

## Scotch Block farmer taught in one room school

EDITOR'S NOTE: The above article is re-printed from a Feb. 29, 1984 edition of *The Herald*.  
By ANI PEDERIAN  
Herald Staff

Farming has been a way of life for Jim Fisher, his dad, grandfather, and great-grandfather.

Ever since great-grandfather William Fisher left his Scottish homeland with his relatively new bride, the Fishers have lived in the Esqueving area on Fifth Line known as the Scotch Block.

Many Scots settled in the area stretching from Sideroad 5 to 15 and down to Second Line, and gave the area its name.

"There were some English, Scots and Irish down the road. We never had any differences. Some of them (Scots) even married an Irish girl," Mr. Fisher said.

Back on Nov. 29, 1876, William Fisher bought 100 acres of land from William Roe, for the sum of \$1,200. The mortgage was set at 7 per cent.

Jim Fisher still has the deed with its slanted, black-inked lettering. A white-haired farmer with green eyes to match the green workshirt under his overalls, Mr. Fisher has been the owner of the farm property for many years now.

Born in 1902, Mr. Fisher has seen a lot of changes along Fifth Line.

"As a kid, I used to ride horse from this sideroad to Steeles Avenue to get farmers to sign for rural mail," he smiled. "Next was for the gravel on the road, and next the hydro."

Before the arrival of rural mail, farmers would pick up their mail from a post office in Ashgrove, a white house that still stands on the north corner of the village off Trafalgar Road.

"People by the name of Hoods used to run it," Mr. Fisher said. "It used to be one cent for a card and two cents for a letter."

Of the original 100 acres, hydro has taken 5.5 acres and 11 acres have been sold to neighbor Bob Lawson, a cousin.

When Mr. Fisher was still a student at Waterloo School SS No. 5, he used to go early to dust the desks and start up a fire in the Fourth Line

building so that the school would be warm for the teacher and 30 other students due to arrive.

He was the caretaker for the school and would leave home at 7:15 a.m. Mr. Fisher's dad would let him take the horse in the winter, and by itself, the horse would trot back to the farm.

"One Monday morning I went there and there'd been a tramp over on the weekend. They would walk down the railroad track and beg their meals along the way," Mr. Fisher said.

There were four grades and one teacher in the school room. Mr. Fisher remembered his first teacher being Charles Day of Norval.

"He was a bad tempered bugger I've seen him give one student the strap so bad he couldn't write the next day. He was brutish," Mr. Fisher said.

A favorite activity of Mr. Fisher's boyhood was smoking cedar bark. The lads would take the bark off the telephone post and roll it up with a piece of butter paper like a cigarette. They got a good lecture if the teacher ever caught them.

Not doing well in Grade 8, Mr. Fisher left school at Easter, intending to start his year again in September, but he never returned.

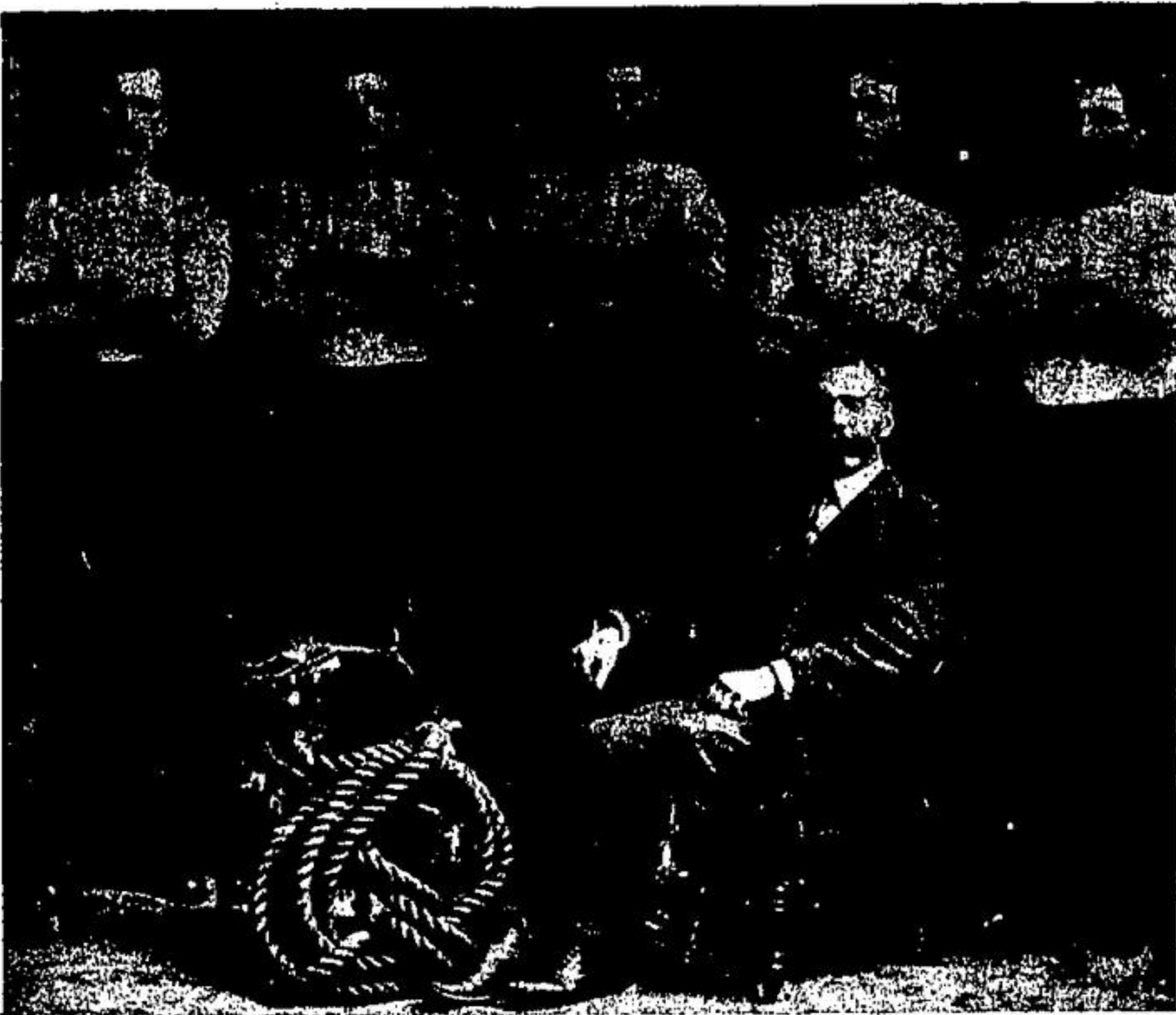
"I've been working on the farm ever since," he said.

