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PIONEER DAYS

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When whiskey was 25¢ a gallon

Helena Sinclair, 81, lives east of Ballinafad near the Eighth Line. However if you ask her about early days in Halton Hills she will tell you about the Bannockburn school section of Highway 7 where her ancestors, the Manns, settled in 1816.

"Aunt Maggie (her father's sister) used to tell me that there were 40 children on the four farms near the school when she was young," Mrs. Sinclair says.

"The Gordons lived on the west half of lot 24, Concession 4 with their 10 or 11 children. The Watsons were on the east half of lot 27, concession 5 and they had nine or 10 kids. Grandfather was on the west half of lot 27, concession 4 and they had a family of 10. And Archie Mann lived up the Fourth Line just behind Bannockburn School and they had 10 children."

Mrs. Sinclair places these big families as living in the area in the 1850s.

Among their 10 children the Archie Manns had two special sons and one special daughter. They were blind, Mrs. Sinclair says. They all went to school in Brockville. One of the boys was reputed to be able to recite most of the Bible from the memory while his brother was able to handle horses with remarkable skill.

"They say he could work around the stables, clean the horses, harness and unharness them and even the restless

ones never offered to kick at him," Mrs. Sinclair recalls.

Helena's husband, Fred Sinclair, 79, also knows about big families. He was the eldest son in a family of six boys and five girls.

"My mother used to say she made school lunches for 35 years," he says.

Mr. Sinclair says cutting wood took up a lot of time during winter months. The family farmed 350 acres and at one time they also did custom threshing with a steam powered machine. They milked 20 to 22 cows and his mother and sisters helped with the milking.

Bees were the way to get big, dreary jobs done in the early 1900s and Mr. Sinclair's eyes twinkle when he speaks of the stone bees in the summer or the manure bees in the spring.

"They'd send someone to the 'Fad for a gallon of whiskey and everyone had a good time," he grins. There were three hotels in Ballinafad in those days and a gallon of whiskey only cost 25 cents.

He recalls two teams drawing empty sleighs racing back from the field at one o'clock.

"They were abreast when they were coming to the gate, and the only way they both got through was that one driver made his team jump on the back of the other sleigh so that they could both go through together."

The men brought their wives along to the bees, Mr. Sinclair

says and the women would have a quilting bee while the men worked.

Rural Halton wasn't a dull place to grow up, Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair indicate. House parties were the favorite form of entertainment and there was an average of two a week during the winter. The number of guests invited would depend on the size of the house and everyone danced until morning, Mrs. Sinclair says. There were also sleigh riding parties during the winter. But never on the Sabbath.

"All you could do was sit around with a long face on Sunday," Mr. Sinclair recalls.

Funerals were conducted from the home of the deceased family in earlier times, Mrs. Sinclair says. The undertaker would come to the home and dress the body there. Caskets were covered in black cloth instead of polished wood and the inside was lined with white material. All the neighbors would come to the house the night before the funeral and stay quite late for the wake.

The minister would come to the house for the funeral service the second day after the death and again all the relatives, friends and neighbours would come to the service in the home. Even children attended funerals.

The undertaker in Acton was a fellow named Johnson, Mrs. Sinclair says. When he arrived for a service he always wore a silk plug hat and so did the two

horses he had hitched to the horse.

Mrs. Sinclair says the first funeral in Acton to be conducted from the funeral parlour instead of the deceased's home was for Mrs. Wiles during the early 1930s. Her children, Laura and Harold, ran the bus depot and a store on Mill Street in Acton.

"Laura was very upset because the funeral wasn't from their home," Mrs. Sinclair

says. "She didn't feel it was right leaving her mother at the undertaker's but they had no room downstairs in their home for a casket and they had to use the funeral home."

Mourning was strict during the early half of the century. Men wore black crepe arm-bands and women dressed totally in black for a year after a death in the family. They even had to add thin black veils to their hats for going to church

on Sunday. Only the children weren't dressed differently after a family death.

Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair bought their present farm in 1942. At that time they had hydro - it was brought in during the late 1930s - and they also had a telephone.

There was only two phones east of Ballinafad at the time, Mr. Sinclair says, their's and Dave Sinclair's. During the next two or three years their

neighbors came to use the phone whenever the need arose until gradually more people installed their own.

It was a wooden box on the wall with a crank for making your own calls to neighbors on your line. When your call was finished you gave the crank a little turn so it ding' and told your neighbors 'no line was free. Mrs. Sinclair says there was 17 parties on their line before it was finally split up.



