

**Andrew A. Gawley**

*THE MAN WITH THE IRON HANDS*

**Researched by**

**Coral Chapple Henderson**

**July 20, 1996.**

**newspaper clippings**

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REQUEST #

April 19, 1917

## MADE HIS OWN HANDS.

The Orillia Packet tells this story about a new citizen of that town, formerly of Meaford:—

A remarkable man came to Orillia early this year, and is now working at the Fisher Motor Company's factory. He is Andrew Gawley, and he hails from Meaford. He has two steel hands, and he uses them with wonderful facility, and he designed the hands himself.

Mr. Gawley lost both his hands above the wrists through coming in contact with a circular saw many years ago. He thought out the principle of the hands which he now uses while lying in the hospital at Owen Sound. On coming out he endeavored to have his ideas put into form, but was prevailed upon to adopt an artificial hand which was already being manufactured. This hand might be very useful to a man who retained one of his natural hands, but did not meet Mr. Gawley's case. He therefore returned to the carrying out of his own ideas, and with the help of his brother and a friendly blacksmith, was at last able to make a somewhat rough pair of hands for himself. Finding that the principle was correct, he went on from that to make a better pair, and has also made a number of hands for others who are afflicted like himself.

Mr. Gawley's hands may not be ornamental, but they are very useful. Mr. Vollans, manager of the Fisher Motor Company, says that

on any operation he has been to at he could do as well as any other man in the shop. For a time Gawley was engaged in boring plugs for the shells. These weigh 45 pounds, and he was the only man on the job who in lifting them away from the machine could do with one hand.

Mr. Gawley can do with his steel hands almost anything that an ordinary man can do. When he rises in the morning he can, if necessary, search about for a match and light the lamp. He can light the fire, dress himself (all except putting on a collar, where he cannot reach to button) at the back of his neck, and get his own breakfast. He can give a very uncomfortable squeeze in a handshake, for between his steel fingers he can crush the hardest pebble. On the other hand, he can lift a delicate china cup by the handle with as gentle a touch as a lady. For, strange to say, he has the sense of feeling in his steel hands, really, of course, in his arms, which have become highly sensitized. He can write well.

In view of the large number of soldiers who have lost hands in the war his invention may prove a real boon to humanity. With one natural and one steel hand, a man would, for practical purpose, be almost as well off as with two hands. It is said that a prize of \$50,000 has been offered in England for the best artificial hand, and Mr. Gawley is inclined to enter the competition.

June 24, 1920

**THE MAN WITH  
THE STEEL HANDS**

A gentleman in town took his lawn mower to Mr. Andrew Gawley for repairs and he was confronted with a sign on the repair shop reading as follows: "Off work to-day on account of a broken arm. Will be all right to-morrow." The man laughed at the idea of so quick a recovery but found Mr. Gawley at work next morning with his both hands as though no accident had happened. So much for the man with steel bones in his arms.

**THURSDAY, JULY 1, 1926**

**REWARD—A reward of \$5.00 will be offered for information that will lead to the conviction of the party or parties who removed the cap from a radiator of the car of Andrew Gawley as well as other articles missing.—Andrew Gawley, Repair Works, Seymour street. 27**

Feb 9, 1928

**FOR SALE—St. Lawrence Marine Engines, Lawn Mowers and Bicycles. Call and see them. All work guaranteed. Andrew Gaw-**

March 13, 1930

**SKATING AND OUTFITS COMPLETE**

Buy your Outfit from the Skating Grinder. Have your skates sharpened to suit your liking, (ask the hockey boy), free of extra cost. A good job guaranteed. Call and see complete supply.

**ANDREW A. GAWLEY  
Opposite the Ford Garage**

Dec 25, 1930

**SKATING OUTFITS.**

New and Used Skating Outfits and Skates (C.C.M., new) for sale. Call and see these before you buy. All skates ground—true and smooth hollow grind.

**ANDREW GAWLEY,  
Seymour Street**

June 2, 1932

**—Andrew A. Gawley solicits your patronage for Lawn Mower work. Every mower is guaranteed after grinding and adjusting to cut like new mower. Phone 328. Mowers called for and delivered.**

March 31, 1921

# BIG DEMAND FOR ARTIFICIAL HANDS

MR. ANDREW GAWLEY IS HAND-  
LESS AND IS FAST MAKING  
AND SELLING HANDS OF HIS  
OWN INVENTION

In another column we reproduce a photo of Mr. Andrew Gawley and three of his customers for artificial hands. As will be seen Mr. Gawley is handless, other than the ones he made himself, and he is now employed in assisting those who are unfortunately placed in a similar position. Recently three customers were here on the same day in search of limbs that would be of service to them and the picture was taken. The first person in the party is Mr. Chas. Stone, of Stayner, who had his arm taken off in the war and was fitted up by the Government with an artificial hand. For instant use and usefulness it proved a failure and he ordered one of Mr. Gawley's celebrated five-point iron hands, which are proving their worth as time goes on. Another Stayner man, Mr. Fred Mitchell is second in the picture and has also ordered a hand from Mr. Gawley. The last in the picture is

Mr. Joshua Dobson, who hails from near Feversham and who was having repairs made to his "iron member" while in town. He has been using his hand purchased from Mr. Gawley for some 10 years.

At the time the picture was taken Mr. Gawley was working on a hand for Mr. Arol Wilie, of Dean Lake, Ont., an employee of the Hope Lumber Co.

Mr. Gawley himself can be seen in the picture displaying the hands of his own invention. Only three natural hands are displayed by the quartette and Mr. Gawley is to be congratulated on being able with his handicap to put on the market such a necessary and useful substitute for the natural limbs that many have been unfortunately deprived of. He has had many enquiries from various armless men from different sections and those who are using his "iron hands" are his best boosters and advertisers and many prospects are in sight for future orders. Soldiers now claim that Mr. Gawley's product is the best manufactured from Vancouver to New York and the more the armless men of the war learn of his invention the more enquiries he receives. He is kept busy with orders and has a number of prospects for the near future.

