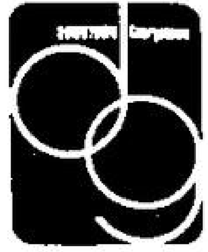

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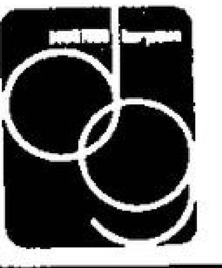

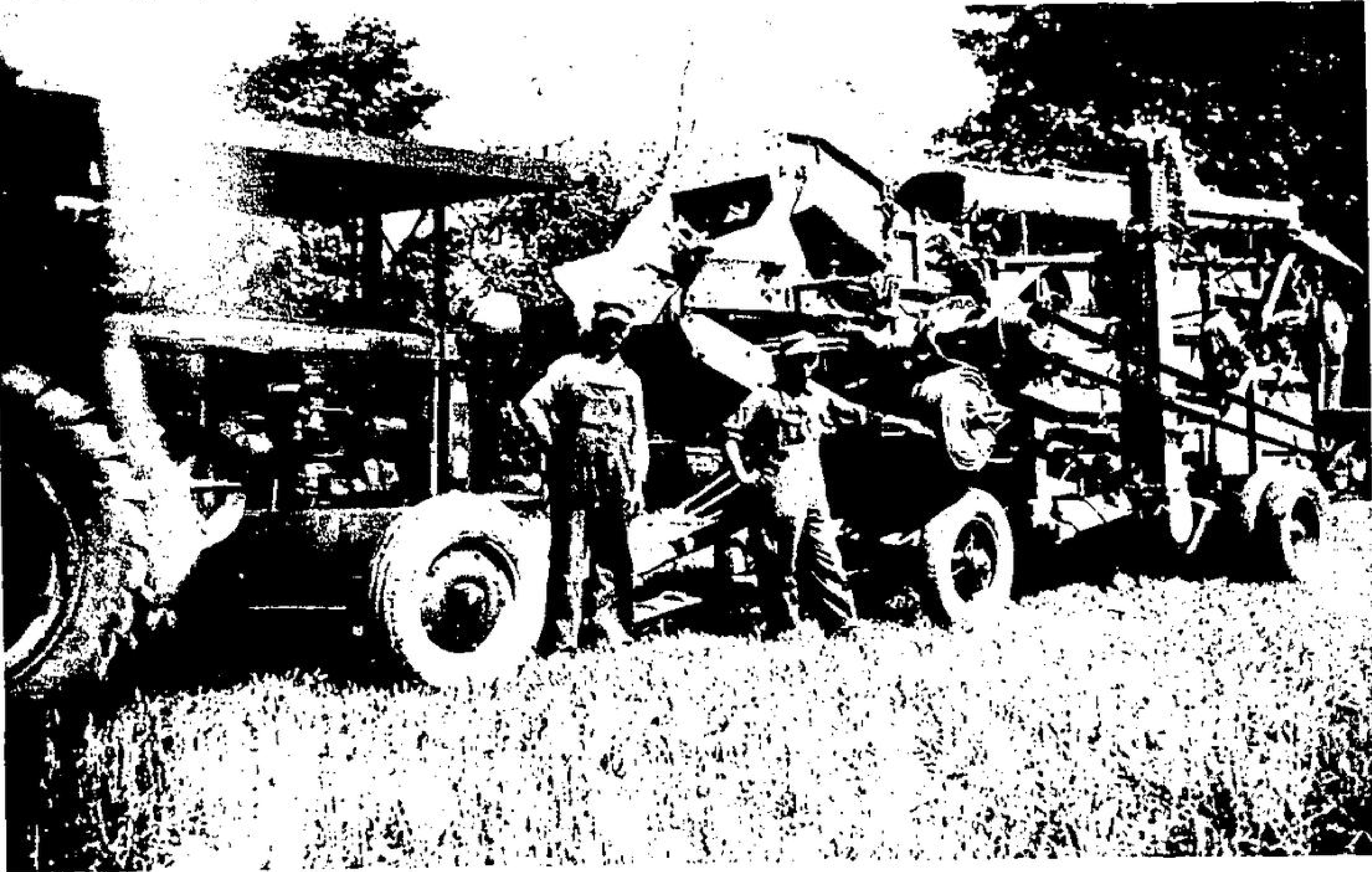

Ernie Ellison (left) and Norman Eden pose with the McCormick-Deering Diesel Tractor and Bell separator Mr. Ellison used to do custom threshing in Gray County for 13 years. The separator originally had steel wheels but Mr. Ellison replaced them with wheels off an old car. Photo courtesy of Ernest Ellison.