Moving timber

While timber is not considered to be a Halton specialty these days it is obvious from this picture taken at the turn of the century that we did have good sized trees here at one time. This white ash log was being drawn to a sawmill in Acton by Alfred Storey. No one knows where it was cut but it must have been somewhere near Acton or it would have been hauled to one of the other mills in the area. Photo courtesy of George Allen.

80 YEARS AGO

WI provided a chance to meet

For farmer's wives the Women's Institute meeting has been an educating medium as well as a social gathering for more than 80 years.

Adelaide Hunter Hoodless (1858-1910) founded the first Women's Institute in Stony Creek Ontario on Feb. 18, 1897. The Canadian group has joined the Associated Country Women of the World and shares in projects in underdeveloped countries and disaster relief work all over the globe.

Mrs. Archie McEnery, 84, of Ballinafad, remembers when the first institute was founded in the 'Fad in 1906. She was only a girl when it began, but she says guest speakers used to be invited to instruct the

members in various cooking and canning techniques. Proper nutrition and meal planning were also explained by a number of speakers over the years.

"We often had speakers from Toronto," she recalls. "They'd come up on the train to Georgetown and we'd send someone in to meet them. Usually they had to come up on the stage. (It wasn't a real stage couch such as we see in the movies. It was the wagon the storekeeper drove to town to collect the mail. It would carry six or seven passengers, though, and Ballinafad residents referred to it as the stage.) Often they couldn't get a train back to Toronto until the next day so they spent the

night with my mother. She had the only spare room in the area that was close to the stage to get the guest back to Georgetown."

Mrs. McEnery joined the institute in 1917 after her marriage and was a member until the branch was disbanded in 1921. She also recalls the days when the District Annual, the annual meeting for all the institute branches in the county, used to be held in a private home.

"They came from all over the county with their horse and buggies," she says, "and they stayed the whole day. Then they drove home at night."

Mary Matthews knows much of the history of the Bannockburn Women's Institute because her mother, Agnes Clarridge, was the first president and some member of her family has belonged to the group since it was founded in April 1918. The organizational meeting was held in her mother's livingroom and 27 members joined at that meeting. Of those ladies three are still living, Emma Cole, of Acton, Myrtle (Clarridge) Storey of Wasaga Beach and Pearl (McDonald) Hammond of Streetsville.

Quilting bees were favourite occasions for the Bannockburn

Box socials were another form of family fun and also raised funds for the Institute, Mrs. Matthews says. The women all made lunches and packed them in boxes which they decorated to catch a bidder's eye. Inside the box they hid their name. Usually there was a dance for the early part of the evening and then someone would auction off the lunches. The lady had to eat with whoever bought the lunch she had brought.

Reina Morrison laughs when she remembers box socials. "I only went to one or two before I married Stan and they were at McCullough's." (Mrs. McCullough was her aunt as well as her husband's next-door neighbour.) I used to have to tell Stan how to identify my lunch because I didn't know anyone else in the neighbourhood and I wasn't about to spend my evening with a stranger."

A couple of sisters Mrs. Morrison recalls used to play tricks on the men who bought their lunches. The girls had the same initials and, instead of putting their full name inside the box they put their initials in it. Then if they didn't like the fellow who bought the lunch they said it belonged to the other sister.

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MUSICAL CHAMPIONS

This photo of the Georgetown Citizen's Band was taken after it won first place in Class C at the Toronto Exhibition in September 1931. Reading from left to right the members of the Band are as follows: Top Row: John Shepherd, Kenneth McDonald, Ray Thompson, Wilfred Gill, Walter Diggle, James Clarke, Thomas Eason, Omar Diggle, Anson Thurston, Roy Magloughlin. Middle Row: Harold Wheeler, Albert Simson, Charlie Wilson, Ernest Simson, Kenneth Weston, Joseph Carter, Heuhen Eason, Arthur Herbert, Waldo Diggle, Bolton Row: Roy King, Harry Hale, Roy Bradley, John Addy, Roy Norton, Bandmaster, A.H. Perrott, Harvey King, Edward Ballingal, Wilfred Leslie, Mark Clark, Cyril Brandford, Not in picture - Russel Wheeler, Winston Wheeler, Harry Cook, Ernest Forgrave, Hugo Diggle, W. Pedlar. Photo courtesy of Larry Wyles.

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