

FOUNDER OF THE HOLMAN FIRM BUILT BETTER THAN HE KNEW

The Beginning And Growth Of The World's Largest Small Town Store

ROBERT TINSON HOLMAN, founder of the century old Prince Edward Island firm that bears his illustrious name, was a man of many parts.

This man, who was destined to establish what is now "the world's largest small town store," was born in Saint John, N.B., March 13, 1833. He was the eldest son of James Holman, a native of Plymouth Rock, England, who came to Canada at the age of twenty-one and built up a successful mercantile business in the New Brunswick port city of Saint John.

Adverse fortune in later years reduced the father's business to a point where young Robert Tinson Holman, at the early age of 13, was forced to go out into the world and earn his own living. He headed south soon after and became a clerk in a wholesale drugstore in Boston.

In this capacity the founder of Holman's showed the qualities which were to stand him in good stead when finally he launched into a business career of his own. His genius for organization and devotion to detail won him distinction. His department developed from chaos to perfect order and neatness. During the two years he worked for the Boston drug firm he distinguished himself as an employee of unusual talents for business enterprise.

While in the United States, Robert Tinson Holman yearned for his homeland in Canada's Maritime Provinces. Equipped with the modern business practices of the larger centre, he returned to the Maritimes and went to work with his brother, Samuel Holman, who operated a store in Charlottetown which was favored with an extensive West Indies trade.

He later became a clerk for another brother, James L. Holman, who was doing business at St. Eleanor's.

Soon the business was expanded into a partnership when James L., was joined by a brother-in-law of the Holman's, John Andrew. The firm started business under the name of John Andrew and Company and transferred its operations to nearby Summerside.

TAKES OVER

However, it was a short-lived

partnership. After only a year, John Andrew decided to accept a teaching position with McGill University in Montreal and his interest in the business was acquired by Robert. Business was not flourishing at the time but, aided by financial assistance from his brother James, the founder of R. T. Holman's, he persisted in the struggle to put the business on a paying basis.

He was only 23 at the time but, fired with the ambition of youth and equipped with the mental capacity to cope with the business world, he tackled the job nobly. His first store was only a one-room building, 30 feet long and 20

feet wide. This was the humble beginning of a firm which today is the largest retail business in Prince Edward Island.

When R. T. Holman died in 1906 at the age of 73 he left a flourishing business and a fine heritage for his two sons who stepped into his shoes to keep the Holman tradition alive.

The Holman founder, who married Miss Ellen McEwen on July 27, 1864, was survived by eight children. Two other children had died in childhood.

STRONG CHARACTER

R. T. Holman was a man of strong character, a man who knew his own mind but, did not force his opinion on others. He was an astute businessman but by nature was charitable and a friend of man and beast. In his dealings with the public, he was just and fair and treated everybody alike. There are many stories told about the founder of the Holman firm which attest to the kindness of which was an underlying virtue of this great Island storekeeper. One of these anecdotes came to light in this, the 100th anniversary year of the firm.

A widely-known and beloved Island clergyman, a retired Catholic priest, wrote to Holman's the following letter:

"On the occasion of your Centenary, I am prompted to write this note. When I was a young boy I went to Holman's in Summerside two days before Christmas. As a boy I had been ordered on an accordion and began to play on my own way. A young grandfather, R. T., came around and instead of giving me a good scolding, said—'Look here, boy, if you come down tomorrow night and play like that, I'll give it to you'—so on Christmas Eve I was there and after a few tunes R. T. came around and told the clerk to wrap it up and 'give it to the boy.' I always remember that kind act of your grandfather's. Again, while at High School in Summerside, my father took the family over to Sydney, Nova Scotia, where the boom was on. I decided to stay in Summerside, so I went to R. T. and told him my story and asked for a job. 'My boy,' he said, 'I'd rather see you continue in school, but under the circumstances, come down in the morning.' So, through his kindness, I was a clerk at Holman's until the fall of 1900 when I went to College. Roy Holman and I were cordial friends as school boys, and we had many happy days together in the big house on Holman's Island and elsewhere.

"Please pardon my boldness, as your grandfather did in his tactful manner. 'May the next hundred years be brimming with happiness and blessings for R. T. Holman, Limited. There is another story about Robert Tinson Holman which exemplifies the true nature of the man.

FED BIRDS

For the last twenty years of his life, regularly at seven o'clock each morning, he took a half bushel of oats from his granary and fed it to the five hundred pigeons that made their home in his numerous warehouses.

This small act was typical of his inherent kindness and the deep feeling he possessed for the welfare of others.

Such acts were performed without fanfare and were not done with any thought of gaining favorable recognition. R. T. Holman was a man who worked quietly, and consistently shied away from the limelight of publicity. His numerous acts of charity carried on over a span of half a century were mostly performed under a cloak of anonymity. He gave, and gave generously, to all worthy causes.

