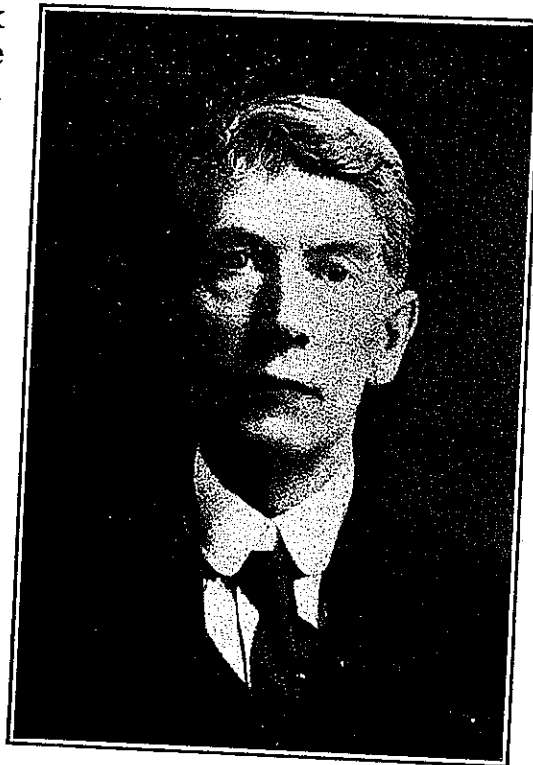


THE LATE JAS. A. BELL

(Memoir by Geo. A. McCubbin)

The death of James Anthony Bell, which took place at his home in St. Thomas on June 25th, 1929, brought to a close an engineering career of more than ordinary merit and achievement. Born in the Township of Lobo in 1851, Mr. Bell obtained his early education in the schools of Middlesex County, and then took up the study of land surveying as an apprentice with Mr. W. G. McGeorge, of Chatham. He completed his apprenticeship and passed the examination for admission to practice as a Provincial Land Surveyor on 11th October, 1875, and as the examinations included not only the use of surveying instruments, but the candidate's possession of them to enable him to carry on a practice, our candidate was forced to purchase these during the examination, and to prove his ownership of them, before receiving his certificate.

In March of 1876, Mr. Bell located in St. Thomas for the practice of land surveying and civil engineering, and for a time was associated with Alfred Weir, architect and town engineer. As there were a number of older surveyors in the town (as St. Thomas then was), and in the county, work came as slowly to the young surveyor as patients to a young doctor. The first employment, which came after some weeks, was the making of a map for a county atlas, and the pay was neither great nor certain. Further details of the beginnings of this remarkable professional career are unknown to the writer, but by the end of eight years the energy and ability of Mr. Bell had won him an extensive practice in surveying and municipal engineering, and he was employed by the Canada Southern Railway to survey the new lines between Essex Centre and



Windsor, and between Welland and Niagara Falls. Assisting Mr. Bell on these surveys was Mr. A. W. Campbell, who had just completed a term of apprenticeship with him and been admitted to partnership. The Railway Company found Mr. Bell's services so satisfactory that he was commissioned as Resident Engineer during the construction of their Cantilever Bridge at Niagara Falls.

A year or so before his employment by the railway, Mr. Bell had been appointed County Engineer of Elgin, an office which he held, in connection with his general practice, for forty-five years, when he was succeeded by his son in 1927. As engineer for a county intersected by many deep gullies and streams, he had a very wide experience in the construction of highway bridges; in the early years of his practice these were wooden bridges, many of them of long span. These were followed in turn by bridges of wrought iron, steel and concrete. In the design and construction of the newer type of bridges, it might more truly be said that he led the times than that he kept up to them. His long and valued service to the county was fittingly recognized on his seventy-eighth birthday, when he was waited upon at his home by the entire County Council to express their personal regards and official appreciation.

Concurrently with his county work, Mr. Bell held the position of Town Engineer, and later of City Engineer, for St. Thomas until 1891, when he relinquished the city work to assume, along with his other duties, the management of the St. Thomas Pipe and Foundry Company. As City Engineer he was succeeded by his partner, and former pupil, Mr. A. W. Campbell, who carried on an extensive programme of street improvement, and was in 1896 appointed by the Ontario Government as Instructor in Roadmaking, and later became generally known as Good Roads Campbell. From 1896 to 1911 Mr. Bell was again City Engineer, and during this period the writer was in partnership with him as assistant city Engineer, and in the practice of land surveying and municipal drainage, removing to Chatham at the last named date to take over a portion of the firm's municipal drainage work, which had gradually expanded into the adjoining counties.

The city work gave Mr. Bell an experience no less varied than that of the county, and included the construction of a trunk sewer and complete system of laterals, sewage disposal works, an excellent city waterworks system and storage basin, the paving of a notoriously long main street, first with cedar blocks, then with brick, and finally with asphalt, the construc-

tion of a high viaduct, the first of its kind to be paved with concrete, and for a time the management of the municipally owned street railway. He also constructed pavements or waterworks in the towns of Aylmer, Tillsonburg, Paris, Milton, Port Stanley, Lambeth, Tilbury, Forest, Rainy River, Oakville and North Bay.

As engineer for the townships in Elgin County, as well as a number of others in Western Ontario, Mr. Bell became thoroughly versed in municipal drainage practice; it might correctly be said that his experience in this branch of engineering synchronized with the beginning and growth of the drainage laws of the Province. His services were frequently required in examining and reporting on extensive or difficult drainage schemes, and on occasion he was commissioned by the Provincial Government to solve some particularly difficult and contentious problem in Eastern Ontario. While he was frequently required as an expert witness in the drainage courts, it could never be said of him, as it is so frequently said of experts, that his opinion was prejudiced; his opinion was as honestly and fearlessly expressed in the witness box as it could have been in his own office.

Mr. Bell was a member of the Association of Ontario Land Surveyors, the Association of Professional Engineers, and of the Canadian Society of Civil Engineers, now the Engineering Institute, of which last he was for some years also a member of the Council.

The surviving members of the family are Mrs. Bell, nee Kate Darrach, and four sons, George E. Bell, M.E.I.C., of Ottawa, Arthur R. Bell of Toronto, Fred A. Bell, A.M.E.I.C., O.L.S., of St. Thomas, and Walter A. Bell, Ph.D., of Ottawa. The fifth and youngest son, William D., went direct from college to the Great War and was killed at the battle of Courcellette. Dr. Bell, of Merlin, Ont., is a brother, as was the late Judge Bell of Chatham.

The writer cherishes the memory of a friendship which grew steadily during fifteen years of business partnership, and the nineteen years that have since elapsed. One could not know Mr. Bell without recognizing his sterling worth as a citizen, nor be long associated with him without feeling the sincerity of his friendship and admiring the ability and sound judgment that made him so eminently successful in his chosen profession.