

# A HISTORY OF

The Sovereign Tanning and  
Manufacturing Co. Of Delhi

The Sovereign Mitt, Glove & Robe  
Co .Ltd,

The Simcoe Shoe & Glove Co.

The Simcoe Mitt & Glove Co. Ltd.

This online version is a sub-set of the original document,  
covering only the early years.

The entire original is on file at the  
Norfolk Heritage Centre, Simcoe, Ontario.

## DEDICATION

This history of the Sovereign Tanning Company to RANPRO INC. has to be dedicated to the wives, who had to put up for years, with the joys and pains of The Factory.

To my mother Catharine, Bill's wife Lillian and my wife Barbara I dedicate this book.

Forgive us for all of the time that we stole from you and the children and the endless, around the dinner table, conversations concerning "The Factory."

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To brother William James Whitside (Bill) for all of his help and remembering. He really got into the spirit of the search.

His health may not be the best but his mind is as sharp as ever.

## FOREWORD

At the time that we were President and Chairman of the Board of Directors, first William J and then myself, Robert L. Whitside, were the 5th generation of the family in the business. When my son Kimberley and daughter Robin joined us, they became the 6<sup>th</sup> generation. A history of the Sovereign factories to Ranpro Inc. therefore is part of our family history. This connection with glove companies goes back through three generations of Whitside and one generation of Heath and one generation of Sovereigns.

Most old companies were family businesses and certainly that is how we started and finished. We are proud of our family history and heritage, it was with some sadness that the business passed into other hands. I am afraid it has been so, with many of the old family businesses.

Kimberley Whitside carries on in his safety and work-clothing business in Simcoe called The Mitt & Robe Company. He took the name from the old Sovereign Mitt, Glove & Robe Company

This therefore, is a family <sup>1</sup>history as well as the history of our Company. The Company has changed since 1987 as the only glove business left is the sale of those that are made in the far east.

Over the years the family put their whole life in to the business. It provided us with a good income and allowed us to raise our children in relative comfort. The companies never made a great deal of money but there were a number of good years along with the bad ones.

I hated to think that there would not be any record of our old companies and our involvement. For that reason I decided to put the story in to print for those who might find it of interest.

As the project progressed we began to realize that we needed to recognize some of those loyal and wonderful employees who also dedicated their life's work or even a large part of their working time to "The Factory."

If we missed someone, believe me it was not intentional. Too much time has passed and our memories are bound to leave some things and people out.

We could not have done it without a lot of fine people's help.

Robert L. Whitside  
#602 - 17 Mill Pond Ct.      Simcoe, Ontario      February, 2001

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<sup>1</sup> The Whitside and Sovereign Genealogies can be seen in the archives of the Norfolk Historical Society in Simcoe, Ontario.

# Chapter 1

## THE JACOB SOVEREEN YEARS

1865-1909



The founder of the business was Jacob Sovereen, (1817-1909). As a matter of interest, Jacob's great grandfather, Frederick Sovereen', (1714-1805) had emigrated from Germany in the early part of the 1700's to Schooley's Mountain, New Jersey in the United States.

Frederick i<sup>2</sup> had nine sons and three daughters. In 1799, they left the USA with twelve other families including our direct ancestor, their second son, Jacob ii, grandfather of our Jacob generation iv.

The original Jacob ii<sup>3</sup> by this time, was married and had two sons and a daughter so it must have been quite an expedition that traveled to Canada. The younger son of Jacob ii<sup>4</sup> was Henry Boltis iii Sovereen (1787-1878) who was the father of the founding father of our Company, Jacob iv, (1816-1909). Jacob iv built the first mills in the village of (Fredericksburg), Delhi and lived to the ripe old age of 93. He was extremely active for all of those years

It is most difficult once you get back into the 1800's to establish dates of beginnings of business as records were not always kept or, in many cases such as ours, were destroyed by fire. We believe that about 1865, Jacob Sovereen iv, formed a company that was known as the Sovereen Tanning and Manufacturing Company of Delhi. As the name indicates, this was both a tannery and a manufacturer of leather mitts and gloves, wool mitts and gloves, woolen robes cowhide robes and buffalo robes. In those years most villages had their own tanneries. We really do not know anything about the tanning activity carried on in Delhi.