Another example of the unbounded generosity of this fine old Island gentleman is disclosed by the following incident:

One day there walked into the Holman store in Summerside a very young man whose father had died rather unexpectedly a short while before. As so often happens, there was little if any money left to the son to carry on with the difficult job of operating a farm which was not in too healthy a position financially. The father had been able to swing the load while he lived, but the son had to have money or new equipment right away if he were to save the farm and look after the family that was left. He was faced with this situation when he walked into Holman's store that fateful day many years ago.

A HELPING HAND

Robert Tinson Holman quickly perceived the troubled look on the face of the young man, and immediately approached him instead of leaving one of the store's clerks to do so. His words to the young man were recalled many years later by a clerk who overheard them. Cheerfully spoken they were, "And what can I do for you, my man?" Responding immediately to the kindness and sincerity of the tone, the young man described his predicament and ended by telling Mr. Holman that he had no money.

Not hesitating for a moment, the founder of the Holman firm took the young man to the hardware counter and told the clerk to give him whatever he needed. This kind act of charity and trust ended the young man's quest for a variety of items. Practically every requirement of the household of the successful farmers in his community, he never forgot the kind deed done for him by Mr. Holman.

His community was much the richer both materially and spiritually for his having passed that way.

EVERYONE BENEFITED

He was not necessarily a religious man in the sense that his adherence to any particular church singled him out for special treatment. His religion was of his own choosing and making and went deeper than any outward show of regular attendance at church services. He was what would be called a free thinker. Yet all churches benefited directly from his charity and his interest in the welfare of his fellow Christians. Although he refused to accept an orthodox religion, Robert Tinson Holman gave generously to all churches of all faiths.

In politics he was a Liberal, but nothing could ever induce him to run for political office. He believed in sticking to business and letting others attend to the affairs of state. This is not to say that R. T. Holman was not interested in government. On the contrary he took an active interest in all moves for the betterment of Prince Edward Island in particular and the Dominion of Canada in general. His advice was heeded in the council rooms and a candidate who had his blessing was sure of election. He was a fluent speaker

Tribute Paid The Founder Of Holman Firm

A citizen of Summerside paid the following tribute to the Founder of R. T. Holman Ltd., on the 75th anniversary of the firm.

A brave, honest, generous, noble man of nature, a foremost citizen, a hater of shams, a true and many-sided man, it will be long until we see his like again.

R. T. Holman was known all over the Dominion of Canada. Although he seldom left his beautiful home — and travelled but little — few men, however, were as well educated. When not engaged in business or in sleep, he was ever storing his mind with knowledge.

He had a small body but a great soul; a Liberal in politics and in religion he cherished the hope of Universal Salvation. So repugnant to him was suffering that old time orthodoxy was a nightmare, a hideous dream which he did his best to break up.

He knew the churches were a necessity, and every church in Summerside received his generous support with real financial aid but he hated shams, all cruel teachings, all hypocrites, whether in or out of a church. He was an Iconoclast, but his love for the idolator caused him to seek to destroy the idol, though it gave temporary pain.

Need seldom thought of succor from him in vain — to the deserving poor his hand was always open — if the money and money's worth he gave in charity were added together it would make a fortune.

His word was as good as his bond. Self-reliance was a dominant feature of his character. He would follow no lead — he must lead. This peculiar characteristic made him appear overbearing, self-willed and egotistical—but he was none of these. Indeed he was essentially a modest man — too modest to be as useful as he might have been, for it was hard to get him to speak in public, although he was a splendid speaker, with a wide range of knowledge and ready wit, fluent of speech, keen, cutting and sarcastic; when he did speak it was effectual.

He could not be induced to accept a public office. Had he sought election to any Parliament, on any ticket, it is doubtful if any opponent could have beaten him.

With the great mass of the people he was extremely popular. This was one secret of his success as a merchant.

His enemies were few and were generally self-made. To those who only knew him slightly he was paradoxical—socialistic — monopolistic, austere—humorous, kind—cruel, religious, small—large. The truth is he was skeptical, courageous — timid and great many sided, not easily understood, a close reasoner and deep thinker.

He worshipped the new; his face was always toward the dawn. He was an optimist, a lover of the light. Studies of Sanitary science, kindness to dumb animals, love of the beautiful and the breaking of idols were some of his pastimes and hobbies.

and possessed a remarkable command of the English language. Had he chosen to accept office, there is little doubt that he would have been elected by a large majority.

WAS WELL INFORMED

Mr. Holman was a great reader and he kept himself well posted by perusing the latest books and the periodicals of the day. As a result he was widely informed on many issues and few businessmen of his day had greater knowledge of the problems of that era.