Helping his dad out, Mr. Fisher would take a team of two horses on the walking plow and turn up the soil.

Plowing one acre is the equivalent of walking 15 miles. There were 60 acres to plow, so that wheat, soy beans, pumpkin and canola, a rape seed, could be planted.

On the wall of the home built in 1897 by Mr. Fisher's father when he married, is a painting by Georgetown's Steve Clayton. It shows Mr. Fisher with the walking plow and two horses.

"We always had good neighbors. You'd go help them with threshing and there'd be from 12 to 16 men here for meals when they came to help you," he said. "There were cross-cut bees for firewood and circular bees."



There were strong men in Ashgrove who dared war. The make-up of the community has changed, from challenge neighboring communities in a game of tug of rural to semi-urban, says Insey Bird. (File photo)

## Ashgrove 'black dots' multiply on most recent map of village

The times, they are changing in Ashgrove.

Who might know better than a former Ashgrove school teacher and curator of the Ashgrove Tweedsmuir histories?

Insey Bird was born in Guelph, but she came to teach school in Ashgrove in 1943. She's been a part of life in the tiny hamlet ever since.

Pulling out a map from 1977, prepared by the Ashgrove Women's Institute, every little detail is carefully laid out for future students of rural history.

"You see all the little dots? You can hardly get all the houses accounted for, really," she said.

On the concessions, back roads such as the Eighth Line, there has been a lot of residential development over the years, she said.

"The other (older) maps are so plain in comparison," she said, noting the lack of little black dots. The Ashgrove history in maps date back to 1858, said Mrs. Bird.

Mrs. Bird was trained as a teacher in Toronto. Jobs were plentiful during the war and it was possible to be selective in choosing where you wanted to teach, she said.

"I was invited to teach close to the city, but I wanted to be my own boss, have my own school in the country," she said.

The Ashgrove job meant teaching eight grades and looking after 36 students.

One of her biggest thrills was learning how to use a camera indoors so that she could capture special events on film such as school plays.

The brick school in Ashgrove was built in 1870. It is still standing and is now used as a mechanics' shop, opposite the Jeff Nurse farm on Trafalgar Road.

A third room was added to the school when there was an overflow

of pupils from families who moved in to work at a Sixth Line sawmill.

Mrs. Bird married husband John in 1951 who farmed in Ashgrove on Trafalgar Road. They raised three children together. "The young people would get together at the church and also at young farmer socials," she said.



Insey Bird

As a young woman she remembers dances in Huttonville and corn roasts in the fall.

The church in Ashgrove was on Lot 10 near the school. The old brick church was dismantled and re-built into a house in Limehouse. In 1969 the Hornby and Ashgrove congregations amalgamated and Hillcrest United Church was built.

The four corners of Ashgrove now support more people than it once did, Mrs. Bird said. "Until about 10 years ago there were five or so (houses). Now there's about 19," she said.

The community has changed from rural to semi-urban, she added.

At one point in the village's history there were three hotels, three stores, a paint shop, a chair factory, Huffman's wagon shop and Hood's blacksmith shop. There was also a weigh scale at the corner for the grain farmers, she said.

The four-horse stage which operated from Orangeville to Oakville used to change horses in Ashgrove, Mrs. Bird said. A post office operated in the village from 1852-1913.

"Most buildings are still there, the core ones like the grain storage barn," she said.

The Ashgrove Tweedsmuir history was started in 1953. An Ashgrove Women's Institute was founded in 1926. Thus far, there are 285 large size pages in the Ashgrove history collection, consisting of pictures and articles.

The collection is available on microfilm at the Georgetown Public Library.

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