

Mississauga Hospital pioneer

Builder and visionary Gordon Jackson reflects on occasion of his 98th birthday

By STEVE WARBURTON
Staff Reporter

In 1919 Dundas St. was dirt, sewage and water systems in Toronto Township were still years off and a young Gordon Jackson set up his first legal practice in Cooksville.

Sixty-seven years later, with a lifetime of achievements to reflect on and one of the most noted names in local history, Jackson is still in Mississauga, and he's celebrating his 98th birthday.

As lawyer for Toronto Township for more than three decades and as the leading light behind the construction of Mississauga Hospital, Jackson has cause to celebrate both his accomplishments and his birthday.

His life has been at the centre of area politics for over half a century and his contemporaries have included former Ontario premier T.L. Kennedy.

But when Jackson speaks of his feats there is no hint of bragging nor is there any desire for publicity. In fact, he seems to wonder why people would be interested in his life at all.

It's only after an hour of conversation that Jackson comments, "Seems to me I've got mixed up in a little bit of everything."

The master of understatement launched into his life here with a vigor that has characterized his entire life.

A native of Muskoka, Jackson came to Toronto Township following WWI. He had a few friends here and he says he liked this part of the country.

Establishing himself as the only solicitor in Cooksville, he quickly earned the respect of the community.

As lawyer for Toronto Township for more than three decades, Jackson was instrumental in shaping the Mississauga of today.

In the 1930s his expertise helped Toronto Township land the contract to develop Toronto International Airport and in the 1950s his work helped the township escape the expansionist claws of Metro Toronto.

He fondly recalls the decision to exclude Mississauga from Metro, made at Queen's Park because no court was big enough to hold the participants. Jackson says when the decision came down, the Metro lawyer came to him and said it didn't matter — in a few years Toronto Township would be a part of Metro anyway.

"I told him, 'You won't get us, we're going to get you,'" he says with a chuckle.

The Mississauga-area population at the time was a modest 17,000. Now, as it approaches a number 20 times that, Jackson says he always felt the area had too many advantages not to prosper.

Pointing to its location, climate, farming and industrial advantages, he says he wouldn't trade it for anywhere.

"I've been right across Canada from Vancouver to Newfoundland and this is my choice," he says — more specifically, the corner of Queensway and Hurontario Sts. which has been Jackson's territory for close to 40 years.

His first house still stands on Hwy. 10 as part of Mississauga Hospital and he now lives just blocks away in a townhouse complex.

Somehow it seems only appropriate that the man responsible for the building of South Peel Hospital (later Mississauga Hospital) lives within a stone's throw of the facility.

In his words, "From potato patch to hospital," the building of the only hospital in the vicinity was exhilarating but taxing.

"If anyone wants to have a good series of headaches, let them build a hospital," he says.

The \$12-million structure, at the time a colossal venture, benefited from his organization skills and finesse.

Current hospital president Merritt Henderson recalls Jackson's savvy in putting together the hospital project.

"It was quite a community undertaking in those days," says Henderson.

Mr. Jackson's leadership was critical in mobilizing the community. "He was well organized and had clear goals. He helped to keep everything on track."

Beyond his community achievements, Jackson along with his deceased wife, Florence, had three children, twins, Beth and Ruth, and a son, Robert, who is now deceased.

Beth still lives with Mr. Jackson in his current home.

He was also involved as an elder with three Presbyterian churches locally, Dixie, St. Andrews and Clarkson Rd.

In retirement, Jackson keeps busy with friends at the HMCS York in Toronto (he was its founding officer) and by walking in the parks around his home.

All of his contemporaries have

since died so most of his friends are years younger. He's happy with his life, though, and with what he has done.

And what does he think about Mississauga's current boom?

"I think the pulse is still beating and that Mississauga is capable of almost any development. But with all this building on farmland I don't know where we are going to get strawberries."