

# Grave. Undertakings

AINSWORTH FUNERAL HOME, WELLINGTON

## A FIVE-GENERATION FAMILY ENTERPRISE

Part 2 – Researched & Written by Phil Ainsworth

### DENSMORE RISES TO CAPTAIN IN THE PRINCE EDWARD MILITIA

Densmore Ainsworth was active for several years in the 16th Regiment, also known as the Prince Edward Militia, serving in the Allisonville Company in Hillier Township. He began this community service while he was still working on the Wilson farm north of Wellington.

In 1910, the same year he moved to Wellington, Densmore rose to become Lieutenant of Allisonville Company. In 1913 Allisonville Company joined with the Wellington Company and Densmore was promoted to Captain of the new Wellington Company.

He held drill sessions for the newly-amalgamated Company on the second floor of the building where his furniture store and undertaking establishment were located, at what is now 306 Main Street.

The emerging situation in Europe in 1913 looked more and more menacing. England was lining up to support its ally, France, against the threat of the German and Austrian empires. War seemed more and more inevitable. Canada was still very much a member of the British Empire and was prepared to come to the aid of England.

The Prince Edward Militia had a long history of involvement in various military actions over the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries. These activities ranged from



Captain Densmore Ainsworth,  
16th Prince Edward Militia at  
training in Petawawa in 1914.

active participation in both the War of 1812 and the Rebellion of 1837, to preparation for problems that it was anticipated might spill over the border into Canada during the American Civil War in the early 1860's. In 1863, like many other militias, the one in Prince Edward was formed into its own formal regiment.

The 16th (Prince Edward) Regiment had most recently parti-

pated in the Boer War in South Africa from 1899 to 1902 in support of the British Empire. When World War One broke out in August 1914, the troops from various Companies of the Prince Edward Militia volunteered for the cause of the Empire right from the beginning. The troops who remained behind continued to drill on a regular basis in preparation for the possibility of being asked to go overseas.

By late 1915 the Wellington Company was getting ready to proceed for additional training in preparation for the trip to Europe and the war front. At that time, in spite of his increasing age (he turned 43 in February, 1916), Densmore volunteered to go overseas and he reverted to his former rank of Lieutenant in order to do so. He signed up on January 11, 1916, and passed his fitness test performed by local Wellington doctor J. J. Broad. (He gave his occupation as 'merchant' which indicates that he still saw undertaking as a secondary occupation even though he



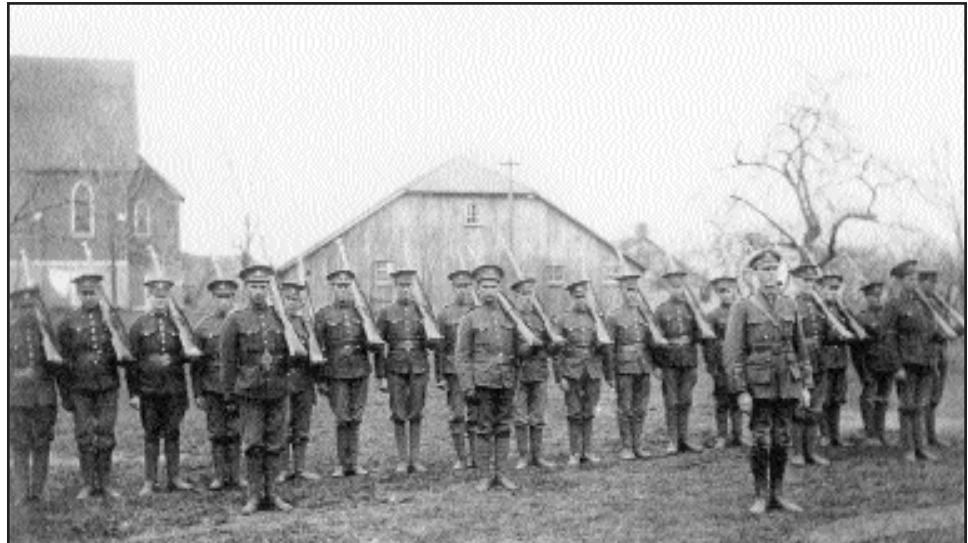
Two badges for the 16th Regiment (Prince Edward) and one for the 21st regiment (out of Kingston) in which Densmore served during the War.

and his partner, Taylor, had provided funeral services for 40 individuals in 1915.)

