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## Acton Is Century Old, History Is Its People

BY CELIA SAXON

Acton is 100 years old on July 1. To the present generation Acton is a budding suburb of the

new town of Halton Hills, doomed to progress. To many it is a delightful mixture of the old and the new. To others, third and fourth generation Ac-

tonians, Acton is a history of their ancestry. But to a few of the remaining folks who contributed to the growth of this progressive town

it is fond memories of happy days gone by. Folks like Laura Wiles, Acton's longest continuous resident; Ruby Clark, Acton's

oldest living descendant; and Jean and Mary Lasby, former owners of the Station Hotel.

Mary Lasby (Mrs. Osbourne) remembers falling off the balcony of her father's hotel on Mill St. when she was four years old.

"You know the hotels in those old western movies, with the big cement verandah downstairs, and the big wooden balcony upstairs, held up by pillars," she recalls. "Well, I fell over the railing, and smashed my head a little and broke my leg."

**ONE DOCTOR**  
The one doctor in town was out on confinement, but Mary's grandfather, who was used to doctoring up the cattle, fixed it up as good as new. He placed boards on either side of the leg and bound it all up with a sheet, and it went back together without any trouble, she reports.

"After that, Sam, our father took the verandah and the balcony off and rebuilt the hotel. He added all the red brick part that comes out to Mill St.," said Jean Lasby, (Mrs. Jean Precious). "Dad opened the new Station Hotel on July 1, 1913."

Originally it was Bells' Town, built in the 1870's by Wm. Bell. Following that it changed names and owners many times. It was called the Queens, The Rossin House, The Depot Hotel and the Station Hotel.

Jean recalls the day her father took her out of school when she was twelve years old, the eldest of six children. He told her, "You're mother's on her deathbed, so now it's up to you, the oldest to keep things going."

"So I had to do the cooking for the hotel patrons, get the kids off to school, make all the beds," Jean continued. "I was still making the beds when the men got home at night, because by the time I got finished cleaning up after the breakfast, it was time to start dinner."

**BOILED EGGS**  
Back in those days breakfast wasn't boiled eggs and toast. Hotel patrons were usually hydro gangs or telephone gangs who usually stayed four or five weeks while they were putting in a line somewhere.

They went out to physical labour at 7 o'clock in the morning, and had to have a good breakfast. "We would have to give them steak or pork chops one morning, lamb chops another morning, and fried potatoes every morning, besides a big bowl of porridge, a big bowl of fruit, such as prunes or applesauce. On top of that they would have as much bread and toast as they could stuff into them and all the tea and coffee they could consume."

"And they were all back again at 12 o'clock for soup and roast and potatoes and vegetables, and pudding or pie. And at night they returned for another meal of sausages or liver, and more potatoes, or a big stew."

Jean remembers the first morning she got breakfast she had to feed 35 people. That wasn't counting her dad, brother and four sisters.

In those days there was no hydro, no telephones, and water had to be carried in pails from down Mill St. across the road from the Baptist Church. The property was a livery stable at that time. They ran a horse and buggy taxi service to and from the trains.

**BUSINESS**  
"We did an awful lot of business from the tracks," Mary recalls. "Guys would come down to the hotel and get a sandwich for a nickel. Everything was a nickel in those days, a glass of buttermilk, a cup of coffee, a slice of pie. They didn't even sit at the table to eat it, they would

stand at the old bar like they do in cowboy movies, eat their lunch and go back to their work at the tracks."

Jean added, "There was so much freight in those days that there was always a bunk car beside the tracks with a bunch of fellas on, doing some kind of work at the station. Nobody knows more than I do, because I'd just get out of that place and the bell would ring and I was back into it. I'd run up and downstairs half a dozen times just to get one bed made."

The Lasby girls enjoyed their work because they always met such interesting people. They said in every business, but they made it their business to pick out the good in everybody, no matter how odd they seemed.

Jean recalls one particular gentleman, a Prudential Insurance agent from Guelph, who walked with a limp, but never complained. He told her, "The pain goes down my leg and out my big toe."

