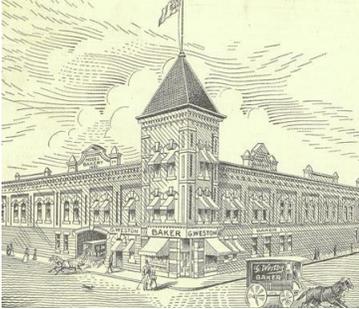


A Model Bakery

Spared No Money



Model Bakery, Soho and Phoebe streets, Toronto, ca. 1899.

When George Weston's Model Bakery went into production in the fall of 1897, it created quite a stir. As Canada's biggest, most modern bread factory, it received considerable press coverage and was the subject of at least one newspaper report south of the border. It also set off a price war among Toronto's bakers.

The city's press wrote glowingly of how Mr. George Weston had "spared no money" in building his new Model Bakery and marveled at the factory's ability to turn out thousands of loaves of bread on a daily basis. While turn-of-the-century Toronto was a city of bakeries, dozens of them, most were small operations that made a few hundred loaves a day. But with his new bread factory, George Weston was baking 3,200 loaves a day, with the capacity to double production. Within months, the Model Bakery was making more than 6,000 loaves per day.

The Evening Star was impressed enough with the operation and its proprietor, given his humble beginnings as a baker's apprentice, to write, "Perseverance and pluck combined with brains have brought many a man out of the rut. Such a man is Mr. George Weston."

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A Model Bakery

Should Not Suffer



The Model Bakery wagon room with salesmen and their rigs, ca. 1897.

It wasn't only the Model Bakery's capacity to mass-produce bread that attracted attention, though, but also its high standards with regards to cleanliness and neatness.

"The fault of many bakers was that their surroundings were not clean enough, and Mr. Weston decided that the fame of his genuine home-made bread should not suffer through any lack of cleanliness," wrote *The Evening Star*. "Though bakery, house and stables are under one roof, the building is so constructed that one does not affect the others."

As immaculate as the premises were, George Weston was no less particular about his staff, all of whom were expected to maintain the highest standards of personal hygiene. Separate bathing and dressing rooms were provided and workers were required to thoroughly wash before and after every shift.

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A Model Bakery

Best Ideas



Bakers tend to their ovens at the Model Bakery, ca. 1897.

In planning his Model Bakery, George Weston traveled to different countries to study the latest in machinery and production methods. *The Evening Telegram* reported how “his new establishment is a composite of the best ideas he has been able to gather.” The end result was a carefully laid-out manufacturing process that maximized efficiency.

The factory consisted of two storeys, the first where the bread was baked, in eight enameled brick ovens, and the second, the mixing floor, where the dough was prepared. Ten large tubs, all on rollers, were used to combine flour, water and yeast. The dough was then run to a large mechanical mixer. “This is a machine in which the tub sits, and as the machinery is started the tub is raised, and as it raises, two flanged mixers revolve into the tub and thoroughly mix the dough.” When done, it was then dropped down one of two chutes onto a large table on the floor below.

Next the dough was moulded and put into baking pans, which were placed on racks underneath the tables, also on rollers. They were then run to the ovens. Once the bread was baked, the pans were removed and placed on movable racks, which were rolled to a separate room in order for the loaves to cool. The bread men then took over, filling orders. Finally, the salesmen brought their wagons around to a covered dock to load that day’s delivery of freshly baked Weston’s bread.

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A Model Bakery

Have Fallen Out



Model Bakery bread route salesmen, Soho and Phoebe streets, Toronto, ca. 1900.

With his Model Bakery in production and his wagons busier than ever, plying the roads of Toronto and its suburbs, everything seemed to be going well for George Weston. But soon he began hearing unsettling reports from his bread route salesmen. Apparently he was being undercut by the competition.

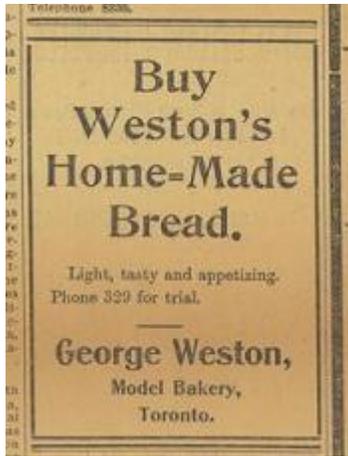
His customers were asking if they could buy Weston's *Real Home-Made Bread* at the same reduced prices being offered by other bakers for their bread. For George, that set off alarm bells, not because he was afraid of competition but because what he was hearing ran contrary to the local bakers' association and its agreement setting a common price for a loaf of bread.

