

LOST IN TIME

By Marliese Gause > Photos by Cody Storm Cooper

Tempus fugit! Yes, time flies - words that are often engraved on the face of a clock to remind us that we exist in a fleeting moment, a world hurtling through space and time changing with every second that we breathe in and out; time measured in the steady, inexorable swing of a pendulum and the equally steady beat of a heart.

Ian MacDonald knows a thing or two about time! When he emerged from his stint in the military in 1946, it didn't take him more than a few heartbeats to decide to enroll himself in a two-year watchmaking course at Central Tech in Toronto

"I liked working with precision instruments, getting in there and putting a complicated mechanism together and then seeing it work". Ian was gifted with a steady hand and the limitless patience needed in a profession that demanded minute attention to detail.

When he first embarked on his training in 1947 and 1948, watches and clocks were still "mechanical", driven by sets of tiny gears and wheels; balanced with jewels and teeny weeny pivots measuring a mind-boggling six-thousandth of an inch. Battery powered watches were just in their infancy and the clock world had yet to enter the digital revolution.

Ian quickly found work at Lloyd Thompson Jewellers in Parry Sound. Four years later, he took his skills as a watchmaker to the instrument lab at Orenda

Engines in Nobel. There he worked on the instruments and probes of the Iroquois Engine, designed for the ill-fated Avro Arrow, which is still one of the most advanced jet engines ever developed. When the Orenda plant closed in 1959, he purchased his own jewelry store and went into business for himself.

MacDonald's jewelry store was one of two jewellers on Parry Sound's main street. Generally, residents and visitors who were looking for fancy teacups or a beautiful china service would head for Laird's, while those looking for a watch or a clock repair would visit Ian. For 25 years he sold and repaired watches and clocks, closing his doors in 1985 when he retired. Tempus fugit!

Ian may have retired from the jewelry store business, but his watchmaking skills continued to bring him customers who were searching for someone to fix a clock they had inherited or found at a yard sale. With the advent of the digital revolution, it was becoming harder and harder to get old timepieces repaired. Watchmaking was becoming a dying art, literally ticking its way into oblivion.

"The watchmaker's school has folded," Ian mused. Even the Ontario Watchmaker's Association has vanished.

"People would come to me with a clock or a watch they got from the family wanting to see if it could be made to work again." And of course, the lure of a repair was irresistible to Ian.