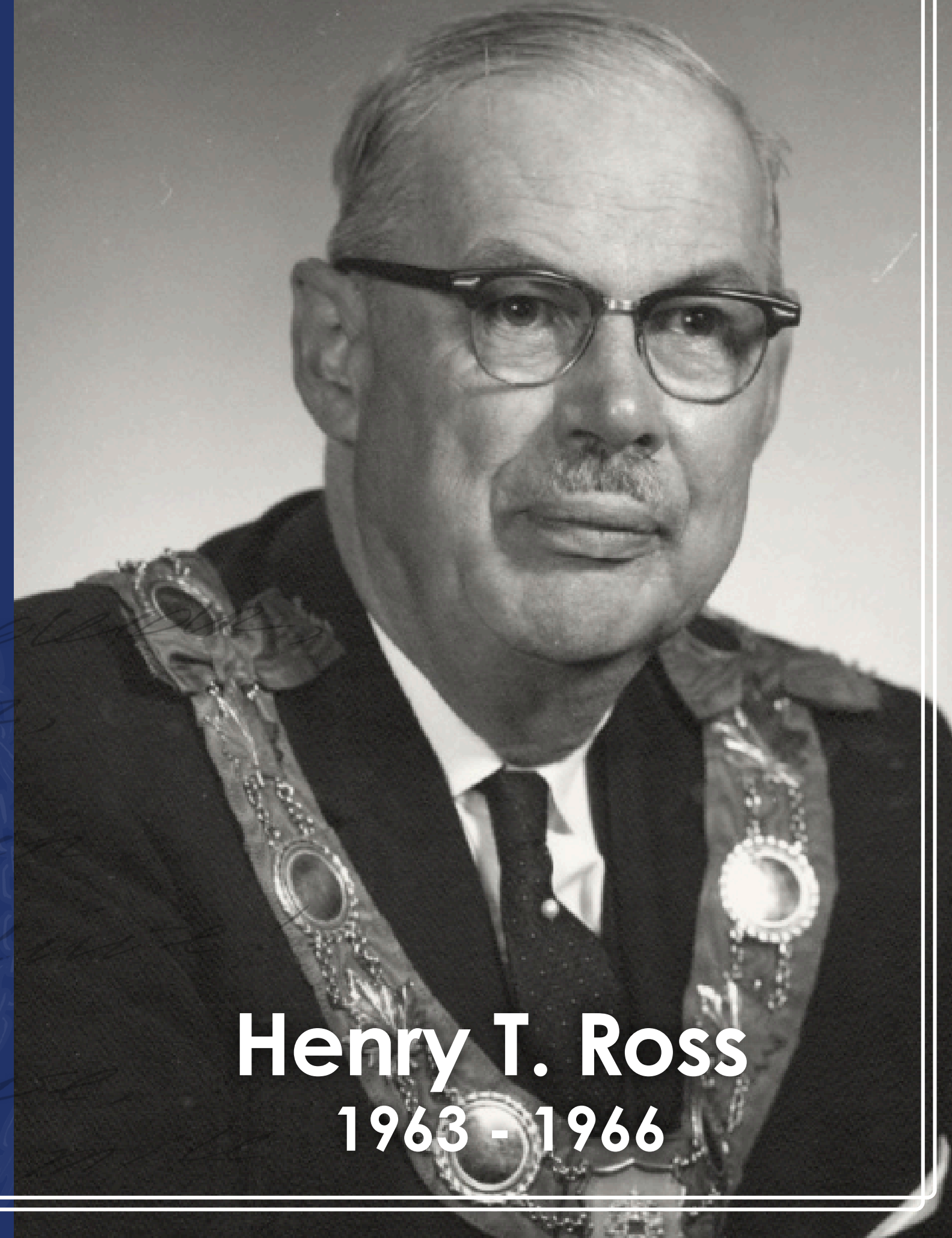
He was the man who opened Sarnia's waterfront to the public.

Henry T. Ross, the City's 62nd Mayor, was chiefly responsible for the creation of Centennial Park. Born in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia, he graduated from McGill University with a degree in economics. During the First World War he served overseas with the 1st Canadian Tank Battalion. After the war he moved to Sarnia and spent two decades working as a manager for the Royal Bank.

Ross was elected an Alderman in 1959 and became Mayor three years later. He spearheaded planning for the waterfront park that was built as the City's Centennial project. Ross insisted that open space along the river would be more valuable for future generations than other developments.