From the *Simcoe Reformer* of April 1889 we read that "Jacob Sovereen has a gang of men engaged to repair and fix up the old canning factory in Delhi. He said he expects to have the building repaired and that will make it as good as new". Jacob at this time would have been in his 73<sup>rd</sup> year.

In 1893, R. A. Spears purchased an interest in the Coat, Robe and Mitten Factory from Jacob Sovereen. We do know that around October 1896, fire completely destroyed the old marble works building owned by Jacob Sovereen. The lower floor was occupied by Geo. Schmidt's shoe factory and the upper floor by Sovereens Robe and Mitt factory

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<sup>2</sup> R. L. Whitside has written the Sovereen/Sovereign genealogy. It is available on computer and in the Archives of the Norfolk Historical Society in Simcoe, Ontario. Detailed data is also available from the author of this history.

<sup>4</sup> I indicates the generation starting with Frederick Sovereen I the patriarch of the family who came from Germany to New Jersey and then brought his whole family to Norfolk County in 1799.

The first meeting<sup>5</sup> to form a new company was held in Delhi on the 28th day of December, 1901. The Sovereign Tanning and Manufacturing Company of Delhi became a new company to be known as the Sovereign Mitt, Glove and Robe Company of Delhi. The selling price was the grand sum of \$1250. Jacob Sovereign was the President of this company because out of the 1,000 company shares, he owned 324 shares, the largest block of shares. The rest of the shares were sold to friends and business acquaintances in the Delhi area. W Spears was a director. One must realize that at this time Jacob, born in 1816 would have been about 84 years of age. On Feb. 6 of 1902, Denton Dalton first appears as a Director of the Company. At this meeting, Jacob transferred his shares, stock and fixtures, etc., of the Sovereign Tanning et al, Co. to the Sovereign M. G. & R. Co. for \$1250 and he was to get a 6% dividend annually to repay the \$1,250. Any balance was due in five years. The Dalton's also had a glove factory in Delhi at this time!

Shareholders at this time were as follows, Denton Dalton, 100 shares, Rufus Dalton, 40 shares, Jacob Sovereign, 320 shares, J. Chandler, 80 shares and W. H. Whitside 40 shares. So this is the first we see of the Whitside's being involved. I believe Wilbur. H. Whitside was the Manager of the Delhi Canning Co. at this time. Wilbur Whitside would have been about 41 years old.

At a meeting of Feb. 12, 1902, Mr. Jago was the manager of the company at a salary of \$600 per year. If he hit a sales forecast of \$34,000 he would get an advance of \$25 for every \$1,000 of sales over that. He was to guarantee 20% profit and his maximum salary was not to exceed \$1,000.

In December of 1902 they passed a resolution to push their trade in to Manitoba and the North West Territories.

On January 3 of 1903, Nelson Sovereign who had been on the Board of Directors was appointed Managing Director of the Company at a salary of \$500 per annum. He resigned on January 16, only 13 days later. One can only wonder what happened, also, what happened to Mr. Jago? There is a notation that on April 21 of the same year, that Nelson Sovereign transferred his shares in the company to Mary E. Whitside, (Wilbur's wife and Jacob's granddaughter). Jacob then became the Managing Director again and Nelson became the Assistant Manager, still at \$500 per year and Jacob got only \$260 per year. Jacob would be 87 years of age and quite evidently needed a Manager. Most of these meetings were held in Jacob's house, which would suggest that he was not in the best of health.

On June 20, 1903, W. H. Whitside was made Manager as of July 1<sup>st</sup> at a salary of \$1,200 per year. On August 21 he was made Secretary Treasurer of the Company.

Denton Dalton was President on January 28<sup>th</sup> of 1904. W. H. Whitside was Managing Director and Secretary.

The Sovereign Mitt, Glove and Robe Company of Delhi Limited advertised at this time that they were manufacturers of "The Northwest Black Galloway<sup>6</sup> Robe" which was warranted "not to get hard from use or age." This robe was used in sleighs for warmth in wintertime and no doubt galloway hides were used, as buffalo hides were no longer available. This was a genuine full cowhide, tanned with the hair still on and lined with wool lining on the flesh

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<sup>5</sup> From minutes of the Board meeting. The minute books are in the hands of Ranpro Inc., Simcoe, Ontario.