Old Simpkins, she called him, was particularly fond of Jean's rhubarb pie. Except that every time she made rhubarb pie, she forgot to put the sugar in, and old Simpkins would ask, "No sugar again today, Jean?"

Years afterward when Jean was working in Toronto, she was sitting on a streetcar, when she recognized a boarding passenger as Old Simpkins. He sat down across from her and looked and looked, and suddenly exclaimed for all to hear, "Rhubarb pie without sugar!"

To which Jean retorted, "That pain went down your leg and out your big toe."

She says the onlookers must have thought they were a pair of lunatics, "but we knew what we were talking about." During the prohibition years, when Old Sam Lasby lost his liquor licence, he did everything to keep his hotel business. At that time he had the only hotel in Acton. He worked two farms, one at Blue Springs, the other the property which is now the Bovis Homes subdivision. He grew all the vegetables and things that the girls served in the hotel. In 1932 he got a licence to serve beer and gave up farming.

**PANELLED DOORS**

The girls often wondered why anyone would put white panelled doors with fancy white knobs on a barn, until their dad explained, that upstairs over the stables used to be the town entertainment hall, known as Bell's Hall. It was used for dances, parties, travelling shows and auction sales.

"And I heard during the Boer war they had recruiting in there," Jean remarked, "but then what would I know about that stuff? That was before my time."

Mary worked in the hotel most of her life until her son, Sam Brunelle took it over. Because she was widowed with four children, her father put her children through school in return for her services at the hotel.

Jean, as if she hasn't had enough, still works in the kitchens occasionally for the new owners when they are short of help. It is now owned by brothers Nick and Eli Keck who are now undertaking the first major renovation since 1913.

They have removed the big old lobby with the two fireplaces and the spiral staircase, to do away with wasted space.

One of the fondest memories of the two sisters is that there wasn't a lock in the place. "We would go to bed at night and leave the whole place open and know that nobody would bother you. You couldn't do that today."



**THE PRICE FAMILY** of Acton goes back four generations to 1840 when Evan and Sally Price built the old homestead on what is now Hwy. 7 and Sixth Line. Herbert and Emma Price and two of the five children still living in Acton; below: James Price, son of Evan and Sally, and his wife and children.



**THIS PICTURE** of the Anglican Church Sunday school picnic is dated a little later judging from the clothes. Jean Lasby, former owner of the Station Hotel, remembers when half the town crowded onto a train and went up to Kitchener Park for their annual Sunday School picnic. Perhaps your grandparents are in the photo. Can you pick them out?



**PERHAPS SOME** of the oldtimers will recognize themselves and their friends in this picture. It looks like a wedding with all the fancy dresses and gay flowered bonnets. Actually it is the annual Sunday school picnic with the members of Knox Presbyterian Church. "Nobody went anywhere without a hat," Ruby Clark commented. Picnics have come a long way since 1910.

### CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

#### Looking Back On Early Life In Acton

Childhood memories for second and third generation Actonians like Ruby Clark, Laura Wiles and Charles Landsborough are:

- skating on Henderson's Pond behind the Free Press.
- skating from the dam on Mills St. across the Mill Pond (Fairy Lake) all the way to Beaver Meadows.
- sleigh-riding down the hills on Main Street, right down the road.
- hitching a ride on the back of the long bob-sleds that used to carry logs to the saw-mill up

where Lakeview subdivision now stands.

- when all the churches had baseball teams and provided entertainment for townsfolk by playing each other.
- torch-light parades to the train station to greet the winning, baseball, lacrosse or hockey teams. Everyone carried a lighted bullrush that had been saturated with coal oil.
- going to the old two-story red brick school-house when Mr. W.H. Stuart was principal and Robert Little was the first

school inspector.

- going to Acton High School in the old stone building that was formerly the residence of Peter Smith.
- when all the churches had driving sheds for the horses and buggies, like the one that still stands behind the Baptist Church at the corner of Mill St. and Elgin.
- when half the town crowded onto a train to attend the Sunday school picnics at High-top Lowpoint Park in Rockwood, or Blue Springs or Kitchener.

