

When Am I From the County?

I recently attended a couple of meetings where participants have risen to inform the crowd that they were born here in Prince Edward County, their parents were born here and so were sundry generations of their forbears. They were pretty proud of their heritage, and rightly so. I might be proud of my heritage, too, if I knew what it was. My ancestors were either revolutionaries or loyalists, I don't know which. Even if I could trace them back, it's probably a wiser course to just leave it alone. I've always had a feeling there's real bad blood back there... thieves, layabouts, wretches from prison or worse. Still, I live in Prince Edward County now, and in spite of my mongrelish background, I wonder if I dare say I'm from here?

I was once in Burlington, Vermont on business. A high tech plant producing "ceramic substrates and chips" had been built there and changed the lives of the residents substantially. An influx of alien folk together with the availability of high paying jobs for many residents and the inevitable retail stores so they could spend their newfound capital had fundamentally altered the landscape and the life.

I had taken a cab from the little airport to the plant. The cab driver was from New York City, one of the influx of people who had moved to Burlington when the plant was built. He loved it there, lived in a old farmhouse, had a big vegetable garden, and raised his kids in safety. He'd been in Vermont sufficiently long that the New York City cabdriver attitude had eroded to the point where he was recognizable as a human being. He told me that he was talking with his next door neighbour, an old lady who'd lived in Vermont all her life, as had her parents and many previous generations. The cabdriver had hinted to her that now that he'd resided in Vermont for ten years, he considered himself a Vermonter. She assured him he was not. As a fallback position, he opined that his children had been born in Vermont and they could lay claim to being Vermonters. She looked at him, thought a little, then said, "Just 'cause a cat has kittens in the oven, that don't make 'em muffins." He isn't sure how many generations it takes to be a Vermonter now. What's that make my grandson, born in Bloomfield?

So we newcomers may not be able to lay claim that we're "from the county" just yet. Don't get me wrong, this article isn't about County folk running a closed society or having closed minds. To the contrary, the old time residents have been as open and friendly and nice and inclusive as it is possible to be. Surprisingly so, really. Of course, had that not been the case, I wouldn't have dared to write this article. I'm reminded of a friend who moved to Bala in the Muskokas, where they've been overrun with cottagers for many years. One of the local politicians confided to my friend that, "For years, the tax money from the cottagers has helped build our community. We have a burn unit in the hospital, a new library, new schools, community centre and rink, and you know what? Now that we've got all these things, the damned cottagers want to move here permanently!"

It's funny, isn't it, that once us outlanders get here, we kind of figure that no more of us should arrive. That's enough immigration, we think, now that I'm here. Now let's keep it the same. Many people assume that long time residents resist change. Heck, I think us old buggers who've retired here do as much resisting as anyone. I had a friend, a financial planner, visit me from Toronto. When he arrived he claimed he was in a time warp. He said he saw a CF-18 jet plane parked on a lawn. "We haven't flown those for forty years", he stated. Then, while he was puzzling over this and speeding down the road, he nearly rear-ended a 1971 Cadillac. After driving down maple shaded Morrison's Point Road with it's stone walls, it's not surprising really that coming directly from Toronto, he felt that he had entered another dimension in time.

There's no doubt though, that people who've lived different lives see things through different

Continued on page 6

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