With the agreement broken, George Weston lowered his price from 12 cents for a large loaf down to ten. "Bakers have fallen out with one another since Mr. Geo Weston has left their Association and the outcome will be the bakers' loss and the citizens' gain," he wrote in an October 1897 newspaper ad.

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A Model Bakery

One Quality



A Model Bakery newspaper ad, *Toronto World*, June 25, 1900.

George's competitors were not about to throw in the towel, though. They lowered their wholesale price from 11 cents a loaf all the way down to six in an apparent bid to fill the store shelves of Toronto with their bread. Weston thanked his customers for "staying so nobly by him" and predicted that those selling bread at such drastically reduced prices, "the principal leaders of the combine", could not continue to make money. In the meantime, George Weston declared that he would stick to his business:

"Mr. Weston does not intend to be governed by any ring or association in the future but will attend strictly to his own business, which has made Mr. G. WESTON'S name a household word with the citizens of Toronto for his SUPERIOR REAL HOME-MADE BREAD. He promises to treat all classes alike, one quality for the rich, the same for the poor. No half a dozen prices with Mr. Geo. Weston."

While the price of Model Bakery bread fluctuated over the coming years, depending on the going price for wheat, business flourished. In less than two years, George Weston was selling three times more bread. Not only that, Weston's bread was being shipped to no fewer than 38 cities and towns throughout Ontario.

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A Model Bakery

In the Smell of Bread



George Weston and family,
Model Bakery, ca. 1897.

Business aside, the Model Bakery was more than Canada's biggest bread factory. It was also the home of George and Emma Maud Weston, and their young daughter Pearl. In an era when many proprietors lived above their shops, living in an apartment in the corner tower of the bread factory wouldn't have seemed so unusual. In practical terms, it meant George could attend to the demands of his business at all times.

That small apartment above the bakery was also the birthplace of the couple's first son, Willard Garfield Weston, in 1898. George placed a British Union Jack and an American Stars and Stripes above their bed, so that the child would be born under the flags of both parents' roots. Soon after the birth, George brought the baby boy down to the bread factory floor to immerse him "in the smell of bread", as Garfield himself would tell the story many years later.

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A Model Bakery

If You Like Them



A decorative Model Bakery bread wagon, hand-coloured postcard, Toronto, ca. 1908.

While George Weston was known throughout the city for his bread, early in the new century he began making biscuits. The bread business had always been very competitive, but so too was the biscuit trade, with Christie, Brown & Co. being the big Canadian biscuit maker. Instead of spending a lot of money on advertising, though, George employed other, more innovative approaches, as described by one company history:

“Vanilla wafer sales were promoted by three men in a fancy wagon of brightly painted scrolls and decorated mirrors. The men rode through the streets and distributed samples door to door, telling housewives, ‘if you like them, buy them at your grocers.’ For 1908, this was considered forceful sales promotion.”

Sales of the company’s biscuits grew and so did the number of “biscuit travelers” or traveling salesmen. Soon, there were more than a dozen biscuit travelers calling on merchants throughout Ontario. And if a salesman was laid up due to a cold or other illness, a letter promptly went out that apologized for any inconvenience, along with an order form for Weston’s Biscuits.

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A Model Bakery

Biscuit Factory



Weston's Biscuit Factory,
Peter St., Toronto, 1910.

In 1911, George Weston did something almost unthinkable. He sold the Model Bakery and stopped making his bread.

Weston joined with other manufacturers from Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg to form the Canada Bread Company, Limited. The bread business had always been one of narrow margins, and consolidation may have seemed not only desirable but inevitable in order to reduce costs and increase efficiencies. George was also willing to move in other directions, namely biscuits, which had better margins. The Model Bakery that had turned out millions of loaves of Weston's bread became part of the assets of the new firm. George Weston became a company director.

For the next ten years, George Weston Limited, along with the other Canada Bread partners, was barred from making bread. Meantime, a brand new Weston's Biscuit Factory went into production at the corner of Peter and Richmond streets in Toronto.

It would not be the last time the people of Toronto would eat George Weston's bread, though. When former customers kept complaining about the quality of the city's bread, asking him when he was going back into the trade, he finally did. In 1921, with the ten-year agreement up, George Weston went back to the business of making his bread.