

The Blackburn Family

The ongoing history of the Blackburn Family began when Josiah Blackburn, born in London, England on March 6, 1823 emigrated to Canada.

He began his newspaper career at the Paris Star. In 1852, he purchased the Canadian Free Press, which after three years changed from a weekly to a daily publication and changed the name to the London Free Press and Daily Western Advertiser.

Josiah also aided in the establishment of the Toronto Mail. During some time in Washington, DC in 1884 Josiah participated in a Canadian Government Commission studying public printing methods, which resulted in the establishment of the Federal Department of Public Printing.

Josiah died on November 11, 1890 and was succeeded by his son, Walter Jaxon Blackburn. Walter served in the Canadian militia in 1885 as a member of the 7th Regiment in the Northwest Rebellion campaign. He was president of the Tecumseh Baseball Association, held a life membership in the Ontario Hockey League, and was honorary president of the Western Ontario Colt's League. He served on the first Board of Directors of the Canadian Press Ltd., an organization that was greatly responsible for bringing the quality of Canadian newspapers up to world standards. After Walter's death in 1920 his brother Arthur was elected president and managing director of the London Free Press.

Arthur was fascinated by photography and radio. He was one of London's first residents to own a wireless radio set. His fascination with radio, lead the London Free Press into broadcasting. Arthur's sister, Victoria Grace served as literary and dramatic critic of the Free Press. Victoria eventually retired to pursue her secondary interest poetry and literature and died in 1928. Arthur remained devoted to the paper until his death in 1935.

Arthur's son Walter Jaxon Blackburn II joined the Free Press while still a student at the University of Western Ontario. He became publisher and chairman of the board. Walter II established CFPL-TV in 1953. He was also a member of the governing bodies of Huron College and the University. Walter II shared his father's love of science and devoted much of his energy to the establishment of first-rate medical, research, and health care facilities. He was also chairman of the Planning and Building Committee, which oversaw the construction of University Hospital, which opened in September 1972.

With Walter II 's death on December 16th, 1984 the presidency passed to his son-in-law although another report in the same source reports that his daughter Martha succeeded as president of the Free Press.

Other divisions of the corporation are CFPL Broadcasting Ltd., CKNX Broadcasting of Wingham; Netmar Inc.; the Shopper and distribution business operating in 17 Canadian cities and Composearch Market and Social Research Ltd. of Toronto.

On Saturday, May 17, 1997 the Blackburn Group, after 144 years, four months and 17 days and - almost 45,00 issues - was sold to Sun Media Corp.

Sources:

London's Old Boys' Revue July 30-Aug. 6, 1938

London Free Press