

# The Canadian Champion

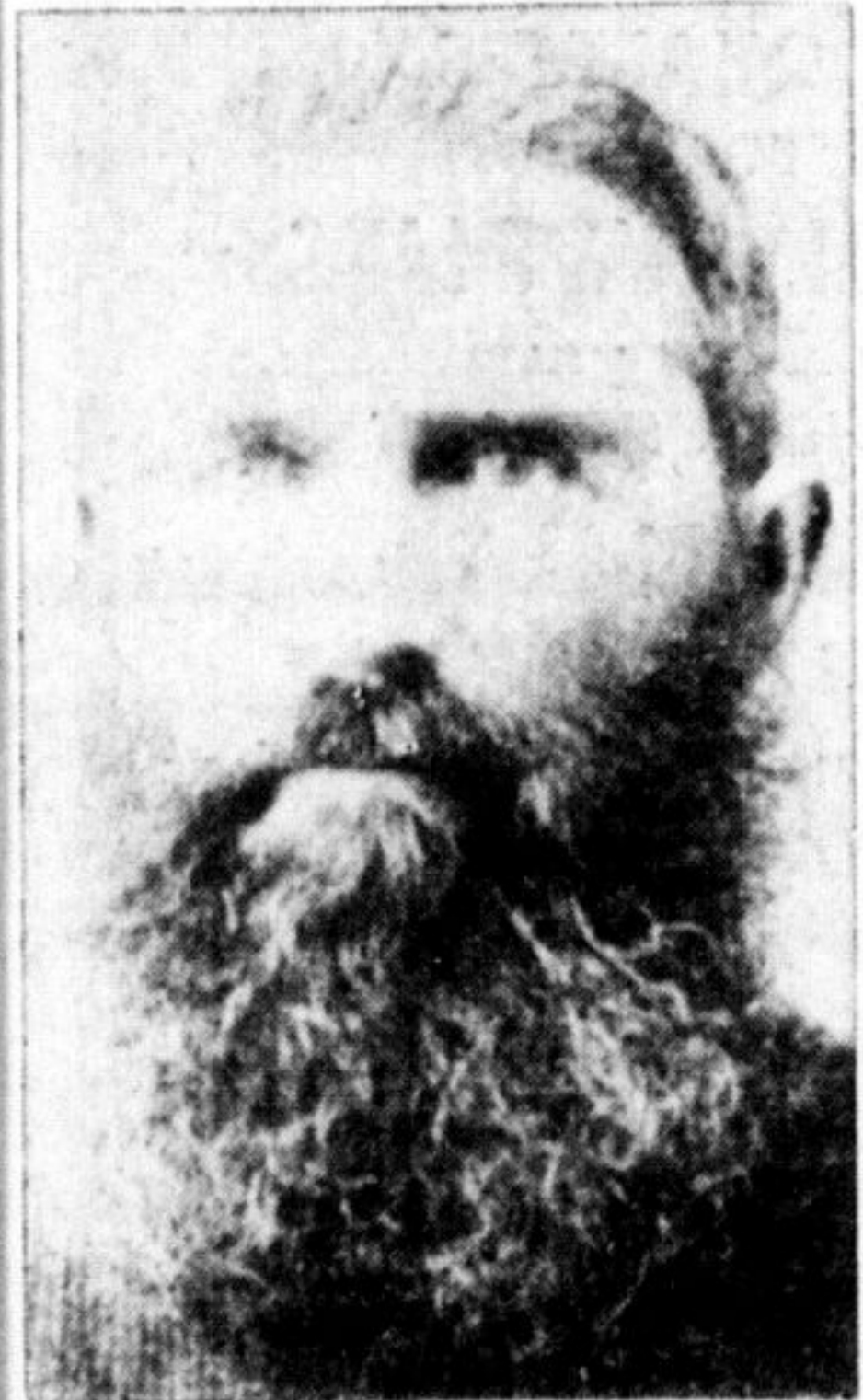
MILTON, ONTARIO, THURSDAY, AUGUST 20th, 1964

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Section Three.