However, it was not always a case of all work and no play for the man who founded Prince Edward Island's largest retail business.

Robert Tinson Holman, although he seldom found time for any protracted vacation, sought his relaxation in gardening and similar hobbies. His home was his pride and his flower garden was a thing of beauty.

No other businessman in Prince Edward Island, and possibly few in Canada for that matter, built such solid foundations as did R. T. Holman. He came up through the ranks and had a thorough knowledge of his business from the smallest to the largest transactions. When he died after more than fifty years as a shopkeeper, he left a business heritage which has been carried on by his descendants into its second century in a flourishing state and with promise of continued expansion.

Holman Tradition Proudly Retained

Prince Edward Island's largest retail establishment, the firm of R. T. Holman, Limited, like so many other large business enterprises, carries with distinction the name of its founder.

One hundred years ago, this proud Island firm was founded in Summerside by Robert Tinson Holman. At the end of its first century of service, the business is still controlled by the Holman family. The grandsons of the founder are guiding the destiny of the firm as it celebrates this year the centennial of its founding.

A century ago conditions were much different than they are today. It was a day when the rugged individualist such as Robert Tinson Holman could rise or fall on the tide of free enterprise which engulfed a whole new world. And the founder of this great mercantile business built on solid foundations. So well did he lay the groundwork for his chosen career that the firm of R. T. Holman is today known as "The World's Largest Small Town Store."

SOME THREE HUNDRED SOULS

made up the population of Summerside when young Holman hung out his shingle over the one-room wooden building on Water Street which was the forerunner of the store which today is the leading retail firm in the Province and one of the largest in the Maritimes. The tradition of service which characterizes the Holman's of today was established by the founder.

The one-room store flourished because of the business principles carried out by the founder. Business expanded rapidly and in 1895 Mr. Holman built a new and much larger store.

EXPANSION

When he died in 1906 at the age of 73, he had two sons trained and ready to take over the business. These two sons, Harry and LeRoy Holman, inspired by the leadership of the founder carried the Holman banner to new heights. The firm flourished under their policies and soon it became evident that additional space would have to be provided if progress was to be made. In 1914 the two Holman brothers converted a large brick warehouse belonging to the store and adjacent to it into a new store. This building still stands today and was the final accomplishment from the one-room store of 1857 to a full department store. It occupied almost a whole block in the heart of Summerside's business district.

It was during the regime of Harry T. and LeRoy Holman that the firm undertook what might have been considered a bold venture by a small town store. It started Canada's first mail order catalogue which was an object of wonder and an interesting reading piece for families throughout the Maritimes. The first issue came out in 1909. It brought a flood of mail orders from all parts of the province including a letter from a hinterland settlement in New Brunswick, the writer of which was apparently a bit confused. The address on the envelope was merely, "Old Man, Summerside, P.E.I." The letter reached its destination thanks to the ingenuity common to mem-

OLDERS THAN CANADA

Holman's store in Summerside is ten years older than Confederation. Its progress has kept pace with that of the province. It is doing the same adequate job today serving the town's population of 7,000 as its founder did when there were only 300 inhabitants. But it serves more than the town's population as its trading area stretches from Hunter River to Murray Harbour in the southeast and Elmira in the northeast.

This old Island firm is as modern in its merchandising methods as the newest shopping centres which are mushrooming outside the larger cities of North America. A progressive group of directors and departments are always alert for the latest and best merchandise which is imported to serve the wants of their myriads of customers. Holman customers are protected by a century old guarantee of service and satisfaction, Holman's have a proud boast that they will never knowingly be undersold.

Initiative And Vision Led To Great Store

The success of R. T. Holman, Limited in the mercantile world can be attributed largely to the initiative of the individuals who controlled the firm down through three generations.

R. T. Holman, himself, of course, blazed the trail. The idea of the department store was foreign to Prince Edward Island when he started business 100 years ago. The colony was small and the needs of the people were met by small stores in the few towns and villages which then existed.

But R. T. was a man of vision. He reasoned: if separate stores dealing in hardware, groceries, farm supplies, hats, clothing dry goods, etc. could be merchandized successfully under individual management, it should be practical to sell them all under one roof and with the same financing.

Thus the first department store of any size was established in the province.

Made Customers Feel Welcome

There are more ways of selling an item than by standing behind a counter. In fact R. T. Holman, Limited came out from behind that counter many long years ago. They came out on the floor to talk with the customer. They came out of the store to talk with the customer at his home.