Centennial Park became his greatest achievement, but other major projects occurred during his term. Council opened a new City Hall and the Sarnia Public Library and Art Gallery during his administration. He also served as President of the Chamber of Commerce, the Sarnia Golf and Curling Club, and the Sarnia Riding Club, and was involved with Lambton College and local hospital boards.

Mayor Ross died in October 1989 at age 90.



**Henry T. Ross**  
1963 - 1966

Sarnians can thank Paul Blundy for the fact that the City has a home for the aged today. That's because Blundy, who was Mayor from 1967 to 1974, led the Council that saved away \$750,000 a year for three years in order to pay for construction of Marshall Gowland Manor.

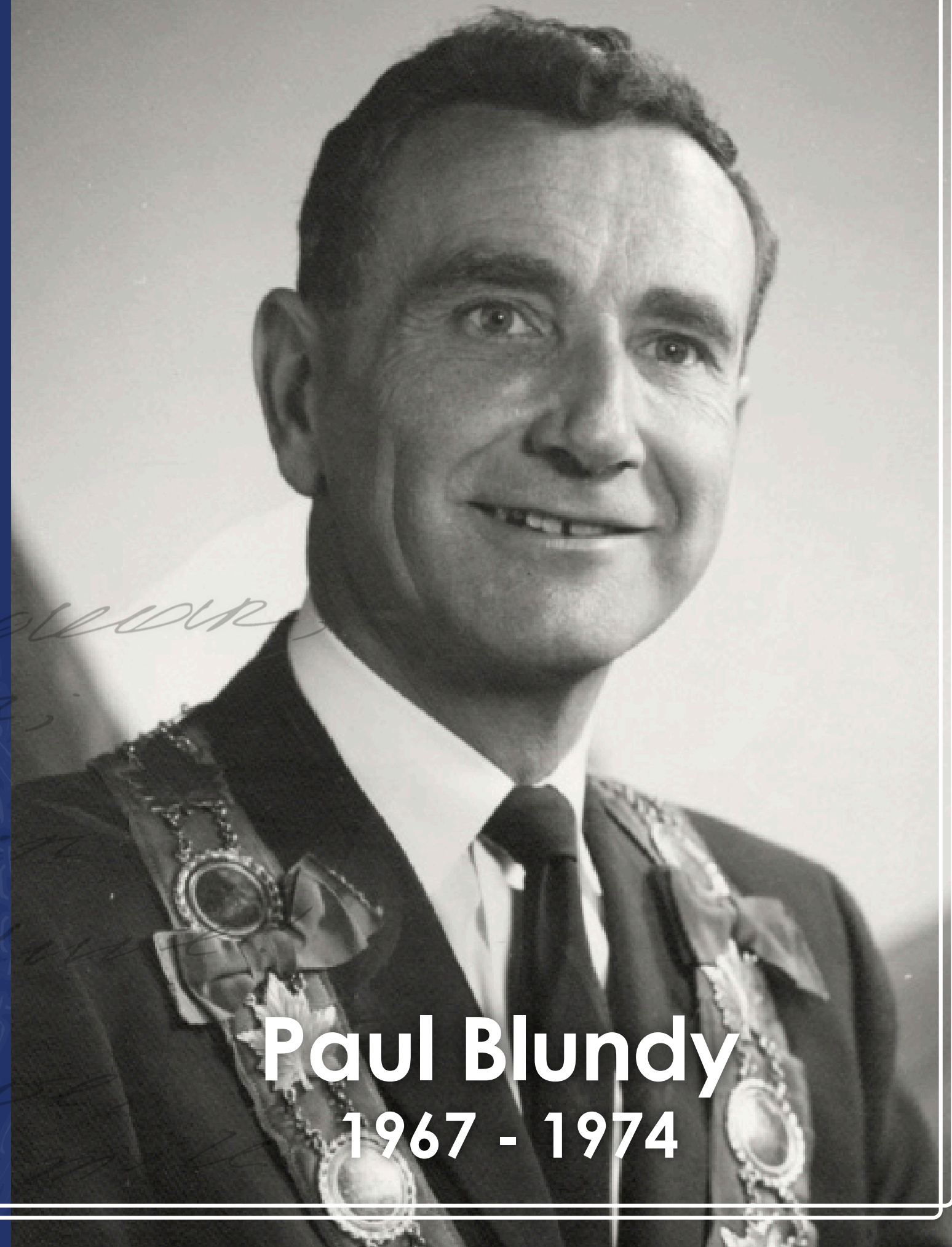
Born in Sarnia on March 23, 1918, he served in the Royal Canadian Navy during the Second World War. Shortly after the fighting ended he co-founded the McKenzie-Blundy Funeral Home with partner Don McKenzie.

