

## "UNDER THE TOWN HALL CLOCK"

An illustrated recounting of the adventures and responsibilities of ARTHUR JAMES CHESHER, Tax Collector, Clock Engineer, Police Constable, Weigh Scale Superintendent, Gardener etc., etc., who lived in the Port Hope Town Hall 1908-1940; as told by his daughter Doris, now Mrs. Arthur Reed, of Port Hope, Ontario.

From its construction in 1851, its Fire 1893, to refurbishing, prior to the 1984 Sesquicentennial Year, the Town Hall has been the focus of life of this mid-eastern town, one of the prettiest in Ontario.

Photographs from the collections of:

Tom Long  
Cal Clayton  
Mike Wladyka  
Port Hope Evening Guide

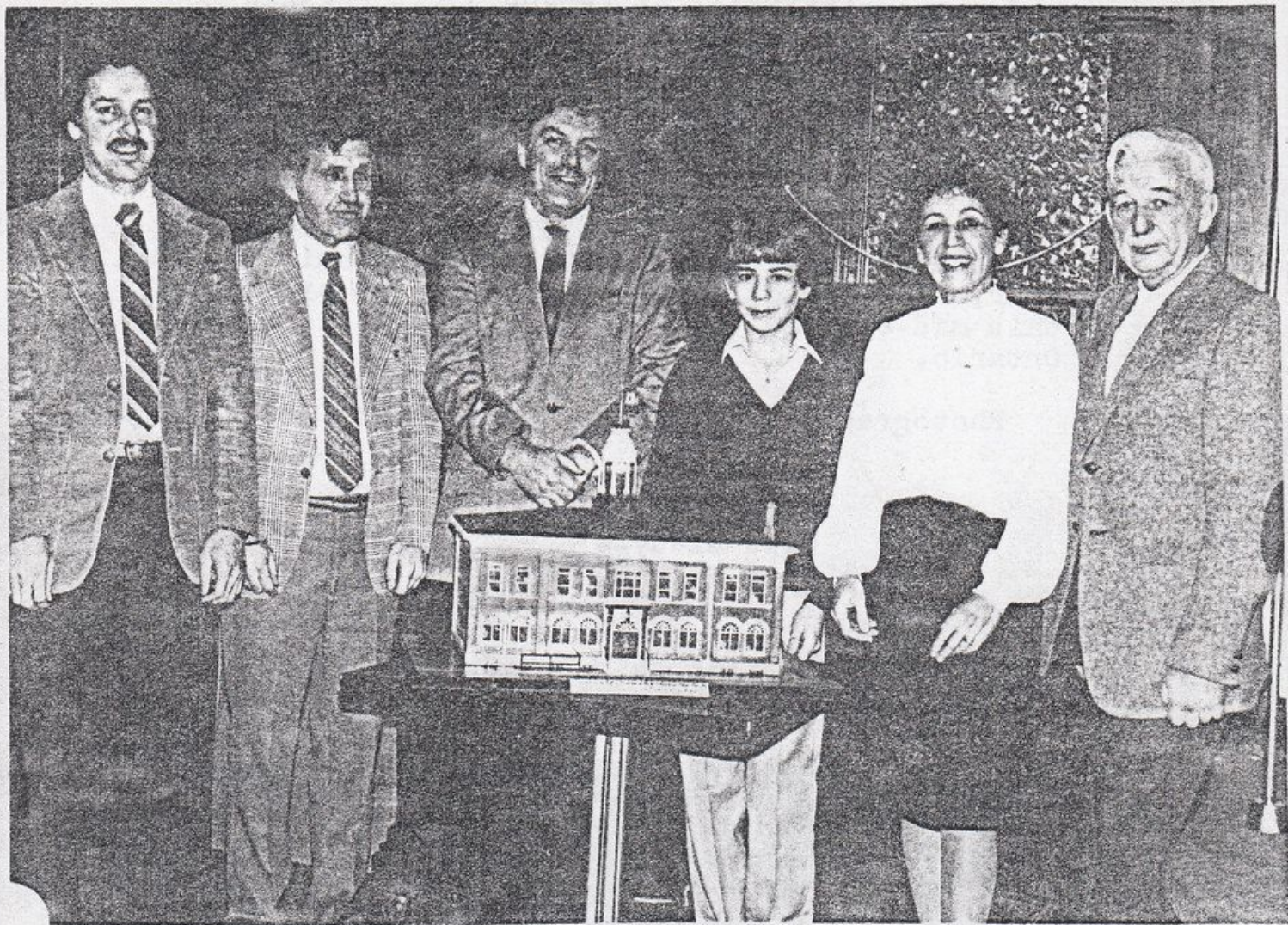
Doris presented this talk on November 21, 1984, to the East Durham Historical Society, Port Hope.



