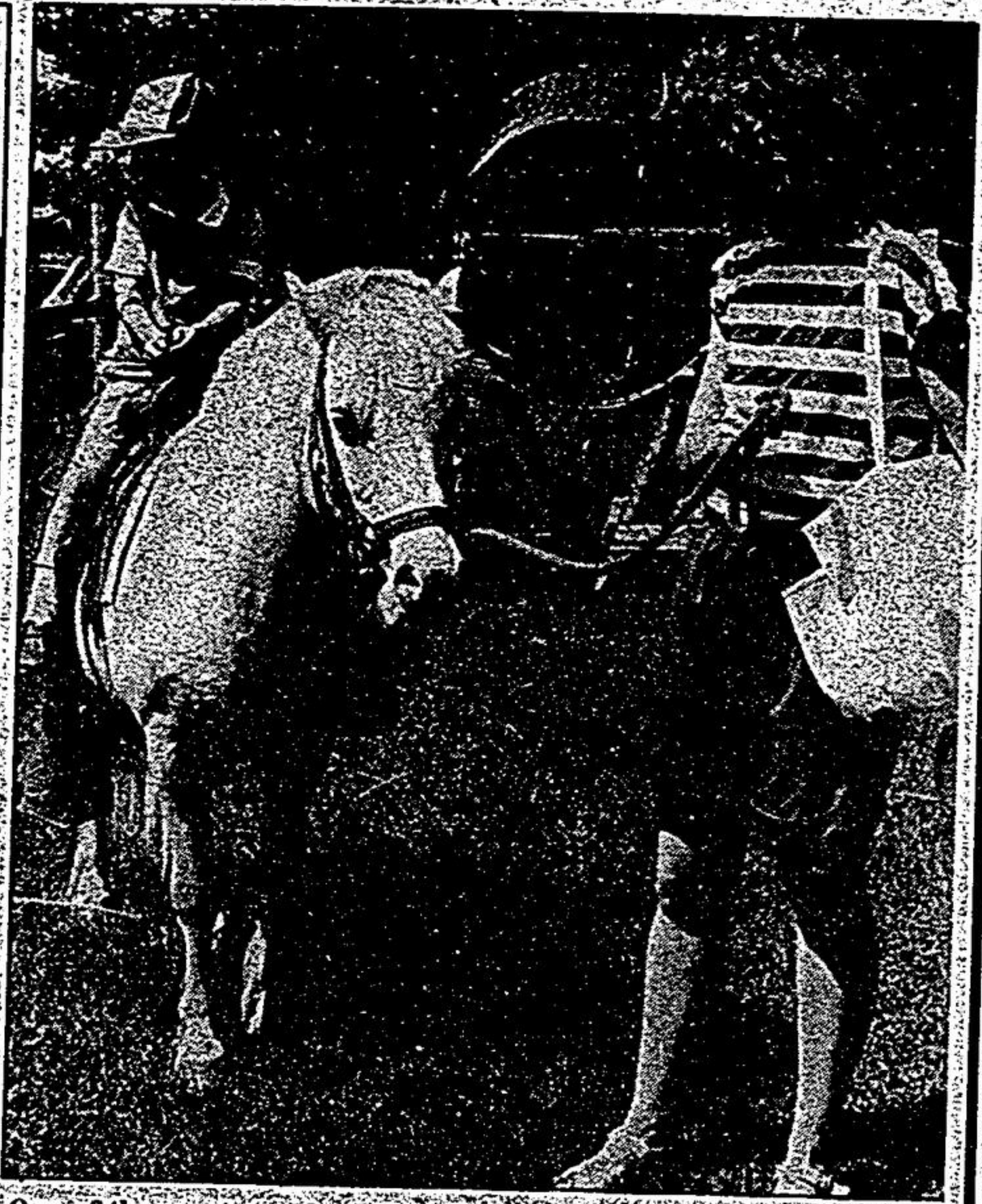
