

# PROFILES

with Jennifer Barr



At 88 most people spend considerable time staring fixedly out of the window of a senior citizens' apartment. Jack McKerracher never has time to stare out of any window—he's recently been around the world, paints in his spare time, plays the organ and mandolin, and is planning a move to Edmonton next month.

This fascinating Acton resident has homesteaded out west in the days of the Great Depression, he's farmed all over Canada and fought in the Great War.

Listening to his stories requires more than a brief visit and the story of his life would fill several books—with a sequel planned for the next ten years.

Round the world at 80 plus years  
Mr. McKerracher enjoys shocking people by describing himself as "nearly 90." He looks decades younger and has that timeless enthusiasm so very endearing in any human, no matter what age.

His trip around the world a year ago looms large in his current memories. It started in Britain where he travelled up and down the breadth of the island, even bouncing down a Scottish coal mine.

"They'd have never let me go down if they knew how old I was," he twinkles.

From England he went to Israel, a country he'd love to visit again.

"Israel is an armed camp," he comments describing the constant presence of soldiers with rifles. Mr. McKerracher tried to get to Syria and Damascus but was not allowed to go. Instead, he travelled to Greece where he saw the Acropolis and other assorted Greek things.

Next on the list was Tehran in Iran where he was nearly jailed for not having the proper visa. And so to India where he spent time in New Delhi and saw the Taj Mahal.

Although Mr. McKerracher has driven all his life, he says he wouldn't drive in New Delhi. Roads are crowded with people, camels, sacred cows, and the occasional elephant, he says.

After a visit to Bombay, the flight Mr. McKerracher was on had an engine catch fire over the Indian Ocean and had to return under nerve wracking circumstances.

He wasn't afraid, although, he figured if he went down in flames it would be "just one more trip I'd take".

Hong Kong was next on the list—"the cleanest place I saw"—then home via Edmonton.

Mr. McKerracher doesn't think he'd go round the world again—"it's cold at both ends and too hot in the middle"—but he'd love to revisit parts of it. He had a trip to Rome planned this summer but moving plans pre-empted it. He'd like to go back to Vienna to "listen to the music."

### Uneasy soul

"I've been an uneasy soul all my life," Mr. McKerracher explains. He talks of a life spent darting all over this country trying to settle at farming.

Originally born in the Chatham area, he went out west to homestead in 1910. He had tried to land a job in Detroit prior to that but "couldn't do anything" because he wasn't educated for it. So he took a stony half-section of land near Moose Jaw and built himself a sod shack while he tried to make a living.

Working at a regular job in the summer provided his winter food. The landlord provided seed for a crop and half the cost of harvesting, splitting the crop profits down the middle with young Jack. However, there was no crop that year and Jack had to leave the land to the owner.

It was just as well, he was fed up wrestling the land from the rocks and had got to the point of hurling his pick at the horizon.

Next came a succession of well boring contracts in Northern Saskatchewan while he again farmed in the bush. He found some interesting geological formations while well boring, including fossilized fish and large coal seams. The University of Saskatchewan are interested in Mr. McKerracher's findings.

So came the Great War, service, and marriage, followed by farming in B.C. ("a big mistake").

Back to the prairies where Mr. McKerracher worked for a dairyman, the former mayor of Moose Jaw, who is still numbered one of Mr. McKerracher's long-time friends. At this job he received 75 dollars a month plus a furnished house—a princely sum at a time when men were lucky to find work at a quarter that salary.

Following this job, came a management position in Central Butte, managing a purebred stock farm for a doctor.

But this wasn't the same as farming for himself. So in 1922, the McKerrachers bought machinery and set themselves up still in Central Butte. By now there were five little McKerrachers and the stockmarket crash of '29 destroyed markets.

After nine years the mud and poplar pole shack that had served as home was sold and the McKerrachers came home to Chatham.

Here a huge old mansion of a house ("the place was a barn") was purchased and a broiler operation was set up. The large house was traded for a smaller house as the family grew, but Mr. McKerracher continued to raise chickens until he was nearly 80. He quit one day when he suddenly felt he'd had enough. He cancelled his order for new chicks at the hatchery, went home and told his wife they were going to Arizona.

