

Ballantrae farmer keeps up tradition

By BRUCE STAPLEY

Recently, Harry Simpson became a grandfather, again, to a bouncing baby boy.

"Another potato-picker," he nods approvingly. When you come from a family that's been growing potatoes ever since it arrived here from Ireland in the 1850s, you're always pleased at the prospect of a new generation continuing the tradition.

"I guess I'm just picking up where my parents left off," says Harry with reference to his potato operation on Hwy. 48 in the middle of Ballantrae.

"I suppose we've come a long way from the days when my grandparents used to load the potatoes in box cars on the old Grand Trunk Railroad for transport to Toronto."

Today, Harry, along with wife Marlene and son Larry, put in about 70 hours a week keeping up with the challenge of planting, spraying, picking, packaging and transporting potatoes to grocery stores.

The entire operation involves 185 acres. The central location at Ballantrae accommodates the main building and the residence where Harry and his family reside. They own land a mile north of the hamlet and rent an additional 100 acres in the area.

Harry is proud of the fact there are four generations of Simpson's currently living on the Ballantrae acreage. Harry's mother recalls how she used to pick potatoes by hand.

"When I started, we only had a one-row picker pulled by a horse." This has been replaced by a modern two-row harvester pulled by a tractor.

Harry has always attempted to maintain the standard of quality established by his great, great grandparents.

All potatoes are washed, packed in five and ten-pound bags and sold to grocery stores. They set up shop every Saturday at the Stouffville Sales Barn, a day Harry looks forward to because it gives him an opportunity to meet people. After a long, grueling week on the farm, this is a break for him.

Harry hopes to enlarge the existing building that serves as head of the operation. While he claims he'll never get rich, he admits it's satisfying doing something he knows how to do well.

"No, there's no big money in it," he says, "and it's a lot of hard work, but I enjoy it."

He also feels a certain amount of pride when he traces his family's contribution to both the municipality and the province. His great grandfather, Seneca Baker was an MPP at Queen's Park in the 1920's and instrumental in founding Baker Hill Baptist Church where Harry and his family currently attend.

Harry's father, the late Herb Simpson, served on the Whitechurch-Stouffville Council from 1970-1972. Both his dad and grandfather were trustees at Ballantrae Public School.

Harry claims he's been approached time and time again by developers wanting to turn his farm into a subdivision. But he's not anxious to sell. "The land's been in the family name over 100 years," he says, "if you don't have to sell then why sell?"

Harry enjoys his self-sufficient lifestyle. He'd like to see his potato operation span another five generations. In the meantime, he'd be happy to let up just a little bit, perhaps allowing himself and wife Marlene an opportunity to "take off" for the Sunny South this winter.

"We've always fallen a little short when it comes to holidays," he claims. "Maybe this year we will."

So how often does Harry Simpson, a life-long potato farmer eat the product he grows and sells?

"Twice a day, every day," he replies, "I love 'em."

Bus driver fined \$400 in Pleasure Valley accident

Back on Aug. 28, 1986, a southbound gravel truck collided with a school bus near the entrance to Pleasure Valley Park, Brock Road, R.R. 1, Claremont. Twenty-three children were injured.

Last week, truck driver Daniel Henry, 44, of Holland Landing was convicted on a charge of careless driving and fined \$400 in Pickering Provincial Court.

A careless driving charge has also been laid against Ronald Henshaw, 31, driver of the bus. This

case has been put over until early next year. In making the conviction, Judge P.H. Megginson said he believed Henry accelerated his vehicle in an effort to swing around the bus. At the same time, the bus moved forward, blocking the road. The truck's speed was estimated at between 44 and 56 miles per hour.

Both Henry and the truck's owner, Greg Smith of Keswick were acquitted of operating an unsafe vehicle.

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