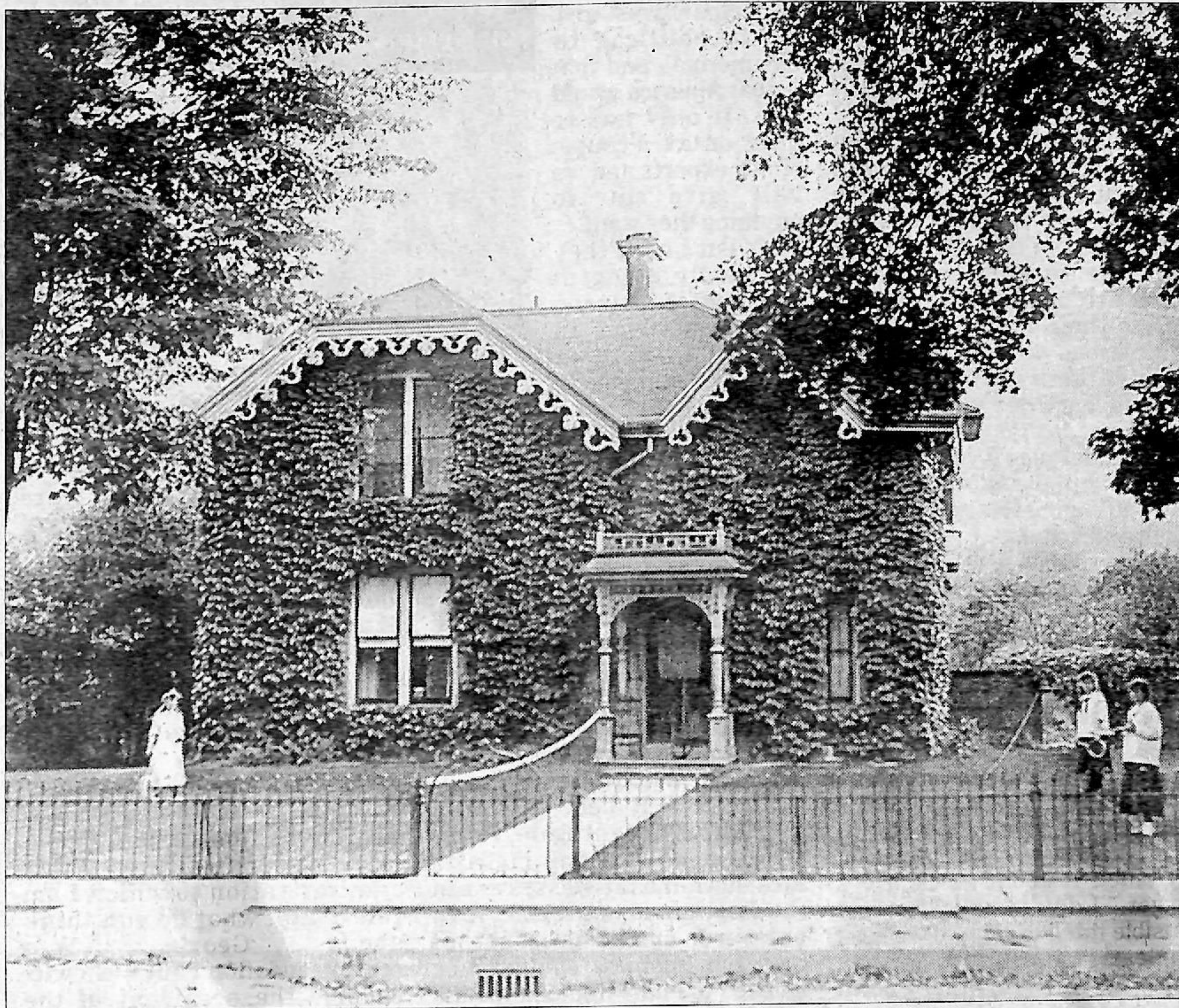


letters tell of final year



An old family photo shows children playing tennis on the front lawn of the Martin home in Hamilton.

As always, he is upbeat, speaking highly of the kit he has been given.

He's in the air at Deseronto, basking in the thrill of handling the controls and remarking on the crash landings. He assures his dad that no one is ever hurt in them. It is part of an ongoing assurance that he gives his parents that he is being treated well and is safe.

Often the letters are filled with the patter of day-to-day life. At Mohawk, he commends his mother for the fine quality of socks she has knit him. He has worn them for two weeks straight, with no signs of holes, "which proves their value". He promises he will change them tomorrow, "purely for sanitary reasons". Soon he will have his lined leather flying outfit. In the letter he tells his dad he will be making landings at the speed of 65 miles per hour. Nearly two months later he notes that the grapes that were sent to him arrived "mouldy owing to the delay in transit."

On November 4, he asks his dad to telegraph him at Camp Borden with a good reason to be granted leave. Four days later

Tom writes again - the Adjutant wouldn't buy it. No leave before he heads off for Texas in seven days. He suggests that he may 'get lost' on one of his training flights and land in Hamilton. It's a time when aviation is new, and any flat spot is a potential landing field. In the same letter he writes that he flew over his Aunt Nell's place that afternoon and waved at her or Lena. (Aunt Nell is Anne Wyminga's mother.) But for a wind blowing in the wrong direction, he would have landed on his uncle's farm on that November 8 flight.

Off to the U.S.

Texas is a whole new experience, challenging some of his stereotypes. He marvels at the number of horses and mules used by the contractors who are still building the Benbrook Camp. For his dad's benefit, he recounts some of the details of the rail trip down. (His dad worked for the Toronto Hamilton and Buffalo Railway.)

A neighbouring rancher invites him to share Thanksgiving dinner. "I and ma wife would like yo' all three to come ovah to dinner on

Thanksgiving if yo' all can come", comments Tom in his letter home.

While at Benbrook he first hears of the poison gassing of his friend Ken Inglis.

Later, during his stay at Talliaferro, Tom was shocked to hear of Ken's death. The news spurs the young aviator to avenge the loss of "one of the truest friends that ever lived." It reminds him of the "seriousness of the war on the other side". He is anxious to get over to the front where he can do some real good.

His parents hear everything. On November 16 he turns his first loop at 3,000 feet. He writes the next day to his mother. "There was a bunch of mud sticking to my wheels however and when I turned upside down it started to fly in my face which somewhat alarmed me as I did not know what was happening for a while."

Living in an age of jet planes, it is hard to imagine a plane 'losing ground' and averaging only ten miles per hour against a head wind, as Tom reported to his dad on November 22. Or being grounded for eight days due to heavy mist.

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