

SPECIAL PIONEER DAYS FEATURE

# Grain threshing remembered

Angus McEachern of RR2, Acton, is no longer doing custom work but that hasn't ended his interest in the older version of the machine he operated for 49 years, like many other members of the steam association.

Mr. McEachern was a thrasher. His older brothers Herb and John bought a threshing machine in 1922 and started doing custom work. Mr. McEachern, 71, did his last custom threshing in 1971.

"We started the threshing season with the wheat," he says, "and often didn't finish it until Christmas. Believe it or not there were often icicles hanging on the steam engine in the winter while it was running."

Moving the machine from one farm to another on a frosty winter night with the stars shining clearly and everything quiet the steel wheels of the machine made a creaking sound that Mr. McEachern terms "something you never forget."

"We often left home on a Monday morning and didn't return until Saturday night," he says.

"We ate and slept where we worked and soon learned where all the good cooks were. Everyone gave us good meals and there were always 10 to 14 men working at the threshing. There would be three men with the outfit, two on the machine and one drawing water. Neighbors coming to the threshing would take the other jobs. Usually there were two men carrying grain, boxes, one man feeding the machine, five men in the mow feeding sheaves to the man on the machine, and one or two men in the straw mow."

As well as a fire in 1930 which cost him a separator, Mr. McEachern recalls a near miss in 1946 or 1947. He was threshing for Jack Sprowl on

the Third Line south of Highway 7 and Jack Cole was working with him.

"Jack saw the fire start in the straw mow over the grainery and he yelled at me," Mr. McEachern says.

"I couldn't hear what he said but Jack Sprowl saw it and tried to reach over to put it out. I saw what was going on by then and I was close enough to get to it and pat it out with my leather gloves. We doused it with water and made sure it was really out. It froze over the night and Jack brought down the frozen straw the next day to see if he could find what had started it. He couldn't but he kept looking. Finally he found a match case a few feet or so from where the fire started. Someone must have dropped it and it went through the machine and started to smoulder."

People blamed barn fires on steam engines and threshing machines, but should not have placed the blame on them, he says.

"If a bearing was getting hot enough to start a fire in the barn you'd smell it in plenty of time to shut the machine down," he says.

Tractors started far more fires than steam engines ever did. People knew the dangers with a steam engine and were careful accordingly. But tractors were supposed to be safe and therefore they'd stick them anywhere and never look at what was happening to the exhaust.

Threshing was not the only custom work the McEacherns did. They also sawed wood with a circular saw for four to six weeks each spring and filled silos with the cutting box for about three weeks every fall from the 20s to the early 50s.

Mr. McEachern and his brothers helped at a lot of barn raisings including all the ones in the neighborhood. Height didn't bother them and they enjoyed the work. At his first barn raising the bents were put up with hand spikes as the

Mennonites do it. Each section was raised as far as the workmen could lift it then other men used poles with spikes in the end to raise it higher. Another group with longer poles would take over when it was raised as far as the first group could reach. The process was repeated until each bent was upright.

Not only was the work hard; it was dangerous for the unwary, he notes, for a man was killed when a beam on which he was sitting slipped and came down with him during a barn raising near Acton in the mid 1920s.

Mr. McEachern says he worked in a sawmill helping to saw lumber and timbers for barns prior to the raising on a number of occasions. Sawmills used to be portable so that they could be loaded onto a wagon and taken to the site of a barn about to be raised. The material for the barn would be sawed right on the site and the sawyer would probably have a couple of weeks work in a location because neighbours would bring in logs they wanted sawed while the mill was close by.

There used to be an upright saw powered by water down on the Sixth Line at what is now called Waterfalls Playground. That saw ran up and down rather than around in circles like modern saws or back and forth like drag saws. He suspects that the timber for his own home was cut on an upright saw, probably the one on the Sixth Line.

Mr. McEachern lives on the farm his mother's people, the McLeans, settled in 1844. The original log house was across the lane from the present building and his mother vaguely recalled moving from it to the new house when she was a child. She died in 1942 at the age of 83. The stone at the back door of the house is the hearthstone from the log house, he understands.

Everyone had to have a trade in the old days, Mr.

McEachern says and his family was no exception. One of his great uncles, Alex, was a stone mason - and worked on the old city hall in Toronto.

Two of his mother's sisters were weavers and the remains of their 12 foot by 20 foot weaving room finished in lath and plaster are still beyond the woodshed of the present house. The loom frames were made of oak and Mr. McEachern remembers them being taken down piecemeal over the years.

"They'd be up at 4 a.m. putting on the fires out there so they could start working," he says. "People brought them wool from all over to make blankets and counterpanes."

There used to be a nine foot by 12 foot room at the head of the stairs where they stored their wool. Often it would be crammed tight with wool to be woven. Balls of twine and rags for weaving into carpets were still stored in the attic when Mr. McEachern's sister-in-law Mary first came to the house.

The storage room at the head of the stairs also held maple sugar, Mr. McEachern says and there would be great quantities of it made from their own trees and put away in milk pans each spring.

"It was the only sugar they had, you know," he says. "There were very few others in the area then and they had to be self-sufficient."



This photo of employees at the Sykes woolen mill in Glen Williams was taken at the end of World War One and was loaned to The Herald by Larry Wyles.

# It may be Consumers' 20th birthday, but you get the presents.



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**Graduate**

(Walter) John Langlois, son of Mr. and Mrs. Norman Langlois, of Catander, Ont. graduated from George Brown College with honors as an air conditioning technician. John graduated from Georgetown and district high school.

**Committee asked for report**

The high cost of replacing a stone which has fallen out of the old Acton town hall has prompted finance committee to ask members of Acton's Save the Town Hall committee for a progress report on how well their fundraising is progressing.

Estimates of \$900 to \$1,000 were offered for replacing a large stone which has fallen out of the face of the old town hall and remodeling the existing brick work around it. Committee members felt that it would be wasteful to spend such a sum on repairing the building if it will only have to be demolished later.

"Demolishing the whole building is only going to cost us \$8,000 so why should we spend another \$1,000 on it unless we know we're going to keep it," said finance committee chairman Russ Miller.

Ward 1 Coun. Peter Marks indicated that the committee is still extremely active in its efforts to raise funds to save the old town hall but he has no idea of the amount of success they are making.

Finance committee will recommend that council forward a report on the amount of the cost of the repairs and ask the Acton group to make a progress report on their fundraising efforts.

**Two hired**

Two of the four students hired to gather statistics for the proposed Halton women's hostel are area girls. Carol Joyne of Terra Cotta is a psychology student at the University of Western Ontario and Maria McNulty of Norval is a psychology student at Wilfrid Laurier University. The girls have finished gathering information in Halton Hills and are about to move into the Milton area, Miss Joyne says.

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**NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING**

**Thursday, June 22, 1978**

8:00 P.M.

**GEORGETOWN HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIUM**

The Halton Hills Library Board invites the citizens of Halton Hills to attend a public meeting for the purpose of discussing present Library facilities and future alternatives in the Town of Georgetown.

This Board urges all citizens who wish to express their views to attend this meeting.

For those unable to attend the Public Meeting, the Board invites comments, written or verbal, by contacting any of the following members:

**BOARD MEMBERS**

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