

Early Pattern Of Harrington Is Typical Of Oxford County

By E. E. BOSSENCE

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, and the early part of this one, there were some interesting and amusing characters, who had lived in, and around, the Village of Harrington, Ontario (Oxford County) including that early period when Ralph Connor's father Rev. Mr. Gordon, was the minister at the Presbyterian Church.

Dr. McLeod, the genial, local physician, was overfond of that which "In the end biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." Meeting Mr. Gordon, one day, and finding it difficult to keep his balance, down he went, right at his minister's feet. Embarrassed, he said "The Reverend Mr. Gordon; The Reverend Mr. Gordon; The laws of gravity; if a man's feet go from under him, he is sure to come to the ground". Mr. Gordon looked down on him in pity and sorrow.

A local scotchman, Mr. Matheson, was fond of an argument, especially on politics. Riding home from town with a mild Dutchman, John Ruthermel, he started in on the Liberals, calling them everything he could think of. Mr. Ruthermel said, "That's right, Mr. Matheson." After awhile he lit into the Conservatives, giving them an equal drubbing. "That's right," said Mr. Ruthermel. Exasperated, the old Scotchman said "Why you no arger wi' me?" Somebody offered him a drink, telling him that it was ten years old. "It's vera sma' for its age", said he.

Spafford (Spot) Rounds the mayor, on being elected, said that he was like cold pertaters — he was better warmed up. Nearly two centuries ago, someone drilled there to find oil. No oil appeared, but the fountain of youth, a flowing well — the water of health, containing iron, sulphur, etc. rolls up from the bowels of the earth in volume enough to supply the whole village, were it piped to their homes. A suitable park now adorns the site.

Walter Ford was badly retarded. Today he could be treated, but then he was the village fool. He was followed, laughed at, and mocked by the younger boys (and often by much older ones). In summer, Walter wandered around the farms, helping anyone who would give him a meal and a few pennies. He collected so many he decided to go to Michigan and buy a farm. Put wise to his error, after that he insisted on "white" money. In the winter, a shooting-match

was held, when the ice on the mill-pond was heavy; the prizes, turkeys. Walter stood watching. Someone said, "Have a try, Walter". He raised the rifle; bang! The bullet ripped through the surface of the ice, ricocheted into the target — a bull's eye. Walter got his turkey.

Maggie McKenzie, the local, good-natured seamstress, lived with her scotch grandmother. Granny was very much afraid that one of the young men would marry Maggie and so leave her alone. George Lampman used to often call of an evening and, to tease the old lady, they would sit in a corner and whisper. Granny watched them with a suspicious eye. One day, Maggie said to her, "Grandma, I wonder you ever got married, you watch me so much". "Me get married!" replied the old lady. "Eight want me!" "Why then" said Maggie "are you so afraid that one might want me?" "Oh, diffrence," replied Granny, "diffrence in mans in this country and mans in the old country."

At the Methodist Church revival meetings were frequent. Evangelists, Crossly and Hunter, Mrs. Williams, and others found ready audiences and made many converts. A respected member of this church Matthew Morris, was "down on" young men who left the farm. "By sir", he would say, "Another gone to the city to starve". Sometimes he was right. They were glad to return.

Bert Lampman, Harvey's father, was local skating champion. He encouraged the rising generation to learn to skate on the mill-pond. Bert's and George's father was quite a fighter in his youth. He used to go up street with a freak outfit of clothes on, hoping that someone would make fun of him; and so provide a good excuse for a fight. Later in life he repented, and worried much because of his wild youth.

The Campbells, on a farm east of the village, were a mischievous bunch. One morning, when their dad was saying family prayers a young Campbell held a pin behind his father's back. Another youngster pushed his arm, making his father jump. I will not say what happened after that, but you can imagine.

My old-maiden Aunt Julia Bossence had a valuable watch, cost \$50.00 and that was something in those days. Because she prized it highly, when she travelled she wrapped it in rag after rag until, as Milton Sal-

vadge said, "If you found it, you would kick it out of the way like a football."

The two-roomed school at the west end of the village, was at first just one stone building. It had its share of two-fisted boys. Harvey Lampman, like his grandfather, was a chip off the same block. He and Jack Kittmer had a fight most every day at recess. They were like a continued-story in the newspapers. Next day they started where they left off the day before. If you got bored watching the behind the schoolhouse you would likely find Ed Hill and Fenwick Duncan, sparring for a knock-out. Short, heavy-set, Harold Wilson and tall thin Jack McComb for fun, used to wrestle. Jack marvelled because short Harold could usually throw him. My dad Henry Bossence, owned the second farm north of the village. In wintry weather, my young brother and I rode our pet horse, old Kate, to school; bareback. He sat behind me his short legs sticking straight out. When we arrived at the school, we turned old Kate around and, with a pat, we sent her home. Harold and Tom Wilson meeting her, rode her back to the school. Again sent her home. This might happen as often as any boys met her.

The school inspector Mr. Carlyle, we nicknamed "Coal-oil". He had big feet, and wore

heavy overshoes to keep the cold out, as he drove a slow nag from school to school. His big feet looked to us like pontoons. To test us he would ask what we saw coming to school. When we told him, a tree or a horse, he would say, "Where are they? I don't see them here." One day he sent Harvey Dunnell on an errand telling him to take his horse and buggy. Harvey, to liven-up the old nag, used the whip freely. It was not used to this, and got the "jitters". The old man would wonder what ailed it. Harvey looked innocent, like the cat that had just swallowed the canary.

To complete this story, we swam in the river behind the grocery store, in our birthday clothes Jack Morrison pounding the water with his fists closed, dog fashion; all of us yelling like Indians. We waded up the Thames River for duck eggs and frogs. Mother would not cook the frogs' hind legs — made her, you know. So we did it ourselves. Outside of being too salty, they tasted good. We made acorn pipes, with docks for stems, and smoked mullein leaves for tobacco. Elm roots made good cigarettes but soon got hot.

Harrington is much the same today; a haven of peace and rest, in a world that is rushing somewhere, but most of the time is not sure where it is going.