

GRAVE UNDERTAKINGS

AINSWORTH FUNERAL HOME, WELLINGTON

A FIVE-GENERATION FAMILY ENTERPRISE

Researched & Written by Phil Ainsworth

The Ainsworth Funeral Home in Wellington is nearing 100 years in operation. It has been in the same family for five generations. It is one of the few examples of a business in Prince Edward County that began nearly 100 years ago and is still owned by the same family. The business has been of central importance to the Wellington and area community. The family has also played a prominent role in the social and cultural life of that community. Tod Lavender, who is the current family member to operate the business, wants to see it continue to play that central and supportive role to the community as the enterprise moves into its next hundred years.

When the Ainsworth Funeral Home began at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, funeral directing was not yet generally a full-time occupation. In most communities morticians were engaged in another primary occupation while supplementing their income with the dignified disposition of those who had passed on to their final reward. Only in a few larger cities where there was sufficient population, were there enough opportunities to earn a full-time living from taking care of individuals and their families after life's final act, the business of embalming and undertaking.

FOUNDER AND FIRST GENERATION

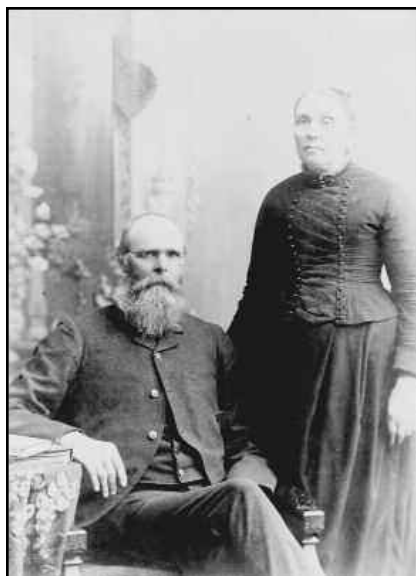
My great-uncle, Densmore Sawyer Ainsworth, who was the founder and first generation

funeral director, was no exception to the circumstance of having multiple occupations. Born in 1873 to Philip and Sarah Ainsworth on the family farm on Christian Street in Hillier Township, Densmore worked as a farmer with his father and three brothers raising farm animals and growing crops. The four boys and their two older sisters attended the local one-room school, S.S.# 4, 5 & 19, Hillier and Sophiasburgh (a.k.a. Jericho School), returning to the family farm after their elementary education to continue making their full-time contribution to its operation.

Densmore had been named after his older first cousin, Densmore Sawyer Doolittle, a farmer who lived on Burr Road. After a few years working with his father, Densmore married school teacher, Cora Isabelle "Corey" Wilson, daughter of Hallowell



Above:
Densmore and his siblings c.1890.
Front: Aurelia, William, Alzina.
Rear: Densmore and Willard.
Photo courtesy
Clara Ainsworth Hogg Estate.



Left:
Densmore's parents c.1890, Philip
and Sarah Ainsworth of Christian
Street, Hillier Township.
Photo courtesy
Mildred Ainsworth McBride Estate.

Right: Henry Wilson Ainsworth, born 1904.
 Far right: Newlyweds in 1895. Densmore and
 Cora Belle (Wilson). Ainsworth lived on
 Wilson Road, Hallowell Township for several
 years. Photos courtesy the late Myrtle McDonald
 Ainsworth.



Right, middle: Main Street, Wellington looking
 west c.1910. On left, Fitzgerald Block, loca-
 tion of Rockwell Furniture and Music Store,
 purchased by Densmore Ainsworth.
 Photo from author's collection.

Ainsworth residence, 292 Noxon Avenue.
 Young Wilson Ainsworth in front, c.1908.
 Photo courtesy Ruth Boyle and the late Myrtle
 Ainsworth.

Wilson Residence, 288 Noxon Avenue
 from 1909 to 1927. Later became
 Ainsworth Funeral Home.
 Photo courtesy Marjorie Wiltse.



farmer, John D. Wilson and his wife,
 Adelaide MacDonald, in 1895. Cora had
 been born in 1870. The Wilson's son,
 Alexander, born in 1867, had died in his
 teens.

