**Stamford Centre**

**By**

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*The following are my recollections of Stamford Centre in the years that I lived there and went to Stamford Collegiate. I am now 89 years of age and as you can imagine, my memory is somewhat dampened after seventy-four years. I may have missed a few places of business and I may have misspelled names, but that is the way it is today, in my life. Stamford Centre will always, always be a fond memory of my past.*

My years at Stamford Centre seem so long ago and it seems I lived there for many years, in fact, it was long ago…1946. My life in Stamford Centre was only eight years in length, but so much happened to me in those eight years. I was fifteen when my dad was transferred to Niagara Falls and had a house built at the corner of St. John Street and St. Peter Street. The Stamford United Church was on one corner, John Marshall public school on the other corner and a family by the name of Pew on the fourth corner. I have fond memories of my short time in that area. My brother went to John Marshall public school and I went to Stamford Collegiate Vocational Institute, to be exact.

“Stamford Centre” or “The Five Corners” as it was fondly called, was the business hub of the area. On the north-west corner one could find Meadow’s Pharmacy, Collard’s Red and White grocery, George Powell’s butcher shop, a barber shop, Forgie’s hardware, Schmaltz’s Shoe Repair shop and then, the teen hangout, The Hub. Tucked away, up an alley behind all these stores was Norm’s print shop. Across the road on the north-east corner was a beauty shop and Hope’s Restaurant and on the south-east corner a gas station. Where the meeting of Portage Road and Drummond Road came together, forming a “V”, there was the Imperial Bank. On the south-west corner stood a magnificent house owned by the Collard family.

Let me tell you about the individual businesses. Today, they would be considered either ‘old fashioned’ or ‘unique’. To the people of Stamford Centre, they were owned and operated by friends and neighbours.

Meadow’s Drugstore was owned and operated by Bill Meadows. In today’s dictionary Bill’s picture should appear opposite ‘neighbourhood druggist’. Bill was the epitome of the down-to-earth person who dispensed wisdom, advice and prescription drugs. Just inside his store was a ‘soda fountain’… you know, the place where the kids could go for a soda, milkshake, sundae or an old-fashioned ‘fountain coke’. If you had a good relationship with the ‘soda jerk’ you could get the coke stronger than the prescribed formula with a few extra shots of coke syrup.

Collard’s Red and White grocery was owned and operated by Curt Collard; I understand his father owned and operated it before Curt. To enter the store, you had to go up three or four steps to the main door. The floors were of the old-fashioned kind, bare hardwood and well worn. A customer was always greeted warmly by Curt or one of the staff. The aroma that assailed your nostrils was that of sharp cheese. You see, right there in front of you when you entered, was a stand with a glass bell covering a round of sharp, old cheese. The cutter was a piece of wire attached to the stand base at one end and wound around a piece hardwood dowel at the other end. Curt could wield that cutter like a samurai sword and slice off a piece of cheese the exact weight that you ordered. The shelves in the store were stocked with all the products needed for the average family… no fancy stuff there. The store seems small, to me, as I recall it now, but in fact it not only held all the groceries one would need, but it housed the post office for the area. Little boxes with glass fronts and fancy grills adorned the walls to the right of the ‘cage’ where the postmaster sat. For a few months, I worked at Collards with my friend Brian Olsen, stocking shelves and delivering groceries, then I procured a job at Monroe’s fruit farm.

Next to Collards was George Powell’s meat market. Since I went into the store with my mother on rare occasions, as I was working and she shopped on Saturdays, my memories of Powell’s are dim. I do know that when little kids went into the store with their moms they were treated to a ‘wiener’ or slice of bologna. I was too old for that treat, much to my chagrin.

Then, there was a barbershop. For the life of me, I cannot remember the name of the barber, but it may have been Kieghan. I think there might have been two barbers chairs, but I am not sure. I do not remember there being more than one barber. I know that is where I had my hair cut until I was a little older and then I went to a shop near Stamford Collegiate as it was handier for me.

Next, was the neighbourhood hardware store owned and operated by Al Forgie. It had everything anyone could ever need to fix, repair or mess-up a job around the house. Al knew his business and he knew where everything was located in that store. Eventually, Al took on a partner in preparation for retirement; it became Forgie and Johnson.

At the end of this row of stores was a shoe repair shop owned by mister Schmaltz. I never had an occasion to enter this establishment, but I did go to school with mister Schmaltz’s son Frank. I understand that before the shoe repair store a bakery occupied this building, but I cannot swear to that.

Norm’s print shop was up the alley behind all of the stores and did a flourishing business. My friend Harry began his working career there as an apprentice typesetter.

As I recall, all of these stores were connected. Today, they would be considered a small plaza; in those days they were just ‘the stores at the centre’.

Not connected to these businesses was a teenage hangout, The Hub. When the teens exited the bus from school it was right there at the centre and many of them headed for The Hub. It was our generation’s answer to Happy Days’ “Arnold’s”. There was a juke box, with song selectors at every table, space to dance and great food. I was either at band practice, orchestra practice or working after school, so didn’t have time for such stuff. It remained the centre for teens for many years with changes of owners and names.

Across the road was Hope’s Restaurant. They served many of the adults in the area and had the best fish and chips around. The Hopes lived at the back of the restaurant and, through their hard work, were able to spend November to April in Florida. Many of the adults in the area envied them and missed them, along with their fine cooking.