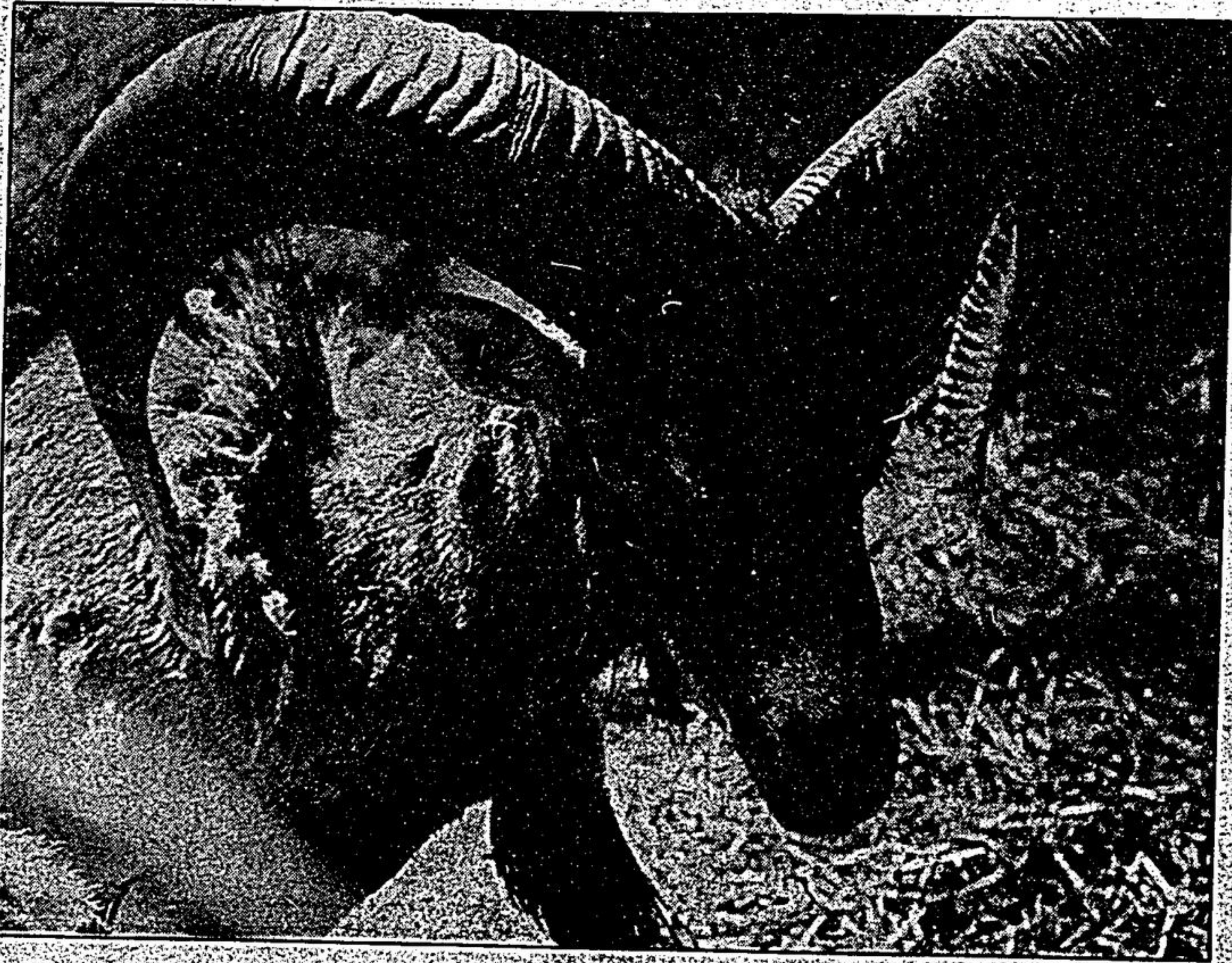




