

"Look after the land, it will look after you" -

James Robson Vaughan Twp. Ex-Reeve Has Lived on Same Farm For Seventy Two Years Might Yield To Pressure - Again Run For Office

By Alex Sjoberg

On a sunny August afternoon after a 10-mile drive from Richmond Hill to and through Maple, north on the seventh concession road and thence east over a swooping lane, we reached the final rise and saw James H. (Jimmy) Robson who has lived on the same Vaughan Township farm for 72 years.

Mr. Robson was thoughtfully contemplating his car which he drives with practiced skill and care. The first question that came to mind was that hoary old chestnut, "To what do you credit your long life and good health?" We refrained. After all, we had not yet been formally introduced. But within minutes of stopping the car we felt as though we had known one another for decades. Mr. Robson is that kind of fellow: genial, outgoing, definite in his views without giving offense, and with a fine sense of humour.

Regular Hours

When I said that he looked like a well kept man in his early sixties he laughed. "Son," he said, "I'm going on 79 and before you ask how I do it, I'll tell you. I've been lucky and have looked after myself. I've never had an accident or needed a doctor. Everyone should respect regular hours." He said he was now a non-smoker, had always treated alcohol with extreme respect, drank tea and coffee in modest quantities, ate whatever was placed before him and tried never to worry too much.

Trying not to worry too much hasn't always been exactly easy. Mr. Robson's wife, the former Annie Wilson, born near Elgin Mills, passed away in the 1920s. There were six children, three boys and three girls. "I was father and mother to them," said Mr. Robson, "and do you know, I raised those kids and kept 350 acres of land going with hardly a fuss. We understood one another."

"Whatever was to be done in the house, or in the fields was looked to promptly. We sort of divided responsibility, each taking a just share, each doing his or her work according to ability. We co-operated then and we do to this day."

The three boys, Frank, Albert and Charles each operate 100 acres of the original 400-acre farm. Frank's land lies to the north of the birthplace, Albert's to the west and Charles' to the south. Among them they have six children, which might be called a coincidence.

Of the three daughters Marian (Mrs. Reginald McDonald) lives in Calgary; Helen (Mrs. R. McDougall) farms in Sask. and Jean, now Mrs. Roy Bone, lives on the 6th concession. Among them the girls have presented their father with eight grandchildren. Mr. Robson figures that the family name is going to be around quite a while yet.

24,000 Bales
Most of the 400 acres are given over to hay and wheat and most of the hay ends up as fodder for the boys' milk cattle and young stock. "This was a fine year for hay," Mr. Robson offered. "We came out of it with 24,000 fifty-pound bales, a record for us, and about 2,000 bales more than in 1958, another good year." As to wheat, he figured the land would yield about 30 bushels per acre. "Some years we get 40 bushels."

Farming keeps the Robson men pretty busy. Beside the immediate 400 acres, they operate 600 acres elsewhere in the township. Mr. Robson would not use his and his boys' farm endeavour as a yardstick of potential farm success in the township. "We're in a different position than most," he



JAMES ROBSON

with an overall ditching program to make it worthwhile, otherwise there's bound to be expensive repercussions in the years to come."

He said that actually the roads of his day in the township were almost as good as they are now. "The difference now is in the number of vehicles on them and the weight of those modern vehicles. This means a greater yearly outlay to keep the roads in shape."

Growing Children

His toughest years? "Oh, I wouldn't say I've had too tough years," he replied. "After my wife died, what with six kids to look after and farming 250 acres, I guess you could say I was too busy to get into mischief." He cogitated briefly, then went on: "I'll tell you something. I had a smart, able, willing parcel of children. It's quite an experience watching them grow, change, develop and become distinct personalities. I guess you could say the reward of watching those kids take hold and grow eased those years considerably."

1,000 Bushels

Economically, the twenties were like the fifties, he said,

"There was a boom on. Money ran like water. They were good years. Then the depression hit us like the kick from a short tempered horse. I remember in '31 and '32 I had a lot of wheat, but that it took 1,000 bushels at 40 cents a bushel to pay my taxes. Used to feel I was working for nothing. But we got over that too."

"You look after the land and it will look after you," he said. It's quite a privilege to look into eyes which have studied the fruits of the land for 79 seasons. "I don't doubt you," we rejoined.

What about politics? Would he enjoy another crack at it? He rubbed his jaw. "My boys are against it," he said, with an undercurrent of complaint in his voice. "But yes, I'd like to sit at council table again. Of course, I'd like to feel I would get a good vote. A man wants to feel that the people believe in him when he is in politics on their behalf." He admitted he had been pressed to start for council again. "Tell you what," he said, "you get Bob Scott of Richmond Hill to run and I'll consider throwing my hat in the ring too. I sat with Bob on council for eight years and considered him one of the best township administrators going, and you might say I've known quite a few."

Mr. Robson lives by himself now but is never short of company. There are his families to visit and entertain and old timers to gab with. He is partial to William Johnson of Maple. "Bill is well into his eighties now," he said, "but still keeps busy. We never let our political differences spoil our friendship."

Mr. Robson is a strong Conservative but that doesn't prevent him from disagreeing with men in the party. He is of the opinion that Diefenbaker perhaps promised more than he could deliver. "Should be more like Leslie Frost," he said. "There's a man who does what he feels can be done and doesn't go over the deep end."

We proceeded to leave and our host prepared to resume seeking his car. He intends to be around for a while, quite a while yet, when his male grandchildren

will continue what his parents before him started and what he and his sons are carrying on.

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