In need of someone to work the farm
 with him on the Irvine Gore, Mr. Wilson
 encouraged Densmore to join him in the
 business after 'Corey' and he were mar-
 ried. Densmore and Cora stayed on her
 parents' farm for 12 years. After they lost
 their first child, Henry Wilson
 Ainsworth, was born there in 1904.

By 1907, at the age of 62, John Wilson was looking forward
 to retirement. John had been a school teacher before he became
 a farmer and had developed carpentry skills which he taught to
 Densmore. Building lots were available on the north-west edge
 of town in Wellington, in the orchard of the Edgar Noxon farm.

In retirement John and Adelaide yearned to move into
 Wellington where they would be closer to stores and services.
 The new lots were located on the north side of what was then
 called Mitchell Street, now known as Noxon Avenue.

In June 1906 the village council approved the name change
 and the opening of Noxon Avenue so that houses could be built
 on the lots on that street. The Wilson and Ainsworth families
 purchased neighbouring Lots 36 and 37 (now 288 and 292
 Noxon Avenue) at the same time in March, 1907, for \$ 150
 each.

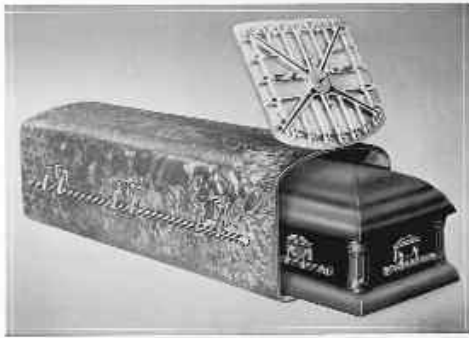
Densmore and his father-in-law first built the new Wilson
 home at 288 Noxon Avenue. While continuing their farming
 duties, they probably drove a horse and buggy for the four miles
 (six kilometres) regularly from the Wilson farm to Wellington
 to construct the new Wilson house.

In June of that same year, Densmore purchased 64 acres in
 Lots 70 and 71 in the Gerow Gore of Hallowell Township, not
 far from the Wilson farm. The land had become available for
 \$1,500 from the Canada Mortgage Company due to a foreclo-
 sure. Densmore took out a mortgage with them for \$ 800.



"The St. Thomas"

Appealing new features and modern design
without sacrifice of strength or quality
...the trustworthy mark in reputation.



A FINEST OF FORMS FOR BURIAL WITH THE BELEGUARD "THE ST. THOMAS" CASKET LINE.

Available in Golden Wood, Copper, Purple, Green and
Ivory Crystal; also Marble, Granite and Plain Enamel.



By December of that year, this mortgage had been discharged. Densmore may have bought this farm as an investment. Perhaps he was keeping his options open and was still giving consideration to continuing farming as a career. It is not known whether he farmed this land, in addition to working on the Wilson farm, while building the Wilson home in Wellington. Perhaps he leased the new land to another farmer.

Once construction of the new Wilson home at 288 Noxon Avenue was completed, John and Adelaide Wilson sold their Gerow Gore farm in November 1909 to his brother Thomas' son, Alva Burton Wilson (who owned the adjacent farm and wanted to expand his operation).

As was commonly done in villages of the time, Densmore and John had also built a barn at the rear of the new Wilson home for horses and transportation equipment such as a buggy, wagon and sleigh. According to their granddaughter, Doris Ainsworth Lavender, after John and Adelaide moved into their new home, Densmore and Cora lived in the barn behind the new home, while Densmore and John built the new home and barn at 292 Noxon Avenue for the Ainsworth family.

DENSMORE PURCHASES FURNITURE/MUSIC BIZ

During the period of the construction of the new Wilson and Ainsworth homes on Noxon Avenue, Densmore had developed a number of new business and social



contacts and was becoming part of the fabric of the village. Densmore observed business opportunities that existed within the village. Perhaps while purchasing some new furnishings for their new home, Densmore talked to the owner of the village furniture and music store.

In 1910, as their new home construction was being completed, he purchased the furniture and music business in the Fitzgerald block on Main Street, that was being operated by Wilbur Almond Rockwell of Napanee. (Mr. Rockwell had operated a music business in Napanee for several years and had expanded to an additional location in Wellington in 1905. However, as he was nearing 60 years of age he decided that it was time to retire. He and his wife relocated in 1911 to the village of Oak Harbour, Ottawa County,



Amos and Sarah (Sawyer) Garratt.
Wellington's first undertaker.
Photo courtesy Dorothy Fraleigh.

