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Weekend EXTRA

Douglas Crawford

Music, collecting and all those canneries

By Jack Evans

The Intelligencer

If you want to know what retirement is all about, ask Hillier Township resident Douglas Crawford.

He seized on his spare time to undertake a history of Prince Edward County's once-famous canning industry.

He has been doing it in stories in County Magazine and is now completing his 10th such story. Crawford, 65, retired back to Prince Edward County following a 41-year career with the Bank of Nova Scotia.

But preserving the memory of county canneries and their many products is not all. When they returned to the county five years ago, they purchased the Cold Creek Road farm home where his wife was born, and in which they were married 41 years ago, and started on major renovations.

Then there was his love of music and singing. He is president of the area community choir, Command Performance, which involves weekly rehearsals plus concerts.

As a collector, he is treasurer of the Quinte Military Collectors Society. He also heads the county Heart and Stroke Person to Person Campaign and is a member of the executive; he's president of the Bay of Quinte United Empire Loyalists Association, and through that helps run the Loyalist Cultural Centre (museum at Adolphustown) and is an active canvasser on behalf of Heart and Stroke, CNIB and Cancer Society.

When he isn't rehearsing, involved in a meeting or canvassing, Crawford is spending time with his canning memorabilia, his military collection, or researching an article for his series on canneries. "I usually like to do interviews with people who have immediate knowledge," he said. "But I also find important information from the Registry Office or from newspaper files."

Then there's time in front of his trusty typewriter to prepare the article. And with a large rural lot, there are always garden and lawn chores in the spring-fall period.

Crawford's interest in canning goes back to his youth. He was a part-time worker at a cannery operated by his uncle, the late Fred Folkard.

Commercial canning in Prince Edward survived almost 100 years until the Cobi Foods plant, formerly Baxter Canning, finally closed at Bloomfield as recently as 1990.

Prince Edward was once known as "the bread basket of Canada," on the strength of its wide variety of canning produce sold across Canada and abroad.

The range was tremendous in the



Intelligencer photo by Jack Evans

Hillier resident Douglas Crawford, with his collection of local product labels, remains active during his retirement.

heyday, the 1920s through 1940s, when factories not only canned produce like

represented by Crawford's collection of 450 labels from 49 factories. He even has some original antique cans found in a footstool. (A sampling of his collection drew much interest during a special display in the Wellington Museum last summer.)

Many of the factories have disappeared. But Crawford has tracked down the names and locations of 62 known factories so far and firmly believes there are still some missing.

Canning in Prince Edward is traced to Wellington Boulter who opened a cannery at Picton in 1892.

Canneries increased rapidly, encouraging more and varied produce from local farmers while giving the farmers a market for their produce in return.

A partial list of products from Prince Edward County includes tomatoes, peas, corn, pumpkin, raspberries, cherries, plums, white currants, chicken, green and yellow beans, apples and juices, blueberries, peaches and pineapple.

Some, Crawford notes, were obvi-

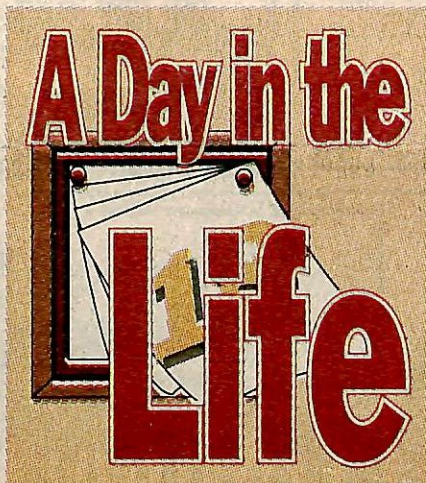
ously imported produce, but local crops were the bulk of the product, and it was shipped all around the world.

Crawford's articles have already covered such major long-time canners as Baxter, Waupoos, Conley, Hyatt and Greer.

Ruins of factories, or buildings converted from factories, even old-style pea vinders, continue to dot the landscape in Prince Edward County, as Crawford continues his search for the definitive collection of county canneries. (Pea vinders were centralized machines to strip peas from the vine before being shipped to a factory.)

A trend to large, centralized corporations was the biggest enemy of the dozens of local factories, said Crawford, followed by the increased popularity of frozen produce.

It was the articles on the role and impact of canneries that earned Crawford the county's Citizen of the Year award for 1993. For Crawford, that memorable night was just one more event to add to a busy calendar.



peas, tomatoes, corn and berries, but meats, especially chicken, with some factories maintaining their own chicken-raising barns next or near to the cannery.

The wide variety of produce is repre-