



Charles H. Coll and the Invention of Muskol

In the early 1950s, a basement workshop on MacLean Street, New Glasgow, saw a rather extraordinary man begin to carry out experiments which led to the production of the well known insect repellent Muskol. A document dated 1 October 1959 from the province of Nova Scotia registered the manufacture and sale of “Muskol Lures” to Charles H. Coll. This was the starting point for a company which would last until 1982 when the rights to make and market the product were purchased by Schering-Plough Canada Ltd.

Charles Henry Coll was born in Stellarton, Nova Scotia on 19 October 1907 to Henry Edward “Harry” Coll and Elizabeth “Bess” Scott Sutherland.

Harry Coll and his brother Charles Coll came to Pictou County at the turn of the 20th century to work for the Sir Hugh Allan Company of Montreal, owner of the Acadia Coal Company. These two men had their origins in Pennsylvania, USA, coming from a family of Irish immigrants who worked in the coal mining industry. Their father, Hugh Coll, was also an inventor, amongst whose creations was a water siphon system used in ships but probably also in the mining industry.

Both Harry and Charles Coll had graduated from American institutions dealing with mining engineering and had worked for the coal mining giant, Henry Clay Frick. In this county, they became responsible for the sinking of the well known Allan Shaft and Charles Coll became the Manager of the Acadia Coal Company for a period of time. While here, he was responsible for the building of the Acadia Coal Company office which stood on the corner of Foord Street and Acadia Avenue. Both brothers eventually worked in other coal mining areas including Cape Breton and Noranda, Quebec.

Harry, however, married a local girl, Elizabeth Scott Sutherland, daughter of Hector T. Sutherland of the Thompson and Sutherland Limited, which was for a period, one of the largest wholesale and retail hardware houses in Eastern Canada - founded in 1872 by A.C. Thompson and joined shortly after by Hector Sutherland. The marriage of Harry and Bess produced descendants who still live in this county.

Charles Coll, son of this marriage, lived in Stellarton and New Glasgow, worked for a short time for Tibbett's Paint and later became the manager of the local Thompson and Sutherland store in downtown New Glasgow. He was an avid outdoorsman and so, while living on MacLean Street in the early 1950s, Charles Coll began creating animal and fish lures. Documents from the Government of Nova Scotia dated 1 October 1959, show that he was registered from that date, to manufacture and sell a product called "Muskol Lures". A little play-on-words produced the word "Muskol" – which combined "musk", the scent produced by deer - and "call" meaning entice and "Coll" the surname.

And so began a small, family-owned business whose product name was often passed word-of-mouth among those who entered the forests – on this continent and others. Testimonials to Muskol came from many areas and peoples, always saying that it was a superior product and that they wanted more! Charles Coll moved to the Truro-Hilden area of Colchester County where he located his outlet, and he was joined by his sons Harry and Charles Coll, in the business.

Charles H. Coll had many interests and many talents and was generous with his time and wealth in supporting other enterprises. The Nova Scotia Agricultural College in Truro, yearly gives a prize in his name, being a recognition of his service to the Nova Scotia poultry industry. On his own initiative, he had probably helped to save a poultry breed called Chantecler which was one of only two truly Canadian breeds. He discovered a small flock still existing somewhere in the US and so purchased these and had them brought to Nova Scotia. He was also a major funding source for the Nova Scotia Fall Classic Poultry Show.

In 1977, Charles and his son Harry, were inducted into the Honorary Order of the Kentucky Colonels, an organization that recognizes service and contribution to the global community and supports many kinds of charitable activities. The moniker "Colonel" stuck to Charles Coll and was used on the packaging of Muskol – to this day, in fact.

Charles Coll – son of Harry and Bess – carried in his genes, strength in body, mind and character and a strain of ingenuity; he probably could be called a "Renaissance man". Because of his education and various jobs which included laboratory work for Leaver Brothers Limited in Boston and Tibbetts Paints in Trenton and as manager for Thompson and Sutherland Limited in New Glasgow, Charles Coll combined a unique set of circumstances, ideas and opportunities, which helped him invent and produce a line of products, one on which was Muskol insect repellent – now fifty years old.

The Coll family retained the rights to this product until 1982 when it was sold to Schering-Plough Canada Ltd., shortly after the death of Charles Coll. It was however, Charles Coll himself who had all but completed this sale when his death intervened 22 September 1982. Competition with industry giants such as Johnson & Johnson who could run major ad campaigns, and rising and prohibitive fuel costs, were the major factors necessitating the sale to Schering-Plough.

The year, 2009, marked the 50th anniversary of Muskol. Charles Coll was, according to what we can read and what his friends and family say, a very special gentleman. He was a

dedicated outdoorsman, an inventor, a family man – hard working, creative, determined. And Nova Scotia was indeed lucky to have enticed his father to our shores and to still have his descendants among us. On the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library website we find a collection in the “Digital Projects” entitled “Pictou County Characters”, a database comprising photographs taken by Don McGarva in the 1940s and 1950s, done mainly around New Glasgow. There you will see one entitled “Community Minded Charlie Coll” taken about 1951 along the East River with the George Street bridge in the background. Under the heading “occupation”, we find “Inventor of Muskol”. We see in that photo a pleasant looking young man in his early 40s, labelled for all-time as an “Inventor” and “Community Minded”. Both terms seem to have been well deserved!