

His family took root in historic residence

By TOM GREENHOUGH

After travelling from England, we arrived in Unionville in October of 1949. The population sign on Meadowbrook Lane read 420. At the shopping area on No. 7 Highway (then dubbed Powersville, after the developer), I went into Billingsley's Pharmacy and asked Mr. B. whether the population was still correct.

"Yes, it has not changed much since that sign was put up a few years earlier," he said. We chatted awhile and upon leaving I told him that on the morrow it would be growing to 426, when the children and all the house effects would be arriving. The following day the largest packing case we had ever seen was placed by winch onto the front lawn of our new home.

A home was not easy to find in those days — with no rentals or high-rise flats available. However, our long wait for a home had in one sense been fortunate.

We had taken possession of one of the oldest, handmade, brick houses in the district — the original farm house in the area. It was the old Eckardt house in the cul-de-sac along the No. 7, called Meadowbrook Lane. The previous tenants told us that the approximate age of the house in 1949 was 127 years, making it 161 years old today.

It had been built by James Eckardt who's father was Philip Eckardt, the first settler in our valley and the town planner, surveying Markham in 1794. It was the first town to be surveyed in Upper Canada.

Philip was a large man, over six feet, with a family of 15 children. He was a man of varied skills — surveyor, skilled mechanic, millwright, and a first-class carpenter. He was largely responsible for augmenting the earlier settlement of United Empire Loyalists, established by Count Berczy, a British government agent in Philadelphia.

He recruited some 60 original German families who were living in the Genesee Valley, in the newly-created United States, and arranged for them to be rafted up the Don to German Mills. History seems to show these people were promised land by the first American government of the day, but were later denied, perhaps as a reprisal against George III of England's use of German mercenaries in their own War of Independence in 1776.

In the late 1950s our historical understanding of the Eckardt family was given a personal dimension. We received a visit from Miss Willa Eckardt, a great, great granddaughter of James Eckardt. Even though nearly 80 years had elapsed since she had lived in our house, her memories were still clear.



The Eckardt house was one of the first farmhouses in this area.

"Yes, we had two long bedrooms then, one down each side of the house, fronting the whole length and back — six boys one side, six girls the other. Father and mother slept downstairs where your fireplace is. We had our clothes pegs fastened to the main hardwood beams under the eaves to hang our clothes at night." She was delighted to see them still there.

She stood quietly in a corner of our new bay window, thinking aloud, reliving the experience of having to stand in that corner as a very little girl for some minor transgression, now forgotten. We felt sorry for that child — now this little old lady, — being conscious of standing on history's doorstep with her.

She remembered the old log cabin that was still standing at the back, with the old pot-bellied German stove for heating, well-stoked on wild winter evenings. It was used to cook breakfast for the odd traveller who let themselves in with the loose latch string. It was a well-known night stopover for travellers, such being the hospitality of the day.

In 1949 when we arrived in Unionville, we never realized the history behind the house we were to call home. Today, we can all share the memories. For example, a walk to the Lutheran Unionville Cemetery, just north of the village, will reveal the grave of Philip Eckardt. If you have the chance, take time to pay him homage.

Drive in the country led her to Unionville

By JOANNE HENEY

It was a bright and sunny June Saturday. We felt like a nice drive in the country and thought we'd stop in at one of the nurseries along the way to buy some small trees and shrubs for our Agincourt home.

As we passed the "Welcome to Unionville" sign and approached Hwy. 7 along Kennedy Road, we wondered why there were so many cars and people congested into the small area. Our curiosity won out and we parked the car and decided to investigate. What could be bringing so many people here on such a hot summer's day?

Walking north along Kennedy Road, something very strange happened. Suddenly, we felt like we had just jumped out of a time machine somewhere in the 18th Century. Where were we? The old homes, and the quaint little antique shops all reflected an era that somehow conjured up long forgotten memories of my Grandmother's stories of when she was young. But what were all of these people doing here?

We strolled on past the craft booths displaying handmade quilts and stuffed animals sewn in brightly colored, polka-dot and

checkered materials, and past ladies selling blueberry cheesecakes and bottled preserves. In the distance, we could hear a band playing bluegrass and the smell of fresh popcorn and sizzling bacon on a bun floated in the air. We couldn't help noticing the happy and friendly faces on the people passing by.

We turned to see a horse and buggy trotting down the centre of the road, the driver in a black top hat and white shirt, nodding to the crowd. A small child giggled gleefully at a silly clown passing out fruit candies and hugs, as an elderly couple sauntered along, arm in arm.

We spent a lovely afternoon browsing through the shops and booths, testing various baked goodies and becoming caught-up in this warmly unique place we had just discovered.

This was our first Unionville Festival, and the memory is rekindled year after year by this annual event.

Unionville has been our home for the past five years now, but we'll never forget that special day when we were drawn here by the quaint, historical atmosphere of our lovely small town.



G.M. Smith Ltd. has made a major contribution to the Unionville Festival over the years.

Local firm honored

This year, the Unionville Festival Committee wishes to honor one of the original sponsors of the Unionville Festival. Early in the history of the festival, Gerry Smith and the employees of G.M. Smith, supplied trailers and floats for the annual parade.

Their participation grew as the festival expanded and Mr. Smith generously provided his company's yard to marshal the increasing number of decorated floats.

Every year since 1969, Mr. Smith and his employees have continued to accommodate us as well as augment the parade by entering his own collection of antique tractors and trucks, which remain on display during the Festival Days.

To highlight our appreciation for his participation and assistance, the Festival Committee will make a presentation honoring his work and that of his employees at 4 p.m. Saturday, June 4, at the Unionville Post Office on Main Street.

Park concerts return this year

Starting Sunday, June 19, and continuing every Sunday throughout the summer, there will be a series of concerts held at Crosby Park in Unionville.

The concerts will take place from 7:30 to 9 p.m. weather permitting. The scheduled performers for June 19 are members of the Markham District High School Concert Band.

York Piano & Organ Centres

Northtown Shopping Centre

Visit our display in front of the ARENA during the Unionville Festival for a demonstration.

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