

# Pioneer Mills and Modern Homes Meet at Unionville

(The Telegram)

People around Unionville have the habit of beginning conversation with, "there used to be..." For instance, there used to be a distillery, a brewery and a malt-house in the district. There used to be a tannery, a blacksmith shop and a sawmill. There used to be a flour mill and a cooperage. But that was "way back in the 1800's."

There used to be good hotel accommodation, meals included, for 50 cents a day, plus 12½ cents for your horse. It used to be that seven small pigs sold for \$3.50; oats for 35 cents a bushel; a cow for \$15, and further back still, a cow sold for \$1.

But nobody around Unionville ever says, "things ain't what they used to be!" Why should they? They like Markham Township's little police village the way it is. And so do all those city people who have discovered that you can't see the houses for trees, and you can shoot a cannon down Main St. Wednesday afternoon and never hit a soul (except maybe the friendly ghost of a Berczy settler).

City people have discovered too that there's a real old swimming

hole (when the dam's in), that the air is air, not smog, and that the only noise is the hum of the machines down in the planing, the woodworking and the chop mills. The cap and fireworks factory behind the \$30,000 Will Crosby Memorial Rink hasn't blown up yet, and isn't ever likely to.

But the village veneer is thin, as the unsuspecting urbanite discovers when he tries slyly for a rural bargain. Villagers, descendants of four Scots and thrifty Germans, born, bred and hope-to-die in the district, are hep to the financial goings-on of the outside world. After all they are only 20 miles from Toronto, where many of them work, where all visit and by which they set their living standards—if not their tastes.

Unionville citizens cherish their village independence and their peace and quiet more than a city man ever could. That's why their forefathers came to Markham from Hamburg, Germany. They settled first in the Genesee Valley in New York State, but found they were only leaseholders there, so they came to Upper Canada where they could own land outright.

First came Fredric Summerfeldt, whose descendants still grow in the area. Fredric lived in a tent one winter. In the fall he traded a sow for four bushels of wheat, four bushels of corn and two bushels of potatoes and moved into York to look for work. He got it, cutting cordwood at "1 bushel of turnips and no salt" per cord. "Now I was rich," he wrote, "and had two loaves of bread."

Homemade bread, that lost commodity that Alex Bruce mourns. He is chairman of the historical committee that included Summerfeldt's story in their "Historical Sketch of Markham Township." (\$1.00 at the township office in Unionville.)

"Nobody around here bakes their own bread now. It's a lost art," he said, busily tying a sack of feed for a local farmer. The Bruce mill is six miles north of Unionville. "I dunno..." he shook his capped head. "There's something about the flavor of homemade bread. The bakers can't duplicate it."

Alex Bruce, 82 in December, doesn't believe in "the 40-hour week and double pay because that isn't now this country was made." Daily, except Sunday, he is in the mill his grandfather bought 108 years ago when the family came from Scotland, "where every decent man comes from."

The mill is painted barn-red and is full of field mice and dusty haze and shadows, and the drowsy rush of the Rouge washing through the great water wheel. The pink-cheeked, white-mustached, powdery miller likes to tell of the old map, circa 1794, on which the Rouge River is called the "Great River" and is "supposed to empty into Lake Ontario to the eastward of the 'Highlands of York.'" Pioneers never got far enough away from home to really prove whether it did or not.

The Bruce mill stopped making flour during the war and the mill down in Unionville has not made it for years. The Unionville mill is run by electricity and the Stiver Brothers, Ewart and Howard, whose forefathers came with Summerfeldt and the rest of the Berczy settlers.

Ewart Stiver lives in the oldest house in town. It looks like a red brick cottage, but under the brick facing is adobe, clay, from the cellar, and plaster on top of that. "There used to be a school north of Unionville up past the Lutheran Church," explains Mr. Stiver, "and another one down in the village south of where the railroad track runs now. Then when Egerton Ryerson was reorganizing education in the province, a new school was built halfway between the other two and called Unionville. That was about 1886 I think."