The Wellington platoon of the 155th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force left for further training at the Barriefield camp near Kingston in the early summer of 1916. Densmore left the furniture store and funeral business in the hands of his partner, Eugene Taylor, who was destined to carry on alone for almost two years.

#### DENSMORE GOES OVERSEAS IN WORLD WAR ONE

Following several months of training at Barriefield near Kingston, Densmore and the 155th Battalion embarked from Canada on Oct. 16, 1916, arriving in England on Oct. 28. They participated in preliminary divisional training at Bramshott, England, before being selected to serve in reserve battalions who underwent further training in England in preparation for rifle and trench warfare in France. (The Germans had overrun France and the British had come to the aid of their French allies in 1915 to drive the Germans out. This activity was to prove long, arduous and high in casualties over the course of the next four years.)



Above: Wellington Militia c.1916 in training. Captain Densmore Ainsworth is in charge. Photo courtesy Marjorie Wiltse.

Below: Wellington Platoon before going overseas in October 1916. Densmore, centre, is surrounded by his men. Photo courtesy Marjorie Wiltse.

Densmore was transferred to the 6th Canadian Reserve Battalion at East Sandling, England, on Jan. 31, 1917 for further training. He remained there until he moved to the Officers' Training Battalion at Seaford, England, on July 23, 1917. He returned to the 6th Reserve Battalion on Aug. 30, ready to serve on the 21st Canadian Battalion (out of Kingston, Ontario) at the war front when called upon to do so.

By this time thousands of soldiers (many of them Canadian) had been

killed or wounded in the mud, wet and cold of front-line trenches, where gains made seemed to come at high costs in lives and injuries.

The 21st Battalion had lost many lives at Vimy Ridge in April 1917, and were struggling to drive the Germans from the northeastern corner of France in the Summer and Fall of that year.

Densmore crossed the Channel to France on Sept. 5, 1917. He received further training behind the scenes until Oct. 13, when he





Lieutenant Densmore Ainsworth of the 21st Battalion during World War One. Photo courtesy Mildred Ainsworth McBride Estate.

rejoined the battalion members who were waiting to be sent to the front.

Before he was able to serve at the front line, he became ill and was transferred to the No. 2 Red Cross Hospital at Rouen, France, on Oct. 30, suffering from muscular pain in back and limbs, headache, chilly sensations and slight elevation of temperature (102°F) and was diagnosed with 'general debility'. Densmore was to miss the battles at the villages of Lens, Passchendaele and Ypres in the Belgian portion of Flanders that Fall.

When his health did not improve he was transferred to the 2nd

Western General Hospital in Manchester, England, where he was admitted on Nov. 3 and diagnosed with 'trench fever'. This was an infectious disease transmitted by lice or ticks that attached themselves as parasites to the men's bodies when they were in close quarters, such as trenches. Although Densmore never saw action at the front, he was in close quarters with other troops during training for trench warfare.

Densmore was invalided sick and detached to the Eastern Ontario Regimental Depot at Seaford, England, until Dec. 29 when he returned to the 6th Reserve Battalion, also at Seaford, in readiness to return to the 21st Battalion. On March 1, 1918, his case was heard by the Medical Board at Seaford and he was diagnosed as having an infection as he *complain[ed] of shortness of breath on going up hill or on exertion...[and] state[d] that [he] still ha[d] stomach trouble at times.* The Board considered him 20% disabled.

He ceased to be attached to the 6th Reserve Battalion on April 5 and was ready to resume civil occupation. He returned to Canada on April 20, 1918, on the ship *Mauretania*.

Densmore immediately returned home to Wellington and resumed his post in the furniture and undertaking businesses. Just a few days later, on April 29, he directed his first funeral since his return from

overseas. He had been absent from the business for 21 months. During that time the undertaking business under Eugene Taylor had continued to average about 40 funerals per year. While he was overseas Densmore's wife, Corey, had continued to operate the furniture and music store, while she raised Wilson into his early teen years.

#### SPANISH FLU PANDEMIC HITS

During 1918 the War was beginning to wind down. Troops, many wounded (or ill as in Densmore's case), were returning home.

Unforeseen was the second major tragedy of the decade which was about to hit the County (and the rest of the world) in the form of the Spanish flu pandemic of the Fall of 1918. (See *County Magazine* #119.)

Ainsworth and Taylor was to see its business increase dramatically in the last four months of that year with 28 deaths and a total of 55 funerals for 1918, up by 15 from the average of 40 in the previous five years since they had gone into business together in late 1912.

