

Speyside has Ghosts of Palmier Days

Nora Gilbert
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While town planning may not be new, one sometimes wonders if it will ever be permanent, considering what has happened to many Ontario villages during the past century. In these cases changes were mostly brought about by the replacement of vehicular traffic with that by rail. The question also arises, what will become of some of the present day planning should air route, supplant railways, and planned industrial and commercial areas become mere roads of an earlier prosperity. Not too much worry should be given to this possibility because it is not likely that either reader or writer will live to see that day.

Prosperous Past

These thoughts were prompted by a visit to Speyside, a former prosperous village, situated at the intersection of No. 25 Highway and a county side road in Esqueving Twp. County of Halton. It is five miles from Acton, seven miles north of Milton, and six miles from Georgetown.

On a hasty glance it consists of a corner store, the ruins of an old log cabin, a burial ground for stray dogs, a poultry farm where hens refuse to be fooled by wire nests, a place where turkeys live on open ground, a home for 33,000 broilers, pleasant pastures for sheep and cattle and an extremely beautiful view from the top of the hill on No. 25 Highway, on the way to Acton. What it was yesterday, history records tell, together with rich memories of some of the older residents. Speyside is still shown on the road maps of Ontario, holds a more imposing spot in the Atlas of Halton County, and in fact is listed in the Atlas of Canada as having had 22 inhabitants in 1901.

Map Shows Streets

A registered map published in 1877 shows a planned layout of streets but where are they today? Not the sheep which graze on the pleasant slopes on the edge of a wood lot, nor the cattle which feed on the silage of the rich farming land, nor the turkeys, geese and chickens which are raised amid pleasant surroundings, could tell you, not even the people who live there, albeit they are more than

ready to give what information they have about the place, and are symbolic of hospitality itself. No, unless one is looking for it, Speyside could be passed by without a thought. But that was not always the case. We wonder if there are any living today who would remember Cruickshank St., Ashbury, Mill and Water Streets; First, Second and Third Streets; and for that matter Spey Street Ontario Street is more likely to be in the recollection as being the road between Two and Three. These are all registered on the map mentioned above.

Postmaster Couldn't Read

Speyside as a small village was named after the river Spey in Scotland. At one time there was a post office and the first postmaster was Robert McPherson. The story is told that he could neither read nor write, but depended on the school children to tell him the names on the letters. "Sometimes we told him right and sometimes we told him wrong," one of them, now an octogenarian, chuckled. He recalled that the postmaster did not understand the abbreviation Jno. for John, and insisted a certain letter was for a man named Jonah. Among the early settlers were the Cruickshanks who had sawmills, the Sayers, the Moores, and others. There were two hotels, two general stores, a small tannery, a blacksmith shop, a village hall, a shingle mill, a lime kiln, a church and several businesses to make it a thriving place. There was one mail a week when the post office was first established, then twice a week it was carried from Acton and Knatchbull. The original building is now used as a utility shed on the farm of John Moore, a native son. Philip Drummond ran the tannery. He was an Irishman with all the colour that fact implies.

Oldest Families

One of the oldest families still living at Speyside is that of John Moore who has the Crown deed of David Moore, his grandfather. Ephraim Moore was his father. The Crown deed bears the date 1840, a grant of 100 acres, and has the signature of Sir George Arthur, Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Upper Canada. Esqueving Township was in existence then as it is named of the Gore District. The word Esqueving is of Indian origin, meaning "the land of the tall pines." It was settled about 1819 by people mostly from the British Isles. While the sum of \$125 was originally paid for the Moore farm, today recent sales of similar properties, only smaller, have brought \$35,000 and \$40,000. John Moore's father, Ephraim, was also born on the homestead, the house being one of the oldest in the district. "I had an uncle a framer, who made the tongues and grooves by hand," John Moore said. He is 77.

Mr. Moore remembered a lime kiln had been at the foot of the hill and the hole is still there. The beavers had blocked the road at the town line at one time, Miss Charlotte (Lottie) Moore, a sister, carried on the Sunday School started by Mr. McPherson, from 1914 to 1925. Although the Moore were expecting the threshers the next day, they were not too busy to offer a cup of tea to the visitors.

Home For Stray Dogs

Another interesting spot on Speyside is Vernon Park Farm, comprising about 200 acres, owned by Dr. H. A. Beatty of Toronto, a brother of the late Sir Edward Beatty, president of the CPR. Dr. Beatty, now up in years, was head of the Toronto Humane Society, and was medical adviser to the CPR. His connections with the Humane Society and his own love of dogs, led him to establish at his farm a home for stray dogs who also found their happy hunting ground there. A cemetery marks the graves of many of these animals. Nelson and Mrs. Turner have charge of the place. Dr. Beatty pays only infrequent visits due to ill health.

Across the road, Hugo Olsen, late of Sweden, has a farm of 2,300 hens. There are no roosts on this farm and the hens seem to like it that way. But when Mr. Olsen tried to introduce them to modern laying methods with wire nests, they would have none of it. Max Key has just come out from Holland to work on this poultry farm. There are also hybrid geese, a cross of Wyandotte and New Hampshire.

