

A Catastrophe.

In September, 1881, one of the worst threshing machine accidents yet known in the province happened at the barn of Mr. George Caldwell. It was about the time that the old horse power was being replaced by steam. Mr. Anson Thrasher owned a separator and was anxious to try steam power. He rented a large engine owned by Mr. Owen Reed and engaged a qualified engineer by the name of William Malcolm of Belleville. The machine was in operation on Saturday and about four o'clock Mr. Malcolm informed Mr. Thrasher that the steam guage was not working and it was impossible to determine how much pressure was on. The machine was idle and Mr. Thrasher was tightening some belts or spikes. Thrasher insisted on threshing just a little longer. Mr. Malcolm and A. Lloyd stood in front of the machine when the explosion took place. The crown plate blew out and Malcolm and Lloyd were killed instantly. The engine upturned and drove into the barn, killing Mr. Thrasher instantly. Two little girls were sitting on a fanning mill near by. One was Lola Caldwell, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dave Caldwell and the other was Helen Caldwell, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. George Caldwell. Lola was killed and Helen was severely scalded. Henry Gavan was so severely scalded that it was several weeks before he could be removed to his home in Trenton. Mr. George Caldwell put up a heroic fight to extinguish the fire on the barn floor.

The explosion was heard 10 miles away. The next day, Sunday, there was a steady procession of buggies, carriages and pedestrians coming and going to the scene of the disaster.

Mr. Herman Hodgins of Roslin threshed in this Community for 50 years - first with a steam engine and the last few years with tractor which was operated by son Everett. In those days the thresher, the fire man and the tank man stayed over night at the farm where they were threshing. Most of the work was barn threshing in the early days. Later they did stook threshing.