We might add that Mr. Gawley's father is blind and the unfortunate pair deserve barrels of credit for the way they provide for themselves.

## HAS HONOR PLACE IN STAR WEEKLY

ANDREW A. GAWLEY RECEIVES  
FAVORABLE MENTION WHILE  
ATTENDING AMPUTATION  
ASSOCIATION MEETING IN  
TORONTO LAST WEEK.

Andrew A. Gawley, of Meaford, lost both his hands when he was seventeen years old, by falling across a buzz saw.

He has been in Toronto this week demonstrating to the Amputations Association and to returned soldiers generally the artificial hands which he has designed and manufactured himself.

He can, with his steel hands, thread a needle or pick up a keg of nails, affix a stamp to a letter which he has written himself, or wield a sledge hammer, dress himself from head to foot and lift and hold up weights far beyond the power of any but professional strong men, though he is himself of slight build.

Part of Mr. Gawley's story is the courage and determination with which he faced the awful prospect of going through life without his hand.

"You don't realize," said Mr. Gawley, "what wonderful instruments your hands are. It seems to me, the

Oct 2, 1924

take you long to enumerate the things your leg or your foot can do for you. But when you think of the things your hands do for you, you never come to the end.

"Arithmetic says that one is half of two. But one hand, I assure you is infinitely more than the half of two hands—when you have no hands at all."

While he was in the town hospital after losing his hands, both between the wrist and the elbow, Mr. Gawley began planning the artificial hands that would have to serve him. His father was blind. But none the less on coming out of hospital with his two stumps, he directed his blind father in the making of two wooden hands armed, after the plan of the regular artificial hand, with hooks for lifting and holding simple objects.

With this primitive equipment Gawley proceeded to make out of cast iron, the hands which he had envisioned while lying in hospital. When he completed the cast iron hands laboriously filed and ground out of the brittle metal, with the assistance of his blind father, he found them the miraculous success he had dreamed of them. He then set to work on the steel, and completed the artificial hands in this strongest metal—of which is still good and in use this day.

It is a simple hand, with five holes or grips in it. Five different grips of different sizes and degrees of power, two opening as the hand

Has Honor Place In Star Weekly  
(Andrew Gawley)

Oct 2, 1924

from the body. The great problem in designing an artificial hand is to find the mathematical secret governing the grips at various distances from the body. There is no sense of touch.

Yet with his five-grip hands Mr. Gawley can eat his dinner as calmly as you or I. He can reach out, pick up a spoon or fork and place them to his mouth with a grip that is secure. He can pick up the handle of a frail china cup in the same pair of pinchers with which he can, by a different bend of the arm, crush a granite pebble into dust.

Here are only a few of the things he can do: he has lifted a Ford engine block, crank shaft and pistons—260 pounds dead weight—in one hand! You see, he is not handicapped by the normal weakness of the muscles of the fingers and wrists. In his steel hands he has all the power of his arm muscles alone, and no weak fingers or wrist to take into the consideration.

He is, by trade, a mechanic. He runs a flourishing little business in Meaford in bicycle repairs, lawn mowers, grinds, skates—a regular bicycle shop. He can do the work just as fast as anybody, and where dealing with repairs requiring great force he does a better job than is humanly possible for the average repair man. He can respoke a wheel and put new hubs in in thirty minutes. During the war he served in

handled the heavy blocks of iron steel with more ease than ordinary men.

With his hands of steel he can a bow in his shoe laces, throw a stone seventy-five feet, catch a thrown ball, play the mouth organ, turn the leaf of books, can shave himself, can open doors, reach to the floor at full arm length and pick up a pin (a trick impossible to the regular artificial hand), telephone, turn on electric light, tie knots in rope or string,

a motorcycle and drive a gear, a motor car—his longest drive being 200 miles, writes a neater hand than most folks, uses a hammer, works with his hand, can take hold of a nail in the wall and pull it out with ease, can crush a stone to powder between his fingers, open his hunting watch, break a steel wire, and be a bachelor does all his own housework and keeps his home like his shop, tidy as a pin.

There is only one thing he can't—put on his collar.

With that one exception he can do and does everything his more blessed fellow man can do—and some things he can do better.

Of all trades he selected the one that looked most hopeless to a man without hands—the mechanical trade. And he is making a good living at it.—Toronto Star Weekly.

January 19, 1933

## NOTICE

Andrew A. Gawley, the skate man, requests your patronage. He carries the best line of C.C.M. Skates are used by leading Canadian and American Hockey teams. The steel in C.C.M. Skates is specially selected and prepared and in grinding they do not scratch deeply and so gives a smooth running surface with very little rubbing down. C.C.M. Skates are properly set on the shoes so gives the skater an advantage. The outfits are good value for your money. Call and see before you buy elsewhere. Give your skate grinder a chance for his life. Skates are all he has for a winter business. He does not carry a big spill of Dry Goods, Groceries, nor Drugs mixed in his business.

A. A. GAWLEY.

April 26, 1934

# A. W. GAWLEY TO BE SHOWN IN MOVIES

MOTION PICTURE COMPANY  
REPRESENTATIVE IN MEAFORD A FEW DAYS AGO  
TAKING PICTURES OF  
THE MAN WITH THE  
IRON HANDS AT  
WORK IN SHOP,

April 26, 1934

A couple of weeks ago, the Canadian Press spread abroad a newspaper article featuring Andrew Gawley of this town, as a result of which last week the Newsreel Motion Picture Company, of New York, sent a representative to get pictures of Mr. Gawley "doing his stuff" with his steel hands.

Mr. George Valiquette, this representative, was vastly impressed beyond his expectations—at what Mr. Gawley could do, and shot a sizable reel of Mr. Gawley demonstrating actions with his steel hands. The showing of this reel, no doubt will bring plenty of publicity to Andrew Gawley and to Meaford. Mr. Valiquette provided a meal for Andrew Gawley brought over to his shop from Pauls Hotel, and pictures of him eating, working his bicycle repair business, crushing a stone between his hands, chopping wood, hammering, writing, etc. Together the "movie man" got about 600 feet of reel.

