



Farm machinery interests men during auction at Norwaydale Farm, Bromley Township, Ont.



Auctioneer Eckford (left) discusses sale sheet with a dealer.

THE LAST DAY

By Brenda Lee-Whiting

PHOTOS BY LARRY LESAGE

THEY came from miles around to the auction sale at Norwaydale Farm, seven miles west of Cobden, Ontario. Many of them from the Wilno-Barry's Bay area were conversing in Polish, and that was hardly less intelligible to the uninitiated than the rapid-fire, singsong delivery of auctioneer Kenneth Eckford of Forester's Falls.

But it was obvious that the crowd was accustomed to this auctioneer — and he to them. Rare was the occasion when he had to ask the name of a successful bidder, so that his two busy clerks could note down the sale. Retired schoolmaster, Willis Hawkins, and retired farmer, Percy Brown, had to scribble fast to keep up with Mr. Eckford who announced at the beginning that he would sell everything by 5.00 p.m. And he did.

The sale started shortly after the advertised time of 12.00 noon, but by mid-morning the first of nearly 200 cars was raising the dust on the back roads leading to the farm home of Mr. and Mrs. John T. Burchat, R.R. 1, Douglas.

Advertised as one of the finest in Bromley Township, the farm itself had already been sold to Allan Kurth and his son, Barton, of Pembroke, reportedly for \$26,000.

Having no sons to take over the property, 69-year-old Mr. Burchat and his wife had decided to retire and move to a small house in Renfrew, the town in which two of their three daughters reside. Their new home could not accommodate the furnishings of a large farmhouse, so many of the Burchats' household goods, including antiques, were offered for sale in the auction in addition to the farm's livestock and machinery.

Mr. Eckford believes in disposing of the "small stuff" at the beginning of the sale.

"I always keep the livestock until last in order to hold the crowd," he said.

Starting off with a collection of tools and implements, his first sale of the day was a fork for one dollar. Spades, axes, chains, etc. sold in quick succession to a comparatively small audience. Many of the visitors at this point were enjoying the lunch provided by the Catholic Women's League of Douglas — homemade sandwiches, beans, pies and coffee for 60 cents a head.

But by the time the auctioneer moved to the household goods, he commanded the full attention of the crowd, estimated at 600.

The item which had attracted most attention prior to the sale was a 110-year-old spinning wheel in perfect condition. Mrs. Burchat knew that it had been in continuous use since the days of her husband's grandmother, Mrs. Michael Zivitsky, one of the pioneers in the Polish settlement along the Opeongo Line. Until this winter the spinning wheel had been regularly employed by Mrs. Burchat to spin the wool that she knitted into socks, mitts and sweaters for sale to neighboring farm families.

Obviously feeling wistful at parting with her heirloom, she was delighted to learn that it had fetched \$65 in the auction.

Many of the household implements pre-dated the advent of electricity to rural areas. There was a set of solid-fuel irons, oil lamps, a foot-operated sewing machine, a hand-cranked phonograph and a butter churn with its wooden molds. Handmade quilts

sold for \$3.50 while braided mats fetched only 50 cents each.

Top price of the day was realized on a four-year-old Massey-Ferguson tractor and, when big money was in the offing, the huge crowd fell silent. Starting at \$1,000, the price leapt quickly to \$1,800 before the pace slackened. There were really only two bidders in the race and the auctioneer treated them with all the deference of a headwaiter serving royalty. Leading them gently through the last bids, in jumps of \$25, Mr. Eckford finally closed the deal at \$2,000 to Mr. Kurth, the new owner of the farm.

The traditional words "Going-going-gone" did not appear in this auctioneer's vocabulary. Instead the operative phrase was "Holding-holding-holding," while his eyes swept the crowd with a challenging gaze and his walking cane was poised to point out yet another bid.

Livestock sales drew the most critical appraisals from the assembled farmers. As the pairs of Holstein cattle were led into the circle, Mr. Eckford reeled off their ancestry and vaccinations and delivered a clinical analysis of their sex life and/or approaching motherhood.

"A knowledge of what he's selling is one of the most important qualities of a good auctioneer," said Mr. Hawkins, one of the clerks.

On this score Mr. Eckford should be well qualified. Owner of a 100-acre dairy farm at Forester's Falls, he clerked for another auctioneer before starting in the trade himself 12 years ago. He handles about 60 auctions a year, the bulk of them occurring in the spring or fall. This one was his fifth in a week.



Owner Burchat and wife decided to retire to town house.

Barton Kurth, one of new owners of farm, tries tractor.



The purchaser of an antique oil lamp carries away her bargain.



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