Barn building memory of chopping timber

Ernie Ellison, 72, may have lived in Georgetown for 29 years but he hasn't forgotten his brief experience as a score hacker when his father's barn was being built near Markdale.

Mr. Ellison says he drew the blueprint for his father and they cut almost all the timber for the barn out of their own bush. Only the rafters had to be cut from his uncle's bush.

It was a three beam barn which was the common kind in that area. The outside posts were 22 feet high and the whole structure was 45 feet by 55 feet long with a one-third pitch roof.

The barn was built into the side of a hill and when the Ellisons began digging for the foundation they found gravel in the hill. They only had to haul a dozen loads of gravel in a yard box to finish off the cement for the foundation.

The rafters were peeled and flattened on one side, he says. The posts and "girts" were sawed. Only the plates and beams were cut with the broadaxe and thus he only had two days of scorehacking.

The scorehacker is the man who chops the first bits off the timber before the broadaxe is used to square it up.

"You chop into the side of the log and give your wrist a bit of a turn just as you get into the wood," Mr. Ellison explains. "That loosens the chip so that the broadaxe chops it away. You can't go deep though or you spoil the timber."

Mr. Ellison put in one day scorehacking and his writ swelled up so badly he "could hardly feed the horses" the next morning. He let someone else try it the second day but he wasn't very good and the third day he finished off the job himself. Doing it for one barn was enough. He never tried scorehacking again.

The barn went up in one day once everything was ready. It was put up with pike poles, a bent at a time, he says. There must have been 100 to 150 men to help raise the barn. They began just after dinner and by 4 p.m. it was up.

More recently barns were raised with block and tackles and a gin pole. The *Ellison* barn, however, was done the old way. All the pieces for one bent (section) were put together. Then the men would get under the timers at each end of the bent and start raising the end the way a caber tosser raises his caper.

Once the bent was as high as the men could reach other men would put pike poles, poles with spikers in the end, under the bent and raise it as high as they could. The next group with longer poles would take over and raise it higher. The process continued until the whole bent was upright. Immediately it would be fastened to the adjoining section and the next bent began to come up into place.

Mr. Ellison says the men who came to the barn raising brought their wives to help his mother feed the gang. The table was set up in the yard and everyone ate before they went home. The visiting women brought pies and cakes and that sort of thing to help but his mother had had to peel all the potatoes and vegetables for the crew and prepare the meat.

"It seems to me it was something like half a beef we had for it," he says.

Halton residents were lucker than those around Markdale, it seems. Although many remember years when the bugs were bad none recall disasters. Mr. Ellison says the grasshoppers were so bad in 1895 that the crops were wiped out. His grandfather built a barn that year and then had nothing to put in it.

Many farmers wound up cutting cedar boughs from the swamps to feed their cattle before that winter was over, he says.

The big grasshoppers came from the prairies after a year of very heavy snow which prevented the ground from freezing. They swept right through Bruce and Grey counties and came at least as fa[illegible] south as Arthur.

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75 cents an hour was good pay for helping to build Highway 7

Highway 7 is strictly a geographical feature of Halton Hills so far as most residents are concerned. It's somewhat like the Niagara Escarpment or the Credit River. It is accepted and most travel it often.

Halton's young generation can't imagine the area without it, but you have to talk to oldtime residents to find out about the time before it existed.

Stan Morrison remembers the highway coming because he was the youngest member of the truck crew working on the section between the 7th Line and Acton when the MacArthur Construction paved it in the summer and fall of 1927.

He has turned 16 in the spring and went to work driving a Model T truck with a dump box in August or September. He made 75 cents an hour and considers that it was good money for the time because when he worked in Beardmore's tannery in Acton in 1942 he was still only getting 75c an hour.