Mr. Valiquette is a much traveled man, as is necessitated by his business. He has been to far north to Fin Land, to Greenland, Alaska, Japan, and those who had an opportunity of talking to him found it extremely interesting.

May 17, 1934

—Mr. Andrew Gawley has received many letters of enquiry about his hands since the Canadian Press published a write-up about him and

July 5, 1934

### ANDREW GAWLEY WRITES

Mrs. G. A. Paul received an interesting letter from Mr. Andrew Gawley from the Odditorium at the Century of Progress, Chicago, in which he expressed appreciation of her talk with him on her recent visit at the Chicago Fair. He also comments on the extreme heat in the Windy City and the number of people fainting as a result. His hours are long and the earliest he has left the grounds since he commenced was 12.05 midnight. He says he felt a little blue at leaving home but when he got away, he often recalls the many long days of tired or weary toil spent at his little shop in Meaford where he had to compete with so many who had so many times the advantage of him, he felt more contented to stay in Chicago for a time. On Children's day at six o'clock some thousands of them were actually lost and at 11 p.m. some 65 were still mysteriously lost about him and many more in other places about the grounds. I am the only Canadian here and that seems strange when one considers that there are people working and doing acts from Egypt, India, Japan, Trinidad, Mexico, Florida, Tennessee and many other States north and

south. I have not been through many other shows yet and the only way I can get is to climb out in the mornings. Our bus reaches here at 12 and soon we hear the call. Did you know the city was 65 miles long and a great distance the other way. The colored population is about 125,000 and they own a part of the city some ten miles long by a mile wide. They are considerably separated from the whites in their living quarters. I got the Express all right and you could not have sent me a more newsy copy. We did not get our Meaford member in. You probably saw more of the Fair than I have. I went through the Ford exhibit and saw some older cars than I have. One of them built in 1865. I do not remember who tried to build the horseless carriage then. Ford has them here of very many dates and models. I wished I had brought my

Buffalo Bill saddle as I think it would be an oddity for the Ripley show case here. It is really odd owing to the man that owned it and the popularity of Wm. Cody. It was an earlier way of transportation for mail and general travel than our beautiful and fast gas machines.

Please extend my regards to all enquiring friends.

Andrew A. Gawley,  
Ripley's Odditorium,  
World's Fair, Chicago.



June 21, 1924

## ANDREW GAWLEY AT THE CENTURY OF PROGRESS WORLD'S FAIR, CHICAGO

When Mrs. G. A. Paul was in Chicago last week at the World's Fair, she took time to visit Ripley's "Odditorium" to see Andrew Gawley. Mrs. Paul went up after Mr. Gawley's show and spoke to him, and passed along some Meaford news. Mr. Gawley was delighted to see Mrs. Paul, and said he was very lonesome for Meaford, though he was enjoying his work, and making better money by far than he could here.

Oct 11, 1934

## THE MAN WITH STEEL HANDS

Andrew A. Gawley of Meaford, Ontario, is Canada's outstanding example of the truth of the adage: You can't keep a good man down.

Thirty-two years ago, when he was a young man of 17, he lost both his forearms in a sawmill accident. Even before the stumps were healed the boy and his blind father were at work on an ingenious pair of artificial arms and claw-like steel hands operated by the movements of the young man's shoulders.

Today Andrew Gawley can do about everything with his steel hands that other people can do with their hands, so skilful has he become with the talon-like fingers.

He makes his living as a machinist and is a facile and skilful workman. He writes a neat and flowing hand and can handle a rifle with the most

Dec 20, 1934

## GAWLEY PICTURES SHOWN IN ENGLAND

MR. HARTLEY PLUNKETT, OF LONDON, ENG., FORMERLY OF MEAFORD, SEES MOTION PICTURE DEPICTING MR. GAWLEY, OF MEAFORD, PARTAKING OF A MEAL WITH HIS IRON HANDS

In a letter to his parents, Mr. Hartley Plunkett stated that while attending a motion picture theatre in London, Eng., he and Mrs. Plunkett saw depicted on the screen Mr. Andrew Gawley of Meaford, partaking of a meal with his iron hands. Seated beside him at a small table on the Meaford Bowling Green, was a young girl. The picture in its entirety was of deep interest to Mr. and Mrs. Plunkett as it also showed a portion of the Big Head river and part of Paul's Hotel, scenes of which both were very familiar and very delighted with. The world isn't so large after all.

May 23, 1935

THURSDAY, MAY 23, 1935

## Andrew Gawley Goes To California This Week

Will Again Take Part in Ripley's Oddity Exposition For The Summer — Expects To Be Absent Until November Next

Mr. Andrew A. Gawley has again signed up with the Ripley Oddity Exposition and leaves here this week for San Diego, California, where he will take part in the "Round the World Oddities" in connection with the Ripley International Pacific Exposition until some time in November.

Mr. Gawley will be remembered as having appeared with the Ripley Shows at Chicago last summer during the World's Fair. In this connection he received world-wide publicity and he and his iron hands have

appeared in motion pictures in every continent since that time. Mr. Gawley is a hard worker and spends much time making iron hands for the unfortunate, and deserves great praise for the way he maintains himself.

Meaford friends are pleased to learn of his recent contract as it affords him an easier and more lucrative way of making a living than by every day labor under his handicap.

April 8, 1936

SEE THE NEW C.C.M. STREAMLINED BICYCLE

Now on Display in our Window

We also have a large stock of rebuilt Bicycles — Also a full line of Bicycle Tires and Accessories  
"Buy your Bicycle from the Bicycle Men"

GAWLEY'S BICYCLE SHOP

May 20, 1943

## Andrew Gawley Joins Nanson & Fenton Show

Mr. Andrew Gawley has signed up with the Nanson & Fenton Show and will report in the next few days to open at Halifax on May 26th. He will be absent for the summer.

