

WALTER MACKOWSKI

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THE CLOCK IN THIS TOWER
WAS DEDICATED TO THE
MEMORY OF THE MEN FROM
SOUTHAMPTON AND THE
SAUGEEN INDIAN RESERVE WHO
GAVE THEIR LIVES IN THE
FIRST GREAT WAR (1914-1918)
DECEMBER 5TH, 1922

It stands in the centre of town - the Tower Clock of the Southampton Town Hall. How many realize though that the tower also stands for the young soldiers of Southampton and the Saugeen First Nation who went to fight in World War I and that, at the very top, is a rare time peace.

One man knows and he knows it intimately ... Walter Mackowski of Vincent Jewelers in Southampton.



Intricate Work -- Swiss Trained

Like his father before him, Mackowski is a watchmaker extraordinaire. As a young student, he won a scholarship to study in Neuchatel, Switzerland, renowned since the 1700s for its watch and clock making industry. There, Mackowski studied the fine art of watch and clock making until returning to Canada to apprentice with his father Vincent. When his father died, the younger Mackowski took over the family business that he and his wife still run today.

After the tower clock had stopped running for several years, the town approached Mackowski in 1972 and asked if he would take a look at it.



The Bell

Designed and built by Bell Foundry and Clockmakers, Gillett and Johnston Ltd. in Croydon England in 1922, the clock and bell had been raised into the tower by hoisting them upward through trap door openings using block and tackle.

"I knew when I saw it that it was very unusual," he explains. "The workings are brass and it is electro-mechanical, meaning that is neither electric nor mechanical, but both. The only other two, that I know of, are in the Peace Tower in Ottawa and the old City Hall in Toronto, although I'm sure there must be others."

Given that the clock was installed a half century before Marckowski was asked to take a look at it, there were of course, no directions nor blueprints as to how the mechanism worked.

The dedication Plaque – One Man Remembers

He knew that the grandfather clock in the Town Hall governed the tower clock ... but the rest he had to learn on his own. His Swiss training enabled him to even make his own parts for the intricate workings. "Instead of the clock driving the pendulum the way a normal clock does, the pendulum actually drives the clock," Mackowski explains.

"The grandfather-style pendulum clock, that now hangs in the Art Gallery, is the master. Every 15 seconds, it sends a jolt of electricity upward to the tower mechanism to keep everything regulated."



Cogged Wheel Runs Four Faces

That mechanism is connected to a wheel which turns four other cogged wheels, each rotating a shaft. In turn, each of the shafts is connected to the hands of one of the four clock faces on each side of the tower. "It really is a marvel, when you think of how ingenious the design is," says Mackowski.

One of the Four Clock Faces



To reach the clock, even today, is no small feat. There are four ladders to climb, each opening on to a landing. Half-way up, is the exquisitely curved bell that chimes on the hour, beginning at 9:00 in the morning until 9:00 at night, and then finally, the fourth and tallest ladder.



The Last Ladder to the Mechanism

This last ladder has rungs instead of treads and they are spaced far apart making it difficult for a first-time climber.

Looking downward, the climber looks directly down through the opening to the previous landing below. The brickwork and beams inside the tower are just as they were over 100 years ago. The windows and openings have long since been sealed to prevent bird nesting, but the body of a small bat gives evidence that life has found its way in to the tower.

The clock usually reads a couple of minutes fast because, according to its caretaker, "...it's easier to slow it down than speed it up." During the winter months however, slowing down the clock is not an issue. "There are several times, especially in December and January, when I have to go up three or four times a week," says Mackowski, "because the hands freeze up."



Making Sure the Adjustments are Correct

For over 30 years, the Southampton master watch and clockmaker, has taken time from his business to climb the ladders and tend the Tower Clock, as it ticks away the hours in salute to those brave soldiers who heeded the call to war.