DORIS (CHESHER) REED - Nov. 21, 1984



CHESHER FAMILY 1916  
Standing - Irene Chesher, (Daughter)  
Arthur James Chesher  
Evelyn Alice Chesher (Wife)  
Kneeling-Clifford Peart Chesher (Son)  
and a Friend.



**SESSQUICENTENNIAL GIFT** — Staff members at Dr. Hawkins School have created a model-size replica of Port Hope's Town Hall. The model was presented on behalf of the school to the East Durham Historical Society at the society's meeting last night. The society will place the model in its window display at New

Service Cleaners. Taking part were (left to right): Dr. Hawkins art teacher Jim Broekstra, woodworking teacher Vince Ruttan, Mayor Bill Wyatt, student body president Lewis Cirne, Marjorie Sorrell of the society's window committee, and society president Frank Melvanin.

Thursday, February 16, 1984

PROCEEDINGS OF THE TOWN COUNCIL.

Monday, March 14, 1853.

The Council met. Present the Mayor Messrs Hatton, Crawford, Walsh, Gallagher, Garnett, Lynn, Meredith and Gillett. The minutes of the last meeting were read and amended as noted by acting Clerk.

An Account from Messrs Steel & Corbier was presented and referred to the Finance Committee.

Moved by Mr Meredith, Seconded by Mr Gillett. That the following Officers be appointed to the Fire Department.

Duncan McLeod,	Chief Engineer,
Thos. Spry,	1st. Assist. "
Philip Pollard,	2nd. " "

Moved by Mr Lynn, Seconded by Mr Gillett, That a Committee of the whole members of the Council do now go into the question of the Market Building, and make necessary arrangements for the reception of the same. Carried.

The Council went into Committee and adopted the following report :

That this Committee recommend the Council to take the Market Building off Mr Fox's hands, in its present unfinished state, and pay Mr Fox the balance that would have been due to him, had he completed the Building at the time and in the manner agreed on ; deducting the interest from the 1st July to date, on the money advanced to him on the said Contract, and the forfeiture of the said contract be not enforced, provided that the Contractor accept this offer on, or before three days from date.

Moved by Mr Walsh, Seconded by Mr Garnett, That the above report be adopted, and that the Clerk do furnish Mr Fox with a copy forthwith. Carried.

Adjourned until Thursday, 17th March.

Thursday, March 17th, 1853.

In consequence of the Fire in Mr Gillett's building on the previous night, the Council met at L'Esperance's Hotel at 3 o'clock, p.m. Present the Mayor, Messrs Walsh, Hatton, Meredith, Lynn and Garnett. The minutes of the last meeting were read and approved.

A communication was received from Mr P. Fox, accepting the terms offered by the Council, for a settlement of his Contract for the Market Building, and the Clerk was then instructed to call on Mr Fox and receive the Keys and possession.

The Guide.

St Hope, Saturday, March 26, 1853.

## UNDER THE TOWN HALL CLOCK

We are just about at the close of our Sesquicentennial Year (1984), and we have held many Special Events. It is One-Hundred and Fifty Years since Port Hope was incorporated as a Police Village, in the year 1834.

So we pause to reflect on the many lovely older Homes and Buildings of Port Hope. ----- I have beside me a beautiful model of the Town Hall, which was built by the Students and Staff of Dr. Hawkins School. Much time and effort was taken to build this model, true to scale in all respects.

The Town Hall was built in 1851. The Architect was Mervin Austin and the Contractor, Philip Fox. The cost Thirty-Thousand Dollars, (30,000.) The Town's People were very proud of their Town Hall, as this was a very special work of Art.

Then came the day of the Great Fire, February 3rd. 1893. The fire began early in the morning and gradually worked its way right up to the Tower. It was said that a huge groan went up from the assembled crowd as the flames ate away the supports and down crashed the heavy Bell, which weighed over a ton. Soon there was nothing left but the walls. But the Firemen fought valiantly and managed to save all the important papers from the Safe.

The townspeople were dauntless and set to work to rebuild. The new Bell was installed at a cost of \$207.00 Dollars, and the Clock works, built by Seth Thomas at a cost of \$785.00 Dollars. The building was re-occupied on February 26th. 1894.

