

Farmer surrenders old homestead to second Ontario Hydro corridor

A farmer is giving up his family's homestead because two Ontario Hydro corridors will soon cut up his lands so much he can't afford to work what's left.

Hydro intends to build a 500kV line over Leonard Manion's farms in Wellington and Grey counties, through Dufferin and Halton to Milton. The line is being built from the power source at the Bruce nuclear generating station on Lake Huron. Leonard Manion already has a 230 kV line diagonally across his lands.

Ontario Hydro, however, is discovering that Leonard Manion, and neighbors, are still capable of fighting a rear guard action.

Hydro hoped to legally enter the Manion farms Monday. The farmers applied for a court injunction to stop the public utility from coming in before Hydro gives them firm written offers, with prices, for the lands.

The court injunction is just one of many steps taken by Leonard Manion and friends to legally halt the newest power lines.

Leonard Manion is perhaps most popular in the Conn area because he dumped a load of manure on a Hydro car last year. A couple of weeks later a Toronto paper carried the story of the plight of a couple of Hydro officials who parked their cars in Leonard's driveway. Farmers circled one of the vehicles with their tractors and manure spreaders. One Hydro official reported to have said he felt he was at Custer's last stand.

The publicity surrounding Leonard Manion reflects the surface of his efforts to halt the line and later to make sure Ontario Hydro acts reasonably. Manion has been secretary-treasurer of the anti-power line Grey County Corridor Committee (GCCC) since it formed three years ago. He's spent hours in travelling time from his farm to attend expropriation meetings at Acton and Durham. He's spoken to political meetings. He attended all the environmental hearings at Hillsburgh in 1975. And he was hit by an Ontario Hydro car.

All this, by a man who stands no higher than five feet six inches with his 185 pounds. His dark hair shows flecks of gray, too soon for his 36 years. The change in coloring, started three years ago, he says, since he started opposing Hydro's plans for another corridor.

Leonard Manion's lands straddle Highway 89. He has 100 acres on the north side and an equal size farm on the south. He and his wife Theresa and their three children Mary, age 8 years, John, 6, and Leo, 4, live in a comfortable storey and a half white frame house east of Conn, which is a village about 35 miles north of Guelph.

Theresa, who comes from a St. Agatha, Ontario farm family, and Leonard share the chores on their land.

Leonard Manion's roots go deep in the Grey-Wellington border area. He was born there. His forefathers from Ireland settled the north farm in about 1850.

He raises pure bred Charolais cattle, a white colored beefy breed. The Manions also grow corn, hay, barley and mixed grains.

He decided to leave. His reasons are many and most of them concern his family; all of them stem from hydro corridors.

For example, the children were given kites to fly, an amusement while their parents worked the fields. The 230 kV line is about 80 feet from their home. The youngsters tried flying the kites in front of the house, but Leonard had to direct them to the north of the barn, away from the lines directly above where they played.

Leonard and Theresa had to alter their routine in order to work comfortably under the power lines. Theresa told, in an interview in the farm's kitchen last week, she would get shocks from the tractor and cultivator as she drove underneath the line.

She would also get headaches, she said, while working under the lines. However, if she works before 10 a.m. there are far fewer shocks. After that hour she figures Hydro use increases, the day gets warm and the line sags.

They've lived in the house for nine years, and Theresa says it is only in the last three years that they've been getting shocks.

Just before the last provincial election the government approached the Grey County Corridor Committee about a settlement. It was the first time that high Ontario Hydro

officials sat down with the folk in the north.

Leonard Manion came down with what his doctor called 'nervous strain', Theresa said. "I couldn't keep anything down. I didn't know what they (Hydro) were up to. Was it just politics, or were they going to be fair to us?" said Leonard.

Following those meetings, which were then secret, Leonard says Ontario Hydro gave verbal assurances that it will buy his farm in Grey County for an appraised price of \$85,000.

The reason for the court injunction, Leonard says, is to make Ontario Hydro live up to its word.

In addition to offering to buy some farms, the public utility is looking at paying injurious affection for easements.

The appraisal on the Manion Grey County land is by George D. Gale. He values the land at \$50 per acre, plus some \$30,000 for the house, barn and shed.

The \$85,000 Leonard says, isn't too far out.

Last year he listed the farm for sale. Because people knew of the oncoming power line, the offers were about half the appraised value.

The Manions think they will put in this winter on their farm. If Hydro buys their lands, they may be gone from

the homestead by May of next year. They've considered farms in Rainy River country, near the Ontario-Manitoba border and as far away as British Columbia.

It's been three years of resistance, battling, demonstrating, preparing reports, and going to courts that has earned the Grey County people what appears to be fair offers for whole farms from Ontario Hydro.

It's a major victory, Leonard says. The people in the southern parts of the Interested Citizens' Group (ICG) of which the GCCC is a member, may think we sold out, Leonard says.

Why is it a victory? "To me, our democratic principles dictate to me that no authority, including Ontario Hydro, should have the power to force us to work under these lines which cannot be guaranteed safe," Leonard

Manion said.

Ontario Hydro appears to be living up to the negotiations about buying farms in the north, said the beef farmer. "To me, that removes the element of coercion," he said. Farming an easement, meant building a fence, parallel to the towers. And that's not worth it, according to the farmer. An easement means Leonard Manion is forced to work under two sets of power lines.

Leonard Manion's opposition to the 500 kV line drew its motive from practical and altruistic motives.

With a 230 kV line already across his crops and cattle, Leonard felt he didn't need a second set of towers.

He'd do it all over again, he said in his kitchen. "If more people, who felt something was wrong, fought, we'd have a better society," Leonard Manion said.

And Leonard Manion and his neighbors might just have to keep fighting. Although Ontario Hydro seems to be keeping its word, Leonard feels he was given, if not a snow job at Orangeville by Hydro officials, a sprinkling of the white stuff.

He's struck by the contradictory stories Hydro has given about its studies of what's become known as the

Bruce-Essa alternate to Hydro's plans to build the 500 kV line through southern Ontario from the Bruce to Milton. At Orangeville Hydro said it studied and dismissed Bruce-Essa, which is favored by the ICG. Later at Acton expropriation hearings, Hydro said it never studied the Bruce-Essa question.

Since the environmental hearings at Hillsburgh two summers ago, Leonard has got support from people on the southern arm of the corridor too. He met John Schneider and Bill Mann and many others who were soon to be fast friends. Leonard, who reads military history in winter, is sustained by the fact that he is not a quitter. Once you start something,

you keep on going, he said. In contrast with the citizen opposition to the 500 kV line, there was little concern by farmers to the 230 kV during the early '60s. Leonard said the power was for local use, but he adds: "We didn't know enough, and we weren't concerned. We didn't know enough to be upset."

The surge in public reaction to power lines over the past five years possibly stems from a strong feeling of injustice. The depth of anti-Hydro feeling that's marked opposition to the Bradley-Georgetown line was summed up in Leonard Manion's quote from William Jennings Bryan. "The humblest citizen of all the land, when clad in the armor of a righteous cause, is stronger than all the hosts of error."

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THE MANION FAMILY under one Hydro corridor across their Grey County farm. A second corridor is heading their way. Leonard stands with wife Theresa, sons Leo, John and daughter Mary.

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