

TIME TRAVELLER'S DIARY: And so he bought the company

By Jacqueline Stuart

One day in September 1944, the Time Traveller was strolling along Wellington Street when he noticed some extra activity at the Aurora General Store, at number 14: people were dropping by to say farewell to the owner, Louis Fingold.

Louis Fingold was born in Ukraine and came to Canada in 1906, when he was twenty. He and his wife Jennie would have five children. It was said to be the eldest, Sam, who, driving through Aurora one day in 1931, saw a vacant space in what was known as the Wells Block and decided to open a store there. Although it was not twenty-year-old Sam but his father Louis who leased (and later purchased) the spot, the newspaper ads for the opening of the Aurora General Store in August of 1931 were indeed over Sam's name.

The Fingolds occupied just the western section of the building at first, but a ghost from the eastern part may have affected the family. That space had housed Aurora's first cinema, showing silent movies. Louis was interested in opening a talking picture theatre but there was no mention of him when a site adjacent to the Wells Block was acquired for the Royal Theatre in 1933. One wonders if he was a silent partner.

Ambitious Sam acquired two more stores and turned the running of the Aurora location over to his father. In 1937 Sam branched out and bought the Roxy Theatre in Mount Forest. Over the next twenty years he would build or purchase more than forty cinemas in Ontario.

Shopkeeping may have lost its appeal for others in the family, too, because in 1944 it was announced that the Fingolds were giving up the store. Hence all the good-byes that September morning.

What next? Sam's two brothers also became involved in the Roxy chain. Their parents moved to London, Ontario, where Louis had purchased, of course, a theatre.

In the 1950s Sam sold most of the Roxy theatres to Odeon. He became an important investor elsewhere. In 1962 he gained control of Foundation Company of Canada, then Canada's largest construction company. Can one see the CN Tower from the Burlington Skyway? Both were Foundation projects. A few years later Sam again made business news headlines by acquiring control of Salada Foods. Thirty-five years earlier he had been selling Salada tea from behind the counter of the Aurora General Store.

Neither Louis Fingold nor his sons had long lives in which to enjoy their material successes. Louis died in 1949, aged 63, and none of his sons reached the age of 60. On the other hand, Louis's wife, Jennie, and their two daughters all lived into old age.

The Aurora General Store, purchased by Larry Rubin in 1944, would become an IGA grocery. When the IGA moved, the Wells Block was purchased by Stuart Barfitt and Ernie Ross for their Aurora Home Hardware. Today Ginger's Cupcakes & Desserts and Dayse Convenience occupy the front shops. Drop in: buy a cupcake, some tea bags, and go home to watch an old movie, sip and snack, and think of the Fingolds.