

# She's a living history book of Quinte

By PENNY GORDON  
Staff Reporter

Ethel Bleecker is 100 years of living Quinte history.

And, through her late husband's ancestors, she's part of the pioneer history of the Bay of Quinte.

Now a resident of Hastings Manor, Mrs. Bleecker will celebrate her 100th birthday—actually March 4—on Sunday afternoon with friends and relatives.

Mrs. Bleecker was born in Murray Township and then moved to her husband's family farm in Sidney Township when she married. They were both 18 at the time. Through the marriage, Ethel Guiles became part of a pioneer history.

The Bleecker family, descended from a Dutch colonial family of New York, came north about 1720 when John R. Bleecker moved to Kingston from Albany. He studied surveying and, at 18, was employed by the government to help lay out township lines in the Quinte area. He located his own land on both sides of the Trent River, recognizing the importance of the area as an Indian trading station. He met United Empire Loyalist Capt. John Walden Meyers and married Meyers' daughter—their baby became the first white child born in Trenton.

He died in 1807 at 45 and his eldest son acquired all the property. His widow opened a hotel and operated a ferry. She lived to the age of 95.

Thomas Howard Bleecker was

owner of the Gilbert House and his son, William Bleecker, managed the Gilbert Hotel.

Through Meyers many of the pioneer Bleecker's grandchildren gained land. Capt. Meyers gave each of his 39 grandchildren a farm or equivalent cash. Henry Bleecker, for example, received a 160-acre farm on the 3rd Concession of Sidney Township. He was a road commissioner in Hastings County for many years. His brother, John Emmett Bleecker, married Esther White and settled on the 4th Concession of Sidney. It was his son, John Henry, who married Ethel Guiles 82 years ago.

Mrs. Bleecker remembers when her second child was born, 75 years ago. Farmers wives attended her, she says. That's the way it used to be. She told her son, Harry, if he wanted a baby sister, he would have to go to bed right away that night—which he did.

"In the morning," she says, "he came down and he had a 10-pound baby sister."

Harry, now 80, lives in Frankford. His sister, Isabelle, lives in London.

Mrs. Bleecker also remembers the days before there were motor cars, when she had a horse named Kit and a buggy for transportation. She relates one day when she had to do some important banking for her husband. He had borrowed \$100 from a bank in order to plant MacIntosh apple trees. The loan was due, she says, so she took the money and a



ETHEL BLEECKER

small revolver she owned—tucking it into the seat beside her—and drove to the bank in the buggy, powered by the little bay horse.

She also remembers churning butter to sell at 25 cents a pound. It had to be hung in the well to keep, she says, and a cover put over the well. But one day, she recalls, one of her grandsons got into the well when the cover was left off. And, she explains,

her husband had to climb down the well to get the lad out. The rescue was accomplished, she says, when her husband put the boy in the bucket, telling him to stay very still, and lifted him out of the well by hauling up the bucket.

She also remembers going on picnics with her good friend Ada Bush and her late husband Jack. The Bushes, she says, had a "fancy Ford car". Ada remains a close friend, and is also a resident at Hastings Manor.

Mrs. Bleecker likes to recall the past. One grandson, Bob, used to stay at the farm. Her husband, she says, gave Bob a little white horse and a little white dog. Actually, she says, he got best of the bargain with the dog because the man who was selling the dog was asking too much money and Bob got a wagon instead. But, she adds, when the man came back the next day, Bob got the dog as well.

During the time the Trent Canal was being excavated, the Bleeckers ran a boarding house near Frankford. They provided meals for Hydro people as well as for the Italian workmen who were working on the canal.

Mrs. Bleecker is the last of five sisters. She has four grandchildren, 11 great grandchildren and one great-great grandchild. Through them, a rich pioneer family history in the Bay of Quinte will continue, with a wealth of local history related to them through her memories.

BLEECKER, Ethel

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