Every ‘centre’ must have a service station and in those days, it was known as a ‘gas station’. Keith had the BA franchise for Stamford Centre. He ran a service station where one ‘pumped’ their own gas and ‘checked’ their own oil… and you thought that was an invention of today. When I say pumped gas that is exactly what you did. The pumps where about ten feet tall with a very large, glass cylindrical tank at the top. On the side of the pump was a long handle. When you wanted ten gallons of gas you pushed the handle back and forth and pumped gas into the glass tank. When you had around ten gallons in the tank you put the hose into your car’s gas tank and gravity emptied the glass tank, no electricity required. Keith was a big man, a very big man so, consequently, he hardly ever came out to the service area… just sat and collected the money.

The Imperial Bank was the main stay of the centre. It sat in the “V” formed by the convergence of Drummond Road and Portage Road. Everyone who lived around the centre must have banked there. I opened my first bank account there in 1946, after I received my first pay, from my first job. I procured my first bank loan in 1951 in order to buy my first car. After I was married I lived in a duplex on Portage Road just south of the bank.

The only building on one of the five corners that did not hold a business was Curt Collards home; it was on the south-west corner. I mentioned earlier that it was moved south on Drummond Road to an empty lot on the south side of Demoel’s Bakery.

There were a few businesses on Thorold Stone Road. One, I remember, was a ‘feed’ store. They sold feed of, course, and bailed straw along with yards of burlap and other farm requirements.

I believe the feed store was torn down and a new building was constructed. This became Frank Branscombe’s insurance and real estate office.

So much for Stamford Centre itself. Life in Stamford was relaxed, safe and families lived there all their lives. Their children lived there and their children after them.

One of my fondest memories was of the Teen Town, organized and run by the brothers Doug Bell and Jack Bell. Teen Town was the centre of activity for many teens in the area. The Bells ran a well-organized teen dance every Saturday evening. They had music of our time, big band music, Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, Harry James and more. It was solid music from seven to midnight. When eleven-forty-five arrived Moonlight Serenade, by Glenn Miller, was the last song. What made this dance place so unique is the Bell’s did not stand for any nonsense, no drinking, no drugs, no fighting. If you broke the rules you were ejected and if you broke them enough you were banned for attending ever again… it was safe and it was fun. Many a couple fell in love there and kept company until they married. Where was this utopia? It was in what is now called, The Stamford Lions Memorial Hall.

The Memorial Hall was the meeting place for many organizations, parties and wedding receptions. In my time, the hall had a large, green front lawn and on that lawn stood an artillery cannon from WWI. On my last visit to Niagara Falls, I noticed the cannon had been removed and an addition put on the front of the old hall. Stamford number one Girl Guide Company met in the hall for years. When our family moved to Stamford Centre, the company was captained by Ella Collard; she recruited my mother as her assistant and the two of them counseled ‘their girls’ for years. When Ella was expecting her first child, James, she asked my mother to take over the company, which she did happily, and ran it until she found it necessary to retire.

My brother Bob built a small electronics repair shop at 4010 Elberta Street; that building still stands. The last time I saw it there was a dog-grooming shop occupying the building.

Moving away from the five corners a few blocks west to Longhurst, we would find the Stamford Centre Volunteer Fire hall. This was a hub of activity at different times of the year. The firemen held a carnival in the summer at The Stamford Green which was situated between Portage Road and St. Paul Street; the ‘fire hall’ was the centre for planning and storage of equipment for the carnival. The carnival was the big activity of Stamford Centre’s summer. In the winter, the firemen flooded the back yard of the fire hall providing a skating rink for the kids of the area. When the siren sounded for a fire, volunteers flooded the streets and followed the trucks to the blaze. During the war the siren blared at curfew time to let the kids know it was time to go home. The Stamford Green and the cenotaph for fallen veterans was also the centre of activities for Remembrance Day. The veterans from Stamford Centre would parade to The Green and participate in a Remembrance Day service.

Stamford United Church stood on the north-west corner of St. John Street and St. Peter Street. The basement of the church was alive three nights a week with meetings of two cub packs and a scout troop. The scout troop came first and the founder of that troop was a former scouter and war veteran, Roy Goodman. Roy gathered eight teen aged boys to form the nucleus of the troop. My brother and I were the first two recruited and we brought in six of our friends… the troop grew from there. Next, came the first cub pack; another veteran, Jack Grierson and his wife Vivian led this pack and then Ray Becket started the next pack. When Ray retired from the leadership, my girlfriend, Betty Sorley and I took up the challenge and we led Ray’s pack until we were both transferred to Toronto for our jobs. Stamford Number One scout troop grew and flourished and Stamford Number One cub packs grew and supplied recruits for the scout troop.

Stamford Centre was flanked on two sides by farms. I worked on one of those farms… the Monroe farm owned and run by Jack Monroe and his brothers, Pat and Frank. My time there saw many changes in workers. Since men had not yet returned from overseas the work crews were made up of young boys and girls. The boys worked in the fields and orchards and the girls worked in the fruit stand on the corner of Thorold Stone Road and Dorchester Road. The well-organized crews worked hard; Jack appreciated that fact and he was proud of his ‘kids’. The farm had been a family farm for generations and the old family home stood on the south-west corner of Thorold Stone Road and Dorchester Road. It covered much of what is now Cherrywood Acres where I lived in the 60s and 70s.

The face of Stamford Centre has changed with time; I am not sure if it has changed for the better, but that is ‘progress’, I guess. Once when I was talking with Jim Collard, son of Curt and Ella Collard who owned and ran Collard’s Red and White store, he said, “You can take the boy out of Stamford, but you cannot take Stamford out of the boy.”

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