## STRUGGLES OF SCOTCH BLOCK PIONEERS

When in 1818-19 a vast trek of settlers from the British Isles came to Central Ontario, they seemed to settle in droves. The people from a certain locality in the old land would settle close to each other in the new. Thus we see a band of Irish Catholics from Armagh County, Ireland, settling in Trafalgar East, earning for this section the name of "the Catholic swamp," a nickname that sticks to this present day. Just one mile to the east of them there came to the "Town Line" the Cooks, Coles, Cantelons, and Sparlings. These were from Tipperary and Limerick, and were all enthusiastic Orangemen, starting the first Orange Lodge in the vicinity in Harry Cole's house. These men, under the leadership of Harry Cole, became known as the "Town Blazers". In one part of Esquema a number of English settled, and this part was known as the "English Block".



WALTER SCOTT

He left the family home, Lot 4 Conc. 5 East, Esquema, in 1857 to settle in Huron County. He returned to Esquema to marry Margaret Shortreed, after building a log cabin in Huron.

At the same time, there came to Concession Three, fifth side-road, a detachment of settlers from Bonnie Scotland. Among them were the Shortreeds, Chisholms, Peter Scott, David Knight, Rob Murray, Sandy Kay, James Stark, John Stewart, I. Sprout, James Laidlaw, Robert McPherson and many others. The large section known as the "Scotch Block" was drawn exclusively by Scotchmen, with the exception of one lot that was drawn by an Irishman.

The land was densely timbered with some of the finest pine on the Continent. This at first, however, was worse than valueless, as there was no market for it, and it had to be chopped and burned before anything could be grown on the land. A derrick was erected on the farm of John Shortreed, where, with labour incessant, the lumber for finishing the first crude log houses was cut with a whip saw. Men of today can hardly conceive the patience of the men that, one above and one below, worked for hours cutting out one board.

### The First School

In the old land the newcomers had all secured an excellent education in the well equipped schools of Scotland. In their modest cabins the stork was constantly arriving, and the sappings that served as cradles were kept constantly rocking. Thus the first problem that faced them as a public duty was to provide education for their children. On a bright May day in 1822 the Scotchmen assembled, and on the roadway in front of Lot 2, Third Concession, they erected a log building to serve as a school. Some of the men felled the trees in the adjacent forest, others trimmed them and cut the logs into proper length and others brought their ox teams and snaked them to the site of the building, where a number of others raised them into position, four of the most skillful taking a corner each and with keen axes dovetailing the

corner to fit snugly. The crevices were filled with moss and mud, making a comfortable building when finished.

Here, on long wooden benches, 60 and 70 pupils were well grounded in the three "R's".

### Board for Teachers

Another log school was built on lot 12, Concession Three. This served for a number of years. The first teachers were paid a small amount of cash and boarded round among the people, the number of days spent at each place being guided by the percentage of pupils attending from each home.

Bears and wolves and other wild animals were very plentiful about this time. The children were often in great danger, especially from wolves, coming and going from school.

In the days of William Lyon MacKenzie, feeling run high in this section, Mr. MacDonald was school teacher in 1836. He was an ardent patriot, and one day got a copy of "The Colonial Advocate", MacKenzie's paper, to which Hugh Black of the Block was a valued and able contributor. So engrossed was he in reading the paper that it was evening before he started at the lessons. In order to finish he had to throw cedar splinters on the fireplace to make light. The children had to go home in the dark, and were terrified at the howling of the wolves.

### Then the Church Came

Everything was Scotch. The Gaelic was constantly heard. People did business in Gaelic, sang in Gaelic, read Gaelic Bibles, and the young couples courted in Gaelic. A piper named MacMillan, who worked for the Laidlaws, cheered the homesick hearts with the skirl of the pipes. To their music the people danced the Scotch Reel, the Tullock Reel, the Highland Fling and other dances, but what their hearts hungered for most was a Presbyterian Church, where they could sing the Psalms and worship God as they did in the Old Land.