Main Street, Wellington c.1910,
Taylor's Ice Cream Parlour on the right
with the awning.
Photo from author's collection.

203 Main Street. A.A. Morden
Undertaking Establishment, 1885 to
1912.
Photo courtesy Prince Edward Archives.



Left: Eugene Taylor c.1920. Photo courtesy Marjorie Wiltse.

Left, below: Densmore Ainsworth purchased the Wellington Undertaking business from Alden Adelbert Morden c.1922.

Right: Typical formal Victoria parlour, where funeral palls and hangings were hung at time of death. This was in the home of Mr and Mrs William Plews, Cressy, 1890. Photo courtesy Prince Edward Archives.



Ohio.) Densmore continued the new furniture and music business in the former Rockwell location for a time.

DENSMORE GETS INVOLVED IN MUNICIPAL POLITICS

In 1910 Densmore was first elected as a municipal councillor. These were the early years in the life of the village of Wellington. It had been incorporated as a municipality in January, 1893, from the townships of Hillier and Hallowell.

Densmore continued to serve as a councillor through annual re-election until 1912. He made an attempt to become Reeve of the village in 1913 but lost the election. He was successfully elected as the Reeve in 1914 and was re-elected in 1915. He did not run for municipal politics in 1916 as he had volunteered for military duty overseas.

EARLY WELLINGTON UNDERTAKING HISTORY: AMOS GARRATT & ALDEN ADELBERT MORDEN

Densmore came in contact with local sawmill operator and cabinet maker, Alden Adelbert Morden, when he and his father-in-law purchased building materials for their new homes between 1907 and 1910.

Morden had purchased the steam-saw and feed-mill businesses located on Beach Street at the waterfront, owned by David S. Saylor, in 1885.

Early 20th Century Funeral Practices



Examination of Ainsworth and Taylor's early business accounts shows that funeral directing quickly became a busy part-time occupation.

Since the mid-1800s the basic undertaking business had expanded to include embalming (where requested by the family and where the body would be viewed in the person's home prior to the funeral, generally held at a church).

Embalming by injecting chemicals into the body had replaced the earlier practice of sometimes using ice to preserve the corpse until the funeral. It is likely that Densmore, along with Eugene Taylor, had learned the skills of embalming while assisting Alden Morden. These were the days before formal training and certification were required.

For the 37 funerals performed by Ainsworth and Taylor in their first full year of business (1913), the average cost was \$ 51 for funeral services with a range in cost from \$5 in one case to \$100 in another. The range in cost was largely as a result of the type of casket selected (much as it would be today).

In 16 cases the body was also embalmed for viewing and in eight of those cases an additional \$10 was charged, in two cases \$5, and in five cases the cost was included in the total funeral price. Although embalming was becoming a more common practice by this time, it was used in less than

half of their funerals that year.

The practice of the undertaker providing a shroud or robe for the body had its beginning in the distant past and still occurred in a few cases into the early 20th century. Ainsworth and Taylor business accounts show that the company provided a shroud or robe in seven of 37 cases in 1913. Presumably the present-day practice of the family providing clothes for the body was becoming increasingly more common.

The business provided other funeral accoutrements, including the crepes hung on the front door of the residence and the velvet palls and hangings for the formal parlour in the home of the deceased. Most homes still had both a formal parlour, which was used only on special occasions, and a sitting room which was more commonly used by the family for rest and relaxation.

The formal parlour was used as a viewing room for the body prior to being taken to a church for the funeral service. Many of the larger homes built in the late 1800s even had a large windowed alcove or bay window in which the body could be displayed in its coffin for viewing by friends, neighbours and relatives.

Although these palls and hangings were gradually being replaced by the use of displays of flowers, it is known that such gloom-setting materials were still in use in the parlours of homes well into the 20th century.

Morden had also purchased the cabinet-making and undertaking business from local businessman, Amos Garratt, in 1889. (Garratt had been a local cabinetmaker since the 1850s and had begun the undertaking business in Wellington as a secondary income by the 1880s).

Morden built a new brick home on the southwest corner of Beach and Main Streets and constructed a barn to the rear along Beach Street (203 Main Street today). Here he located the cabinetmaking and undertaking business.