The first Grammar School of Port Hope was started in the Town Hall, in May 16th. 1853.

In the Year 1908, my Father, Arthur James Chesher, was hired as Tax Collector for the Town of Port Hope. A position he held for thirty-two years. His salary was small, but that also included the apartment living quarters. This was a nicely laid out apartment, with Kitchen, Dining-room, Parlour and three bedrooms, situated on the first floor, at the North end of the building.

My Father had many other responsibilities, besides the collecting of Taxes. He was a Police Constable, and often times was called upon to make arrests and bring the offender to Jail. He was responsible for the upkeep of the Town Hall, both the inside and all the grounds and parks outside. He grew all the flowers from seed, starting them in the basement windows, planted many trees, some of the older trees still remain. The Floral Display surrounding the Town Hall was always spectacular and many times complimented in the Evening Guide. This has been carried on through the years, and today, Mr. Orland Drinkwater's work is worthy of praise. For the first ten years, the town did not deem it necessary to hire an assistant, and my two older brothers, helped with the extra work.

Another very demanding duty was the ringing of the Town Hall Bell. The Bell was rung, by my Father, at 7 a.m., the beginning of the working day; at 12 o'clock noon, Lunch time, and at



TOWN HALL SHOWING WEIGH SCALES  
CIRCA 1948

6 p.m. quitting time. You see in those days people worked a ten hour day.

At the South of the Town Hall on Dorset St., West, was a small building which housed the Town's Weigh Scales. My Father was the Superintendent of the Weigh Scales; and many times in a day he'd be called out to the Scales to weigh the loads of wood, coal or grain, brought in by the Coal and Wood Distributers and the Farmers, on wagons or sleighs drawn by horses, before trucks came on the scene. If the loads were too heavy or too light, adjustments would be made from the coal bins, to make sure the customer received the exact weight. Across from the Weigh Scales, at the west side of the back of the Town Hall was a cement watering trough for the horses to quench their thirst, with fresh running water fed from a Spring.

Another of his duties was the Clerk of the Farmer's Market. This was held every Saturday morning, rain or shine, throughout the year. In the good weather the men who sold the meat, who were known as Butchers, all stood in a row, at their respective stalls on the East side of the Town Hall. It was a very large market, held in the Basement, which was called the "Butter Market". The Farmer's wives brought in their produce --- eggs, butter, cream, homemade Buns, Cakes, Pies preserves, fruits and vegetables. My Dad was responsible for arranging room at the tables, and collecting a small fee from each vendor.

Dad also had to be Engineer of the Town Hall Clock; and with his mechanical ability kept the Clock running and on perfect time.

My Mother (Evelyn Alice Ridley Peart Chesher) was an expert Bookkeeper, and she spent much of her time in the Tax Office collecting Taxes. This Office was adjoining our Living quarters. When Dad wasn't in the Office he'd be out day after day walking the streets of Port Hope, calling on homes of people who had not as yet been able to pay their taxes. Dad would encourage them to pay just a little each week at the office. This seemed to work, because in Dad's Year end report, there were very little outstanding taxes.

One cold Winter's night March 18th, 1918, a very special event happened at the Town Hall. \*\*\* Twin babies were born \*\*\* Douglas Leonard Chesher and Doris Louise Chesher. The Stork was early and there was no room in the Hospital. So we were born at home. We were very small and I'm told we were wrapped up in cotton batting and kept in a basket, beside the big kitchen stove. Two Aunts from Toronto came down to help care for us; also my older sister, Irene, and two brother's Ernest and Clifford, did all they could to help. It was a busy time, and then two years later my younger brother Morley was born.

And so our life began, under the Town Hall Clock Tower, listening to the sound of the striking and ringing of the Bell, in the Tower, and the roar of the trains as they crossed the viaduct.

The Town Hall was my Home, Playground and, one might say, part of my Education for twenty-one years. Living in the same building where all the Business and Politics of the Town was decided.



PORT HOPE TOWN HALL - 1897

There was never a dull moment, not to mention Floods, Fires, and Earthquakes. Our first year of school was held in the upstairs Classroom, our teacher Miss Bennett. My Family suffered personal loss during those years in the tragic death of two older brothers, Harold and Clifford.

