

COMMENT

Listening to the frogs— 190 years ago

By Ted Brown
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A Ted Bit

Last week The Sidekick and I lay in bed, listening to the sound of the frogs peeping in the marsh below the barn.

It was a warm night, so I opened the bedroom window.

I lay there, thinking about those frogs—and how generations of Browns living in my old farmhouse before me, had also lain in bed listening to the frogs.

With April 26 looming in the future, I thought how that date is dually significant to Brown Farm.

First, my grandfather was born April 26, 1897, 119 years ago.

But equally interesting is the date April 26, 1826, the day that great-great-grandfather Alexander Brown purchased the farm where I live today, 190 years ago, next Tuesday.

Great-great-grandfather Alexander Brown lived in rural Fonthill, near Welland. He had settled there with his parents. His father, John Brown, was a veteran of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, and witnessed the death of General James Wolfe. The 400-acre Welland land was awarded to John Brown for his military service.

Alexander purchased the property where my Brown Farm is located today, for his eldest son, James Brown, my great-great-grandfather, to set him up as a farmer on my farm.

Although that sounds generous for the times, great-great-grandfather James had to work hard for this farm. It wasn't just a simple 'sign the dotted line and take possession of your farm Mr. Brown.'

The transaction involved Alexander and James, as well as Mr. Jacob Cutler, (the first owner of the property from the Crown). Jacob Cutler didn't live here. Nor did he live in the Fonthill either.

Mr. Jacob Cutler, Esq., lived in a place called Madison, in the state of Kentucky.

And young James Brown had to travel to Madison to acquire the deed to the farm—the same original deed I have at home today.

There were no fax machines in those days, so getting the deed for the farm required traveling for days to the Cutler farm in Kentucky to sign the necessary papers in the presence of a Justice of the Peace, to make it legal.

Over the years I've looked at that old deed, written with a quill pen on a coarse parchment paper, with all the signatures on it, as well as the legal description of the property. The land wasn't even cleared—James was actually buying a 100-acre tract of land covered in virgin forest. It's doubtful he even saw it before taking ownership.

I have also found, buried in the old Brown records, a letter of introduction for James Brown from his father, stating he was 'the son of Alexander Brown (of Fonthill), acting on his behalf in the purchase of the property located in Esquesing Township, in the County of Halton.'

It boggles my mind to think of conditions back then. James was born in 1799—he was 27 years old, traveling all the way to Kentucky in mid-April, to sign and complete a deal on a piece of property he'd never laid eyes on.

He returned to take possession of his newly-acquired property, and clear the land, build a shelter and make the farm what is today. In 1830, James married Mary Ann Hainer, and together they built the house in which I live today.

As The Sidekick and I lay in the quiet darkness, listening to the frogs peeping in the night, I imagined, for a brief moment, how James and Mary Ann must have done the same thing, 190 years ago, just like every generation of the Browns has done since.

It was certainly a poignant moment.
Happy Birthday Brown Farm...

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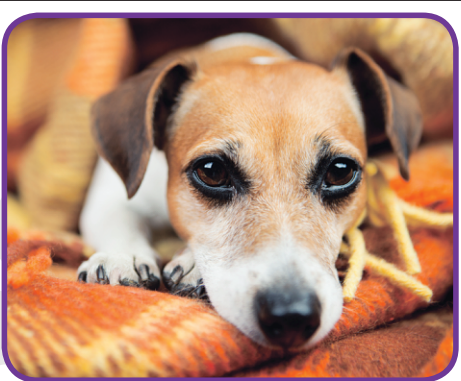
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