



Alison Walker photo

(Left) St. Andrew's United Church in 1963 and (Right) The St. Andrew's United Church today.

OPINION

# I WONDER IF HAMISH COULD 'RUN THE LIGHTS' ON THE FARM

HAMISH SHOWS NO INTEREST, HOWEVER, WRITES TED BROWN



TED BROWN  
Column

Earlier this week, as I was enjoying the slightly warm weather, I found myself puttering around the garage.

As the sunshine was pouring in, I opened both garage doors and surveyed my kingdom.

Now our garage hasn't always been a garage. Back in the mid-1800s, it started its life as a wood shed, a place to stack cords of fire-

wood to keep it dry all winter, as well as keeping it accessible.

Last summer The Sidekick and I started an upgrade project in the garage, adding new doors and a new floor. It seems when you're working on an old structure, there's always something 'new' to be discovered hanging on a nail in the back corner.

My attention was drawn to our old dog treadle.

For those who have no idea what I'm talking about, a dog treadle was a piece of equipment farmers used to harness 'dog power' on the farm in the 1800s.

The treadle was set up and the dog would climb onto the treadle turntable and walked. Through a set

of reduction gears, the dog's walking powered a piece of machinery, like a butter churn, a small saw or even a washing machine.

The dog treadle in our garage has been there since before I was even born. If my grandfather hadn't explained the gadget, I wouldn't have known what it was or how it worked. Its faded red paint is a testimony of countless miles of doggie power.

In pioneer days, dogs on the farm were part of the animal workforce, like horses or oxen. A dog was not only used to herd cattle and sheep back into the barn at night, but also for their stamina and ability to trot for extended periods of time on the treadle.

Our treadle is a horizontal model, which consists of a six-foot-wide 'turntable' of sorts (like a giant record player). The dog climbs on the turntable, which is then lifted to an angle on one side, and the dog walks 'uphill' to rotate the turntable. The power is generated through a set of gears to a pulley, which powers a belt-driven piece of equipment attached to it.

Apparently, our horizontal model is a bit unique - I can't find any pictures of that style anywhere online.

More recent models with a track were built like a treadmill and have been used for centuries, some dating back to medieval times. Apparently street

venders would have a small dog treadle and use it to power a grindstone to sharpen knives and scissors, or some used them to power a small wood lathe or saw.

I did find a photo of a treadmill-style dog treadle on display at Peel Art Gallery & Museum in Brampton. The track is more modern, made with wooden slats running on cast iron sprockets.

Our old wooden dog treadle has been nailed to a wall in the garage for years, partly obscured from view.

As I looked at it and pondered what I could do with it, I glanced at Hamish - who immediately avoided eye contact with me. I did briefly wonder if he could

run the lights on the farm with a generator. Laying his head down and closing his eyes in the warm sunshine, he didn't seem very keen on the idea.

So, I'm going to prominently display it in the garage as a conversation piece, something to talk about - those times when dogs powered our equipment.

It will be the central decor in my garage/man cave, a testimony of that era when 'man's best friend' was not only appreciated for his companionship - but also for his strength and stamina.

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