Wellington and Prince Edward were hit almost as hard as was the rest of North America. People who had grown used to the impact of war casualties after five years, seemed resigned to the further unexpected effects of the influenza outbreak on the young people of their area.

#### CHANGES IN POST-WAR UNDERTAKING BUSINESS

Improvements were made in the funeral business over the next couple of years. It was noted in the Wellington news of the Dec. 5, 1918 issue of *The Picton Gazette* that:

"Messrs. Ainsworth and Taylor, local undertakers and embalmers, received this week an up-to-date Chalmers motor hearse. This will make that firm's funeral equipment complete in every particular and they are to be congratulated upon installing the new funeral

## Favorite Slogans that tell a story-why You Should Buy a Brunswick!

### WHAT SHAPE IS A HORN?

"Just you Hear the Brunswick!"

"Let your Kara be the Judge!"

"All Phonographs in One!"

"Your next Phonograph will be a Brunswick - Ask us Why!"

"You'll Be Glad You Bought a Brunswick!"

"Own a Brunswick and be Satisfied!"

"Look for that All Wood Oval Horn!"

# D. S. AINSWORTH

House Furnisher

Phone—Store 35

WELLINGTON, ONT.

Undertaking and Embalming

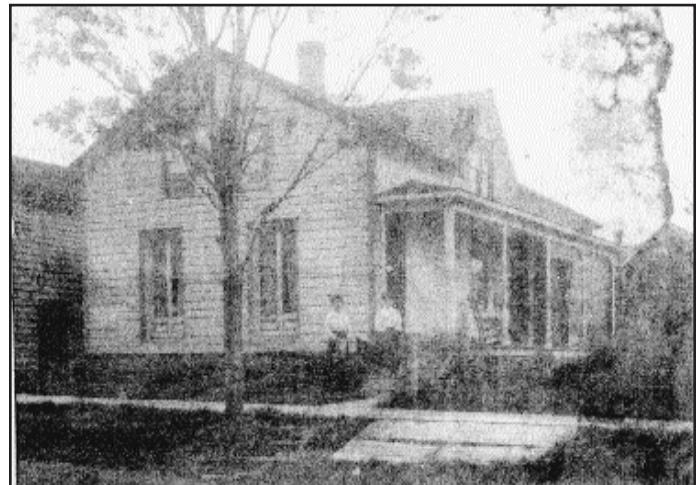
Phone—Residence 21

Advertisement from The Picton Gazette, Dec. 28, 1922.



Above: The first building on the left was the location of Ainsworth and Taylor Undertaking Establishment, 1912-1921. Later Shurie's Drug Store, third building from the left, was the location of Ainsworth Furniture Store and Undertaking Establishment, from 1921.

Photo from author's collection.



Above: The Lane residence, 302 Main Street, purchased by Densmore Ainsworth.

Below: Furniture and Undertaking Establishment of Densmore Ainsworth. Built on the front of the former Lane residence. Location of the Lavender Furniture Store today. Photos courtesy Marjorie Wiltse.



car".

The funeral business was leaving behind its attachment to the horse and wagon era, as it was replaced by the auto-hearse.

A change in venue came for the undertaking business as they relocated their operation to a new building. In April 1920, Edgar Noxon sold the building at 306 Main Street, which Densmore was renting from him, to John S. Shurie, who established a drug store there. Densmore looked around for a new site for his furniture store and the undertaking business. He didn't have to look far.

Next door there was a private home set back from the street. It was the residence of a widow, Sarah Ann Lane. She and her late husband John, a farmer, had worked the land on the edge of the village, while their home was inside Wellington village limits. After retirement they sold the land that surrounded their home, both within and outside of the village, to Edgar Noxon. The Lane home was now available for purchase.

Densmore appreciated its location nearby on Main Street. As a former carpenter who had built two new homes on Noxon Avenue, he saw the possibilities of what could be done to renovate and expand the Lane property to house his businesses. He purchased the property just three months later in August, 1920.

Densmore then built a two-storey addition on the front of the house next to the sidewalk for the furniture store and converted the original home in the rear into the rooms needed for the undertaking business. He was to later construct an apartment on the second floor over the store.

Approaching 50 years of age, Densmore was making a long-term commitment to his two occupations of merchant and undertaker. His son Wilson was still in his mid-teens, but may have already been showing interest in following in his father's footsteps. (The business location is now known as 302 Main Street and continues as the furniture store to this day.)