Blundy was extremely active in community life even before being elected Mayor. He served as an Alderman, a Rotarian, and as a member of the Knights of Columbus. He was also a member of the Chamber of Commerce and sat on the St. Joseph's Hospital Board. He served for a dozen years as an Alderman, during which time Council agreed to establish Centennial Park. After that he was elected the City's 63rd Mayor in 1967.

The new Mayor pushed for construction of a home for the aged and expansion of Sarnia's boundaries. Marshall Gowland Manor was built before he left office, but a 1971 bid to expand the City failed when the Ontario Municipal Board rejected Sarnia's attempt to expropriate neighboring communities. Later Mayors continued the effort, and the City boundaries were eventually extended from Murphy Road to County Road 26.

Blundy was one of the longest-serving Mayors in Sarnia's history, holding office for eight years before being defeated in 1974 by a young Alderman named Andy Brandt. Later he defeated Brandt in a provincial election and served three years as Sarnia's Member of Provincial Parliament.

Blundy died in May 1992 while walking in Canatara Park. He was 74.



**Paul Blundy**  
1967 - 1974

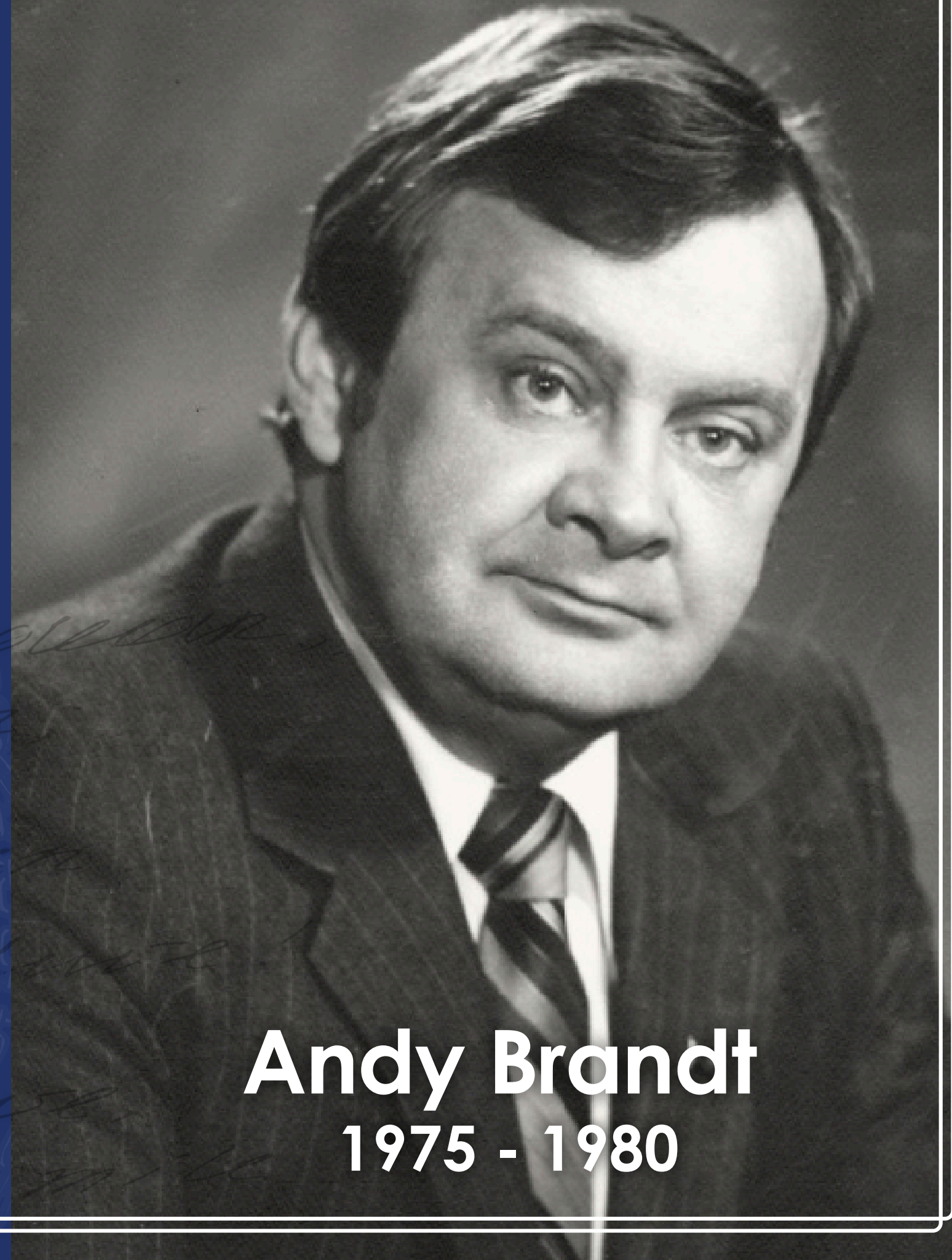
Andy Brandt was one of the most active and popular Mayors in Sarnia's history. Elected 64th Chief Magistrate in 1975, the 36-year-old London, Ontario native immediately set out to transform the face of the municipality.

