

Cedarvale Farm first home in new Canadian land for war-torn European orphans

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on the northeast corner of Maple Ave. and Main St. in Georgetown. One quarter of Cedarvale Farm, as it was known at the time before it was converted to the "Armenian Boys Farm Home," was an apple orchard and the remaining portion was set aside for crops and recreational use. Three buildings, which are still standing today, were converted to suit the purpose of the "Noble Experiment."

The brick farmhouse was modified into a home for the superintendent and his family. The large frame building just west of the house was converted into a dormitory, two class rooms, a kitchen, dining hall and quarters for the staff. The building west of this one, which is now used by the Credit Valley Artisans, was used as an infirmary.

Adourian recalled the boys did everything on the farm. "We even had our own plots of land to garden. Each plot was numbered to coincide with our own numbers." Adourian admitted he knew the boys better by number than by name. "I was #47 and Onnig was #46," Adourian said with a reminiscent smile.

In the classrooms, the boys were taught English and Armenian. The assistant superintendent at the time was A.L. Alexanian, who taught until 1927, after which time he went back to Hamilton and founded Alexanian Carpets.

Little toy soldiers

Adourian described the boys marching to church every Sunday - to the Anglican, United, Baptist and Presbyterian churches in Georgetown alternately. "We looked like little soldiers," Adourian recalled. "People would always stop and look at us." Seventy years later, Adourian can still remember the route to each church.

When Adourian turned 11, he was sent to a farm in South Cayuga. "The work was hard," he admitted. "I was up before 5 a.m. every day, doing chores, then went to school, and returned to work until sunset." At times, the work load on the farms tempted farmers to keep the boys on the farm instead of letting them go to school. But complaints from teachers and concerned neighbors, to representatives of the Department of Juvenile Immigration checked this problem. "I remember a man coming to visit my farmer after I had been kept at home for almost a month," Adourian said. "The next day I was back at school."

The boys worked on the farms until they turned 15 - then they went their separate ways. Some of them kept in touch, others moved away to start their own lives. Those "boys" who kept in touch had their first reunion in 1932 in Toronto. "It wasn't much of a reunion," Adourian admitted. "It was during the Depression, and we were still wet behind the ears."



Paul Adourian and his wife, Lily, celebrate the 70th anniversary of Adourian's arrival in Georgetown. Both Adourians eagerly follow the progress of the remaining "boys." photo by Simon Wilson/HHTW

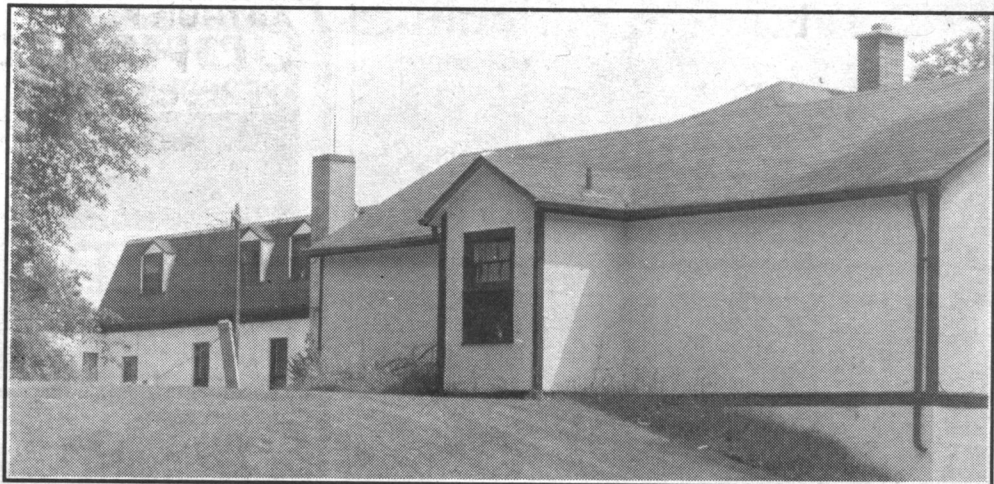
With the help John Apramian, president of the Georgetown Boys Association in Hamilton, the reunions continued on a regular basis until the last one, in 1983, during which the men celebrated their 60th anniversary. "There must have been between 40 or 50 of us there," Adourian recalls. It was held at Cedarvale Park and "the boys" and their families met, traded stories, played games, ate and enjoyed each other's company. Since then, smaller reunions have been held, but they were of a lesser emotion. "We haven't had a picnic in over two years - there aren't enough boys," Adourian grieves. "Many of them have passed away recently."