Services had been held in the school-house, but in 1825 a mighty effort was made and a splendid frame church 40' x 30' was erected. It was tastefully finished and had a gallery. The whole community had helped to build it, and it was supposed to be open to services of any denomination. Here services would be held at 11 o'clock on Sunday forenoon. About one o'clock there would be an intermission of about an hour. People would take their lunch and go for a spring on Mr. Shortreed's farm, where a serviceable picnic would be held. Their worship would be resumed, continuing most of the afternoon. These were before the days of milk-and-water 20-minute sermons. Preachers believed the Bible to be God's Word. They believed in Sin, also in Salvation. Sermons two hours in length on justification by faith, election, predestination and other heavy subjects were not only listened to but enjoyed by the sermon tasters of long ago. Sometimes one service was conducted in Gaelic, this being much enjoyed by the old timers.

### Service of Sacrament

Sacrament was a solemn time.

NOTE — Mrs. Elgin Johnston of Wingham, one of the members of the Shortreed clan in Huron County, has loaned The Champion a transcript of an article written by Rob Roy for the Weekly Sun, Toronto, in March 1915. The article deals with the story of the pioneer settlers of the Scotch Block area in Esquema, just north of Milton, and we proudly present the story for the entertainment of our readers. We are indebted to Mrs. Johnston, to Miss Kathleen Hosford and Mrs. Annie Hosford of Blyth and Miss Linda Coules and Clifford Coules of Belgrave, for preparing this manuscript for reprinting.

Preparatory services were held for several days previous to the Sacrament. On Saturday the Tokens were distributed. Then on Monday a Thanksgiving service was held.

Then a request was sent to the "United Presbyterians" of the United States. They sent a man. When he came, he found a minister in possession of the church and a difficulty at once arose.

A large and influential element resolved to leave and start another church. David Scott, the first settler in Nassagaweya, was chosen to secure a site. Lot 6, Con. 3 was a reserve lot that was for sale. Mr. Scott bought this for church purposes. Walter Laidlaw was going to buy this lot in order to frustrate the building of the new church, but he was just half an hour too late.

Both of these congregations have had a successful and continuous existence. The original frame church, known as Boston Presbyterian Church, has been replaced by a handsome stone building. The first frame known as the "Anti-Bunger Church" has given place to a splendid brick structure. A commodious brick manse on either side of the road smile on each other. Thus a traveller driving through this splendid farming district is surprised to find, at an ordinary country crossroad, two large churches and manses seeming to debate the old questions of the theology across the road.

### Needed a Log Chain

Many were the hardships endured by the first comers. Strong, heavy chains were almost as scarce as gold is today.

A log chain was a necessity in clearing timber away. Mrs. David Darling carried a tub of butter through a trail in the woods 40 miles to Muddy York, and traded it for a log chain. The brave woman came home tired, but triumphant with the much needed chain. With this chain the farm was cleared and became one of the finest in the province. This lady later bought a Clergy Reserve lot for \$200 and paid for it in instalments with butter money. The log buildings gradually gave way to frame ones. Peter Scott burned the first kiln of brick in the township in 1843. He built the first brick house in 1844. This building is still as good as ever and looks as if it would last for centuries.

Talking largely the Gaelic language, lovemaking was sure to make rapid progress among the people. That tongue is said to be the greatest in the world for lovers, there being fifty different ways of saying "Darling." Weddings were frequent and were events of great importance to the people. Money being scarce, wedding fees were necessarily small. One bridegroom married by Rev. J. Gillespie was totally without funds. The thrifty Scot made him grub out a massive stump between the church and the manse. This the man did faithfully and thereby squared the account.

### Fiddler for Dance

One man, James Henderson, Lot 3, Con. 2, was to be married to Miss Susanne Moore, Lot 12, Con. 3. Robert Shortreed was a splendid fiddler and the groom wished him to play at the wedding. Mrs. Shortreed objected, as the baby was small and she did not wish to remain alone. Persuasion seemed useless, whereupon Mr. Henderson lifted the baby out of the homemade cradle and started off for the wedding. The mother and father were forced to follow, and so a fiddler was secured and a jolly night of dancing was held.