Then came the Depression Years, and many men left their homes and wandered from Town to Town, generally riding the Rails across the Province. They had no place to stay at night, so they would come to the Town Hall where they lodged in the Lower Jail. There were as many as 30 to 35 men at night and no fewer than eight in those awful depression years. My Mother was commissioned to make Breakfast for these Knights of the Road, or Hoboes, as they were commonly called. We children, Douglas, Morley and I were expected to help Mother and Dad prepare Breakfast for the hungry men, before going to school. The food was carried, by my Father, on large oval trays, down to the lower jail.

The Upper Jail was reserved for Prisoners. Those unfortunates who had committed a crime or were arrested for being drunk. This Jail was on the same level as our apartment, and sometimes we could hear the yelling and pounding of those distressed prisoners. Many a time my Father would go into the jail and sit down with the prisoner or prisoners and talk to them to calm them down.

During the Winter there were dances held upstairs in the Ballroom, once a week. Also a variety of Clubs held special parties in the large Ballroom. The local Port Hope Citizens Band held regular weekly practices in one of the Anterooms upstairs, and they gave weekly Bandconcerts during the Summer months, in the Round Band Stand, beside the Town Hall. Among the Band Masters I remember were Mr. Unit and Mr. Fred Brooks.

When we were children, we had no problem finding exciting things to do, especially on rainy days, with plenty of large rooms to romp and play in. After business hours or on Sundays our chief delight was to run up the long stairway and then slide down the long bannister, as fast as we could go. What a RIDE! On wintry days we played with our sleighs and bob-sleighs on the two hills of Augusta Street and Dorset St. The hills were much steeper then than they are today. The snow seemed to be much deeper and usually after an all day snow-fall, it would be deep enough to cover and obscure the three and a half foot black railing that surrounded the front and back Town Hall Parks. Then we would build snow forts and snow houses on the back lawn.

Then of course, the biggest deal of all, was when we took a climb up the winding stairs and ladders, climbing through trap doors, past the Clock works, past the huge bell, through the room where the four clock faces stood, which was the room where the pigeons used to roost and make their nests, then a couple of more ladders and we'd be clear up to the top of the Tower. The top platform is about five feet across, with an iron railing all around and the flagpole in the middle. We used to feel as though we were just sitting up in the sky. The view from the Tower across the Lake and hills surrounding Port Hope was just magnificent.

I must say that it was a very demanding and exciting and complicated life. But remember, we were always under the Public

Eye and there could be no misbehaving. We must be very proper, well behaved children. My Father impressed us with this!

When the Tax-Office Bell rang, during the Depression years, one never knew for sure, if it was someone to pay taxes or someone to pick up their Food Voucher, or some person just to come in to talk over their problems and hardships. My Mother was a sympathetic listener and problem Solver, and she helped many people to see their way more clearly.

When the Tax rush was over, Dad was able to take a few days holidays in Toronto, visiting our relatives; then later Mother would take a few days away in Toronto; they could never leave together, as the Tax Office was open every day but Sundays and Holidays and any hour from seven in the morning to eleven o'clock at night. When eleven o'clock struck, Dad would go and put the lock on the large double doors at the Front of the Town Hall.

