

OUR 'ARRY

Harry Evans spends almost as much time as a "consultant" these days as he ever did running the family farm just west of Cherry Valley.

Born in the midlands of England in 1916, Harry was not a farmer's son. It wasn't until later years that he developed a yen for farming...thoroughly sold on the idea when he met a pretty farm girl named Victoria Rose (he calls her 'Vic') who was boarding three young British airmen on the family farm in 1941.

He claims he was born "during a First World War zeppelin raid", and who's to question him? 'arry, as he is best known, fractures truth as easily as The King's English -- and all with the same straight face, his head cocked to one side and his blue eyes twinkling.

'arry Evans is the self-styled bard of Prince Edward County, a title he proclaimed rather than earned. When he first picked up his pen at the age of 55, to write "It's Sunday Night Out here at Salmon Point", for The Picton Gazette, his alterations to style, verse, spelling and H'inglish, earned him more than one beady-eyed glance, not to mention less subtle ways of commenting on the subject matter he chose.

Most infamous, of course, are the tales of his bull Mortimer. His explicit descriptions of the romantic activities caused gasps among the readers of the staid bi-weekly newspaper. Indeed, although a trivial subject to many, Mort's doings' caused more of a stir than 'arry's demands for indoor plumbing at the Athol Township Hall. He eventually found that the smaller things in life got a better reception from the readers of 'Harry Says,' as it is now called, than matters of deadly earnest.

Harry wielded his pen on a regular basis. His columns enraged, they entertained, they informed. But regardless of the subject he "'ad 'is fun." He began his Gazette columns after toying with the idea of a story about Athol Township. "I was sittin' down here one afternoon. I was thinkin', "this bloody township! I wrote about the people, their religion, everythin'." He was off to a ripe start.

"It made the people mad," he recalls. "They thought as I was too goddamned stupid to write me own column because I only had standard (grade) seven, and I'd never wrote before. For years, they thought it was somebody who wrote me column, but I never had any help at all.

"Then I started writin' it in me own style. They edited it at first, but they then left it, as it fitted best." He credits former news editor Jack Evans with urging him to keep writing.

Perhaps his most famous story was about the special birthday present he gave to a friend -- a load of manure. "I don't think I ever saw a guy so tickled over a birthday present before." They toasted the success of the present, spread over the friend's garden, with whiskey.

Of Mort the bull and his escapades, Harry has revealed a secret. "All me bulls was named Mort." You're reading it here first, folks. The truth is out.

He swears the best time for composing columns is at 4.30 a.m., just before the daily milk chores. "I've started columns while the sun rose over the widder Haggarty's barn down the road," he once told an interviewer.

For a short while, he served a term on Athol Township council. In true 'arry style, he ran on the 'privvy' platform. It seems that outdoor facilities were all the township wanted a few years ago. Harry used his column as a soapbox. But when he was elected, he discovered the matter of washrooms rested in the hands of the recreation committee -- to which he could not get appointed.

He tried to shame the township, pointing out the more modern facilities in tine Selby. Finally, in the late '50's, it was finished, "only 25 years behind everyone else," says Harry. But the privvy remained, too.

His penchant for tall tales -- "every word I make up is true" -- stood him in good stead with ghost story writer Eileen Sonin. She had heard of Harry's stories, and asked him to supply some for her book on strange Canadian occurrences, "Especially Ghosts".

One tale relates Harry's story about a lake captain named Clarke, who constructed a house on the southern tip of the County, using the beams of a sunken ship. Capt. Clarke committed suicide after lengthy battles with his wife Pamela. Soon after, whenever there was a storm, the house began to creak as if it were a ship riding out a storm.

The present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Dan Nielsen, say anyone who sleeps in what was Pamela's bedroom, during a storm, awoken to see a wild eye at the captain's porthole in his wife's bedroom, feel a terrible damp chill, and hear a voice pleading "Let me in, my love."

"The next morning, though the roof is sound, there is always a patch of dank water outside the door and traces of moss which can only be found in the deepest parts of Lake Ontario," the late Mrs. Sonin wrote.