Working with private developers, Brandt helped replace a row of crumbling old buildings along the west side of Front Street with modern high-rise office and apartment towers. He once recalled that Sarnia's waterfront had looked run-down and unattractive for years.

Council granted the rezonings needed to make the high-rise developments possible, but insisted the land behind them remain public so residents could walk along the waterfront from Centennial Park to Ferry Dock Hill. Early in his second term Sarnia became the first Ontario municipality to obtain a \$1.1 million loan under the Ontario Downtown Revitalization Program. Along with other loans, the total spending on downtown revitalization reached \$5.5 million.

Brandt also convinced the T. Eaton Company to open a department store in the planned Sarnia Eaton Centre. During his six years as Mayor, the value of downtown projects reached \$50 million, including \$30 million for the Eaton Centre. Meanwhile Chemical Valley experienced a billion-dollar building boom with projects such as Petrosar and Union Carbide.

Brandt was elected Sarnia MPP in 1980 and later became a cabinet minister and leader of the Progressive Conservative Party. He later chaired the Ontario Liquor Control Board.



**Andy Brandt**  
1975 - 1980

He stood up for the little guy. That was the reputation enjoyed by Marceil Saddy, our 65th Mayor.

The London, Ontario native argued against tax increases at every turn, using his well-worn example of how Council's actions would impact on the "little old lady on Brock Street". During an interview, former Alderman Don Poore, who served on Saddy's Council, said, "Marceil was a populist Mayor who wanted to hold taxes down. He made it stick then and it still sticks today. It's been a long time since we've had a significant tax increase here".