The trucks the company used would never pass current safety standards. Mr. Morrison says they had no windshield, no doors, no floorboards and no tops on the cabs.

The seat was just whatever you had to sit on and might have been anything from some sacks, with or without padding to bare planks set directly over the gas tank. The gear shift worked off a foot pedal and the clutch and brake were on a second pedal.

Many of the trucks had no fenders and their top speed was about 30 miles per hour. They had to be cranked since they had no self-starters. Drivers usually came in around 6:30 a.m. so they were ready to begin work at 7 o'clock.

Those with easy trucks to start would throw a chain on the more stubborn ones and tow them to start them. Drivers had an hour for lunch if they wanted it and quitting time was 6 p.m.

Although their hours were long they found ways of enjoying them. One of the past times was trying to give the local school teachers a ride as she walked home from Bannockburn school. Mr. Morrison chuckled as he tells how she would refuse to accept a ride with anyone but him.

"The driver ahead of me could stop and ask and she wouldn't ride with him but when I stopped she'd come over and get in right away. The guys used to get in right away. The guys used to get really puzzled about it. I never let on why she turned down everyone else on the crew. Finally after I'd been working for a couple of months someone discovered that Miss Turner boarded with my mother and she only rode with me because she knew me."

Highway 7 was originally paved with cement. It was formed with nine inch planks and the road surface was 20 feet wide, while five foot shoulder allowances edges the cement.

The cement was mixed on the spot, Mr. Morrison says. The mixer moved on its own power on tracks similar to a caterpillar tractor. It had a scoop like a front end loader into which the truckloads of sand, gravel and cement were dumped and then raised and dumped into the mixer.

Water was piped from the creek that crosses the highway near the Fourth Line all the way to the Seventh Line corner. A flexible hose coupled into the piped supply and fed the mixer. As the road approached the creek lengths of pipe were disconnected and the line shortened.

Sand and gravel came from a pit north of the highway on the Fourth Line. In the beginning it was loosened with a drag line and scoop but later the company put in a high hoe to do the digging. Sand and gravel coming from the Hoppers were already washed before they were dumped into the truck box. Mr. Morrison chuckles as he recalls how those boxfulls were dumped.

"The fellow operating the loader used to love to get just far enough over the end of your box so that the load wasn't wasted, then he'd dump. If the weight hit the box in just the right place it would lift the front end of the truck four feet off the ground. There were no springs in the seats so you can imagine what happened to the drivers when the truck came back down."

On the way from the pit to the highway, trucks pulled up under a high platform on the west side of the Fourth Line corner. Here six bags of cement would be dumped on top of the load. When the load was dumped in the mixer all that had to be added was the water.

Since the trucks had to turn around to dump their loads into the mixer the company had a turntable rigged up on tracks to help the drivers.

"The platform was 10 feet wide," Mr. Morrison says. "You drove on and two men turned the platform by hand."

So long as the turntable worked everything went well, but if it broke down drivers had to turn the trucks inside the 20 foot forms. That was tricky. The drivers all had their own ways of changing gears so that the turn could be made very quickly - providing none of the foremen were looking.

The cement was levelled by hand with a screen and a belt behind the mixer.

The Seventh Line corner was originally built with a sharp bend, Mr. Morrison says. Two or three years after it was paved it was decided that the corner was too sharp and another corner was constructed which drivers could take at 50 miles per hour. That corner was used until the road was reconstructed in 1968.

"You could gun the motor just as you went into the curve," he says, then throw it out of gear and coast from Silver Creek right to McCullough's corner (opposite the Masonic Temple at the junction of Trafalgar Road and Highway 7). You'd only be going very slowly by then but you'd still be moving. A lot of people did it to save gas when it was rationed during the war."

Mr. Morrison left the crew when work stopped for the winter near the Third Line.

Horses were still the usual means of powering farm equipment when Stan Morrison cut down this car to make his first tractor during the 1940s. Note the steel wheels on the cultivator which had originally been horse drawn and was simply converted for use with his tractor. Photo courtesy of Reina Morrison.

Christmas 1933

This photo of the original Georgetown high school shows Ethel McEnery (right) and a girl friend in front of the school on Christmas Day, 1933. It was loaned to The Herald by Reina Morrison.

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