Mr. Gawley has spent some years in the "Believe it or not" string of entertainers and he enjoys the touring during the summer months. This year he goes to the Maritime provinces to start with and knows little of where his movements will be as the season proceeds. As "the man with the iron hands" he is known throughout this hemisphere, and we trust his activities this year will be bigger and better than ever.

Aug 7, 1944

## "Man's Inhumanity to Man"

There is one man in Meaford who is deserving of all the sympathy and help that this paper can bestow on any of our fellow-men. The man to whom we refer is none other than our neighbor and friend, Andrew A. Gawley, the man with the iron hands. Mr. Gawley was deprived of both hands through a threshing machine accident some years ago, and he has displayed all the courage that any human could command. Through his own efforts he maintains himself and gives support to every good cause that is humanly possible for him to bestow in his limited circumstances. He is a splendid type of citizen, energetic to a degree and really proud of being able to act his part most acceptably in the community. Of him it could truly be said, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

While Mr. Gawley is a wonderful example to the human race, there is a second side to his unfortunate case. In his business as a bicycle repair man and machinist in his own way, he comes in contact with the public that should be one of admiration, but lo and behold, he is subjected to many forms of deceit—theft of people stealing his tools, his money and heaping on their ridicule because his service is not up to that of you and I. This is not what it should be. He is entitled to the protection that his unfortunate circumstances warrant, and that is a helping hand to correct all the depredations which he has been forced to put up with.

Boys and men too are continually heaping their wrath on his head, and we hope the Chief of Police will strive to see that he has the protection that his condition warrants. Thanks a lot for such consideration.

Feb 19, 1948

## GAWLEY BUILDING PREY TO FLAMES

Premises Occupied by Meaford Cleaners and Dyers Suffered Heavily When Plant Goes Up in Smoke—Loss to Mr. Gawley is Also Heavy

Fire broke out in the Andrew Gawley building, south of the cement bridge early on Monday morning, and it was completely destroyed. The premises were occupied by Meaford Cleaners and Dyers, owned and operated by Frank Forester. How the fire started is a mystery, as Mr. Forester attended the only fire in the building (under the boiler) about 10 o'clock Sunday evening. Nothing was amiss when taxi driver Owen Devlin put his car in the Smith Garage, next door, about two o'clock. About three-thirty the night telephone operator, Mrs. Margaret Ford, sensed that things were not right when the signal light kept flashing, and contacted Night Constable Wm. White, who on investigation turned in the alarm. Firemen were delayed some minutes in getting the water supply owing to frozen hydrants, and in the meantime the fire gained such headway that the saving of the building was impossible. Fortunately the

wind was in a quarter which spared other buildings in the danger zone until the brigade really got working. A big frame structure within a few feet of the one destroyed was only slightly damaged. Had this fire started in the section north of the bridge it could have been a serious conflagration for the town and community.

The building destroyed was owned by Andrew Gawley, the man with the steel hands, and was only partially covered by insurance, and his loss is keenly felt. Mr. Forester, while handicapped through being put out of business, is planning on re-establishing himself as soon as a location and equipment can be secured.

The prompt action of Mrs. Ford at the telephone switchboard must have been one of mental telepathy, which inspired her to call the police. This is the second such practical inspiration felt by this talented lady which proved so beneficial in the saving of Meaford property and possibly lives, and she is entitled to her full reward in the exercise of her duties and a job well done.

June 26, 1952

page 1

# YOUNGSTER SAVES FAMILY IN BLAZE

Ronnie McDougall, young son of Mr. and Mrs. Jack McDougall, saved two of his sisters and a baby brother when fire gutted the building in which they lived near the Sykes St. bridge last Friday afternoon.

The building, owned by Andrew Gawley, Meaford's "Man With the Iron Hands," was completely gutted and the inmates escaped with only the clothes on their backs.

Cause of the fire is believed to have been children playing with matches in the absence of their mother.

The building, which is situated in the business section near the Big Head River, comprises a bicycle and lawn mower repair shop and an apartment above.

At the time the fire was noticed by Douglas Smith, who operates the garage next door, Mrs. McDougall had stepped out to the postoffice and Mr. McDougall was at the grist mill where he is employed. The fire was well under way, with flames escaping from the upstairs windows before being noticed.

Mr. Smith noticed little Ronnie literally herding his sisters Nancy and Christine, (Margaret was absent at the time) out of the house and dragging baby Murray, who had slipped out of his arms. Although the chil-

Carl C. Manore, publisher of the Express, assisted Mr. Gawley from the building. He was suffering from cuts about the head but refused to leave his repair shop.

Mr. and Mrs. McDougall and the family, Ronnie, seven, Margaret, six, Nancy, five, Christine, three, and Murray, ten months, are living with friends.

The fire left the building a shambles and did much to destroy the economy Mr. Gawley has been building up since coming to Meaford in 1915.

This is not the first time he has met with severe adversity. In early life he was deprived of the use of both arms in a sawmill accident. Through his own pluck and ingenuity he built iron hands which have helped to provide his livelihood for many of his almost four-score years.

His living has been insured ~~many ways by doing a tour through~~ the United States, Canada and Mexico with the Ripley show and a late junket with Conklin Bros. Mr. Gawley spent 13 years on the road making ~~a misfortune that would have daunted~~ the spirits of lesser men return to means of life.

- continued page 2 -

On retiring from the show business he built up a lawn mower and bicycle repair and sales depot. He also acquired the property on which he now lives. While a great part of the new stock of mowers and bikes was saved, the running equipment of the shop was water-soaked. The living quarters upstairs were completely wrecked.

Mr. Gawley's immediate needs are clothing, doors and lumber to cover his body and give him protection against the weather. He says, also, that a cheque for around \$50 in payment on a bike was lost in the fire as well as his records. Persons owing are asked to check their records and if this cheque does not come through the bank to make a replacement on the same.