<sup>6</sup> Galloways were a breed of cattle. They had originated in Scotland and were recognized by a large black band over the shoulder area. The rest of the animal being white.

side and trimmed with red felt. They were also manufacturers of dog, coon, prairie dog and buffalo gauntlets, mitts and gloves in saranac, calf, mule, horse, buckskin, mocha, napa tan, both lined and unlined. The Sovereign Company also made men's Galloway fur coats. These must have been wonderful coats to behold and would be the envy of every hippie today.

In the notes of the Board minutes of January 28, 1904, we see queries raised by other members of the Board as to what they are going to do about that company in Simcoe called The Simcoe Mitt Glove and Robe Co. (No relation to our later company by a somewhat similar name.) This company was evidently taking some of their business because of the similarity of the names to Sovereign. There was also mix-up in parcels and shipments, etc. In the *Simcoe Reformer* of July 3, 1903, there was a note re The Simcoe Glove, Robe and Mitt factory had signed an agreement with the town and will at once proceed to put the building formerly occupied by the Harding Shoddy Company in to shape for a factory, for their business.

This caused many heated debates in Director's meetings. It appears that the Simcoe Company was also using Jacob Sovereign's personal cards to help them sell their products. Finally it comes to light that Jacob has an interest in the Simcoe firm! One can feel the heat of the meetings just by the reading of the minutes of the Board of Director's meeting.

The Sovereign Company's Board of Directors, let by Denton Dalton, finally decided to take legal action against the Simcoe Company and their own President Jacob, but to no avail. Its obvious that Jacob did not hold all of the shares of the Delhi company and was not happy having his competitor Denton Dalton from the Dalton Mitt & Glove Company involved with his company.

Jacob finally agrees to sell his interest in the company to his nephew, Nelson S. Sovereign. We then oddly enough hear no more about this original Simcoe Glove Company. Jacob lost control of the Delhi Company for a six-month period but as the majority shareholder, seems to have persevered and regained control and turned the business over to Wilbur Whitside.

One can't help but wonder if Jacob helped form the Simcoe Company and maybe retained the rights to the name and from here came the idea to move to Simcoe in 1916.

In 1903 he transferred the management of the company totally to Wilbur Whitside his granddaughter's husband.

But on January 23, 1906, Jacob was elected President once more and Denton Dalton was elected Vice President. This could hardly have been a very friendly operated company.

Next on January 26 of the same year, W. H. Whitside resigned as Manager and Secretary. He probably had had enough of the friction and turmoil. A joint committee of Jacob Sovereign, Dalton and Bell were to manage the company. This lasted until May 22<sup>nd</sup> of 1906 when Jacob resigned and B.F. Bell was appointed President.

Now the family machinery must have started to kick in. Can you imagine the meetings and discussions before the eventful date of May 10 of this year when W. H. Whitside bought 322 shares of stock at \$25 each in the Company? Sometime between June 13, 1906 and January 2 of 1907, Wilbur Whitside was elected President. If you look back a few paragraphs, you will see that Jacob owned 320 shares. I guess he finally let go.

He then lived for another two years, dying in 1909. Jacob was a real entrepreneur. I might mention that he also had a gristmill and a general store. In the 1877 Historical atlas of

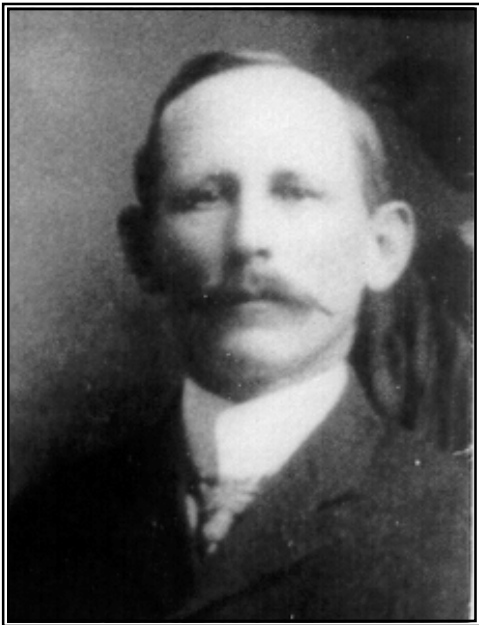
Norfolk County, he is listed as the Captain of #6 Company of Middleton of the Sedentary Militia. James Whitside (Wilbur's father), was his Lieutenant. And of course we should not forget politics. Jacob was in the Town Council for 27 years, Reeve of Middleton 13 years and Warden of the County of Norfolk, three years and he also was acting as magistrate for over 20 years. He was also listed in Middleton, the township around Delhi, as a farmer and grain merchant.

