

Winter sleigh ride was annual delight

OHSWEKEN — One New Year's Day in the 1940s my father started to harness up the horses.

This was to be one of the happy times. We knew we were going to visit our Auntie Lissie and that we would then go across the road to the annual Christmas concert at the Johnsfield Baptist Church.

For some reason at Johnsfield, the Christmas concert was always delayed until New Year's Day. It seemed to be the custom at the time but it has been discontinued.

It did seem a bit odd when songs and recitations referred to Christmas as "coming" and we knew it had already passed.

Auntie Lissie lived with her husband Peter John in a small house at the end of a long laneway across from Johnsfield church.

Auntie Lissie didn't have children of her own. She would come out to meet us even in the winter time and pretty nearly hug us to death. She showered kisses on all us children.

We loved it, of course. It was nice to be appreciated for being as beautiful and lovable as we thought we were.

The Johnsfield church still stands on Fifth Line. We used to go there by bobsleigh drawn by a team of black horses. The bobsleigh was about the size of a farm wagon but it could slide over the snow fairly easily once it got moving. However, it was too heavy for us children to try to use it for riding down hills. We used to try everything else, including our mother's wash tub and large pieces of cardboard.

The bobsleigh could easily hold 10 or a dozen people. We would sit or lie on the bed of hay in the bobsleigh's box. The roads were always covered with snow back then at New Year's.

From our home on First

Jan 17

**Our
Town
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Line, we would travel a mile west to Medina Corners to what is now called Chiefswood Road and then north on this road through Ohsweken to Fifth Line at Four Corners. Two more miles down Fifth Line with sleigh bells jingling and we were at Johnsfield.

The eight miles or so used to take us about an hour which was a fairly easy pace for our two sleek black horses.

One muddy spring day one of the black mares made a misstep on the hillside behind the barn. Her back leg shot out to the side and the big leg bone below the hip snapped. From long years of farming, my father knew there was no use calling the veterinarian. My father did not shrink from doing what had to be done. She had to be put out of her misery.

With a heavy heart, he went up to the house and loaded the shotgun. This was one of the sad times. He had raised her from a colt and they had worked many a field together.

He went behind the barn out of sight. The mare sat immobile looking out over the flats. One shot and she felt no more pain.

The next New Year's Day we didn't go for a sleigh ride to Johnsfield.

Our Town is an Expositor feature which provides a forum for news and views from some of the smaller centres in the region. George Beaver is a freelance writer who lives on the Six Nations reserve.