This is an opportunity for the good folk of Meaford and district to give a helping hand to one who has made every effort to maintain his independence.

Feb 25, 1954

THE MEAFORD EXPRESS

# Andy, the Man With the Iron Hands

One of Meaford's best-known older citizens and businessmen is Andy Gawley. He travelled with Ripley for 13 years, and was known as the man with iron hands.

Mr. Gawley was born in 1872 on a farm near Goring, Euphrasia township. Early part of his life was spent in the village of Elsinore, a small town near Southampton. Andy recalls the fun he used to have around this hamlet. He said it was common for him to leave school at 4 o'clock, run seven miles into Southampton for a game of football and run home for dinner. On days when he was feeling friskier, he extended his run to Port Elgin. It is a known fact he was an exceptional runner and jumper. He hops along the streets of Meaford at 82 at a pace that would put most youngsters to shame.

Andy mangled both hands in a sawmill accident at Spry, a sawmill near Lion's Head in the Bruce Peninsula when he was 16. It took more than a week to get him into the Owen Sound hospital, the trip being made across the bay by boat. His hands were so badly injured both had to be removed. He tried several patent hands, but was not satisfied. He conceived the idea in his own mind as to hands which would give better satisfaction. He arranged, when he recovered, to have them made, and has been using them ever since.

During his career, Andy has operated a cigar store, sold fruit trees, and silverware, been a blacksmith and tinsmith.

His first job on leaving the Owen Sound hospital was clerking in a cigar store. He did not like the close confinement nor the ease of the work. He then took to tramping up and down the Bruce Peninsula selling fruit trees and silverware.

He tells of one experience in horse trading. While on the road as a tinsmith out of Orangeville,

he was approached by travelling gypsies who wanted to trade a horse. He made the swap, but after so doing, found out the horse was so balky he could not handle it even with his iron hands. He endeavored to trade back with the gypsy and give him something to boot. An altercation arose and Andy landed in court and was fined \$17 for trying to uphold his rights. He said, while \$17 was a big sum, it gave him valuable experience and taught him not to

be too trusting, especially with the police force of that time.

During his travels with Ripley, Andy was at the World's Fair, Chicago, exhibitions at San Diego, California, Texas, Florida, Cleveland, San Francisco and New York. On leaving Ripley he spent a year with Conklin Brothers, doing a number of Canadian towns.

He was made famous by Ripley as The Man With the Iron Hands. Andy said one of the questions asked while on tour was how a man with no hands could make his own hands. He explained the plan of his hands was created in his own mind, and he was able to show others how to make them for him.

Andy keeps himself busy repairing bicycles, sharpening skates and scissors and doing odd jobs which test his mechanical skill. He has always had a fierce desire to be independent, and for that reason, has always operated on his own. He said his arms have been bothering him lately as he has had several bad falls on icy pavement. He does not believe one should quit work at 50. Thirty-two years past he exerts his strength in shoveling walks as shown in the above picture, while his dog Blackie, and Skip, belonging to a tenant, watch.

Returning from his travels, Andy built a business block on his property which was occupied by the Meaford Cleaners and Dyers. It was completely gutted by fire on February 16, 1948. An endeavor was made, at that time, by kind people of this neighborhood to set up a fund. The full objective was not maintained, and Andy has been going along under his own steam. He now lives in a barn he moved from the rear of Paul's Hotel. This building was also badly damaged by fire in 1952, but the resolute old citizen still maintains his residence.

Not many would value independence as highly as Andy Gawley, so much so that he could not be content with the confinement and easy life of a cigar store. He wanted to be his own boss. His independent spirit was shown in his tussle with the gypsies, because a man as handicapped as Andy, must have real courage to attempt to maintain his rights in

Andy is a staunch member of the Meaford United Church and one who practices his religion by constant attendance. During the last illness of his father who was nearly blind he looked after him.



ANDY GAWLEY AT WORK



January 1, 1911

ANDREW GAWLEY

## OVERCOME HANDICAPS TO BECOME USEFUL CITIZEN

Andrew Gawley who won wide repute as "The Man with the Iron Hands," died Sunday morning, December 25, at the White Manor Nursing Home, Owen Sound, where he had been a patient for about a week. Mr. Gawley, who was in his 91st year, conquered an almost insurmountable handicap when, as a boy of 17 years, he suffered the loss of both hands in a buzz saw accident, and lived a long and useful life.

Misfortune was not altogether new to the Gawley family at the time of the tragic accident which severed both hands of the youth. His father was blind and had never seen Andy, but it was through the fine touch of his skillful hands that the first pair of steel hands was fashioned roughly, in the blacksmith shop at Ripley. Andrew himself improved the steel hands which he wore until they were perfected with five separate grips and enabled him to catch an object thrown to him.

Mr. Gawley, 'Andy' as he was known to young and old, operated his own business and for many years was a skilled craftsman at sharpening skates and secured more business than he could handle. He also was in constant demand to repair bicycles and lawn mowers and at the time of his death still owned a bicycle shop. In the repair of bicycles his steel hands enabled

parts without the use of tools. He rode a bicycle and motorcycle and established a reputation as a winner of many bicycle and running races. He thought nothing of a bicycle ride to Collingwood or Owen Sound. He was a man of integrity and always strived for perfection in his work, for which his charge was often very minor. His shop was often filled with youngsters who were intrigued with his skill as a workman, and his kindly disposition.

He was a member of the United Church and a Past Master of Meaford Orange Lodge No. 984 and a member of long standing of Meaford Black Knights R.B.P. 434. He never neglected civic responsibility and in the December municipal elections walked four blocks to cast his ballot.

Mr. Gawley was the only surviving member of his family. His parents were the late Mr. and Mrs. Royal Gawley of Elsinore township.

Funeral services held Tuesday afternoon at the Gardiner Funeral Chapel were conducted by Rev. M. Balke. Pallbearers, all members of the Orange Lodge were Oliver Watson, James Dickson, Oakley Clubine, Ross Robinson, William Apps and Russell Sparling. Monday night members of the Orange Lodge and Meaford Black Knights held a memorial service in the chapel.