After the death of his wife in 1970, Mr. McKerracher sold his farm and came to Acton four years ago to be near one of his sons.

### Grandpa Moses

The painting started when Mr. McKerracher was

82 ("I'm Grandpa Moses") after a stab at liquid embroidery. He paints from memory, postcards, magazines pictures and photos. His easel currently features several scenes, two Taj Mahals and some pig portraits.

His only advice to the young? "Get an education—it's the easiest load you'll ever carry all your life." He always figured if he had plenty to eat, a place to live and something to wear, he was rich.

Jack McKerracher is presently busy packing belongings for his impending move. A large gap will be left in Acton when he leaves.

\*Re: Letter to the Editor from Howard Coultrup, May 16

Dear Mr. Coultrup,  
It's amazing that you interpreted my comments—"shrieking out fighting words, banging un-musical chords from their tortured instruments"—to refer to hard rock. Nowhere in the column was hard rock mentioned. However, if the shoe fits... Perhaps you'd better read the column again—nowhere was their criticism of good musicians no matter what their style.

You denounce Jim Gordon's talent as "simple" and resulting from being brought up in a simple place. Don't let Rockwood people hear you say that—they'd probably object to an Actonian calling their town names in such a derogatory manner.

I'd also like to know how a musician who writes poetry, lyrics, and music; plays at least a dozen instruments; sings; arranges music; and organizes the career of himself and two other musicians, can be called "simple"?

I'm very pleased you read the column (if somewhat inaccurately), though—keep reading, perhaps we can argue about something else.

Yours truly,  
Jennifer Barr



## Obituary

# Norma Silcock had respect of everyone

A very much loved and respected Acton teacher, Norma Silcock died Saturday in Grace Hospital, Toronto, following a lengthy illness. She was 42.

Born on June 9, 1936 in Falkirk, Scotland, she was the daughter of Tom and Lillian Todd. On March 27, 1959, she married Alexander John Silcock in a ceremony in Falkirk. Ten years and four children later, the family pulled up stakes in Britain and came to Canada, making their home at R.R. 1, Acton.

Once settled in her new home, Mrs. Silcock attended Lakeshore Teachers' College in order that she may resume her teaching career in Canada. While teaching full time, Mrs. Silcock managed to attend night classes at Wilfrid Laurier University to earn her Bachelor of Arts.

For six years, Mrs. Silcock taught at Robert Little school as a class-

room teacher, and as a special education teacher. She was a remedial resource teacher for two years alternating between Limehouse and Joseph Gibbons public schools, and in the 1977-1978 school year alternating between McKenzie Smith and M.Z. Bennett.

Mrs. Silcock was respected by both teachers, parents, and students for the little extras she put into her job with the special education pupils. Her interest went beyond what is expected of a teacher as she cared for each student individually, working just a little harder to make things easier for them.

Even through her lengthy illness, Mrs. Silcock showed her good will towards the students. She taught as late as this January, attending school part time to continue teaching.

In addition to being a dedicated teacher, Mrs.

Silcock also was a key member of the Federation of Women Teachers' Association of Ontario.

Left to mourn her loss are her husband, Alexander, daughters Rhona and Mandy, sons Greg and Jonathan, brothers, David, Robin, Henry and Ronald, all of Scotland, and a sister, Marion, Tilbury, Ontario. She was

