

Robert Dawson, the Entrepreneur

Bridgewater's longest running business started out on Commercial Street (now King) in 1848 as Jennings Hardware Store, managed by a young Robert Dawson. Born in Port Mouton in 1812, young Dawson possessed lots of energy and a strong business ethic. He soon bought out Jennings, and set up his own hardware store, establishing himself as a generous and reliable businessman, and becoming a prominent member of the community. He and his wife Martha Elizabeth (Hebb) had five children, three of whom lived to adulthood. The two boys, Robert Jr. and Kenneth would join him in his business, and it became known as Robert Dawson & Sons.

Bridgewater was booming in the mid 1800's, and Dawson expanded his business to include a large general grocery store, and a hardware business with two warehouses. He got into lumber and owned several wharves, a rotary mill for manufacturing lumber, and several fishing vessels. He had a great interest in boats and ships, and hired Benjamin Harrington to build him the brigantine, *Micmac* in 1862.

A fine home was built for the Dawson family in 1864, high on a hilltop overlooking the LaHave River. The house, known as Pine Hill, stayed in the Dawson Family for four generations, passing from Robert Senior to Robert Junior, to *his* son Robert MacGregor Dawson, and subsequently to *his* son. The house is there today, still possessing charm and character, if not the original facade.

The entire Dawson family was active in the community, with Robert Dawson Senior holding various positions, including Chairman of the Board of Fire Wardens, Commissioner of Schools, and Treasurer of the Bridgewater Agricultural Society. When he died in 1894, Judge Mather Byles DesBrisay stated that Dawson was "A man of sterling integrity, high principle and gentlemanly manners, he succeeded in impressing all who knew him most favourably, and his death makes a gap in our community that cannot easily be filled".

Dawson & Sons continued under the ownership of Robert Dawson Junior until his death in 1929, when it was bequeathed to a trusted employee, Walter Gow. In 1948, Gow's sons Kenneth and Frank took over. The business moved several times over the several years, until settling at Eastside Plaza in 1989 under the name Gow's Hardware Ltd., with Frank's son Peter at the helm.