Great Great Grandfather Jacob was quite an entrepreneur!

## CHAPTER 2

### Wilbur Whitside 1903 - 1916

Jacob Sovereign had two daughters. The eldest, Nancy Jean Sovereign, married Mortimore Heath and they in turn had two daughters but no sons. Nancy Jean died at the age of 28 and as Mortimer remarried, it appeared that their grandfather Jacob raised the two girls. Also being very vigorous and in good health, Jacob continued to work well into his 80's. His eldest granddaughter Mary Elizabeth Heath (1861-1945), married Wilbur H. Whitside and so, Jacob passed his business on to his granddaughter and her husband Wilbur Henry Whitside (1860-1916).



W. H. Whitside actually joined the Board of Directors in November 1902. In the *Simcoe Reformer* of July 10, 1903 it was announced that Wilbur Whitside was the new manager of the Sovereign Glove Factory of Delhi. So he was general manager from then until the time of his death in January 1916.

Prior to taking over the management of the glove factory, Wilbur had first been a salesman and then the manager of The Delhi Fruit & Canning Company, (later the Dominion Canneries) of Delhi. Our father, Bruce, remembered going to a cottage at Niagara on the Lake (or Pt Dalhousie), in the summer while his father was operating a seasonal canning factory there. It is interesting to note that in 1889 Jacob Sovereign had a canning company in Delhi that he was fixing up. In 1903 The Delhi Fruit

& Canning Co. was located at the corner of Main and William streets near the railroad station. It was a good-sized establishment turning out half a million cans annually.

In April 29 of 1913, fire struck the Sovereign Mitt, Glove & Robe Co. at 3:30 a.m. The two story brick building was completely destroyed. The loss was estimated to be between \$25,000 and \$30,000. The family suspected arson. Luckily it was insured for \$8,000. *Doesn't seem like enough considering the loss.*

The fire was investigated by the Pinkerton National Detective Agency and a bill submitted for same but there did not seem to be any conclusion reached as to the cause of the fire. The Dalton's who owned the competition Dalton Mitt & Robe Company were considered as well as Wilber Sovereign a 1<sup>st</sup> cousin, one generation removed of Jacob Sovereign. He was a troublesome young man my father said.

In the December *Simcoe Reformer* of 1913, the following is written: The new factory for the Sovereign Mitt, Glove and Robe Co., Delhi, is nearly completed and will be about twice the size of the old one destroyed by fire some months ago. The offices are on the main floor with W .H. Whitside's private office to the rear of the general office area.



In 1916, misfortune really struck. On June 17, W. H. Whitside, the President, died of cancer. The company management was taken over by his second son, Bruce W. Whitside who was a college student only 22 years of age. There didn't appear to be anyone else available to do it.



Being in the middle of a war didn't help with many men away in the army.

On November the 11th, Wilbur's eldest son, Leroy, was killed in the war in France.

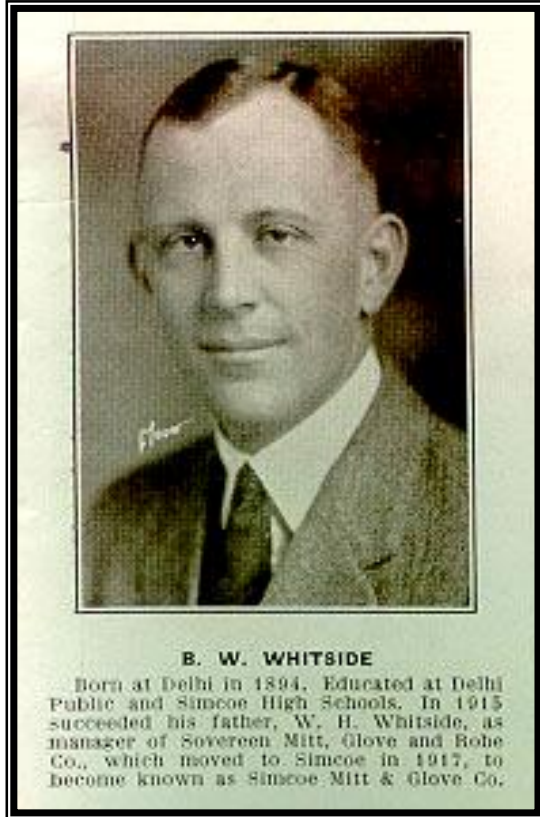
On December 1st, the complete new factory was burned to the ground. Once again arson was suspected but nothing could be proved. The Dalton family had a glove factory and had been fierce competitors for years. First a Sovereign factory burned then a Dalton factory and now the Sovereign factory burned again.