Wields Wicked Axe

The oldest resident of the district is believed to be W. J. L. Hampshire, former sheriff of Halton County and a one-time reeve of Esqueving Township. At 81, Mr. Hampshire wields a wicked axe when it comes to cutting fire wood. Through him is traced a link with the outside world in the fact that General McNaughton is of the same family. His great-grandfather, Malcolm McNaughton, settled here in 1813, coming from the United States. John, Alex and Findlay were all sons. His grandfather, John McNaughton, was the first reeve of Esqueving, and his great uncle, Alex McNaughton, was the first reeve of Northwinds Township.

not only in appearance, but in his alert intelligence. It was with a brisk step that he took up his red flag to cross the highway to being in the cows. Presumably the red flag was to stop traffic and allow his cattle to cross in safety. He and his sister lived in the big grey stone house on the west side of No. 25 Highway.

The government of the Gore District continued in Esqueving until the establishment of municipal institutions by the Municipal Act of 1851. The first municipal council under that Act had John McNaughton as reeve. He was again reeve from 1867 to 1870 inclusive.

Dufferin School

The Dufferin School, although not strictly in Speyside, is the one attended by the children of the district. It was named after Lord Dufferin at the time he was Governor General, it is said.

The story of Speyside would not be complete without reference to the general store, formerly operated by William Douglas, until his death last April. Now his wife, Mrs. Nelson Douglas carries on at the corner. Her son, Crawford Douglas, is supervisor of music in 31 schools in Esqueving. He spends 45 minutes a week in each school.

Man-Sized Hobby

Another point of interest just this side of Speyside is the broiler house owned and operated on a 109-acre farm by T. H. Spratt of Hamilton. This is a man-sized hobby, carrying as it does, 33,000 broilers, 400 turkeys, and 37 head of cattle. Mr. Spratt also has 1300 broilers in a house at Bronte.

One of the most important places in the district, and one on which the epicurean diners depend, is the mushroom plant on Glenspey Farms, owned since August 1st, 1953, by Robert Reed who bought it then from his employer at that time, John Frame. Mr. Reed, who had had five or six years in mushroom growing, just bought the plant and the large orchards covering about 300 acres where apples and pears abound, are still owned by John Frame and his son Bruce Frame.

There are 40,000 square feet of growing area in the mushroom plant, producing annually about 150,000 pounds of mushrooms. Now, if you only had the steak of comparable size "yummy." But not all these mushrooms find their way to the table in the elite company of a juicy steak. There are 11 employees on the place and recently Terence French has come out from the old country of Britain, to be associated with Mr. Reed in this project. Harry Herensberger, a brother-in-law of Mr. Reed is also employed there.

Tricky Business

The growing of mushrooms requires exacting conditions, according to Mr. Reed. Usually a temperature of 60 degrees is maintained which is not the optimum, but which keeps the growth relatively

free from disease. The old saying of growing up over night like a mushroom, does not run quite to form, Mr. Reed says. It requires about five days from the time of the "pin up" until the vegetable (is it a vegetable?) is ready to use. The methods employed in culture, makes the products practically fool-proof, and people buying mushrooms are assured of safe and delectable eating if they buy the commercially grown plant.

Mushrooms will also grow in diffused light, but if there is a dark building there is better control of humidity and air circulation. Mr. Reed imports his mushroom spawn from the United States. It is not grown in Canada, the kind he has. As the population grows it is expected the industry will "mushroom" in growth too. In fact, the prognosis of acquiring a taste for the product, is already beginning to tell on the output.

On No. 25 Highway

Glenspey on No. 25 Highway, is now a split farm but the mushroom plant lies in what is known as the Spey Valley, through which runs a creek called Stoney Creek. This according to the earliest recollection of W. J. L. Hampshire, across the road, and he should know, having spent the greater part of his life in the place.

Among other old timers of Speyside were two families of MacDonaldis, Duncan was former governor of the jail at Bracebridge. Alex MacDonald was a captain in the Salvation Army. Another Alex MacDonald carried mails from Acton. James Conley was postmaster after McPherson. John Kennedy, a

stone mason, kept a store. John Frank also had a store and was succeeded by James Martin. There was a family by the name of Dunn. Donald Stewart kept a hotel and had a brother Charles. There were the families of Thomas, William and James Michie; three families of McArthur, Sandy, Peter, and Joseph. All these names were supplied through the rich store of memory of Mr. Hampshire, to whom with all others, this writer is deeply indebted. Were there longer time, one might delve even further into the history of the place called Speyside. Advice to the travellers: If you get weary by the wayside, just stop and take a look at Speyside.

STEWARTTOWN

MRS. WALTER LAWSON CELEBRATES BIRTHDAY

Congratulations to Mrs. Walter Lawson Sr., who celebrates her birthday next Monday, February 8.

The February meeting of Esqueving W. I. will be held at Mrs. Lawson's home, Wednesday evening, February 10th. The topic "Health." Roll call, an emergency hint.

The Junior W.A. meeting was held last week. Lillian Lawson chose the hymn and conducted the worship service. The hymn was "Holy, Holy, Holy." The Wednesday service was St. Luke's Hospital, Hebron, Palestine. Scrap books were made in the busy period.



W. J. L. Hampshire, 81, former Halton sheriff



Speyside general store, owned by Mrs. William Douglas



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