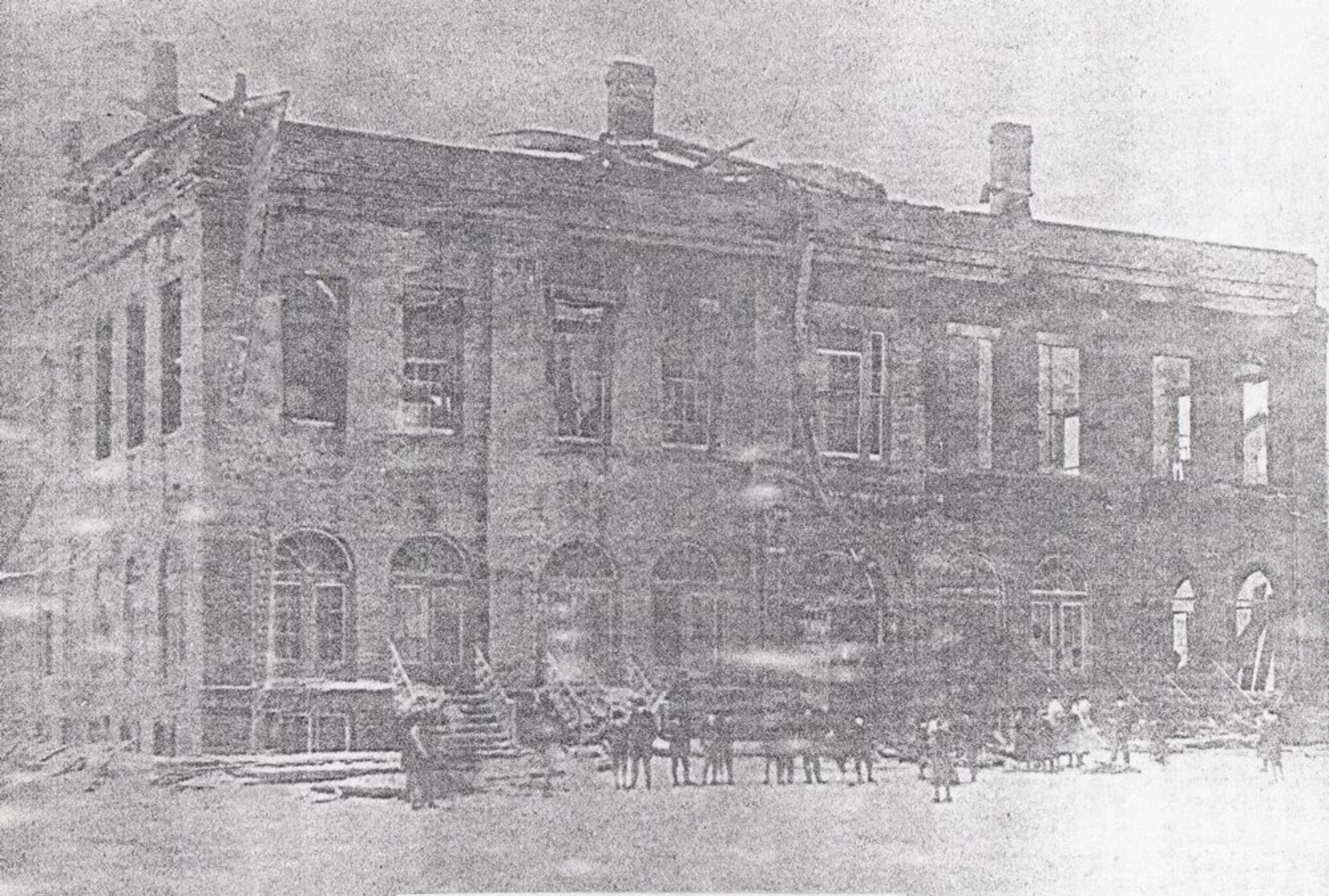
As the years went by Dad was given one steady Janitor and during the busy planting Season, a second helper. A few improvements were made in our apartment. About 1933 it was decided to install a three piece Bathroom in our apartment. This was a real luxury, as before that, we used the old fashioned galvanized, round tin Bathtub. This had to be carried up from the basement into the kitchen, whenever anyone took a bath. It was a short time before this, that gas burning fixtures were removed and electricity installed. Changes were slow in that old Town Hall!

For a few years at Christmas time, Dad placed a large seven or eight foot Christmas Tree up in the Tower, fastened to the flag-pole. One year when he was dismantling the tree and lights, he tripped on the electric cord, while climbing down the ladder. He took a bad fall and sustained serious injuries to his feet. He carried on for about a year but in 1940 he was forced to retire. We moved to a home on 16 Ross Street, where he enjoyed his beautiful flowers, garden and waterfall.

Then the Janitor, Mr. Lew Staples moved into the Town Hall apartment with his family.

A new Tax Collector was hired, -- JUST TO COLLECT TAXES -- There were many changes that took place about then. After a few years they stopped the ringing of the Bell three times a day, and only rang it for fires in town. Then they installed a large Siren, beside the old Firehall on Walton Street. Then the Weigh Scales was torn down. In 1958 it was decided that the Town Hall apartment would be an excellent spot for the Police force headquarters. So Mr. Staples was moved to a small house back of the Town Hall, which has since been torn down and a new Bungalow built for the Janitor, Mr. Drinkwalter. Sometime in the '70's several more changes took place. The Ballroom was no longer needed, and was replaced with the new Council Room. Drapes were hung in the windows and carpet on the floors; all very modern --- and all this in the name of PROGRESS. Yes, we can indeed be very proud of our Town Hall.

Doris (Chesher) Reed.  
Nov. 21, 1984.



PORT HOPE TOWN HALL FIRE 1893  
FRONT VIEW

PORT HOPE TOWN HALL FIRE 1893  
BACK VIEW

