

Kept diary for nearly 50 years

1983

By SUZANNE HANSON

Do you know what you were doing on this date 49 years ago? Granted, some of us weren't even around then but those who were would probably find it difficult, if not impossible, to even remember what the weather was like on a particular day that many years ago.

But if you asked Russell Orth of RR 2, Burgessville, he could tell you in just a matter of minutes. All it would take would be a quick reference to his diary and he could tell you what he did that day and what the weather was like.

Mr. Orth was given his first diary by his sister Muriel Meldrum as a 27th birthday present back in 1934. He faithfully kept it up, writing in it daily. The next year he bought a five year diary himself and continued the practice for the next 49 years, non-stop. At the end of this year, he will have 50 years of daily life recorded as history for future generations.

Few people could boast maintaining such a continuous record of events and Mr. Orth is quick to point out that he never missed a day of writing in his diary. For him it was no chore to do it. "I just got into the habit."

He said he usually wrote it up each day as the last thing he did before going to bed.

"It got to be as normal as taking your shoes off," he said.

While he may not have realized it at the time, Mr. Orth was actually recording bits of history in his diaries. And that thought now provokes a laugh from him as he admits he always hated studying history in school. "I thought it was a terrible thing to have to study what they did years ago in Europe," he said.

Browsing through the diaries he finds many days where there's nothing major recorded but he always managed to find something to fill the space.

He has been busy recently, condensing the important details from all the diaries into one book for easy reference. So far he's up to 1971 with the most important details from each day of each year highlighted. The weather

extremes he writes in red ink, the deaths in black, the births in green and the general information in blue ink. Any important events such as weddings are underlined, he said. That means he can quickly gain access to important information without the time-consuming task of sifting through an entire year of writing in the diary.

Mr. Orth said once he's finished his condensed version, he may donate the diaries to the Norwich

archives to ensure they are preserved for the use of others and for future generations.

"If you lost them you couldn't replace them," he said, and such a complete uninterrupted record of the past can be a useful key to the past.

In addition to the weather reports and recording the major events in their lives, Mr. Orth has also recorded such things as variations in the seasons and machinery purchases

on the farm where he has lived since moving there with his parents in 1913. He and his wife were married in 1932 and lived in part of his parent's house on the farm until his parents moved into Burgessville in 1942.

Browsing through the diaries he's kept, Mr. Orth can tell you they bought their first tractor in 1937, having used horses up until that time and he can tell you they purchased their first combine in 1945. The

diaries are also proof of the many changes that have taken place over the years.

"What we did 30 or 40 years ago we're not doing now," said Mr. Orth. And he can see the change in our standard of living from what's recorded on those handwritten pages.

"They talk about the good old days but I don't think I'd want to go back to them," he said. The good times were there but there were also the hard times, particularly during the depression years and sometimes people can forget those times.

Mr. Orth, however, is able to draw upon those memories each time he journeys through the pages of history he has recorded. And he's also been able to solve his fair share of arguments when dates and weather records set have been in dispute. For Mr. Orth, the answers are all there down in black and white. "I've gone to them (the diaries) a good many times and hunted around for things," he said. And he's hoping that his son Wally will continue the tradition of keeping the diaries when he's finished.

Wilbur Morley started his diary in 1911 and continued to 1979.



Grade 13 proficiency winners

Roger Empey (left), Michelle Millsum and Rod Dickson were presented with proficiency awards for having the highest standings in Grade 13 at the Norwich District High School commencement ceremony Friday night. (NG Photo)

DEMONTMORENCY — At Norvilla Nursing Home, Norwich, on Friday, December 23, 1983. Elmirck DeMontmorency of Norwich in his 84th year. Husband of the late Florence I. Morris (1978). Father of Mrs. Tony (Lois) Duncan of Leamington. Brother of Mrs. Frances Palmer and Mrs. Emily Hammond of Brantford; Raymond of Norwich and Eland of Brantford. Grandfather of Howard of Ottawa and Chris of Sudbury and one great-grandson, David, also survives. Friends may call at the Arr^o Son Funeral Residence, Norwich, Saturday 2:00-4:30 and 7:00-9:00 p.m. The complete funeral service will be held on Monday at 12 noon. Reverend David Fearon will officiate.

DOWNHAM — Suddenly at Stratford General Hospital, on Sunday, January 1, 1984. Myrtle Jane (Campbell), of People's Care Center, Tavistock and formerly of Thamesford, in her 94th year. Beloved wife of the late Asa Downham (1962). Dear mother of Mrs. Erie Walden (Margaret) of Toronto, Cecil of Stratford, Seymour, of London and James of South Mountain. Sister of Jessie Drummond, of Newark, England, Florence Hamilton of Hamilton and Mary Burt of Pointe Claire, Quebec. Also survived by six grandchildren and seventeen great-grandchildren. Predeceased by one son Allan. Friends may call at the Carrothers-Betzner Funeral Home, 177 Dundas Street, Thamesford where complete funeral service will be held on Tuesday, January 3rd, 1984 at 2:00 p.m. Reverend David Mack officiating. Temporary entombment. Interment later in Zion 7th Line Cemetery.

Sailors honoring First War vet during ceremony

May 8/83.

Arthur Tanner was 18 years old when he left his home in England and joined the Royal Navy. During the First World War, Tanner was a member of the ships which escorted Canadian troops to the European battlefields. Tomorrow, 66 years after he joined the Royal Navy, Tanner will be honorary parade marshal for the annual commemoration of the Battle of Atlantic.

Tanner, 84, now resides in the Caressant Care Nursing Home. He is one of the oldest members of the Oxford County Naval Veterans Association and said this week he would attend tomorrow's ceremonies "come hell or high water."

His hearing was severely damaged by the sound of guns and bombs during the Great War for Civilization. Doctors were unable to repair his hearing, but Tanner has been an inspiration to all who know him. In his wallet are photographs of himself when he joined the Royal Navy and the ship, the HMS Gruiad, where he spent most of his time.

The rigorous life on the sea was an experience Tanner will never forget. His travels took him to centres throughout Europe and some of his fondest memories include Palestine, the Mediterranean Sea and Paris.

Tanner was one of the lucky ones to return from the Great War. Many of his friends weren't so fortunate, he said.

- Tomorrow's ceremonies will include the second consecutive appearance of the Ontario Provincial Police Pipes and Drums, who will lead the Battle of Atlantic parade.
- The parade marches off from Towers parking lot on Dundas Street at 10:30 a.m. and arrives at the Victoria Park cenotaph at 10:50 a.m.
- The parade will include the OPP Auxiliary Color Guard, Royal Canadian Legion Branch 55 Color Party, Korean War Veterans Association, Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corps units and members of the Oxford County Naval Veterans Association (Woodstock Navy Club).
- Services will be held at the Victoria Park cenotaph at 11 a.m., after which the parade will march back to Towers, with the salute taken by Commander Donald S. Bethune, C.D., Ancaster at city hall.
- Upon return to Towers, the OPP Pipes and Drums will stage a brief tattoo-type concert.
- Invited guests include Woodstock Mayor Wendy Calder, Oxford MP Bruce Halliday and Oxford MPP Dick Treleaven.



ARTHUR TANNER
—First War vet—

Tanner says father