Childhood memories for Charles Landsborough are of his dad's butcher shop at Mill and Main Streets; his dad's boat rental when he had to pay Mr. Beardmore a one dollar lifetime fee for the privilege of putting the Landsborough boats on Beardmore's Lake. (Fairy Lake) Charles' memories of later days include playing in the Acton Citizen's Band when George Mason was bandmaster. Charles also played for many years with the

Lorne Scots Regimental Band in Georgetown under the direction of Alf Perrott, who was also bandleader of the Acton Citizen's Band for several years.

Laura Wiles recalls the days when her father William was transferred from Toronto to work in the Beardmore warehouses in 1896. They lived on Church St. across from the Catholic church for many years until about 1929 when Laura and Harold took over the candy store on Mill St. When the Gray Coach buses made their appearance the Wiles ran the bus depot for many years.

For Ruby Clark, former school teacher, Acton memories end in 1913 when she went to Toronto to teach. From 1910 to 1913 many of our senior citizens were in Miss Clark's grade one and two class at Acton Public School.

For Ruby Clark the fondest recollection of old Acton is "when you knew every person and his dog."

#### Acton Roots Deep For Price Family

The Price family's roots are deep in Acton. Doug Price, the caretaker of Robert Little School is a fourth generation Actonian.

The old Price homestead was started by Evan and Sally Price when they emigrated from Wales in 1831. They built their home on an old Indian trail which ran from the fifth line to the seventh line just below Ballinfad. This was the only road open for travel between Acton, Georgetown and Guelph.

When the Grand Trunk Railway was being built the workers stayed at a camp down the sixth line from the Pricefarm. Twice a week Sally Price would walk down to the camp with a basket of eggs on one arm and a basket of butter on the other, to sell to the workmen.

In 1837, the peppy little grandmother carried victuals to the hiding place of William Lyon MacKenzie, and later sheltered him in her home, despite the fact that they were high church and Tories.

There was reward of three thousand pounds on his head. When asked why she did not give up the rebel, she replied,

"Drat it, I didn't want any blood money on my hands." No matter what the weather or road conditions Granny Price went far and near to help friends in need. She was so adept at midwifery that Dr. Freeman of Georgetown would refuse to go if he knew Granny was going to be there. He claimed, "I'd only be in the road, anyway."

Evan price died in 1857, and Granny died in 1872. Their son James married and lived in the house until it burned to the ground in 1912. They sold the farm and moved to Acton. But the old original barn is still standing on the property.

Five of the seven children of Herbert and Emma Price are still living in Acton. Hillard lives on Willow St., Abbie lives in Ospringle, Herbert on Elmore Drive, Norman on Bower Ave., and Douglas lives on Main St. Margaret resides in Niagara Falls and another son, Campbell has passed on.

"Every time we drive past the old barn on Highway 7, we feel a twinge of emotion," remarked Doug Price. "Even though we never lived there, we feel that the place is very much a part of our lives."

#### JEAN AND MARY LASBY

(Mrs. Precious and Mrs. Osbourne) in front of the old Station Hotel, now live in the house next door, former residence of old Doc Lawson, town vet and policeman.

#### RIGHT, SAM LASBY

before the fireplace of his hotel after major renovations in 1913.



**A HYDRO GANG** from Toronto putting in a hydro line through Acton. The men would stay at the Station Hotel for four or five weeks until a job was finished. Jean Lasby, at twelve years old would cook breakfast of pork chops, fried potatoes, preserved fruit and toast and coffee for 35 men every morning.



**ACTON'S BASEBALL** team sometime around 1910. A few of the boys have been identified as; Ernie Brown, who owned a grocery store on Main St., (with EB on his hat) and (CL) Cam Liechman who worked for many years at the Acton Post office; Boyd Clark (BC) brother of Ruby Clark, retired schoolteacher who still lives in Acton. Would anyone like to guess who the rest would be?



**RETIRED SCHOOLTEACHER**, Ruby Clark remembers the days when they had torchlight parades to greet the homecoming ball teams at the station. They would soak newspapers in coal oil and light them. Her brother, Boyd Clark (deceased) is pictured wearing a Morrison shirt. The other players are unidentified.