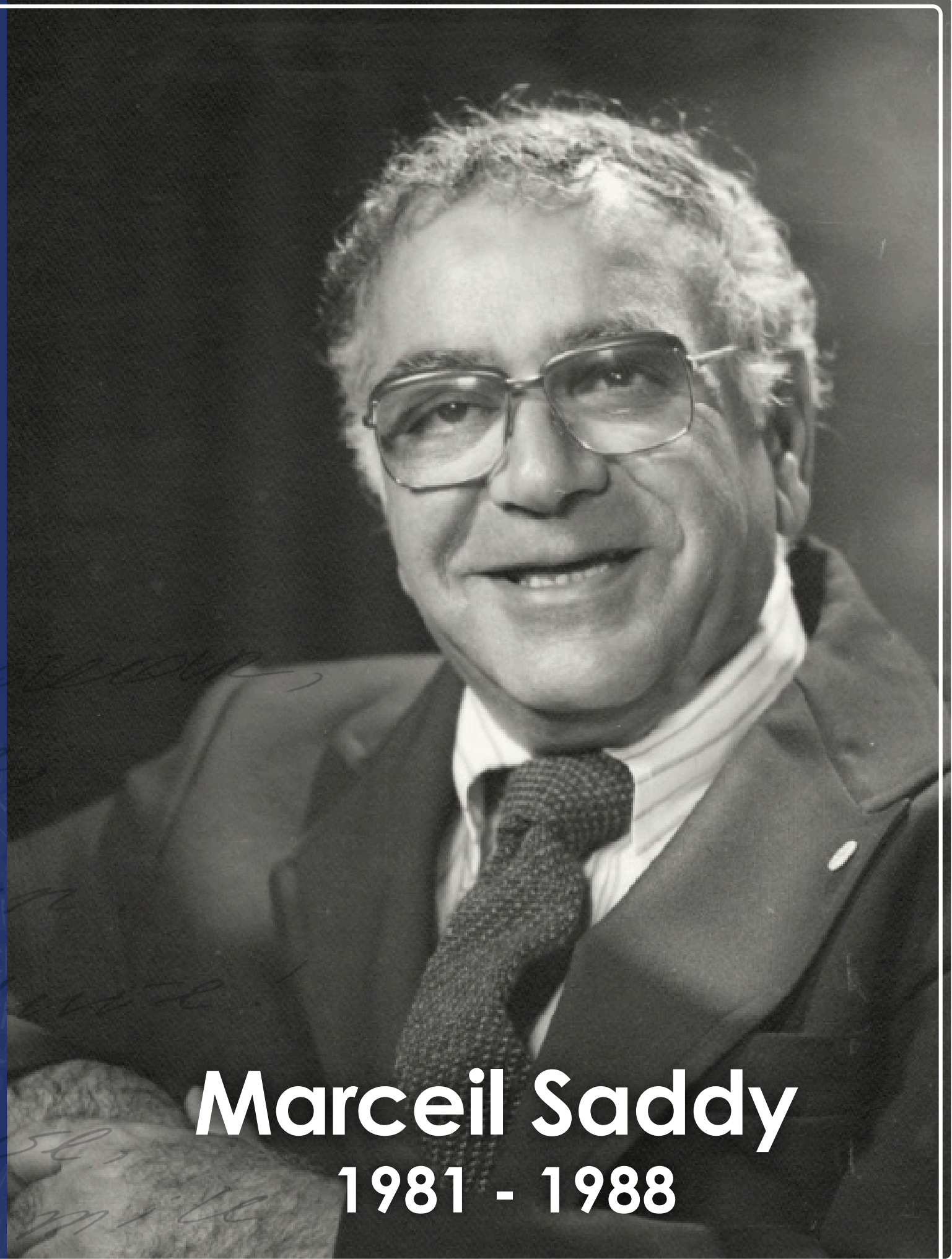
Born in 1924, Saddy graduated from the University of Western Ontario before coming to Sarnia with partner Jack Fullerton to found the "Gazette" weekly newspaper. While covering Council meetings as a reporter he became interested in municipal politics and ran successfully for an Aldermanic seat in 1966. His political career was off to a promising start but in 1972 he lost a bid to unseat incumbent Mayor Paul Blundy.

Re-elected as an Alderman in 1974, Saddy went on to win the Mayor's chair six years later. He soon proved to be a popular Chief Magistrate, winning landslide re-election victories in 1982 and 1985. Working with senior government officials, he helped secure Sarnia Bay Marina and a new Sarnia Airport terminal. He also had a hand in a dramatic upgrading of the City's VIA Rail Train Station.

During his time at the helm Council also built a new police headquarters and converted the old Lochiel Street School into a community centre. Mayor Saddy was also credited with playing a crucial role in development of a senior citizens' home on the St. Clair River. On the downtown redevelopment front, his Council approved a loan program providing up to \$150,000.00 to business people who renovated the exteriors of their buildings.

Mayor Saddy's greatest political obsession was a desire to expand the City's boundaries. He fought for years for an amalgamation with Clearwater but didn't live to see the 1991 marriage between the City and Town. However, Mr. Poore believed Saddy helped make amalgamation possible by keeping the issue alive over the years.

Mayor Saddy, a life-long bachelor, died in office of lung cancer on March 7, 1988. He was 63.



**Marceil Saddy**  
1981 - 1988

He was known as the great “fence-mender” of Sarnia politics. That’s how people who served with Ron Gordon remember his brief tenure as the City’s 66th Mayor.