Before the mid-1800s it was largely the responsibility of family and friends to dispose of loved ones after death (without embalming of course, thus the formal mourning period was, of necessity, very short). The funeral of the deceased was usually held in either the family's residence or their church.

In the last half of the 19th century, undertaking and embalming had become a supplementary career for at least one business person in each community. Undertaking often became a secondary career for a local cabinetmaker who also made coffins. Such was the case for Mr. Garratt and then for Mr. Morden.

Morden had grown up on his father Josiah's farm located at the west end of the Gerow Gore in Hallowell Township, near the Town Line Road (County Road 2 today). He had married a local farmer's daughter, Maria Jacobs, in 1882. By the early 1900s he was a successful miller, cabinetmaker and undertaker, but he had not lost his roots in agriculture. He observed the burgeoning vegetable and fruit canning industry that was developing during the late 19th century using the produce of the farms of Prince Edward County. About 1902 Morden started his own canning factory just on the edge of the village on the Townline Road.

Densmore talked with Morden in 1910 about the undertaking business and assisted him with funerals to supplement his income from the furniture business.

Having his iron in many fires and

lacking time to properly attend to them all, Morden decided to sell the undertaking portion of his business which was growing as the village and surrounding township population grew. Densmore decided to remain in Wellington and put farming behind him, and on November 1911 he sold the Gerow Gore farm, which he had purchased in 1907, to George Hawkins.

DENSMORE AINSWORTH AND EUGENE TAYLOR

In December 1912 Densmore and local entrepreneur Edwin Eugene Taylor purchased the undertaking business from Mr. Morden for \$ 1,950.50.

Taylor was a Hallowell farmer living along the shore of West Lake, east of Wellington. He had started an ice-cream manufacturing and sales business on the Main Street in Wellington in that first decade of the 20th century. He was able to supplement his farm income by selling this sweet, cold product of his excess milk from his dairy herd.

Wellington was becoming a tourist centre which attracted visitors in the summer to its sandy shoreline and the local sand dunes which stretched across the western edge of West Lake.

Taylor also assisted Alden Morden on occasion at funerals and had discussions with Morden about the undertaking business. Densmore Ainsworth and Eugene Taylor discussed setting up a partnership in the undertaking business, leading them to establish this joint business venture.

Eugene Taylor had been born in Buffalo, New York, and was a shoe merchant in Cleveland, Ohio. Through his visits to Wellington he met and married a Prince Edward County girl, Alice Cronk, from a nearby farm in 1899. He emigrated to Canada in 1900 and the young couple joined her brother, Wilfred Cronk, on his farm between Wellington and Bloomfield.

Taylor's connection to undertaking and embalming as a secondary enterprise seems rather incongruous with ice-cream making. Densmore's

furniture business seems a more likely operation to be combined with funeral activities. Taylor and Ainsworth maintained this undertaking and embalming partnership until the early 1920s.

After purchasing the undertaking business from Morden, Ainsworth and Taylor needed a larger space to operate both the funeral operations and Densmore's furniture store. Densmore gave up the location of his furniture business in the Fitzgerald block and rented space in the building on the northeast corner of West Street and Main Street (now 306 Main).

This building had been used by its owner, Edgar Noxon, as a grocery store. Noxon, by now nearing 70 years of age, was looking to retire. He rented the space to Densmore who located the furniture store at the front of the building and used the rear area for displaying coffins and preparing bodies for visitations.

They likely purchased the horse-drawn hearse and other accoutrements of the funeral trade from Alden Morden. Morden would have likely continued to make some of the coffins for Ainsworth and Taylor as he had before in his cabinetmaking business.

Not all coffins were made locally, as their business accounts show that they were purchasing caskets as early as 1913 from the Semens & Evel Casket Company of Hamilton, Ontario, and the Dominion Casket Company of Toronto.

Rough wooden boxes were used to encase the casket and protect it from the elements. Its natural predisposition to decay led to the introduction of the metal vault (and eventually to today's practice of a concrete vault). Ainsworth and Taylor began purchasing metal vaults from the St. Thomas Metallic Vault Company in 1914. Rough wooden boxes continued in common use however, well into the mid-20th century. These boxes were built by Densmore himself during this period.