

JOHN GUY

The caption read in The Cobourg Sentinel-Star, July 21, 1949, COBOURG SMITHY PUTS DOWN HAMMER". Under the picture were the cutlines:

"John Guy, Cobourg's only blacksmith, put down his hammer last week after a lifetime of shoeing horses. Picture was snapped by photographer Win Fisher just as the 73-year-old blacksmith finished shaping the last horseshoe."

The fire was still smoldering away where a thousand shoes had been before, a thousand shoes and more, in the red-hot moods of temper, in the quick flash of smoke as the shoe held by tong seared the hoof, in the sizzling sound when the shoe was dipped in the tub of water to cool off the fitting.

This was the last day. The merry ring of the anvil was stilled.

It was a difficult moment for John Guy, smithy, one of the most traumatic in a long life pitted against the strong legs of horses, of human strength and toil and sweat.

There was no ceremony. No laurel for distinguished service. Only time and change in the thoughtful mind were present. Slowly the last customer and his steed went out the double door; the horse stepping gingerly, gradually getting the feel of new shoes. Man and beast disappeared down the long avenue, gone in the mists of time, engulfed completely now in the purge of progress.

Suddenly, to stimulate the nostalgia, a letter was seen in The Cobourg Sentinel-Star. It read:

"I wonder if you might have a copy of your paper describing the high hurdle jump performed at one of the summer Cobourg Horse

Shows. I am not positive of the year in which it was performed, possibly 1910, 1911, or 1912. If I remember correctly the horse's name was 'Confidence' and probably owned by the Siftons. I saw this event and was a guest of Daniel B. Tracey who lived in Northumberland County on the lakeshore west of Cobourg."

Yes. Confidence was one of the horses shod by John Guy.

John started horseshoeing when he was 18. When he served his apprenticeship there were 10 Sifton horses to look after, other show and race horses, as well as regular town and farm horseshoeing business. The Siftons were among the aristocracy of the period, and later noted as publishing magnates with a chain of newspapers.

John Guy attended Confidence, a horse never equalled in high jumping in the United States and Canada. In later years Confidence was shipped to Russia. Why? No one seemed to know.

John Guy, smithy.

Even if the blacksmith trade was at an end, old-timers lingered at the smithy doors to reassure themselves that an age really had not departed; sitting around talking, chewing tobacco.

But even near the end, John never put in an idle day; born of an earlier era, a human stock which took pride in doing a good job. On the last working day he said:

"You can't get the iron today to make good shoes. See that?"

He pointed to a horseshoe where the turned tip had broken off.

"Well, that's what happens when you work this iron they give you to use these days. It breaks if you leave it too long in the fire."

Then John spoke of Confidence. Quite a horse. Never beaten in Canada or United States. Confidence "had a foot like that", said John, pointing to a large horseshoe on the wall.

Perspective. It is now 1984. John Guy, smithy. Think of 80 years ago . . .

. . . see the thundering, galloping, flying white horses, charging down the street with fire engine steaming behind; hear the clang, clang, clang of the bell; watch the rush of children, youth and adults darting behind the monster pell-mell, helter-skelter, in the wake of the clanging; know the sudden stop with the horses braced on haunches; discover the the bucket brigade, with bucket passed to hands on and on in an endless row. Hopeless is the tiny spray of water from the last hand, gulped hungrily by the giant, roaring flames . . . perceive the ruins, the sorrow and privation of the homeless; behold the brighter day, the color and pageantry of the horse show, the gay plumage of lady and effete gentleman in polished carriage behind glistening horses . . . and another day press your nose to the windowpane in the long wait for the delivery man. You are five and it's 11 a.m., time for the groceries and meat to be brought for dinner, and you want to see Nell. Here comes the delivery man and there is Nell pulling the rig; Nell waits until the delivery man knocks on the door, then off she goes to the next house stop and dutifully wait. Nell in summer, fall, winter and spring knows every rut and corner of the route she travels six days a week . . . You're older now; you've a wart on your finger; you've had it a long time. It bothers you. You hear about a remedy and you slip away to John Guy's blacksmith shop: "May I dip my finger in the water, Mr. Guy, where you cool off the horseshoes?" "Sure, sonny," he says, nice as you please, "go ahead."

And you do, and away you go to almost forget
you were ever there . . . flying a kite,
playing with marbles, jumping fences, and
getting spanked, when lo and behold ! One night
before going to bed you felt your finger
and the wart had gone ! Oh, the horse !
Oh, the shoe !

John Guy, smithy . . .

Clip, clop, clip, clop.

It's early morning now in the solemn blush of dawn,
dipping brilliantly over the saucer down the slight incline
into the heart of Cobourg.

Clip, clop, clip, clop.

Here now is dawning a beautiful day.

Clip, clop, clip, clop.

Think, wilt thou let it . . . clip, clop, clip,
clop . . . slip useless away.

Clip, clop, clip, clop.

The new day is born.

Clip, clop, clip, clop.

Horse and milk waggon gone . . . clip, clop, clip,
clop . . . into eternity . . .