#### AINSWORTH AND TAYLOR PARTNERSHIP ENDS

After the relocation of the businesses to 302 Main Street, Densmore and Eugene Taylor dissolved their undertaking partnership. Taylor returned to the United States

and was living in San Antonio, Texas, in May 1921, when he sold his half of the undertaking business to Densmore for \$1,600.

Taylor had made his wife, Alice, power of attorney (POA) to handle the sales of his property on his behalf. In the POA document he gives her the power to sell "all my right, title and interest in the undertaking business located in a building owned by D. S. Ainsworth ... one-half interest in all personal property used in the conducting of said undertaking business, consisting of caskets, auto hearses, and all other personal property used in the conducting of said undertaking business in conjunction with D. S.

# D.S. AINSWORTH & SON

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## FUNERAL DIRECTORS

Ainsworth, he being my partner in said undertaking business".

Densmore then became the sole proprietor of the funeral business in Wellington.

In September 1921, again through his wife, Taylor sold his ice-cream business to Robert J. Campbell, Jr. In the POA document this business was described as "... the Ice Cream Factory, consisting of all of the personal property used in said building located ... on Main Street ... and used for the purpose of manufacturing ice cream."

In a second POA document he described the personal property and real estate in greater detail as being the "dwelling, bank building and other buildings including Ice Cream factory and Ice Cream accessories, and supplies, machinery etc. [sic] all situated and being on lots 25, and 33 on the north side of Main St., and south side of Noxon Avenue...".

R. J. Campbell, Jr., then went on to operate a dairy as well as the ice-cream business, all of which later became Quinte Milk Products in the late 1940s.

### D. S. AINSWORTH & SON, FUNERAL DIRECTORS

A new father and son partnership began to develop, replacing the former one between Densmore and Eugene Taylor. Because of the nature of the undertaking business, it is difficult to work without a partner, or some regular assistance at the very least. Being on call 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, is extremely demanding for someone working alone in this enterprise. There are also times when lifting requires two people. Wilson Ainsworth turned 16 years of age in

April 1920, and left school to help his father in the family enterprises at the new location at 302 Main Street.

### DENSMORE'S FURTHER COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

As an undertaker and prominent community figure, it would seem natural that Densmore would be involved in the establishment of the Wellington Cemetery Company in 1920. He was one of the founding directors. The Company continues to operate the Wellington cemetery to this day.

During this early post-War period Densmore returned for a time to municipal government. In January 1920 he was hired by the Wellington Council to be one of two auditors of the municipal accounts. Returning to elected politics, Densmore was once again chosen by the village ratepayers as Reeve of the village for the two years, 1923 and 1924.

Densmore continued his community activity into the 1930s when he was one of the founding directors of the Wellington Arena Co. Ltd., which was formed in 1931. He served on this board until 1939.



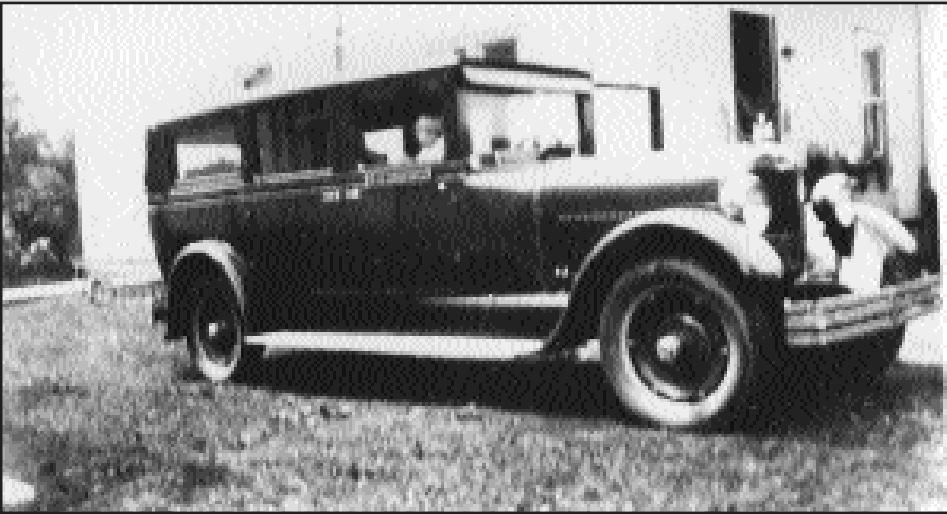
Wilson Ainsworth and Myrtle McDonald, married May 1, 1922.  
Photo courtesy Doris Ainsworth Lavender.



