

FARMING METHODS

How did the Oastler family survive? In clearing raw land they burned the resulting brush. This left a layer of ashes rich in potash. In clearing they cut the wood for firewood. Each year they had around 400 cords of split firewood for sale as well as wood for their home fires. In 1914 this sold, delivered and piled at \$4.00 per cord. They hauled this by the load in the cold of winter eight miles into Parry Sound with a team of horses. Sometimes they were not paid for the wood as some individuals figured on heating their homes free.

The first year after burning off the brush they planted turnips for themselves and the cattle. These were delicious. The next year they planted oats and it would be a bumper crop. The following or third year they sowed a mixture of timothy and white clover. This white clover provided nitrogen for the timothy. They would take off about four good crops of timothy and from then on the land would slowly peter out. The Oastlers had access to a huge swamp where they, along with other local farmers, cut swamp hay. They stacked this. They would tramp down about two feet of hay and then a layer of salt, and then another two feet of swamp hay, and on top of this another layer of salt etc. They then brought this swamp hay eight miles home over the ice and snow. Deer would eat off these stacks and once an escaped bull existed off these stacks all one winter and was quite at home with the deer around him.

There was maple sugar in the spring. If an infant was present they hung the baby in an Indian basket near the fire burning under the syrup kettle while the mother worked. The kettle used is still on hand.

The hard wood ashes at home were kept to make a soft soap. The milk was separated by a running creek from an ice cold spring. The separation cans were purchased from the T. Eaton Company. The ice used in the separation tubs came from Oastler Lake. It was kept in summer in sawdust in an ice house, the sawdust being obtained from local lumber mills. The cream from the separation was used to make butter. The family had a butter and egg route in Parry Sound. The buttermilk was kept cool in the home cellar and was delicious, with lumps of rich butter floating in it. The hired help were sometimes booze fighters and they drank copious quantities of cold buttermilk so that they could fight off the thirst for booze until Saturday night. The skim milk fed the calves and pigs.

The Family, along with other farmers, ran cattle in the twenty square miles of bush behind the house. About half this area was "burned". Once a forest fire went through, old Ern (Aron) Gould, the hermit of the area, would scatter timothy seed all over the burnt area. This had to stop eventually as the government, in 1914, put on anti-forest fire patrols by the use of airoplanes and the resulting forest became too thick for pasture.

It is remarkable how well cattle and hogs became acclimated to the bush. There was one cow that swam one-half mile across Otter Lake in the morning and had her calf in the afternoon. The cows could hide their calves so well that you would be right on top of one before you could see it. If you grabbed a cow by both horns and propelled her forward she would take you to the calf. Because of bears and wolves she wanted to get the calf out of the bush and home. When she got close to the hidden calf she would moo.