Sidney, a Himalayan llama, goes bobbing for grain (turn) are the proud new parents of a baby named Patches. A llama can cost up to \$10,000, Mr. Purcell says.



One of the most popular attractions at Lionel's Pony Farm is, not surprisingly, the pony rides. Above, Prince takes three-year-old Benjamin Russo for a tour of the farm while mom, Linda, leads. The bizarre beast below is a Scottish Highland Cow. The animal's long reddish-brown hair makes for a warm winter coat on the damp moors of its native Scotland. Despite those awesome horns Scottish Highland Cows are actually quite timid.



Scaling precarious cliffs is what this surly-looking South African Mountain Sheep wishes he were doing. According to Mr. Purcell, these animals have no trouble leaping 10 feet straight up in the air from a standing still position.



Story and photos by Bruce Etheridge

## Exotic beasts reign at local farm

By BRUCE ETHERIDGE

Double takes are not uncommon when people pass by the bizarre beasts roaming around Lionel's Pony Farm on McCowan Rd. just north of 19th Ave.

"We have a lot of cars jam on their brakes to take a second look," says Rita Purcell, who helps her husband Lionel, operate the farm.

Among the Purcells' myriad of animals are long-necked llamas which look like camels without the hump. They have miniature donkeys and goats, spiral-horned South African mountain sheep and dainty Japanese deer.

Wandering the pastures are Scottish Highland cows which appear to be a cross between a woolly mammoth and a Texas longhorn.

Mr. Purcell and his animals have been in great demand on

movie and television sets ever since producers discovered the variety of trained animals he had available.

Mr. Purcell has coached birds and ponies for ballet performances at the O'Keefe Centre. He provided all the livestock and horse-drawn carriages for the recent Anne of Green Gables television series.

Many of his 70 horse-drawn carriages and sleighs — which include a 150-year-old hearse, a gypsy wagon and a circus cart — have found their way into the movies.

Mr. Purcell spent last week working with rats, spiders and Sammy the Crow on the movie set Friday's Curse, a made-for-television horror film.

His interest in exotic animals began when a friend could no longer care for his Chinese pheasants. Mr. Purcell

bought them. "That was 35 years ago," he says. "I've been adding to them ever since."

Over the years Mr. Purcell has expanded his menagerie by trading and exchanging animals with zoos and private collectors. Petting zoos at Thompson Park in Scarborough and at Centre Island are stocked with his animals.

"Teachers started asking 25 years ago if they could bring classes to visit," he says. "We have hundreds of kids come every day during the school year."

What makes Mr. Purcell's farm so special is that children can get much closer to the animals than at, say, the Metropolitan Toronto Zoo. The chance to take a pony ride has a certain amount of appeal as well.

In the last seven years, Mr.

Purcell has gotten into breeding llamas. He has raised half a dozen so far and is expecting another couple of babies before Christmas.

The llamas share more than just a passing resemblance to camels. They also show signs of a similar temperament. For example, camels are notorious spitters. It's a trait not uncommon to llamas.

But Mr. Purcell recalls a llama spitting at people only once. A group of teenagers lounging along the fence started spitting at one of the llamas. Yelps and curses brought Mr. Purcell running.

What the boys didn't realize was that they were dealing with an expert spitter. Llamas can shoot a prodigious stream with precise accuracy.

"When he spit they got a good wad of it back," Mr. Pur-

cell says with a smile. "That put an end to it pretty quick."

Along with his more exotic animals, Mr. Purcell has more than 100 horses and ponies. He has been showing horses for more than 50 years and has won "thousands of ribbons."

He also has various types of rabbits, pigeons, turkeys, geese, ducks and eight different kinds of pheasants. "The taxidermy guys love to get a hold of these pheasants," he says pointing to a bedazzling bird decked out in gold and copper, fluorescent greens and eye-catching blues.

On Sundays, Mr. Purcell opens his farm to the public from noon to 5 p.m. free of charge. Children can go for pony rides or just wander around this unique home for unusual animals.