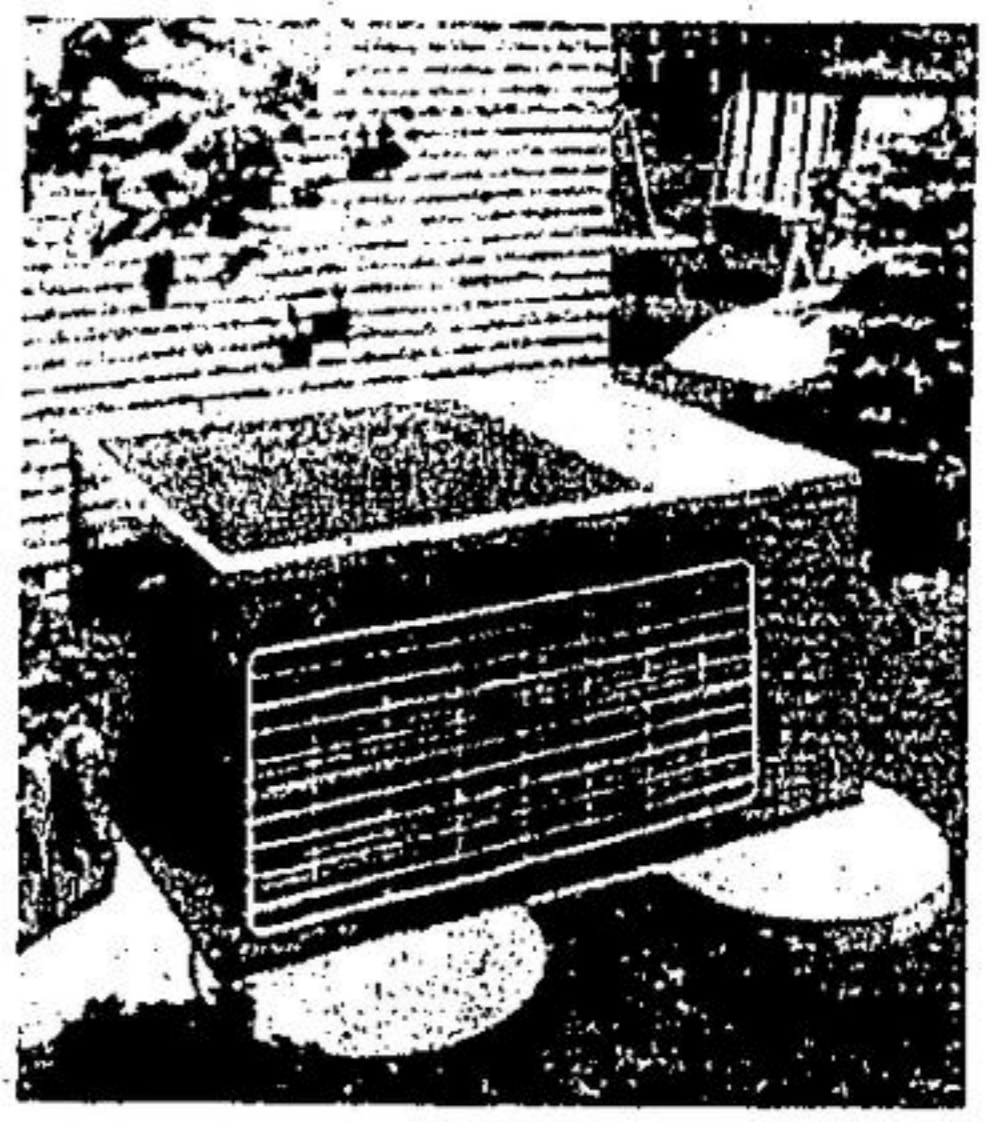
predeceased by one brother Tom Todd.

Rev. Chas. Beaton officiated at the funeral service, held today, Wednesday, at the Trinity United Church. Pallbearers were Roy Dodd, son Greg, husband Alexander, Lorne Doberthein, Dr. Ron Trenton and Garnet McKenzie. Interment was at Fairview Cemetery.

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## Jones remanded

Oakville Provincial Court remanded Doris Jones, charged with two counts of first degree murder, to a further 60 days of assessment yesterday.

The testing is to take place at the Clarke Institute of psychiatry in Toronto. Mrs. Jones previously underwent 30 days of examination at the psychiatric hospital at St. Thomas.

Mrs. Jones, 37, is charged in the Good Friday fire deaths of her son Brian, 10 and mother-in-law Mary Jones at the family farm on Highway 25 south of town.

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**Jones remanded**

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