Interment was at Lakeview

# The Man with the Iron Hands

## Museum given toys made by Andy Gawley

BY SCOTT WOODHOUSE  
EXPRESS STAFF

You couldn't exactly call Clive Prentice's toy bulldozer *hand made*. That's because the man who made it had no hands.

And while the bulldozer, along with its mate, a steam engine, may look like kid's stuff, they are an integral part of Meaford's quirky history and will be a welcome addition to the collection at the Meaford Museum.

Museum volunteer Bruce Shepperd, quite a model builder in his own right, showed the latest donation to the museum to *The Express* in his workshop.

"These toys were made by Andy Gawley of Meaford," said their owner Clive Prentice. Clive and his wife Brenda and their daughter, Tanya donated the pieces of antique folk art to the museum.

But before they became folk art, they were real toys. "My brothers and I were given one each for Christmas for a few years," explained Clive.

"I seem to recall I got the steam engine in or around 1950 and the bulldozer in 1951.

"I didn't play outside with mine so they are all well-preserved," he said. "My brothers, on the other hand, destroyed theirs."

Prentice isn't sure of the variety of toys Mr. Gawley made other than the bulldozers and steam engines, but he does recall that he made at least one large fire engine.

"My brother and I received it jointly for Christmas. It was at least four feet long and had an extension ladder that would extend right to the ceiling; and the room had a nine foot ceiling."

The toys were made from oil, copper and salmon tins and



Museum volunteer Bruce Shepperd shows off two "handmade" toys built by The Man with the Iron Hands, Andy Gawley. The toys were donated by Clive, Brenda, and Tanya Prentice.

ment.

Andrew A. Gawley's story is both sad and inspiring. Born in Euphrasia Township near Goring in 1872, he was a man of incredible vitality, energy and ingenuity. When he was only 16 years old, he mangled his hands in a sawmill accident on the Bruce Peninsula. It took more than a week travelling by boat across the bay to get

He tried several manufactured hands, but was not satisfied. So he conceived the idea, designed, and built, his own hands.

But the story is even more incredible. His family was already used to misfortune - his father was blind and had never seen Andy. But it was through his fine sense of touch and skilled hands that Andy's first pair of steel hands

# Meaford's famous Man with the Iron Hands

Continued from Page 1  
pair designed and built his hands using primitive tools in a blacksmith's shop.

First they built two simple arms with hooks for lifting and holding simple objects. Then using these hands and the primitive tools in the workshop, the two Gawleys proceeded to make another pair of hands out of cast iron. These hands were laboriously filed and ground out of the brittle metal. He found them to be the miraculous success he dreamed they would be. "Finally, he set to work on 'tool steel' and completed the artificial hands in this strongest metal," noted The Express.

"It is a simple hand, with five holds or grips in it. Five different grips of different sizes and degrees of power, two opening as the hand is drawn toward the body, and three opening as the hand is moved away from the body," said The Express.

"You don't realize," said Mr. Gawley, "what wonderful instruments your hands are. It seems to me, the human hand is the most wonderful of nature's creations."

"It wouldn't take you long to enumerate the things your leg or your foot can do for you, but when you think of the things your hand can do, you never come to an end."

Yet with his five grip hands, Mr. Gawley could manage quite well. He could eat his dinner easily with a knife and fork. He could pick up

the handle of a frail china tea cup with the same pair of pincers, that with a different bend of his arm, crush a granite pebble to dust.

He lifted a Ford engine block, crank shaft and pistons weighing - 260 pounds dead weight - in one hand.

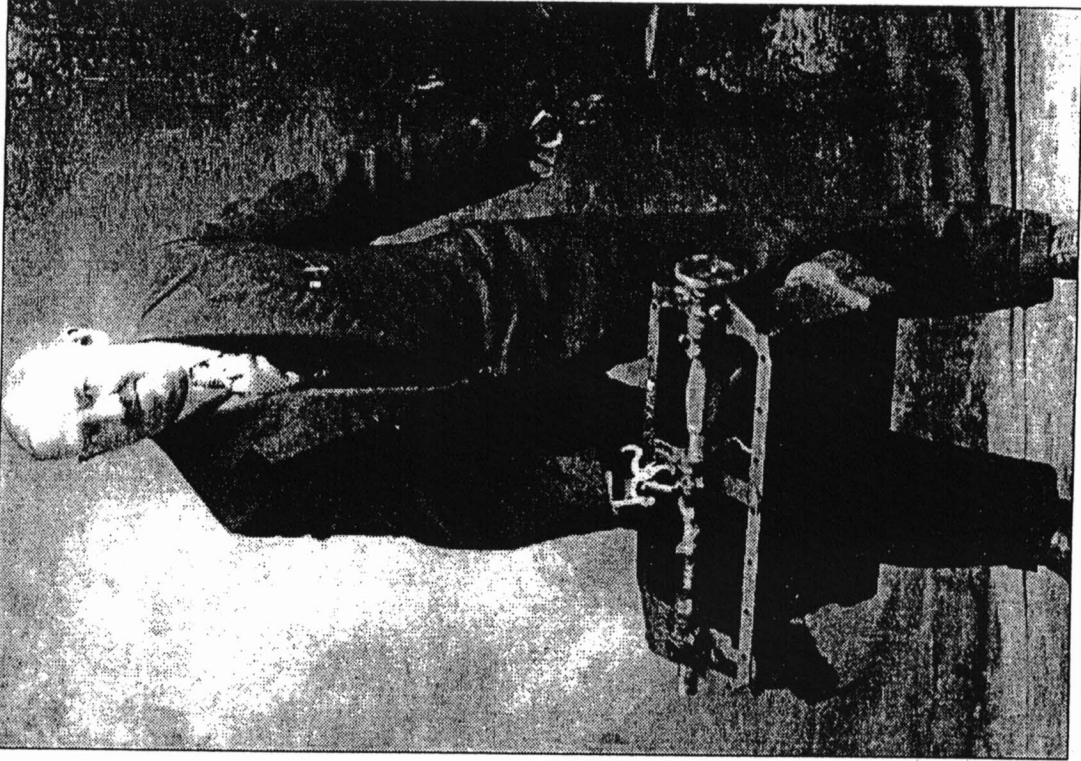
With his hands of steel, he could tie a bow in his shoe laces, throw a stone 75 feet, catch and throw a ball, play the mouth organ, turn the leaves of books, and write in neater hand-writing than most people.

