

Clip-clops in the darkness

Recently I was trimming the grass along the edge of my long laneway at home.

The lane travels through a marshy area, and at one point crosses the stream with a steel culvert.

Years ago, I wrote about that culvert, how when I was a little boy, it was a magical culvert with an equally magical little stream that meandered through it. The frogs jumped around in it and I floated little boats through it, from one side of the lane to the other.

But the culvert wasn't always there. Originally, a plank bridge crossed that same stream where the culvert rests today.

According to my grandfather, the plank bridge was a unique part of our farm. One could hear clip-clops echoing off the planks, right up to the house, as a horse and buggy crossed the bridge.

Back then, it was customary for local residents to take short cuts through neighbours' farms.

Our farm was no exception and travelers from Georgetown walked through our farm, on a trail that led from an area around the present day Georgetown Hospital, west to the old sales barn on Trafalgar Road, through to the Sixth Line, clear across three concessions, to the wooded bush west of the Fourth Line.

And they all had to cross that plank bridge. The trail ended at the establishment of a boot-legger, called Meggie (or Maggie) Katz, who operated an illicit whiskey 'still' up in the bush somewhere between the Third and Fourth Lines.

I recall as a little kid, hearing stories of those early prohibition days from my grandfather.

Gentlemen from Georgetown, (some quite respectable businessmen apparently) would be found on the back lane of our farm on a Sunday morning, propped up against a tree, sleeping off the effects of Meggie Katz' booze.

My grandfather lived by himself in those days, since both his parents were dead and his older brother was married and lived on a neighbouring farm. He hadn't yet married my grandmother.

He spent his evenings in the big old farmhouse, (the same house in which I live today)

Ted Brown



passing the nights, reading by the light of an oil lamp, or simply going to bed.

He told stories that put the hair up on the back of my neck, about noises on the old plank bridge.

You see, at the same time Meggie Katz was plying her trade in the nearby bush, there were "gypsies" in the area (his words).

And apparently they weren't very trustworthy. It seems local farmers had problems losing grain from the granaries in their barns during the night, and if a shovel or ax was left out, it'd likely be gone by morning if gypsies passed through.

As a result, our granary was always padlocked. My grandfather told of lying in the darkness, hearing the clip-clop of their ponies' hooves and the rumble of their buggies and wagons as they crossed the plank bridge, en route to Katz' still.

But like ghosts, he never ever saw them. Today the plank bridge is long gone, and even the culvert that I played around as a little boy has been replaced by a newer one.

The old stories still make the rounds. I've heard variations, all of which get better with time. And I'm always ready to listen to another.

I also know, when the evening is dark with no moon, and it's very, very quiet, I can lie in bed—in the same room in which my grandfather slept—close my eyes, and imagine I can hear the distant clip-clop of a pony's hooves on a plank bridge through the open window, somewhere in the darkness, down the lane by the marsh....

(Ted Brown can be reached at tbrown@independentfreepress.com)

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