A blacksmith walked up to a minister's to get married. On coming home in the afternoon, he had to pass his shop before coming to the house. Here he found a team waiting to be shod. He put on his apron and shod them, the bride in the meantime taking the key to her new home and going in to prepare supper.

### The Plowing Match

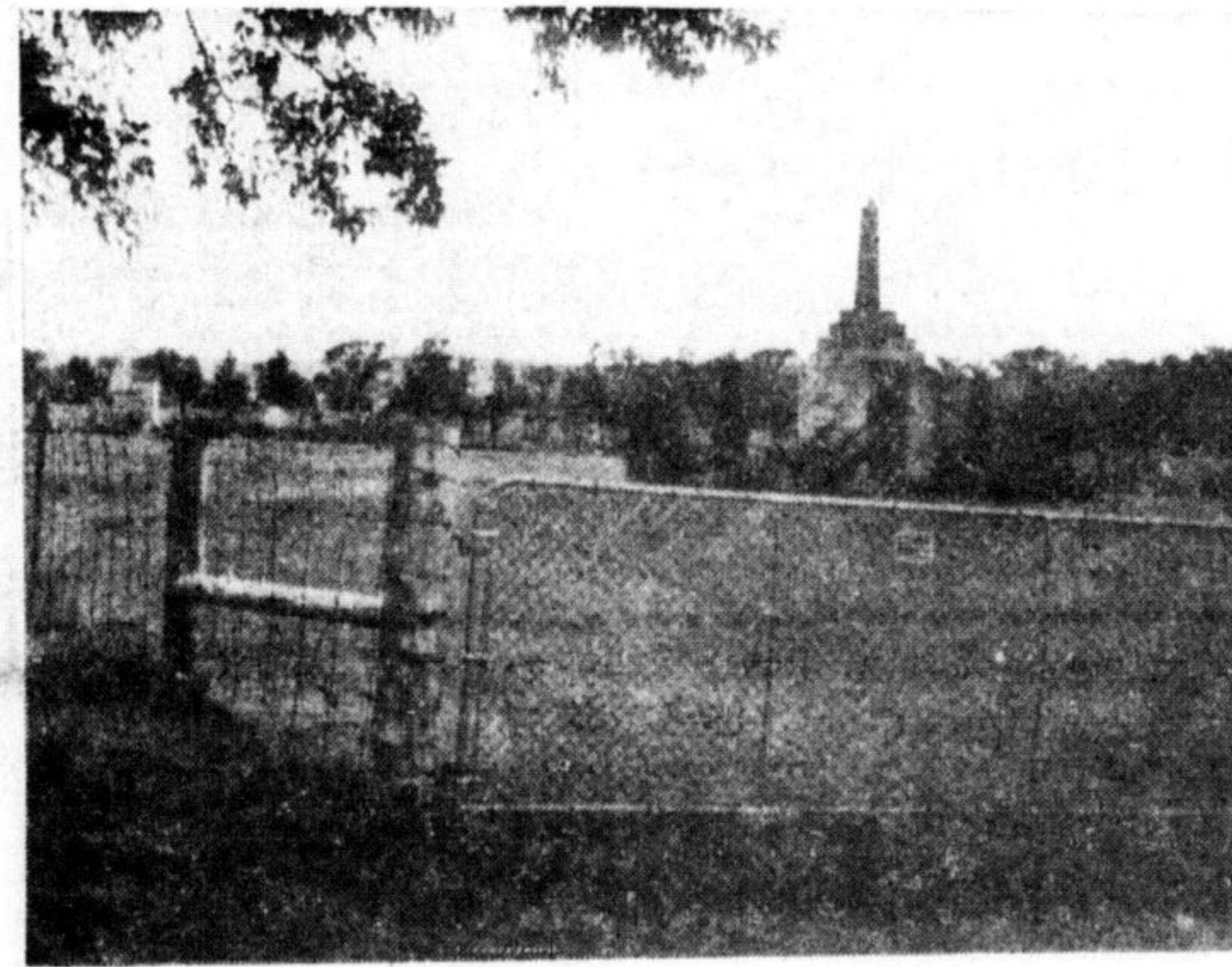
Among so many Scotchmen plowing was sure to be a fine art. The annual plowing match

was an event that was looked forward to with great interest and would be attended by as many people as the Milton Fair. One match is spoken of that took place on Wm. Pickard's farm at Hornby, where the school has since been built.