By trade, he became a mechanic and operated a bicycle and lawn mower repair shop. He was extremely skilled at sharpening skates, and judging from the toys donated to the museum, he was quite a toy-maker as well.

He also became somewhat famous, first through the Ripley Odditorium at the 1934 Chicago World's Fair. Through the Ripley show, he received worldwide publicity and appeared in motion picture newsreels "on every continent."

Each summer he would leave Meaford and travel with the Ripley show to fairs and exhibitions across the continent. After Ripley, he became involved with several other travelling road shows, which helped him supplement his income.

He was a man of integrity and always strived for perfection in his work, for which his charge was often very small. He also spent a lot



Andy Gawley demonstrated his strength by lifting a Ford engine block, crank shaft and pistons weighing - 260 pounds dead weight - in one hand. He was an energetic man who entered bicycle races and enjoyed riding a motorcycle.

of time making hands for others who were victims of accidents like himself.

As if losing his hands wasn't bad enough, tragedy and misanthrope seemed to follow Andy. He was burned out of two workshops and ended his days living in a barn he moved from the rear of the Paul's Hotel.

He was often the target of vandals and petty thievery. In an editorial in the August 7, 1944 edition of The Express, an editorial decried "Man's inhumanity to man" and said:

"While Mr. Gawley is a wonderful example of the human race, there is a second side to his unfortunate case. In his business as a repair man and machinist in his own way, he comes into contact with with a public that should be one of admiration, but lo and behold, he is subject to many forms of deceit - that of people stealing his tools, his money, and heaping on their ridicule because they claim his service is not up to that of you or I. Boys and men are too often heaping their wrath upon his underserving head and we hope the Chief of Police will strive to see that he has the protection that his condition warrants."

But Andy took it all in stride. He was a staunchly independent man, who always provided for himself. At the age of 82, he still worked at sharpening skates, repairing bicycles, and shovelling walks.

He passed away, Christmas Day, 1961, leaving a legacy and a legend: "The Man with the Iron Hands."

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Source: Book

“Green Meadows and Golden Sands, The History of Amabel Township” 1851-1982  
Compiled by The Amabel Township Historical Society and published in 1984.

GAWLEY, Royal

Pg 139

“Blind Mr. Gawley of Elsinore”

(contributed by Dr. R. W. Beattie, Guelph, Ontario)

“Blind Mr. Gawley of Elsinore, or to our family, known as Uncle Royal was born about 1840 in Hastings County. With his brother, Thomas and Richard, he came to Grey and Bruce Counties about 1860. Royal is listed as one of the early storekeepers at Elsinore. His wife was a Miss Smith from Burgoyne. They had three children: Sara, Andrew and Chesley.

To put it mildly, a lot of disasters happened to this family in a very short period of time. The mother died not too long after Chesley was born, Mr. Gawley went suddenly and totally blind and Andrew, while working on the Bruce Peninsula, fell on a rotating circular saw and had both arms cut off.

Sara Gawley married a Walters from Walter’s Falls and they moved to Saskatchewan.

After losing his sight, Royal had to eke out a living as best he could in the days before pensions of any kind. He had very good neighbours. He had a small gadget for women to use to lift pies out of the oven. This made it possible to lift the pies without using their apron in the days before pot holders were thought of. He would give these to people who had helped him and at other times would sell them for ten or fifteen cents each.

Andrew Gawley, with the help of Sy Kolb, created a primitive set of steel hands in the Kolb blacksmith shop at Elsinore. He was not content to have a single iron hook and kept working at, and improving them for years. These steel hands were flat and operated in one plane only. As a kid, I paid little attention to them; I just took them for granted. He called at our home in Brooke quite often and he always carried his own knife, fork and spoon. Each of these folded by a joint in the middle and could be carried in his pocket.

During WWI he worked with his steel hands as a tool and die maker in an Orillia factory making war supplies. He finally had a small bicycle repair shop in Meaford where he sharpened lawn

“Believe it or Not”. He showed what he could do with his steel hands and also his great strength in lifting objects weighing 200 pounds with one hand.

Royal Gawley died about 1926 after being totally blind over 50 years. Andrew Gawley died about 1961 having lived without human hands for over 60 years.

The people of Elsinore have memories of Royal Gawley. Mr. Bill Nelson, who only had sight in one eye, and blind Mr. Gawley used to drive a blind horse back to Chesley Lake to go fishing.”

