



by Eiran Harris

The Emperor's Clothier

After several informative conversations with manager Rene Brisebois I was, at long last, escorted into the office of Vincent Gladstone Scully, president of William Scully Ltd. Mr. Scully allotted me a half hour of his busy schedule for an interview. Three hours later I left his office with a lot of information and a great deal of respect for a company which has been in business for over 80 years.

The first question I asked Mr. Scully was whether he had any old buttons, badges, lapel buttons and catalogues which I could add to my collection. Sadly he informed me that some 25 years ago an accountant, who was more interested in profits than with tradition, scrapped everything which was not current and threw out the old catalogues to make room for accounts receivable files.



(I've read that accountants will run the world in the 21st century. There is no hope for us romantics.)

I was, however, cheered up somewhat when Mr. Scully provided the answer to a question which has been puzzling collectors for years. He told me that the designer of many of the Canadian badges, buttons and insignia so familiar to collectors was G. Heridan Lemasnie.

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Mr. Lemasnie sat in grandfather's office overheard clients describing their requirements for badges, buttons and other insignia. All the while he doodled in his sketching pad. By the end of the conversation the sketches were ready to be shown to the clients. I guess you can say that Mr. Lemasnie was grandfather's secret weapon because he never lost an order. Due to Mr. Lemasnie's artistic abilities a regiment would receive the badges and buttons within two months instead of up to one year as was often the case with grandfather's competitors.



ARGYLE & SUTHERLAND

"Many of the familiar Canadian military, police and civilian badges and buttons were designed by Mr. Lemasnie and manufactured by Scully's."

All the old sketches are preserved in thick books which Mr. Scully proudly showed to me.

Mr. Scully, who this year is celebrating 50 years of service with the company, also told me some of the many 'firsts' for which the company is responsible: The first

Lieutenant Governors' full dress uniform to be made in Canada was produced by Scully's. It took two girls a full six months to gold embroider the coat alone. The appreciative recipient was Esioff Leon Patenaude, Lieutenant Governor of Quebec. As well, the firm was the first in Canada to manufacture badges and buttons for the armed forces. It was the first and only to manufacture regimental colors in Canada. Also the first to produce uniform buttons using 'Super Pure' anodized aluminum.

In 1908, with the encouragement of Sir Wilfred Laurier and with regular orders assured by Sir Frederick Borden, Minister of Militia, William Scully opened a factory in Montreal. The Canadian Military Gazette gave an account of the event: "... Mr. William Scully, knowing that it was the desire of the authorities of the various departments at Ottawa to have as many of their requirements as possible manufactured in this country, recently made a lengthy visit to Great Britain, where he purchased the necessary machinery, all of the latest design, and at the same time secured the services of thoroughly qualified foremen to take charge of the respective departments.



"While walking through the different sections of this new plant, one is astonished at the bewildering number of machines and processes through which the various insignia have to pass before badge or button reaches the wearer.

On our way through we observed an expert die-sinker from Great Britain, busily engaged making dies required for the manufacture of uniform buttons and badges.

Mr. Scully is emphatic in stating that he is producing at the present time accoutrements that cannot be excelled by any firm in Great Britain, and this statement can be readily substantiated by experts examining and comparing the Canadian article with other makes.

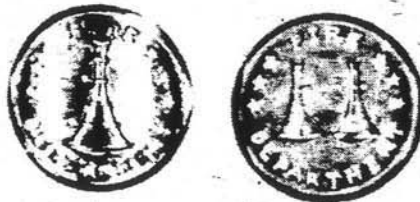
"It will be a matter of interest to know that this is the first and only firm in Canada engaged in the manufacture of the goods mentioned below.

Among the articles now being produced in this establishment are Military, Naval and general Uniform Caps, also helmets, uniform buttons and metal badges of every description and accoutrements for military, naval, police and other forces.



"We may say in passing that for years Mr. William Scully has supplied the Dominion Government with helmets, forage caps, metal badges, uniform buttons, embroidered rank badges, chevrons, waterproof coats, oilskin caps, etc., etc. for use by the Departments of Militia and Defence, Marine and Fisheries, the Royal North West Mounted Police and the Post Office Department. Various railway companies, police departments, steamship companies, etc., are also being supplied by him."

Some ten years before opening the factory in Montreal William Scully established a business in Toronto selling military accoutrements imported from Great Britain.)



The outbreak of the Great War brought expansion to the firm, but it was more the result of patriotic zeal than good business sense. Nearby buildings were taken over and an overhead passageway joined them to the main store across University Street. The firm overproduced in an effort to meet promptly the expected demands of the military.

Following the war's end Canada's militia had more than enough equipment on hand and the company was stuck with a large, unusable stock.

Scully's went into the red and only got back on its feet during the depression years when there was a renewed interest in uniform regalia.

Circumstances were such that president Scully's first job with the company was to carefully remove the wrapping paper and string from the packages which arrived at the factory. He then smoothed out the paper and piled it neatly in a corner and the string he added to an already large ball which was



begun some years before.

During the Second World War expansion was controlled and the amount of surplus goods left at war's end was limited.

In 1955 the firm had to move from University Street to make room for the gigantic Place Ville Marie project. It was located on Craig Street before moving to its present address on Moreau Street in 1966.

Unification of the armed forces may not have been appreciated by Scully's — they were stuck with over \$100,000 worth of obsolete buckles, buttons, badges and other regalia. But collectors didn't mind it at all. They still find their way to 2090 Moreau Street and select from a large variety of goods available for sale.

Manager Rene Brisebois told me that some day, when he can find the time, he will organize the thousands of uniform buttons which are now stored in the basement and make them available to collectors. Perhaps if enough collectors were to write to Mr. Brisebois it will encourage him to do so in the near future.

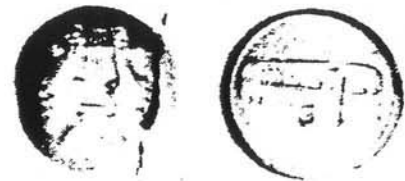
When, in 1973, the R.C.M.P. needed authentic pill-box caps to top off old uniforms to be displayed during celebrations marking the 100th anniversary of the force, they contacted Scully's. Searching their old files the firm came up with a purchase order originally received from the Royal North West Mounted Police in 1906. Using the original specifications the pill-box caps were produced and delivered in time for the celebrations.

Working late at the office one night president Scully was disturbed by loud knocks on the front door. Looking out he saw an apparition lit up like a Christmas tree waving its arms and making strange noises. Mr. Scully's first reaction was to ignore it, but curiosity got the better of him. The apparition turned out to be the Aide-de-Camp to Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia wearing a bemedalled, full dress uniform.

All Mr. Scully remembers of that night is a ride in a luxurious limousine to a luxurious Royal Suite at a downtown hotel and an audience with the Emperor himself.

The outcome of that meeting was an order for a luxuriously embroidered dress uniform for the Emperor.

Mr. Scully modestly informed me that the Tanzanian soldiers who recently overthrew Uganda's Idi Amin were wearing belts and buckles supplied by Scully's.



Quite an accomplishment for a company that employs no salesmen, depending instead on word of mouth advertising by satisfied customers.

From a wartime high of over 200 employees the firm now employs some 40 people many of whom have been with the company for over 20 years. The attrition was due largely to the federal manufacturing tax which gave importers an advantage over Canadian producers and caused Scully's to drastically reduce the production of badges, buttons and other insignia. For some years now the firm has been importing most of these goods from all parts of the world.

Today Scully's specializes in the manufacture of caps of all sorts, but still maintains an expertise in embroidery and metalwork.