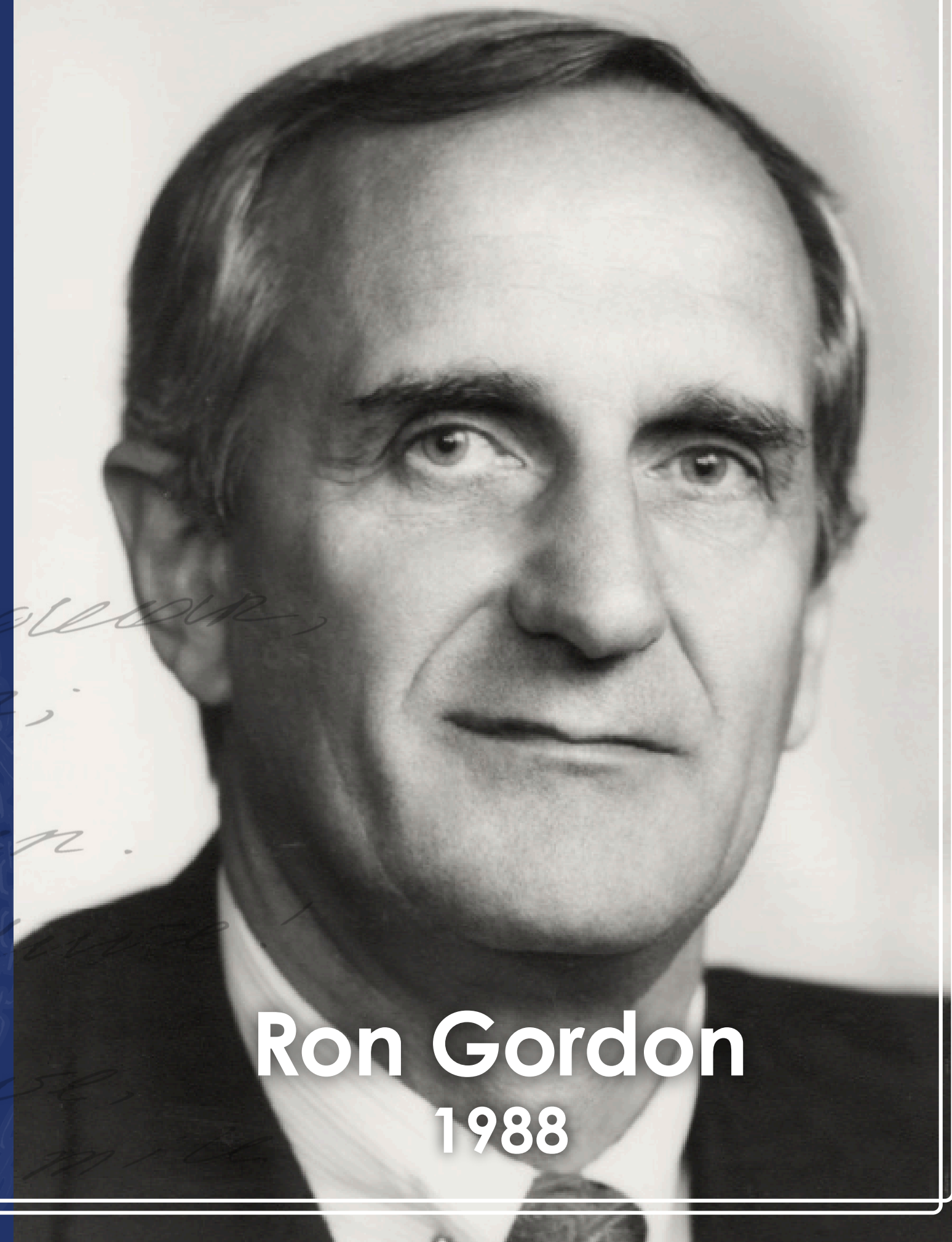
Gordon was born in Timmins in 1938 and moved to Sarnia at age two. After graduating from the University of Windsor with a Business Administration degree, he helped found Kel-Gor Ltd., a company that manufactures industrial valves and pipe fittings.

He was heavily involved in community activities before entering politics, including Canada Day committees, the Ontario Handicapped Games, and fundraising for Sarnia General Hospital, the Women’s Interval Home and Huron House Boys’ Home. In 1984, when a vacancy occurred on Council, Gordon accepted an invitation from Mayor Marcel Saddy to fill the position.

Three years later a divided Council faced a potential judicial inquiry into whether an Alderman was leaking confidential reports to the media. Gordon refused to participate in finger-pointing and encouraged councillors to accept each other’s word. Eventually the inquiry was dropped. When Mayor Saddy died in office on March 7, 1988, Council again became divided over who should finish the term.

Council chose Gordon after he promised not to run in the next election. During his short time as Mayor he helped stabilize Council and pushed several initiatives including market-value property assessment, redevelopment of the Children’s Arena site, expansion of Sarnia’s boundaries, and establishment of a 911 emergency telephone system.

Within a month of taking office Council approved the 911 system. Mayor Gordon served from April to December 2, 1988, and, true to his promise, did not seek re-election.



**Ron Gordon**  
1988