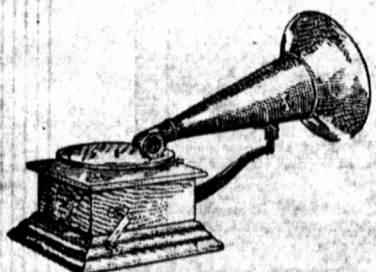
They also thought up other ways of increasing sales volume. One of the most successful of these ideas were the special contests run by Holman's.

One of the latest of these was the contest which gave \$1,000 to the Women's Institutes. Everyone voted for their favorite institute and they voted simply by dropping into the store.

The June bride contest is another favorite. In former years there were Popular Girl, Popular Boy contests. There are also bicycle riding contests and other athletic contests to interest everyone.

Holman's Catalogue Was Wonder Of Day In 1909

TYPE F, \$15.00



Type F.—Has a solid oak cabinet with a rich golden finish, a bell shaped back, and gold horn. Size of turn table 7 inches, will play 8 and 10 inch records. Has the new automatic grand sound box which gives marked distinctness to the sound. Single spring motor with friction clutch to regulate the speed. It can be wound while running. This machine will give the best of satisfaction. Price.....\$15.00

Take off your Hat to the Myers! BEST PUMP ON EARTH!

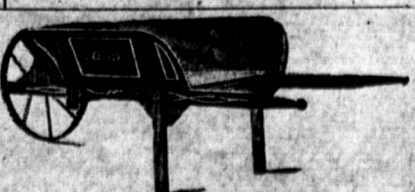


Myers Pumps are made by the largest pump concern in the world. In their construction are used only the very finest material. You will see imitations made of old cast-iron, but they are not Myers, accept no substitute. There are none "JUST AS GOOD"

No. R. 162—Myers Ratchet Top, with roller bearings, this causes rod to work straight up and down and work extremely easy, has reversible spout, adjustable base. This pump with 3x10 cylinder, galvanized steel rod, 4 ft. pipe, complete ready for work, price \$4.75

No. R. 172—Force Pump, same style as above, complete with cylinder, price \$5.50

There were bargain galas in the old days. Here are reproductions of articles and prices from one of the old R. T. Holman, Limited catalogues.



GARDEN WHEEL BARROW made of hardwood, painted red, 16 in. heavy iron wheel, sides 7 inches high, extreme length of box 30 inches, with large heavy handles, price \$1.00

HEAVY FARM BARROW 16 in., extra heavy iron wheel with iron spokes set in deep sockets, 10 in. adjustable sides, double braces on bottom, legs strongly braced, all put together with bolts, made of selected hardwood, painted red, it is made for hard usage, price.....\$3.15

The mail order catalogue put out by R. T. Holman, Limited back in 1909 was an innovation which captured the imagination of the 35,000 customers who received it in their mail boxes twice a year. It was given an honored place in almost every Islander's home library and was trotted out on many occasions. It brought the store right into the parlor.

The catalogue came about when the firm found that competition was not confined to Prince Edward Island merchants but that the Maritime and Canadian mail order houses as a whole were becoming a serious factor in the problem of retaining their volume of business. As Mr. Harry Holman explained it himself in an article written at the time for the magazine "Business System," "We were simply forced into the mail order business when outside mail order houses began cutting into Prince Edward Island trade. We

first in 1909 and showed the merchandise which the firm had to offer from the stock in the store. This catalogue was not a very well illustrated one and today it would be likely to be classed as a Price List rather than a Catalogue. However, a few of the illustrations which did appear included such items as the old large gramophone, ranging in price from \$15.00 to \$68.00. Singer sewing machines with a ten years guarantee were offered for only \$18.00. The going price for milk muffs

was \$30.00. You could order a suit from the old catalogue, a man's single breasted suit for a rock bottom price of \$9.40. A made-to-measure suit cost as little as \$18.00 in those good old days.

The first catalogue included a variety of items. Practically every requirement of the household of that day could, as they can today, be purchased from the Holman organization.

SPECIAL TRAINS

In 1922, approximately 15 years later, the Holman organization was selling somewhere near \$2 million worth of merchandise (in 1957 over \$4-million) each year. The methods used to build such a volume were unique and in a great many instances peculiar to the Island firm itself. The Holman methods included, in addition to the semi-annual Catalogue, mailed to

over 35,000 families, the development of special shopping excursions to Summerside. The following up of selling opportunities resulting from couples getting married and building new homes.

In later years the mail order business became unnecessary particularly after the advent of the automobile and its ready availability on almost every farm. Consequently the mail order catalogue was discontinued and new selling methods substituted.

Besides the catalogue and special trains which were used in the old days for promotion of business by Holman's, the firm introduced at an early date a Santa Claus parade. This is now a tradition in the Province and thousands of children down through the years got the biggest thrill of their young lives when the whiskered old gentleman passed through the streets of Summerside and Charlottetown.

~1957~ BOARD OF DIRECTORS

