

Penniesworth owner talks history

Timothy Eaton started here, merchant says

By LORI TAYLOR
Herald Staff Writer

Lynn Barnard may be a relative newcomer to Georgetown, but she probably knows as much or more of the town's history than many people who've lived here for years.

Asked by Rev. Ric Ruggie and Coun. John McDonald last summer if she would be willing to talk about the history of downtown Georgetown to members of the Esqueving Historical Society, Mrs. Barnard told Society members Monday night she has always been a history buff, and had a good background for it. During her childhood, she spent many hours sitting in a real stage coach that was stored behind the general store in the village where she lived. She also had the now almost-unheard-of experience of ringing the bell in a one-room schoolhouse, and being pulled aloft by the swinging bell.

Mrs. Barnard, who owns Penniesworth, has been in Georgetown for three years.

"I've fallen in love with your town, which is now my town," she said. "I own my own business here, and I chose to live in the old section of town."

"It's much easier to write a history of downtown Georgetown than to talk about, and I hope to write it down some day."

Georgetown's earliest beginnings were in John Moore's 200-acre land grant, which was centred in this area, Mrs. Barnard said. Mr. Moore in turn sold the grant to George Kennedy in 1823. Mr. Kennedy is believed to have built his first home in town, a log cabin, in the area where Silver Creek Towers are now located, she said.

BRICK HOME: Mr. Kennedy later built his where Fendley's Florists is located now, and later moved to a brick house across the street, next door to the police station.

In 1837, Mr. Kennedy sold 13 acres and the rights to the pond to William Barber, who operated a mill in town. In those days, Georgetown was known as Hungry Hollow, and had a total population of three families.

By 1840, Georgetown had its first general store, which it is believed was located between Mill and James Streets on Main, Mrs. Barnard said. The store was owned by an Englishman named John Sumter. About the same time,

the first frame church was built on Wesleyan Street.

"The person who really established Georgetown in a business sense was James Young," Mrs. Barnard said. "He came to Georgetown in 1840 with his bride and he pitched his tent on the lot bounded by Main, Market, Church and Mill Streets. That must have been pretty romantic with the wolves howling away all night."

Mr. Young built and operated a hardware store, a general store and a stable on that lot, and he cultivated a garden in the middle of the lot, Mrs. Barnard said. He brought in the stock for the garden from Rochester, New York, and within a few years, had the finest garden in the area.

Mr. Young also brought the first strawberry plants into the area, she added. He paid \$1 each for some strawberry plants, which in the 1840s was a great deal of money. The first commercially grown strawberry plants in Oakville came from his plants.

The mill and the general store provided most of the jobs in the town during this period for those who weren't farming full-time, Mrs. Barnard said. Timothy Eaton, founder of the Eaton's Company, worked in James Young's general store at one point before launching his own mercantile empire.

FIRST BLACKSMITH: In 1843, the first blacksmith set up shop and operated a foundry on the corner where Knox Presbyterian Church now stands, Mrs. Barnard said. She added that it is easy to picture the life in the community by the industries and businesses which develop there. Horses and wagons were obviously important because the blacksmith's shop and the carriage works did excellent business, she said.

Mrs. Barnard said she has been told that a man named Bush opened a hotel some time around the time the smithy opened, but she has been able to find no confirmation of it.

In 1845, a congregational church was built where the library now stands. By 1846,

according to the Canadian Gazetteer, there were 700 people in Georgetown.

"That's remarkable growth, from three families in 1837 to 700 people by 1846," Mrs. Barnard said.

By the 1850s, Georgetown was becoming an important grain center. Farmers from as far away as Caledon, Garafraxa and Erin were bringing their grain to Georgetown, where Mr. Young would supervise the collection and transfer of the grain, Mrs. Barnard said. The grain was shipped by wagon teams down Trafalgar Road, as it is now known, to Oakville, which was a major port at the time.

Much of Main Street was built in blocks, Mrs. Barnard said. The first block, the Barkley Block, was built on the corner where the Royal Bank is now located.

In 1862, the Culp and McKenzie Carriage Works opened, and the Bennett House opened where the Old Bank building is now located, Mrs. Barnard said. Rooms in the Bennett House were \$1.50 a day, and the hotel had three sample rooms for travelling salesmen to display their goods.

FACTORY OPENED

The E.C. White Envelope factory opened in 1863 somewhere in the area bounded by

Back Street, Main Street and Mill Streets, Mrs. Barnard said. In the company's hey day, they were manufacturing 100,000 envelopes a day.

In 1864, Georgetown was incorporated as a village. Up until then, the community had been part of the township of Esqueving. It was around this time that the first volunteer fire brigade was established and the first town constable appointed, Mrs. Barnard said.

In 1865, The Herald was established. This was an important step, Mrs. Barnard said, because although there had been newspapers in town before, The Herald was the only one to survive, and it gave the merchants a regular place to advertise.

Around this time, a regular livestock sale was held in the square bounded by Market, Church, Edith and what was then known as Factory Street, but which is now Park Street.

In 1867, the Clark House and Stables were built. It was also the year in which the first Knox Presbyterian Church on the present site was built, Mrs. Barnard said.

Mrs. Barnard said when she is studying the history of a community she is interested in what the children did. In a story in The Herald in the 1920s, James Young's son

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PANCAKE PALS

Jamie and Alex Harris enjoy a pancake supper at St. Paul's Anglican Church with some new found friends. Yehh (with Jamie on her lap), Mann, Yong, Hong, Yehh, Chan (standing back left) and Kien are Laotian refugees who recently arrived in the area through the assistance of the St. Alban's Anglican Church congregation in Glen Williams. The pancake supper was held last Tuesday.

(Herald photo)



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