

Intel April 5/03

p. A14 By Jack Evans

SPECIAL TO THE INTELLIGENCER

WALLBRIDGE — The lights are going out in one more dairy barn in the Quinte area this spring.

Prominent Sidney Ward farmer Bob Burkitt has decided to join the ranks of those just plain tired of doing milking chores twice a day, seven days a week.

"I left high school at the age of 15 and started milking cows. Now I'm 69 and I've done it long enough," he said as he reviewed final details for what promises to be one of the largest milking herd sales in the area for some years.

The Burkitt farm, officially called "Nolevue" is not just an ordinary operation.

The names Burkitt and Nolevue have become almost synonymous with top quality, purebred Holsteins for decades. During those years, the Burkitt family has seen many changes in technology and breed quality.

Modern pipeline machines have replaced time-consuming hand milking. Modern equipment has made feeding systems largely automated. Computers have become an invaluable farm management tool. The Holstein breed has improved its butterfat content and quantity of milk. The Burkitts have been pioneers in many of these aspects.

Family has been a vital part of the business for the Burkitts. Their large spread, almost 400 acres, situated on a knoll on Harrington Road and visible for miles, is a fourth generation farm purchased in 1911 by George Burkitt and family. His son, George and his wife Elizabeth carried it on, and for many years Robert and his wife Evelyn, assisted by their son, George E., have operated it.

Evelyn herself is well known in the Quinte area's farming community as co-ordinator of the women's section for the annual Hastings County Plowing Match among

other activities.

With some 80 herd of cattle, each with a pedigree, and valued in excess of \$5,000 each, the sale is expected to attract hundreds of buyers from a wide area, including some from parts of the United States and other provinces.

The auctioneer, David Carson of Listowel, is known to cattle farmers across a wide swath of Ontario, said Burkitt.

Special preparations will include large marquee weather shelters for the event set Wednesday, April 16 starting at noon at Burkitt's farm.

Burkitt looks back on a dairy

farming career which has included several notable successes. By keeping close records and choosing quality animals, he has been able to sell choice cattle to major farms in Pennsylvania, New York State, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Argentina and Cuba as well as across Ontario.

"To be into dairying, you've really got to like the cattle and be interested in their breeding, otherwise it's not worth seven days a week," he commented. "I like cattle."

His careful management led to selling two bulls over the years to the central artificial insemination operations, which is why his herd

uses the Nolevue prefix. He was also involved for many years with the former Quinte Breeders, now Eastern Breeders Association artificial insemination unit.

Burkitt was a director for the Hastings County Holstein Association for many years. When milk committees were established on a county basis across Ontario in 1965, under the new Ontario Milk Marketing Board, Burkitt was a charter member and remained active on that committee for many years, including a term as chair.

Even as a young man, he was active in the Quinte Exhibition, joining as a junior director at the age of 18 and then becoming a full director. He was president for the year 1981-82, and his contributions to the fair have earned him a "life membership."

He continues to keep abreast of new dairy developments, noting that cows that once had productive lives of 10 to 12 lactations, by modern feeding and milking for high productivity are now out of production in as little as six years in some major operations, often in the United States, he said.

Burkitt still doesn't see immediate retirement. With 400 acres of land and a market for cash crops like hay and soybeans, perhaps also a few beef cattle, he hopes to continue a farming lifestyle. He's not interested in exotic animals like elk or emu, although he agrees some farmers are experimenting in order to maintain farm incomes. "I just don't like birds," he quipped.

His breeding accomplishments with both bulls and cows have earned him a "Master Breeder Shield" from the Holstein Association, in 1991.

"We sell our herd with a sense of pride and satisfaction for many years of building a well-managed enterprise," he noted in part of the coming sale package.