It is hard to imagine the stress on the family and the difficulty in making the decisions that had to be made. Bruce Whitside was caught up in events totally out of his control. I always wonder if he wanted to come in to the business or if he dreamed of another direction in his life. My sisters have told me that our father really wanted to be a doctor and perhaps that was what he was preparing for at Woodstock College. I believe Woodstock College was a Baptist Church sponsored College. Oddly enough neither Bill or I ever discussed this with our father.

## Chapter 3

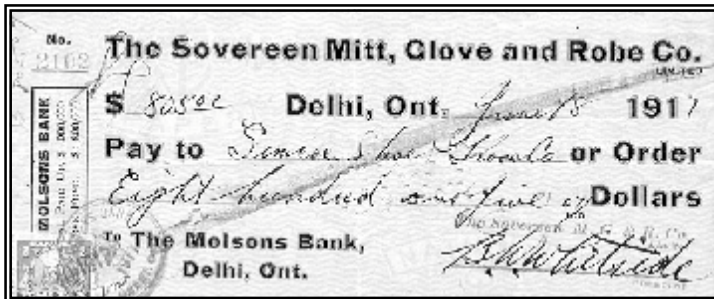
### Bruce W. Whitside

1916 - 1969



With the death of Wilbur Whitside after a relatively short illness, (abdominal cancer), on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1916 there was no one to manage the company. Bruce Whitside was a student at Woodstock College and his older brother, Leroy, was overseas in the army. Because of his father's death he was required to take over as the manager of the Company. He had from June to December 1st 1916 to learn more about the operating business before fire burned the factory, completely to the ground. Quite an undertaking for a 22 year old. The picture<sup>7</sup> of Bruce on the left was taken prior to August of 1924

This burning meant that they either rebuild again in Delhi or move quickly to any available building. The rebuilding in Delhi would have taken some time and as theirs was a seasonal business, with deliveries to be made in the late fall, I can only assume that it was felt that, getting back in to business quickly, was very important. It appeared that there was an available building empty in Simcoe so it was decided to move there.



This building at Pond and Water Street had been originally the N. C. Ford Distillery and had a number of additions made to it by 1916. We think that the original building was the office and immediate adjoining part before the larger section to the south, which is larger and an obvious addition.

B. W. Whitside, in January of 1917, approached Mr. George Luscombe of the Unique Shoe Co. of Simcoe. From this came an agreement to put the Unique Shoe Company together with the Sovereign Mitt, Glove and Robe Company. The Unique Shoe Company was formed on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1914. Its office and equipment had been moved to Simcoe and they had built an

<sup>7</sup> The picture is from the book "Simcoe and Norfolk County" printed in 1924 by the Pearce Publishing Co., in commemoration of the Simcoe Reunion of Old Boys, August 2<sup>nd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>, 1924.

addition on the building. We are assuming that this is the first addition to the south of the present building. In 1916 George Lucscombe<sup>8</sup>, a prominent Simcoe businessman was the President of this company.

On April 10, 1917, the name of the Unique Shoe Company was changed to the Simcoe Shoe and Glove Company Limited<sup>9</sup>. At this point the Whitside's owned 50 shares out of the 265 new shares of the Company.

