

July 15, 1987

Living on

Continued from Page 1A

We never thought of such a thing as going to Owen Sound. The highlight was to go to Wiarton in a horse and buggy. In the winter, we went across the ice in a horse and cutter. The men would work on the roads with a team in lieu of taxes. They had no machinery. They just shovelled the gravel in place.

We grew wheat and we took it to the mill in Wiarton to get flour ground at the place where the Barley Bin restaurant is now. You can still smell the flour in it. Carl Whicher's parents had the store at Colpoys.

(The Geographic Board of Canada decided the name has no apostrophe because it was named for Sir Edward Colpoys, but the local residents, unaware that the terminal "s" is not possessive, use an apostrophe. In fact, Mrs. Gatis, who ran Whicher's store, spent a lifetime putting in the missing "s" when it was omitted.)

They would take anything; logs, butter, eggs, anything for supplies. It was the barter system because there was never much cash around. We always cut enough logs to buy enough flour, sugar, a case of prunes, raisins, figs, (I still love them), and old-fashioned remedies. Coaloil was used for medicine as well as for lighting. There were no banks around, no government cheques, in those days. We always had sheep and sold the wool.

My father was very musical. He played the violin at all community gatherings. My sisters and I liked to go along with him and sing. He called us "The Deering Sisters" because he sold McCormick implements to other farmers and to the Cape Croker Indians who were good neighbours.

The Indians used to hold evangelical meetings at Cape Croker. We would get a team of horses, hitch up the democrat, gather up anyone who wanted to go, drive out to the Cape. We just loved the meetings. There was lots of singing, the Indians are great singers, and everyone had a good time. We would not get home until midnight. The meetings were supposed to make you feel refreshed, give you a different outlook on life. There was a lot of talk about hell. Nowadays, huge crowds get on buses in Wiarton and go to the Bingo at Cape Croker on Monday nights. I have a lot of respect for the Indians. They were always our friends. They still remember me.

Sometimes we used to load up the democrat with all the children and drive out to the Cape for a picnic at Pt. Elgin. The water was shallow there and we could play in it safely. The best wild strawberries were always there too. We would take our lunch of hard-boiled eggs, our home-grown meat and chickens, homemade bread, never any salads, but lots of wild berries and wild fruit.

In those days, cattle were all allowed to run wherever they could find a pasture. We put a bell around one or two of them to tell where they were to find them to bring them home to be milked.

That was my mother's fortieth birthday, as well as my grandmother's birthday, so it was a special occasion for us over the years.

One winter, my father and brothers took logs out of the bush and had lumber made to build a barn. A farmer who was a man trained to put the timbers together, was hired and, when it was all ready, the neighbours came from near and far to help put it up. It was called "a barn raising". The women and children all came and made it a picnic. It lasted for several days. They also took logs out of the bush to sell them, and the tree tops were cut into wood. My father also built an addition to the house. It was used as a kitchen. We were so proud of it. By this time my older sisters were married and away from home. We were able to help my mother take care of all the work around the farm.

My father died suddenly in March, 1914, and that was such a shock to the whole neighbourhood. My older brothers did not want to stay on the farm with my mother, so she managed along with my other brother and sister for a couple of years. She finally gave up and went to live with my grandmother who, by then, had sold her store to my sister and her husband, Margaret and Charles Gilbert. My mother later remarried and went to live in Elmwood. She died in 1930.

When someone died, they always kept the body in the house, and the neighbours would come and sit with the corpse until it was buried in the cemetery at Colpoys Bay. They would always bring enough food with them to feed everyone.

I stayed with my grandparents because they needed help, and I took care of the public school in Purple Valley, getting up early in the morning to light the wood fire, sweep the floors after school was over at night. I used to do the dusting while the school warmed up before the students arrived. This gave me some spending money. Later, I went to help my sister in the general store until I was married in 1920 to Andrew Hepburn who had just returned from three and a half years in the army.

My parents with us. After nine years, we had a baby girl, and we were so happy. One and a half year later, we got Howard. So that made a family of nine to provide for. This went on for twenty-two years. Both parents died in our home. I took care of them entirely by myself. We had two funerals in one week. We had no money, so my son Gordon, his father and I went to the bush and cut wood to sell to pay for their two funerals.

With two children in public school, I was free to help with the family finances. I left the house to work with Andy and Gordon in the bush to get some money to do some of the things we had not been able to do before, such as build kitchen cupboards and make bins for the flour and sugar. In those days, I made butter by hand to sell or trade for groceries, and we always had hens to have extra eggs to sell as well. I helped neighbours hang wallpaper or paint or just anything, clean their houses, or anything they needed. Hydro was built up our road in 1936 and that was a happy day for all of us.

Mrs. Hepburn's story continues on the tape of her interview.

Minnie Hepburn's story of her grandparents illustrates the egalitarian, co-operative kind of society the pioneers had. People shared with their neighbours, and helped them out in trouble. This spirit is still very evident in the Bruce even today. It is a supportive society where everyone is called by his or her first name, always. Minnie says:

I want to tell you about

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J. H.