

TIME TRAVELLER'S DIARY: The Year of Three Mayors

By Shawna White

Tucked away in a corridor behind the Council Chambers is a wall honouring the past Mayors of Aurora. While each has their own interesting story to tell, it was the portrait of George W. Baldwin that caught my eye as he served as our Mayor from February to April 1939. Yes, that is correct, Mayor Baldwin served for just two months!

A bit of background: George W. Baldwin was the son of William J. Baldwin, who served as Mayor for 12 years beginning in 1908, and the grandson of George S. Baldwin who served on Council and was Reeve in 1896 and 1897. George W. Baldwin had also sat on Town Council for four years from 1935-1938.

It is interesting to note that in addition to the Baldwin's political aspirations they were also the proprietors of Baldwin's Mill, whose final location on Wellington St. East next to the rail line is currently up for heritage designation.

George W. Baldwin was elected Mayor by acclamation on February 14, 1939 after then Mayor, Dr. C.R. Boulding, resigned to accept the position of medical officer of health, but it was not to last.

In an article titled Mayor Baldwin Resigns, the Aurora Banner (April 21, 1939) reported on the proceeding of the April 17 Council meeting where the Mayor tendered his resignation and retired from the Council room. No editorial comment or further explanation was given. The only information provided was that the resignation was given after Council instructed the Town's solicitor to bring in the bylaw confirming the appointment of a Clerk and Treasurer made at the last meeting. This was enough to prompt the Mayor to resign.

Apparently, the appointment of a new Clerk was made at the expense of the current clerk, Mr. Morley Andrews, who had served in that position for the past twelve years. Reasons cited for Mr. Andrews demotion to Assistant Clerk included inefficient bookkeeping methods, antiquated office routine, and insubordination, among other complaints. This did not sit well with Mayor Baldwin who requested that the resolution of Council to appoint a new Clerk and Treasurer be rescinded. When the motion was defeated, the Mayor resigned.

The story was picked up by the Toronto Daily Star who reported that a letter was received from the auditor (Mr. Hilborn) deploring the action of Council in depriving Mr. Andrews of the Clerk's Office, a fact that was disputed by the auditor himself. (Banner, April 21, 1939).

Several nomination meetings were needed to find qualified candidates for Mayor, and the election was finally held on June 2, 1939. Two candidates stood for office, previous Mayor J. M. Walton, and newcomer, Howard Morton. In a plea to voters Morton states: "I am criticized because of my vocation, my youth and because I have no previous municipal experience. Council have shown no regard for dignity or experience in the past, and the very fact that I have no municipal experience is in my opinion one reason why I should be elected." (Banner, June 2, 1939)

The election had one of the highest turn out rates recorded, a whopping 85%! Next time you are in Town Hall, stroll over to the Mayor's wall to see who won, and remember to cast your vote on October 22. Let's see if we can beat that turnout.