Ninety teams took part, the number being so great that the boy competitors had to plow on the farm now owned by Sam King. Wm. Cate from Islington took first in first class, also first for team and outfit. Another match took place on Lot 7, Con. 7, Nassagaweya, Michie's farm. Another match was at Cook's farm, near Georgetown, when Abe Stark, Wm. Pickard, John Wrigglesworth, and J. Kennedy, from Acton, took part.

### Early Fairs

Milton's first fair was held in the fall of 1858. (First name obliterated) Chisholm attended



THE MANSEWOOD CHURCH was abandoned, fell to ruin, and was eventually torn down but the cemetery and a cairn still stand on the spot — the corner of the Third Line and Five Sideroad. A plaque on the cairn explains the Associate Presbyterian Church was erected in 1835, united with the Associate Reformed Church in 1858 to form the United Church of America, the brick building was built in 1866 and the church has not been used since 1935.

the first fair and every one since. David Featherstone attended the first fair, and every one since but one being in 1876 when his buildings were burned. Both of these men are still hale and hearty and prize a medal each that the Agricultural Society presented them with. At this fair the horses were shown on the street and the produce in a small building near Brothers' Foundry.

In the fall paring bees were held three or four evenings a week and were much enjoyed. The apples would be finished before midnight, a dainty lunch dispersed, and then Piper McMillan and George Barber fiddler would furnish music for the dancing. The walks home through the autumn woods in the early morning resulted in some of the happiest marriages this old world has ever seen.

John McTavish conducted a brewery on Lot 5, Con. 5. The Scotch however, longed for the old mountain dew that they had refreshed themselves with in Scotland. The nearby mountains reminded them of the old Highland Hills where the gaugers were so often successfully eluded and many illicit stills were at one time in operation on the mountains, some even in the Block itself and one in Hornby East. These all disappeared many years ago.

### Ashes for Potash

The first money made by the settlers was from ashes for Potash. Those in the hardwood section in 1826 began cutting white ash staves. These were drawn to the banks of the Sixteen Mile Creek on the farms of Bowes and Willmott, lots 9 and 10 Trafalgar, thrown into the creek in the spring and floated down the stream to be loaded on schooners and taken across the lake.

Early in the seventies Shortreed's built a steam mill on Lot 5, Con. 5. They were succeeded by Sharp, Core, Douglas and Bannerman and H. P. Lawson. These mills changed the forest from an

incumbrance to a valuable asset, and the money from the lumber moved the dwellers of the Scotch Block to Easy Street.

### Skill With the Axe

A gang of timber men came to the township in 1866. They were Scotchmen from Glengarry and were wielders of the broad axe. Old timers tell of them swinging the immense axes right over their heads and for a wager splitting a line 100 feet long. Some (word obliterated) 120 feet in length were dressed in these woods, the surface being as smooth as if it had been planed. These took ten horses to team them to Oakville.

The men of the Scotch Block were famous at raisings. The most of the early barns were built 60' x 36' with purlin plates, these four plates being one foot square and sixty feet long. These were handled by the brawny Scotchmen as if they were toys. One famous raising was at Laird's barn where the Scotch Block defeated the English Block another at Wm. Chisholm's barn where the Scotch Block defeated Trafalgar. Among the many famous for their strength and skill, John Sprout and Thomas Shortreed are spoken of to this day.

### The Primitive Reapers

Robert McGowan was the first man to operate a mowing and reaping machine. He purchased it in 1854. It was built in Buffalo, was a combined mower and

without carriers. Jack Carradice, George McGowan, Jim Forbes, Jim Laidlaw and W. Laidlaw, now the famous K.C., were all famous threshers. Many of these early machines were built at Ancaster and Palermo.

