

Farming back when

No turning back for early settlers

Submitted by *July 1994*
Melvin Terry

The first 42 years of my life were spent in Prescott County. I sure got to know a very large number of families: French, Scottish, Irish and English. All four of these nationalities had some tradition which they brought from their homeland — maybe it was an accent, the styles of buildings they built or the breed of livestock they kept.

In my young days, I often asked my French neighbour lads where their grandparents came from. The answer was always the same: "Lower Canada". That is understandable, for they came a century or more before the Irish and Scottish settlers.

However, there is a bit of history about the Scottish settlement in the south of Prescott County that I would like to recall. The village of St. Amour was a busy place at one time, a blacksmith shop, a carriage shop, two stores, a post office, a bank, a sawmill, a grist mill and a hotel.

At one time, there was a shortcut road (forced road) that sort of acted as a two-way street for people in our neighbourhood as well as the Scottish settlement.

If we needed repairs for our wooden pumps we went to McLeod, the pump man. If it was honey we went to McLeod, the honey man. If we wanted high-grade see grain or grass seed or maple syrup we went to Little Willie McLeod's. His mother was living those years. She was a walking advertisement for our strawberries in the lean thirties in her neighbourhood. She was loved by all who knew here. There was another family that were good friends of ours: Mr. John McCuaig and his sister. My older brother worked there a number of winters, getting out their winter wood.

Their mother was living in those years. I would have to think she must have been one of the oldest persons living at that time. What a history she must have known about their earlier settlement.

There was another McLeod, Norman Neil Ban. We got our winter's wood

for quite a number of years. He was an upholsterer at one time. Dan McRae was the last councillor in the township of Caledonia, that was when the town hall was on the Ridge.

This shortcut road that I mentioned started at the bottom of the stone quarry and cut an angle across the farms to St. Amours. There was a very deep ditch that drained the low lands and the road was right beside it. The farmers built their fence right at the edge of the road so it was quite narrow and was made of sticky clay, but in the horse and buggy days, that was no problem. This big ditch emptied into the Paxton's Creek near St. Amour village.

One quiet summer night just at dark we were sitting outside in our yard. We heard a horse and express coming and when they got to our gate, the horse tried to turn in. He was given a slap of the lines on the rump by the driver, then he started off on a trot.

Just at that moment one of the men broke into a Gaelic song. He had a beautiful voice. It was the first time I had heard a Gaelic song. As the sound died away in the distance, I asked my father why those fellows took the long way home.

My father chuckled and said, "I think they met some friends at St. Amour, and stayed longer than expected, so they were late getting down to the Flats for their can of mineral water. So they did not want to take a chance meeting someone on that narrow road along the big ditch.

We have to admire the courage of these early settlers. There was no turning back. Arriving on their proper lots, there was some kind of log shanty that had to be built before the harsh winter came, and many only had what they could carry. After building their home, they lost no time in building a church of their own faith.

Not even the bush fire that spread havoc 53 years ago could mar the spirit of these Scottish people.

Melvin Terry is a retired farmer now living in Dalkeith.

A theory about Caledonia Marsh

Sept 93

by Melvin Terry

As far back as I can remember, my father was caretaker of the Caledonia Township hall that was situated in the same yard as our public brick school that still stands there today.

When my father passed on, I took over the job and kept it till the hall was moved away to St. Bernardin. Over those years, there were many hectic meetings that took place in the old hall, especially when election time came around.

One of the most prominent men that was always in attendance was our township drainage engineer, Mr. G. Waite. He lived about two miles east of Routhier on the Ridge Road, with his wife and two sons. He always referred to him home as "White Swan Farm". He was a clever man and had a great sense of humour, and reported many times in *The Review* about the general happenings that came up in the surrounding neighbourhood.

One that I recall was about the ghost that came to St. Bernardin. For a short time it drove fear deep in many folks, both young and old. And it drew large crowds of people from many miles away; these people lined the sideroads at night. The two local stores were sold out of cigarettes and tobacco.

It was rather a mysterious thing to watch in the quiet summer night air. Large balls of fire would rise up and float for a while, then disappear, then appear again in the distance.

But it came to pass that Mr. Waite reported that the ghost had left St. Bernardin after a bridge on Mr. Wilmer Blaney's farm, the bridge over the Caledonia Creek, had completely burned.

One time I remember nearing the end of a council meeting. They were discussing drainage and that was quite a problem in those days in the black muck land for there was no end to the sticks and roots that went down ten or twelve feet deep. Some large pieces were sometimes found almost two feet in diameter and ten or twelve

feet long. And part of it was hardwood that never grew in the marsh or on its edges. One of the men asked Mr. Waite where he thought it came from. "Well," he said, "I will answer that on this sheet of paper ..." So he drew a sketch of the Caledonia Marsh and the Nation River.

This was his theory. The Nation River flows east until it comes to the edge of the marsh, then it takes a turn and goes north. In midsummer, where it runs north there is quite a depth of water, with next to no current at all. Then it takes another angle to the northwest. And the Ottawa River, not so far away, is flowing east. Where the Nation River empties into the Ottawa River, there are only five or six inches of water flowing over the rock (a cut has been made in the rock since then). There was a time when that Nation River went east through the marsh and came out at Caledonia Springs and emptied in the Ottawa River in that area. It is a well-known fact that when the Canadian Pacific Railway line was built, there was a spot where it was hard to reach bottom on the northeast side of the marsh.

By some unknown force, land and trees were moved from further up the Nation, and finally blocked its entrance into the marsh, so as the floods became higher, it made a cut out through the land near Plantagenet into the Ottawa River. Now, this did not happen in a year or two. It took centuries to happen — long before a white man set foot on this land.

I suppose if Mr. Waite was living today and could see what has happened around Lemieux he would not be surprised. It would prove his point about where all this debris came from. Whether his theory is right or wrong is debatable.

Melvin Terry contributes his remembrances to The Review from time to time. Mr. Terry is a retired farmer living in Dalkeith, Ont.

Ed. Note: The St. Bernardin "ghosts" are really no mystery, but Mr. Terry won't say more in case someone decides to resurrect them.