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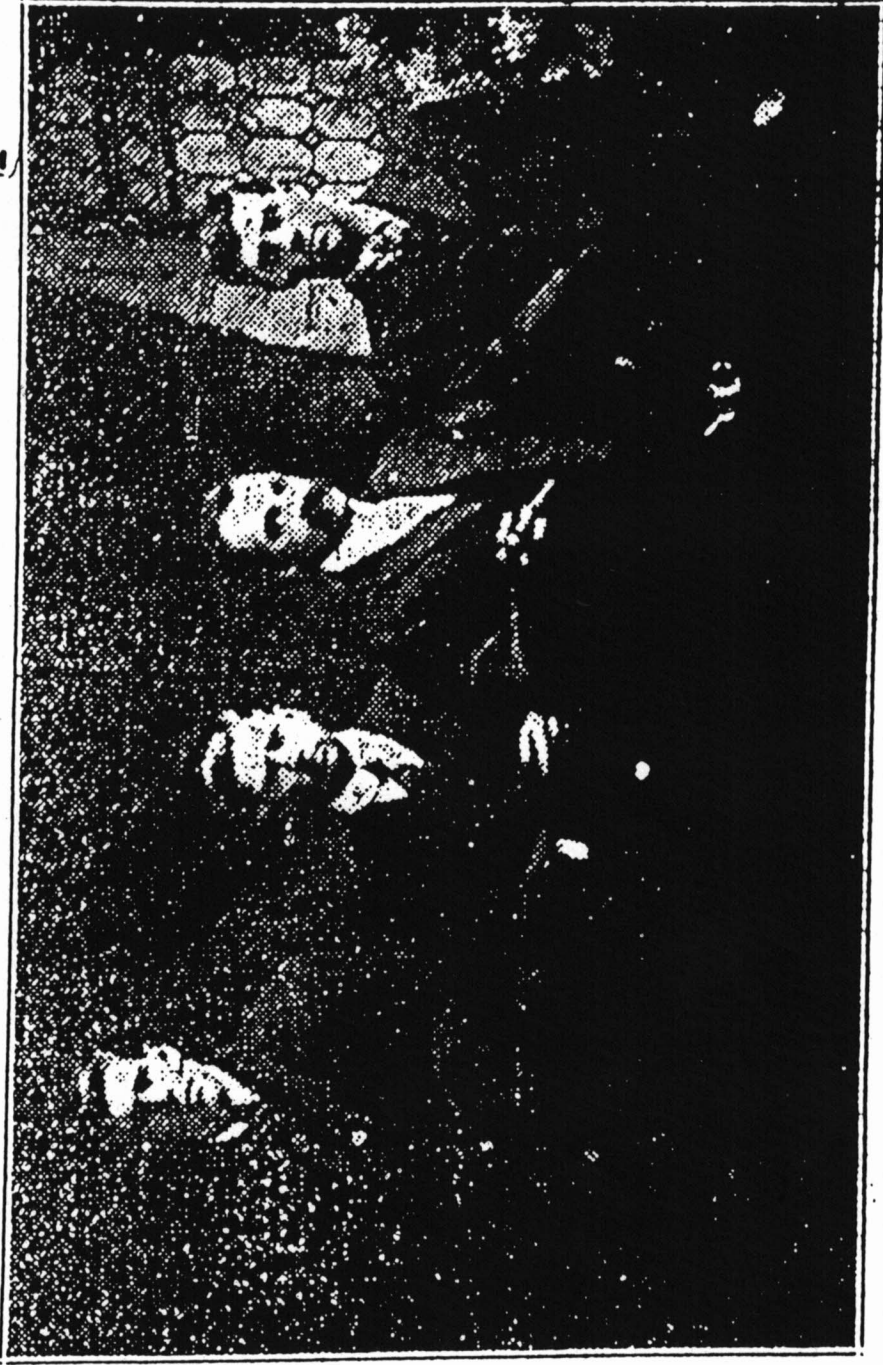
During WWI he worked with his steel hands as a tool and die maker in an Orillia factory making war supplies. He finally had a small bicycle repair shop in Meaford where he sharpened lawn mowers and repaired bicycles.

At one time he left the bicycle shop and toured Canada and the United States with Ripley's show "Believe it or Not". He showed what he could do with his steel hands and also his great strength in lifting objects weighing 200 pounds with one hand. *"The Steel King"*

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March 31, 1921



Chas. Stone      Fred Mitchell      Andrew Gawley      Joshua Dobson  
Stayner      Stayner      Meaford      Feversham

**M<sup>R</sup>. ANDREW GAWLEY'S RECENT CUSTOMERS FOR ARTIFICIAL  
HANDS**

## Andrew Gawley To Visit Big Fair

Meaford, Ont., May 25. — Andrew A. Gawley, "the man with the steel hands," left for the Chicago Century of Progress Exposition to day after reconsidering an offer he turned down a week ago.

Gawley will interview officials of the organization seeking his services and is expected to remain at the Exposition making steel hands for unfortunate persons afflicted like himself.

Gawley, whose name and feats of dexterity with his steel hands became widely known when the story of his accomplishments was published a few weeks ago, fell across a whirling buzz saw when 17 years old. His arms were severed between the elbow and wrist.

While he suffered in the hospital he planned the "steel hands"—hands that could do almost everything that human hands could perform.

After he left hospital his blind father and himself worked for weeks and succeeded in cutting, grinding and filing the "hands" from hard steel. Since then Gawley has made dozens of hands for others.

For 30 years Gawley has made these hands though the work is slow and tedious. In his little machine shop in Meaford, where he has managed to make a living, he works day and night, unaided. He works with only common tools, including a small drill, and finds it necessary to "fit" every hand for seldom are there two alike.

Tourists and visitors at Gawley's little workshop stand and gaze for hours at the "impossible" things he can do, from lifting and drinking from the most fragile of china, to splitting wood and pulling an engine apart. Gawley has a powerful grip with both hands and has been known to lift more dead weight than the man with ordinary arms. He is a mechanic by trade and he will attempt any job.

For the past 15 years he has repaired lawn mowers bicycles, engines and all sorts of machinery. His "steel hands" are simple, with five strong grips of different degrees of power. He can crush a stone to powder, break wire, tie his shoe laces, dress himself and eat with knife and fork.

He is speedy with his work as any skilled mechanic. He can respoke a bicycle wheel and insert the hub in less than 30 minutes. He can drive a motorcycle as well as a motor car, and frequently rides a bicycle. He can write with pen and pencil and boasts of a good handwriting style.

Gawley's father who died four years ago, was blind for more than 50 years and never saw his son.

Note— Mr. Gawley's father was born in Marmora township and still has a number of relatives in Marmora village and township.

MARMORA HERALD  
31 MAY 1934 P. 1





*Andrew Gawley and his steel hands*

Royal Gawley died about 1926 - find i