### The Threshing Match

On in the sixties, however, threshing machines were supposed to have reached perfection. Jos. Brothers of Milton was famous for his horsepowers and separators. A Mr. McDonald of Acton had acted as his agent for years but started to sell the "Climax" built by McPherson of Fingal, Ont. A bitter rivalry sprang up between these men. A match was arranged to take place on the farm of Wm. More, Lot 12, Con. 3, in August 1871. Each machine was to thresh wheat for one hour, speed and clean threshing both to count. Robert Shortreed, John McDougall and others were appointed timekeepers and measurers. The day was fine and an immense crowd assembled. The farm looked like Milton Fair Grounds. The Climax man had the first trial. A big Scotchman had been brought from West Elgin, who fed the full hour. The hardcutter dropper and mower had all been carefully selected, a different gang for each machine. The powers were driven by five teams each and the very best teams had been secured. The Climax machine did her hour in splendid shape.

When time was called the crowd picked up the mower and the separator as if they were toys and carried them away. Then the Milton separator and mower were put into position and set in a few minutes. John Bailey, Jimmy Downs and George Brownridge divided the hour between them as feeders. Andy Brownridge drove. Five splendid teams had been secured. Four of them were Andrew Henderson's team from the mountains, Tom Brownridge's team from Omagh, Wm. Elliot and Malcolm McPherson's big blacks. The first named teams had never been loose on a power before, always being tied back to the arm with the lines. This day however they were let loose, simply being tied in front. Andy Brownridge knew each horse by name. After the cylinder began to hum he cracked the whip once but after that he caught the lash and held it down, soothing each horse for fear they would tear the machine to pieces. So much grain was wasted by both machines that the referees declared the match a draw and the wagers of \$100 a side were given back.

POSTSCRIPT — The Shortreed homestead on Lot 4, Conc. 5 (Fourth Line) remained in the Shortreed name for about 145 years and was sold in July of this year to a Burlington man. Peter

### Buying a Freezer?

## Home Economist Offers Help

At this season of the year many families may be considering the advantages of buying a freezer.

"The realistic way to regard a freezer is as a convenience, but not as a money saver," says Mrs. Kathleen Cosson, the County Home Economist. For most families space in a public locker is more economical, even if less convenient. Those farm families who produce their own vegetables, fruits and meat have more opportunity to make a freezer save money for them.