At the last Stiver reunion there were 250 family members. Descendants of the two sons, Frank and John," continued Mr. Stiver. "And then there's the descendants of six Stiver daughters who don't have the name but are just as much Stivers as the rest of us. They're all over the place—Scotts, Smiths, Hemingways, Milgans...."

There's a comfortable continuity, a deeply rooted security around Unionville that comes only from people staying in one spot. You can scoff all you like but it's something the itinerant city apartment-dweller, with all his advantages like streetcar crowds, restaurant cream pie and pop concert culture, can never attain.

Take Arthur Kingston Harrington in the planing mill. He tried to get away from his birthright. Hanging around in old Toronto houses now are thousands of fine pine shutters "open only for weddings and funerals for fear of fading the carpet," out of which his grandfather made a living. And his father did well in the family planing mill but A. K. Harrington went overseas in the first war, and didn't come back, not for a long time. "I went to the States. They'd pay me \$60 a week to start there, \$30 a week here. Finally I got into a traveling job where I never hung my hat twice in the same place in the same month, so I decided the best place for me was right back where I started. I came back. My-uncle had been running the



Although 81 years old, Alex Bruce, of Unionville, here tying a bag of feed, still operates the mill on his property. His home is on land settled by his grandfather who emigrated from Scotland 108 years ago.



Both William Albert Noble, 89, oldest man in Unionville, and his wife Becky, were born nearby and have never lived anywhere else. Town has much roomed since city workers started migrating to homes in Unionville.

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mill. Then it had been rented." But in spite of his long absence the last Harrington had no trouble in taking up where his father left off. "I hadn't really worked in the mill since I was a kid, but, I don't know. It just seemed to be in my hands and I've done all right. I'm perfectly happy here. I've two children and I wouldn't take them to a big city if it was the last place in the world, and I've lived in most of them, including New York."

Or take the oldest man in the village, William Albert Noble, 90. He was born on Hagerman Hill, a mile and a quarter from the village. "Lived in this same house 41 years. Ever since we been married, haven't we, Becky. My wife used to be a Miss Size, born in the village she was." The former Becky Size said she believed the population of the village in her day was around 400 or 500. "You want to know what it is now?" William Noble hopped to the phone, gave it a good crank and said, "Gimme, games and the show in Markham, the township office. Say, what's our population? Hey? Can't hear you!"

Four hundred you say." Neither he, nor his visitors, could quite figure that out because "all below the tracks here where we live now used to be pasture." Across the road, and all around, were fine new houses, shiny city-fied looking houses built by city people who have gone back to the country.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Noble remember the town's first telephone and Becky remembers the first car. "Well I do remember it," she says. "It was right after we were married and we were going up the Eighth to Ringwood and along came one of the Stivers in this new car, first I'd ever seen, or the ponies either, and you had to get out and hold them until the car went by," she told her husband.

Marjorie Latimer and Teresa Smith, young and pretty and full of beans, don't find their hometown dull. There's swimming hole and the skating rink and the ball it a good crank and said, "Gimme, games and the show in Markham, and there's the infinite relief every evening at five of leaving the

smoke and the tension and the clacking typewriters of Toronto far behind.

**"SHORT" KILLS CALF; CHARGES TAPS IN FARM HOUSE**

A chance visit by a scrap iron dealer is credited with averting a disaster at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Norman Durrer, Carrick Township.

When the scrap dealer and Mr. Durrer went to the barn they found the cattle in a frenzy and one animal electrocuted.

Durrer touched the calf with the toe of his boot and received a violent shock, but he was warned by the scrap dealer to leave the barn.

A veterinary was summoned and he found the watering system, connected for both the barn and the house, charged with electricity.

It is believed the short circuit occurred when Mr. Durrer inserted a new fuse in a stove after their hydro transformer was struck by lightning.

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