

PIONEER DAYS

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Settling on Esqueusing farmland - the family Young

The Young family moved to their farm on the west half of Lot 29, Concession 4 in the early spring of 1919. They came on the train from the village of Utterson, 12 miles from Bracebridge.

They loaded four horses and 20 head of cattle into a boxcar and the two oldest boys, Alec and Roy, rode down in the car with the stock. They also had 20 sheep and some calves boxed up in one end of the car. It was so cold that night that the water for the stock froze in the barrel during the trip. It was also extremely bumpy because the frost had heaved the tracks during the beginning of the spring breakup.

Austin Young, 76, retired from his farm north of Highway 7 in 1963 and moved into Acton. The trip from Utterson was more comfortable for the rest of the family than it was for his older brothers. Mr. Young says how his parents, his two sisters and his younger brother didn't catch the passenger train until nearly midnight. The station agent brought them up to his home for the evening meal and then packed them a lunch to take on the train. They arrived in Acton just before noon and his brothers had just arrived shortly before with their stock.

When they arrived at the farm on the Fourth Line the sheep headed for the bush and the sheep were better off keeping cool all the time. While they may have survived the lambing season very nicely the sheep gave the Youngs problems of another sort later in the year. They managed to slip through a gate and the gate post and wandered down the Fourth Line and along the Acton crossroad (Highway 7) into town.

The entire flock was seen wandering along Acton's main street at 9 a.m. Friday morning and disappearing up over the railway tracks north of town. It was the following Thursday before Mr. Young found them at a farm on the First Line.

The Young farm was two 100 acre farms back to back running from the Fourth to the Fifth Lines. The back hundred had only been partly cleared and the Youngs went at it to finish what their predecessor had started in the winter of 1920. The previous owner had been an American and cleared land the way it was done in Michigan, Mr. Young says. When a tree was felled only enough branches were lopped off the top to enable it to be

hailed into the skyway. Youngs cleaned up the brush that had been left behind and finished cutting down the timber that had to be removed. There was very little snow that winter and it was great for clearing land, Mr. Young says.

The family used the limbs for firewood the first winter but the logs were hauled out and sold and they sold cordwood in Acton.

Mr. Young graded the Fourth Line as part of his road work. In the early days farmers could do work on the roads in lieu of paying tax for road improvement. There was gravel to be dug and spread on the road as well as the grading so residents on the road had a choice of which task they took.

When the Youngs first arrived on the Fourth Line it was little more than a three-rut track through a field. No one bothered to grade it and there were three paths where the horses and wagon wheels wore the grass. The track would be gravelled through the swamp but not on the high ground.

The grader which Mr. Young used was constructed of iron and wood with a long runner on one side and a snow plough affair on the other, Mr. Young says. It was pulled by a team and was eventually sold for scrap iron during World War Two.

Mr. Young says the remains of a house were found on the back half of the farm one year during the fall plowing. They ploughed up some dishes and oldtimers told them there had been a house which faced onto an old road that passed through the bush at that point and continued north for a piece before turning west toward the Fourth Line.

It is also rumored that there were graves near the home although Mr. Young says some of the family were supposed to have been buried in the pioneer cemetery at the Fifth Line corner. Mr. Young doesn't know the name of the family who owned the old house.



On the Oakville road

Robert Armstrong took this photo of the Sinclair family going to thresh on the Lindsay farm with a steam engine, separator and horses hauling the water tank to supply the steam engine. The men pictured are Jack Sinclair and his two sons Fred and Bert. Bert Kentner with the pipe and William Hitchcock driving the horses. This picture indicates how the Seventh line above the Peacock school in the early 1900s. And this was the really good road used by all and sundry for transporting goods to Oakville! Photo courtesy of Ella Harding.

No farm complete without horses, and not always just for working

No farm would have been complete without its horses in the early part of the century and the interest was not always confined to the heavy draught horses we normally associate with farm work.

Ninian Lindsay used Clydesdales on the farm he owned at the corner of the Fourth Line and Highway 7 but his real pride was his hackneys.

Mr. Lindsay, 78, who now resides in Acton Seniors' Residence, used to show his hackneys at fairs from London to Toronto. He used to take his horses to the Canadian National Exhibition and the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto on the radial trains, but later he sent them down by truck.

He says he would take five or six horses to the Ex and some of them would be shown in three or four classes. He would be gone for two weeks at a time because in those days exhibitors couldn't bring their stock home after the show. They had to wait until the entire show was over. They lived in stalls next to their animals and got their meals where they could, Mr. Lindsay says. Competitors returned year after year and many of them became friends over the years.

Mr. Lindsay had a way with horses and a lot of luck at picking good ones, his sister Jean says. He sold some of his prize hackneys to the United States. He even sold the Toronto Police Department the only chestnut on the force. One day Miss Lindsay saw him on the street and went over to inquire of the officer where he had come from because he resembled the one her brother had owned.

The officer told her he belonged to the inspector and was special because he was the only chestnut the force owned.

Mr. Lindsay's father, Flockhart, was an uncle of Esqueusing's well known clerk K.C. Lindsay. He brought his bride to the farm near Acton in 1892, and they built the present 14-room house complete with a tower in 1911.

Mr. Lindsay's father drew the plans for the house and it took over a year to complete it. The attic is large enough for another four or five rooms Mr. Lindsay says, but it was never finished.

Mr. Lindsay's parents planted all the trees which

form the windbreak around the house and down the lane. The land was completely cleared when it was bought from the Brown family and there wasn't even a woodlot.

Mrs. Lindsay loved flowers and grew great quantities of gladioli around the house and down the lane. Miss Lindsay says she sometimes supplied flowers for weddings in Knox Presbyterian Church in Acton.

Lindsay's originally kept Jersey cattle and shipped cream to Acton. Before World War Two they changed to

Shorthorn cattle and shipped beef to the stockyards in Toronto, Mr. Lindsay says. He had a Charolais before he retired.

The Lindsay girls worked in the fields just like their brothers and Jean chuckles now as she tells about a race with neighbors over who could get the grain in fastest.

"We had 40 acres of grain one year," she says, "and Anna and I pitched every sheaf of it onto the wagon while Nin built the loads. The Mann boys were loading grain in the

corner field where we could see them and we weren't going to let them beat us. It was crazy, but we were young then."

The Lindsay's also grew corn although they had no silo. They cut it with a corn binder and bud the sheaves against the rail fence. It would freeze there and when they needed corn someone would go and get a sheaf or two and let it thaw before they put it in the cattle's mangers. Even though it wasn't chopped into silage they would get it down somehow, Mr. Lindsay says.

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