By February, 1919, they owned 80 shares

On November 3 of 1919, a meeting of share holders of The Simcoe Shoe & Glove Company was held at the office of the Company to enact a by-law authorizing the Directors of the Company to sell the shoe business to the Allied Shoe Co. This was the shoe part of the business currently carried on by the Simcoe Shoe and Glove Co. This was done but The Allied Shoe Company only lasted another 2 years and declared bankruptcy in 1921. I believe it was then sold to the Tilsonburg Shoe Company that carried on for quite a number of years.

On March 13, 1922, the name of the Simcoe Shoe and Glove Company was changed to the Simcoe Mitt & Glove Company. Bruce Whitside said that as fast as the Glove Co. made any money the shoe division lost it. Mr. Luscombe remained as President until March of 1928 at



which time B. W. Whitside took over as President of the company, having gradually become the major shareholder.

The Shoe Company used the lower, south part of the building and when they were sold this part became empty. We have no record as to who occupied this part of the building until the British Knit move in about 1928. We wonder if maybe our dates are wrong and the British Knit actually started earlier and used the lower floor after the Shoe Company moved out.

By 1928 the newly formed Simcoe Mitt & Glove Co. was doing very well, its sales trebling that of the sales when they were in Delhi. It would appear that they made some kind of a deal

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<sup>8</sup> In 1888 George Luscombe was a cofounder with Joseph Brook of the Brook Woolen Company. I personally remember "Old Mr. Luscombe" as we called him. He lived not too far from us on Colborne Street and gave we kids licorice from a bag that he always had in his pocket.

<sup>9</sup> You can still see the name of the old company on the back of the existing building that is used as a Senior Citizen Centre.

with the newly formed British Knit Company<sup>10</sup>. Merrill Hare one of the partners in the British Knit became a very close friend of Bruce Whitside. A new addition was built to the south and the British Knit moved into the lower floor of the original section plus the new section and the upstairs of the new section. There was a hand-operated elevator in the new section of the building as well as the one in the oldest section of the original building. As all manufacturing was done on the upper floor the Simcoe Mitt & Glove used this hand operated elevator continuously.

On February 11 of 1924 the salary of the Secretary/Treasurer and General Manager, Bruce Whitside was set at \$50 per week.

In 1927, a committee of three members of the Board was set up to look in to the general affairs of the company and in May of the year, two of the Director, Mr. Murdoch and Sutton resigned and were replaced by William G. Jackson and J. F. Cameron<sup>11</sup>. Jackson was appointed Vice President. In July of the year, B. Whitside's salary was increased to \$70 per week.

The British Knit remained in this building until their move to the old automotive plant on Head Street south in the late 1930's we believe. The section they were using was then rented to the Brewers Warehousing until the building was sold to Springsteads.

The factory building appears to be built in five sections.

The original building which would have been the N. C. Ford Distillery is on the north end and included the Mitt & Gloves original offices, shipping and store room with the knitting room and finishing room upstairs.

A solid firewall, then a short section to the south. This lower part was rented to the British Knit, then the Brewers Warehouse, and finally held the Springstead new fancy offices and production section after they bought the building. The Mitt & Glove had the upstairs of this part. The sewing room on the east side of the centre posts and the leather cutters along the windows on the west side. Machinery up to the 1950's was powered by two large electric motors and leather drive belts that fed a central drive shaft from which each individual machine was supplied by a small leather belt.

The next section to the south, I think was open with the second section and really looks like one large room.

The far south section built by Bruce Whitside in 1928 was built as additional space for the British Knit, both upstairs and down.

Originally there was a one story shed roof building attached to the south wall of the original warehouse. This was on the river side and it contained a big old dirty, coal, hand fired boiler. Access was obtained through a fire door in the warehouse. They used leather scrap for fuel that provided a very hot fire but also tended to burn out the tubes in the boiler because of the acid in the leather. When the new boiler (gas) was installed after Springstead was gone, the old boiler pit was filled in and a new floor poured. A Butler steel frame and steel clad warehouse section was added to the rear of the building in the 1960's for more warehouse space for the Mitt & Glove Co.

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<sup>10</sup> Some of this data is from "A History of Simcoe, 1829 -1929, written by Lewis Brown and published by the Pearce Publishing Co. Ltd., Simcoe, Ontario, 1929. Copy held by the author.

<sup>11</sup> William Jackson was a friend of Bruce Whitside and Jack Cameron was his wife's brother. Both were successful businessmen.