

A Sophiasburgh farm 125 years ago 1986

By Gordon Crouse

When the census enumerator called on James Bishop who lived at Gilbert's Mills (just north of Bloomfield), he found him engaged in real mixed farming. This was in March, 1861, in the days when census records were deposited in the Department of Agriculture due to the fact that about 90 per cent of the people worked the soil.

Today's trend toward specialized and so-called "gentlemen" farmers were as scarce as hen's teeth then.

Interestingly chickens and other fowl never appeared in lists of livestock in early enumerations. What did the census reveal?

First of all, Bishop, who settled here in the 1830's from Ireland, valued his livestock at \$1,171. It consisted of five bulls or oxen, nine steers or heifers, eight milch cows, eight horses, two colts or fillies, 28 sheep, and 13 pigs.

Machinery on the farm was worth \$210-believe it or not! Produce from his one acre of garden and orchard was worth \$30.

Transportation was provided for the large family that lived in the large frame house by two pleasure vehicles (carriages) worth \$40 each.

The family lived near the schoolhouse and sawmill where the 240 acre farm was located. It was purchased by James Bishop from the Upper Canada Land Board in its primitive state as a Clergy Reserve.

The government had set aside certain lands during Ontario's early settlement as gifts to recognized denominations, chiefly Anglican and Presbyterian.

It was sold to the Irish farmer in pounds, shillings, and pence, in 1846 and it was "chopped" or cleared and paid for in eight years.

William A. Munro, the 1861 census enumerator for District Five, was told that the whole farm operation, land, stock, machinery, and produce, was worth \$6,000.

In the column "under woods" we find 78 acres, leaving 170 acres cultivated. Fifteen acres were set aside for pasture with 154 acres under crops.

It may interest present-day farmers to know what crops were grown. The following (acreage) crops are shown: one Indian corn and 34 acres of potatoes! After all, Bishop was an Irishman!

Back 125 years ago residents of Prince Edward County did not rely on supermarkets to keep their larder, or pantry, full.

Witness the produce James Bishop and his wife Rebecca had in store: one bushel of beans, four pounds hops, nine tons hay, 60 pounds wool, 200 pounds maple sugar, 10 yards fulled cloth, 40 yards flannel, 350 pounds butter, and 1,800 pounds of meat! This consisted of seven barrels of pork and two barrels of beef, each weighing 200 pounds.

I imagine they had enough to feed their three

sons and six daughters plus produce to take to the local market.

I also imagine that Bishop was an industrious farmer and his wife was a good manager who stayed at home and looked after the needs of husband and family.

She was born Rebecca Pearsall, daughter of pioneer settler John Pearsall and his wife, Hannah Abrams, all of Sophiasburgh and formerly of the New Republic, the U.S.A.