Special day

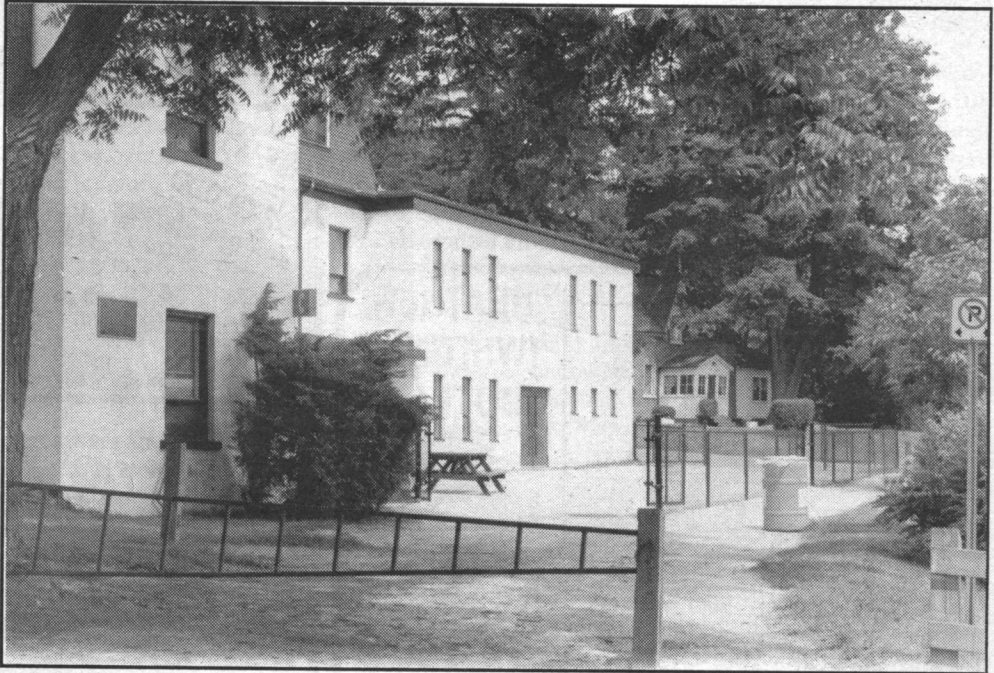
Adourian remembers one special day, July 1, 1984 - when a plaque was mounted on the wall of Cedarvale Community Centre in honor of the Georgetown Boys. Behind the plaque is an opening in which documents about the boys are sealed. "It's like a time capsule about us," Adourian boasts.

Adourian has enjoyed other reunions as well. In 1956, Adourian returned to Lebanon to see his mother for the first time since their separation in Corfu. "It was certainly grand to see her," he said. Adourian admitted he recognized his sister, Dorothy, and her daughter before recognizing his mother.

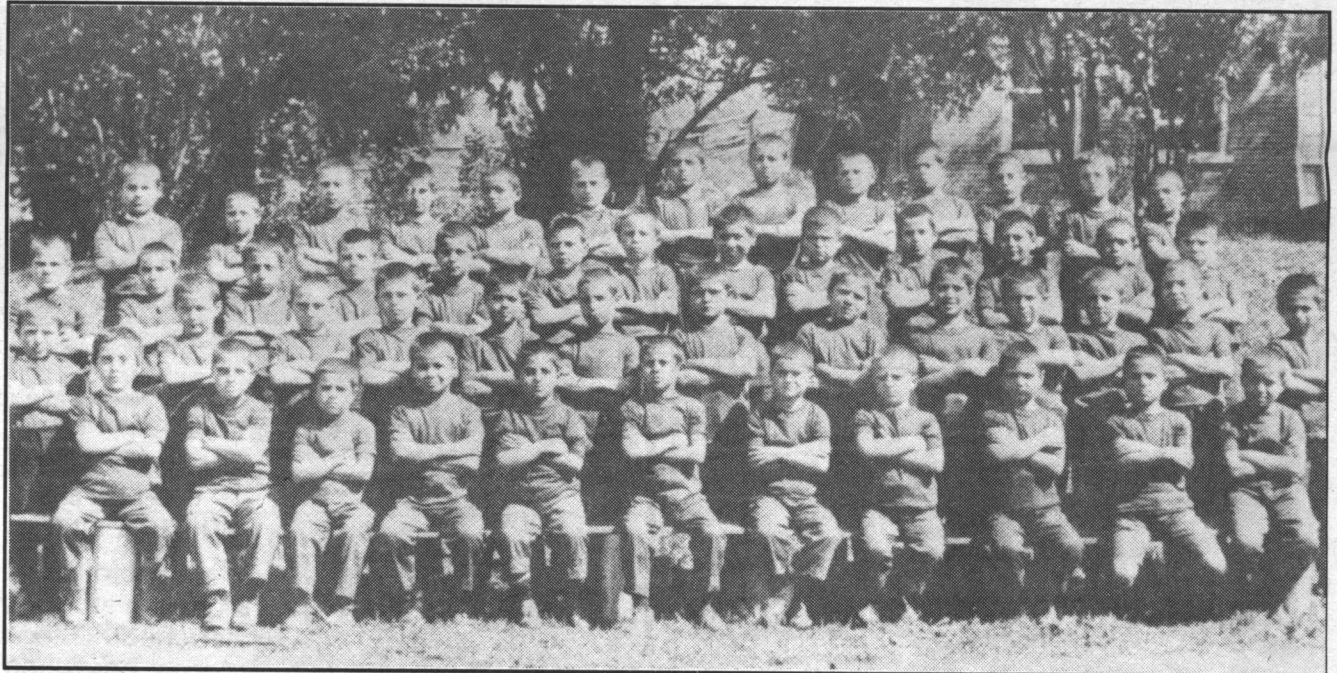
In 1983, Dorothy came to Canada and saw Onnig for the first time - a visit which Adourian described as "quite an enjoyment." Adourian has enjoyed reunions right up until two weeks ago. "My half-brother and his son came for a visit. We had a splendid time together."



The Credit Valley Artisan's building (right), used as an infirmary for the orphan boys, was only steps away from the boys' sleeping quarters and classrooms (left). photo by Oksana Buhel/HHTW



In 1923, the building now known as the Cedarvale Community Centre (left) was used as a dormitory, for class rooms, a kitchen, dining hall and quarters for the staff. The brick farmhouse (right) was the home of the superintendent and his family. photo by Oksana Buhel/HHTW



Crossed arms and feet planted firmly on the ground seemed to be the way of the Georgetown Boys in 1924 and on their 50th anniversary in 1973. Paul Adourian (above; front row; fifth from left, and below; front row; left), joked, "They got me with my socks down in 1924 - I made sure they were up in '73." Adourian's older brother, Onnig (above; front row; second from left and below; front row; fourth from left) was much more careful with his own socks. photos submitted