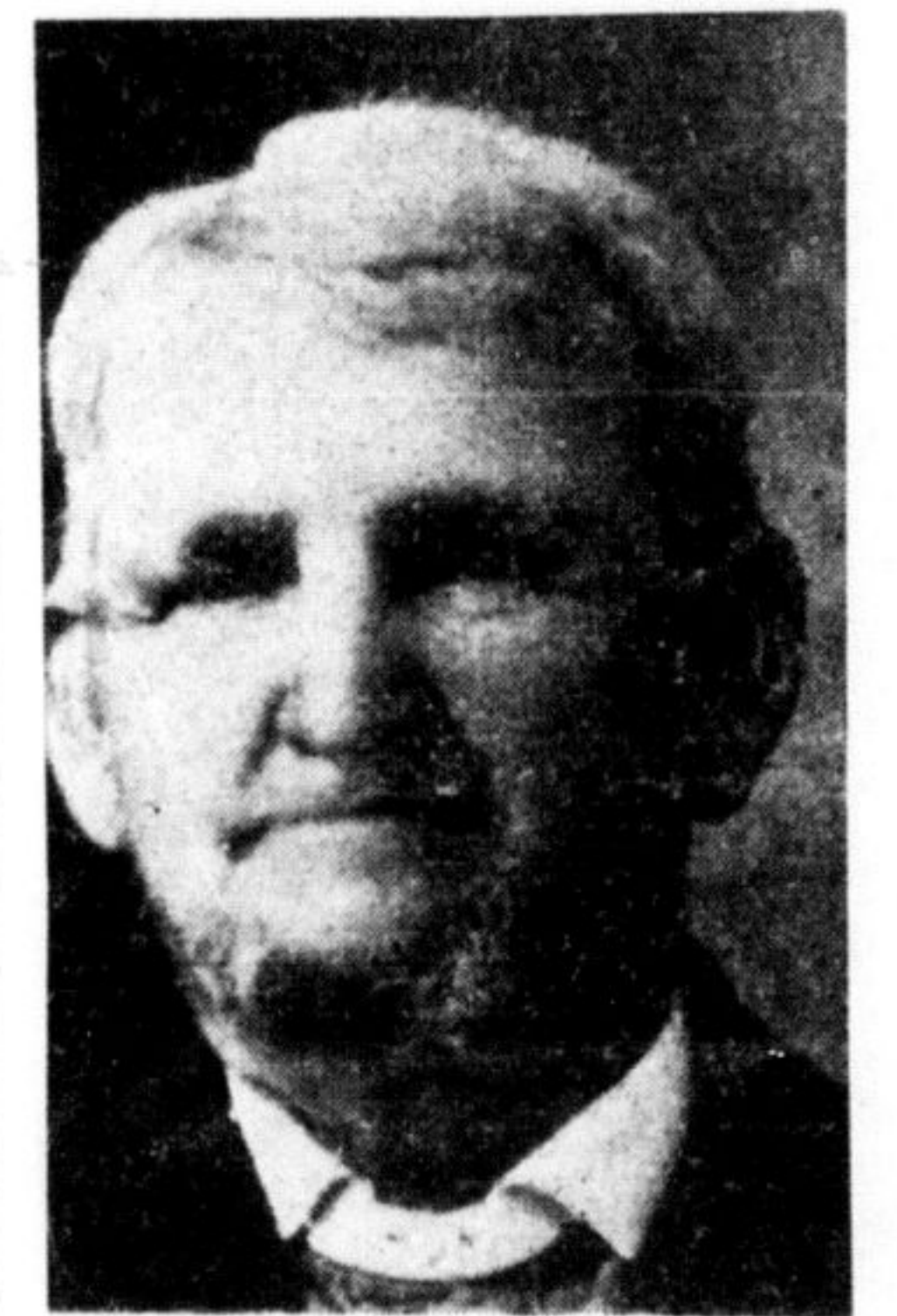
What, then are the advantages of a home freezer? It can save both time and energy in shopping and in meal preparation. You can buy foods in quantity and when prices are low. You have food on hand for unexpected occasions. A freezer allows you to level out your work load by preparing food ahead of time for parties, holidays and busy times. Meals can be more interesting and varied leftovers frozen for later use.

When shopping for a freezer you will be confronted by many sizes and models. As a guide to the size most appropriate for your family, allow from four to six cubic feet of storage for each person. In deciding between a chest and upright model, remember that the chest type is usually less expensive initially and costs less to operate. However the upright model takes less floor space and packages are easier to get at.

### Extra Features

Each homemaker should consider the importance and the increased cost of convenience features such as automatic defrosting, separate quick freeze area, safety signal light, toe-operated door pedals, counter-balanced door hinges, and the great variety in shelves and storage containers.

When installing a freezer remember that it should have its own electric circuit. The floor should be strong and dry and there must be space for air circulation all around the freezer.



