

**THE COMING OF THE COWAN FAMILY
THE FIRST SETTLERS IN LEITCH TOWNSHIP**
by Mrs. C. Wilkins, 1952.

It will be just ^{forty} ~~thirty~~ years this coming October since my father, George Cowan "took up" (or bought) Lot One, Concession One, the first farm to be taken up in Leitch Township. Things have changed a lot since nineteen hundred and twelve.

After taking up this Lot, my father came back home to St. Thomas, Ontario, and spent the winter working in the shoe factory. He was a shoe-maker by trade, a trade handed down to him by his forefathers.

That winter was a winter of preparation for our family and also for that of Mr. Lorne Firby, who had gone north and taken up a lot at the same time my father did. How we all looked forward to the spring when we would go north to this new country. I often think of the many questions we used to ask about this new land. One of my first questions was to ask if any Christmas trees grew on our farm. My joy was complete when I was told there were plenty. Little did I know then that I would never play with or build houses of Maple leaves again.

Finally the great day arrived for our little group to start for the north. Many were the friends we said good-bye to, as the train pulled out from the station. Our little group of pioneers consisted of Mrs. and Mr. Lorne Firby, their son Arnold and daughter Mildred, Clarence and Alvin Moore, brothers of Mrs. Firby, my father, Mother, brother James, sister Edith and myself. For livestock, we had three dogs, one of which we had brought from the U. S. A. a few years before.

After a long tiresome trip on the train, we arrived at Cochrane, a most desolate looking place. There was still snow on the ground, and anyone who can remember Cochrane in those early days can guess how our hearts sank, when we left the train, to go to the house where we were to board for a while, the Douglas house, on Third Avenue.

As soon as our car-load of furniture came, the Firby family and our family each moved into a set of rooms in the Douglas house, and we lived there until we moved to Clute. While we were living there, Mr. and Mrs. Rowan and family, John, Hugh and Willie, having just arrived from Scotland, took rooms in the same house, and there, three of Clute's pioneer families became friends.

We moved to Clute on August 2nd, 1913, and I shall never forget that long drive over rough corduroy roads. We left Cochrane about seven o'clock in the morning with three team loads of furniture, ourselves riding on top. Many times pieces of furniture bounced off the load and had to be picked up later. Some of the boxes had to be left at the foot of the big hill and another trip made for them. We arrived about five o'clock, and Mrs. Firby took us up to her place for supper. That night we moved into a little log shack belonging to Tom Anderson, on the corner of Glackmeyer Township, and there we spent our first winter.

I often look back on those first few years and wonder why our folks ever came up here, or why they ever stayed. Why were they willing to leave friends and relations behind, to take their children away from schools and church, to build up homes in this new country? The answer I find in these words of Robert Reid:

"Sing me a song of her tranquil forests,
Silence eternal, and peace profound,
In whose great heart's deep recesses
Breaks no tempest, and comes no sound;
Face to face with the death-like stillness,
Here if at all, man's soul might quail;
May 'tis the love of that Great Peace leads us
Thither, where solace will never fail!"



James with one of the first cows in the new community, on the North Road!



Edith with Laura Gibson, later Mrs. James Cowan



A happy little pioneer; Edith coming in from her trap line



Right: Edith and James



The Author, Vera Cowan Wilkins with Marion Cline and Edith