Wilson Ainsworth, right, and Roscoe Burlingham after the capture of bank robbers in 1923. Photo from *County Loyalist* newspaper, Oct. 16, 1923.  
Photo courtesy Ron Bailey.

### WILSON AINSWORTH MARRIES AND BEGINS FAMILY

While at school Wilson met Myrtle Ilene McDonald. She was born east of Wellington in Hallowell Township on McDonald's Island in West Lake in 1905 where her father, Seburn, operated a farm. Moving to Wellington in 1911, Seburn became a carpenter. The family lived in the



1923 Chalmers hearse used by D.S. Ainsworth & Son Funeral Directors for many years. Photo courtesy Doris Ainsworth Lavender.  
Right: Ad from 1926 Prince Edward County Yearbook.

east end at what is now 133 Main St.

Myrtle and Wilson were married in 1922. Their first daughter, Ruth, was born that same year.

Wilson received his embalming certificate in 1924 and became a full partner with his father in the undertaking business.

A second daughter, Shirley, was born in 1925. Cora's father, John Wilson, died that same year. John's widow, Adelaide, continued to live at 288 Noxon until her death in 1927. At this time Densmore and Cora moved into the Wilson home.

#### **WILSON HELPS CAPTURE WELLINGTON BANK ROBBERS**

Young Wilson Ainsworth began his first community service in an unexpected way. In October 1923, at the age of 19, he assisted in the search for and capture of two gunmen who held up the Wellington branch of the Canadian Bank of Commerce located in the same building on Main Street as Eugene Taylor's former ice cream parlour.

According to the County's Loyalist newspaper, Wilson and another Wellington resident, Roscoe Burlingham – among others – picked up their guns and joined the search for the suspects, who were found in a clump of bushes, seven hours later, just outside the village.

#### **D. S. AINSWORTH**

##### **House Furnisher**

**Dealer in High-Class Furniture and all Kinds of House Furnishings ... Phonographs and Records**

**Authorized Westinghouse Radio Dealer**

##### **UNDERTAKING and EMBALMING**

**Store 26 ... Phones ... Residence 31**

**WELLINGTON, ONTARIO**

#### **AINSWORTH FAMILY GROWS**

Wilson, Myrtle and their two daughters continued to live at 292 Noxon Avenue. The family was blessed with a third daughter, Doris, in 1928 and a fourth daughter, Lyla, in 1930. Having been born and raised in a family with four girls, it must have seemed quite natural to Myrtle to have four daughters around.

Theirs was an active household, with the girls all attending school in Wellington, participating in church and community social activities, active in sports at school and taking music lessons while later having boys in to call.

Doris Ainsworth (Lavender) remembers playing in the old horse-drawn hearse that was stored at that time up in the barn behind 288 Noxon Avenue. It was no longer in use after its replacement by the auto-hearse in 1918. Doris was a close friend with Marjorie McDonald (Wiltse) who recalls that she and Doris smoked their first cigarette behind that barn.

Marjorie also recalls the two of them one day after school coming in on Doris's father when he was preparing a body in the embalming room behind the store. Not only were they frightened by what they saw but they were strong-

ly reprimanded by Wilson for coming into the area behind the store.

My uncle, George Edward Ainsworth recalled a time when he visited Uncle Densmore in the funeral parlour behind the store when he had a corpse laid out in a casket there. Uncle George found it unnerving, but of course Uncle Densmore was used to it. Uncle George recalls how the telephone, which hung on the wall behind the casket rang, while they were talking and Densmore just reached across the body and answered it.

Densmore retired from active service as an undertaker in 1939 at the age of 66 after a long and varied career, leaving Wilson in charge of the business, although no doubt he continued to help out on occasion.

Ruth Ainsworth served in the Air Force for a time during the Second World War. At the end of the war she married local farmer, Delbert Boyle, in 1945 after he returned from naval service overseas. They operated a farm in Hillier for many years and had a daughter, Connie, born in 1946.

After finishing high school, Doris Ainsworth was planning to become a hairdresser but she met a local Wellington boy, Everett Lavender, who was in the Air Force during the War. They were married in 1945.



Wilson and Myrtle Ainsworth and daughters Ruth and Shirley, c.1927. Photo courtesy Doris Ainsworth Lavender.