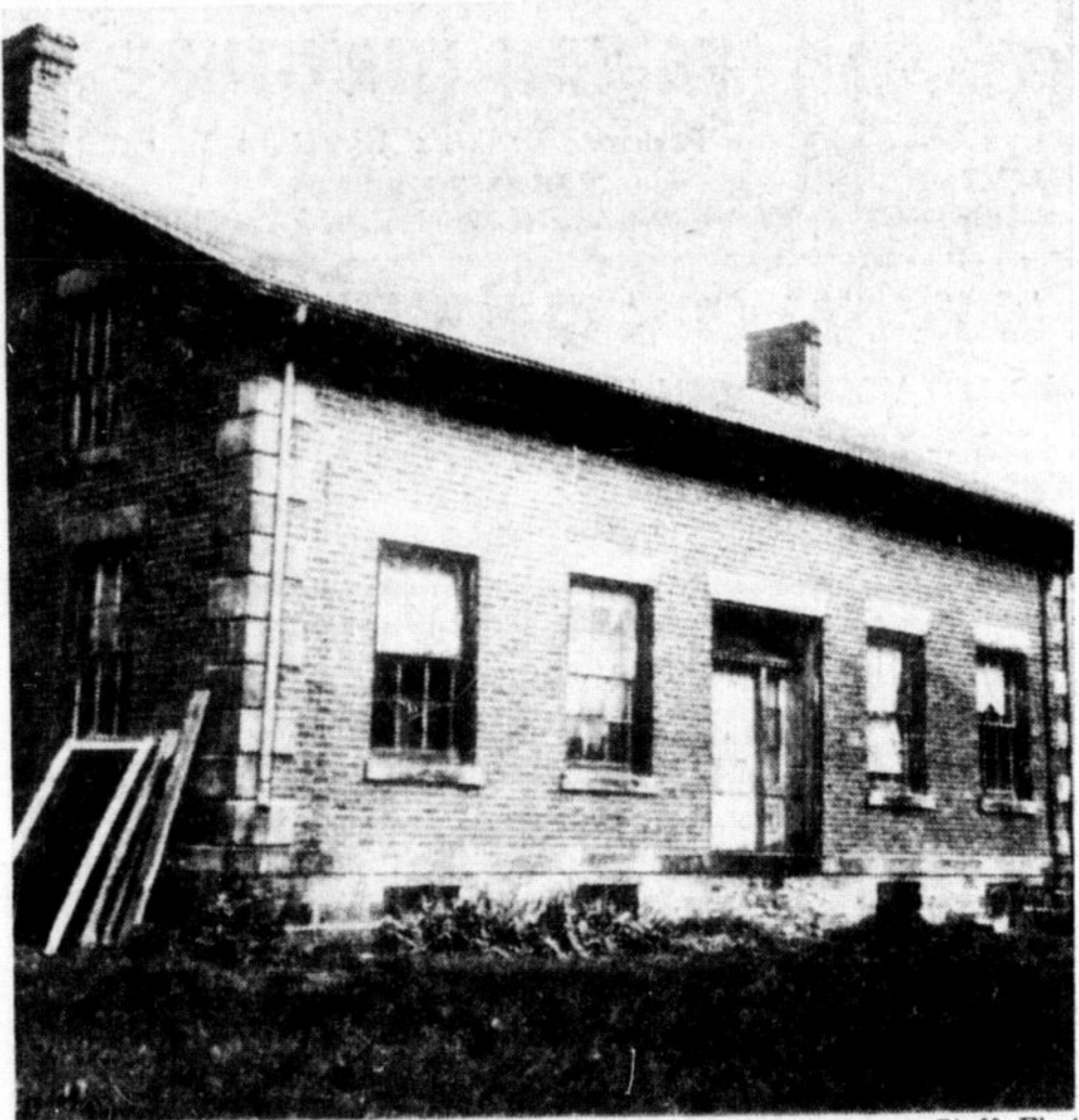
CHARLES SCOTT

His father Peter Scott signed for Lot 4 Conc. 5 East in 1831, and had the first brick house in Halton County, made from materials on the farm.



MISS CHRISTY SHORTREED

She was an aunt of Miss Isobel Shortreed, who died in May of this year, the last Shortreed to occupy the Shortreed homestead in Esquema.



—Staff Photo

THE SHORTREED MANSION in the Scotch Block was one of the early homesteads when the Scottish pioneers invaded the barren land to hew out their homes and their farms. It remained in the family until this year — for a total of 145 years in the Shortreed name.



—Staff Photo

BOSTON PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH was founded in 1825 when Scotch Block pioneers erected a splendid frame church 40 by 30 feet. The whole community helped build it and the church was open to worshippers of all faiths. This stone building came later. A second church in the Scotch Block was Mansewood church, which has since closed and been torn down.