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End of an era

Brothers love minding their bees wax

KATE GILDERDALE
 Correspondent

After five generations of producing and selling honey, the Byer family is selling its landmark operation north of Major Mackenzie Drive on Hwy. 48, and taking a well-deserved retirement.

While he admits to some reservations about leaving, "I'm looking forward to a change after 50 years in business," admits Erle Byer.

The family first came to southern Ontario from Pennsylvania he says "around 1807. We're not sure, but we think they brought some bees with them, which weren't native to this country."

His great-great grandfather, John Byer, settled across the highway from the present property and kept bees for pleasure. "That's how it started," explains Erle. "He was probably selling some of the honey; he would have been producing too much for his

own use."

John Byer's son, Peter, (Erle's great grandfather) kept his bees in Coldwater, Ont., just south of Georgian Bay. "He farmed here for a bit, but he didn't like it; he was a woodsman; that was the love of his life. I can still remember going up to Coldwater myself as a kid."

It was Erle's grandfather, J.L. Byer, who moved into the honey-producing business full time.

"He was strictly in that business and nothing else," says Erle, adding that his father, Edwin, "worked at it all of his life, starting at 16." J.L. Byer offered Edwin the option of staying on at high school, or moving north of Kingston to look after bees.

"He looked after the bees for a while until he was about 18, and then he moved them back by train to Coldwater. The year my dad was married, my grandfather brought the bees to Binbrook, south of Hamilton," Erle says.

He moved there with his family when he was a baby, "then they sold to someone after a couple of years and the family moved back here."

Edwin's two brothers, Walter and Lloyd, were also involved in the family business. Today, Lloyd and Erle are still producing honey together.

The building they work in "has been here as long as I can remember," muses Erle. "It was moved back for the highway; it's at least 70 years old." He started working there when he was in his 20s.

"I just took over as dad and Walter passed on. It's just Lloyd and me looking after it now." While they have less than 400 colonies of bees, "at one time we had over 1,200."

Production varies from year to year, "depending on the weather and other things." Honey sales have dropped in recent years, he says.

"The farmers have gone, we're getting more urban people

in. We're just too close to the city now," he notes.

At one time, recalls Erle, "people used to buy a whole year's supply at once. Now most of them buy a jar at a time, or go to the store and pick up a jar while they're there."

With himself and Lloyd "both well past retirement age," the decision to sell wasn't difficult.

"We're so busy, we're tied up all the time. It's hard when there's just two of us to do all the work," he says.

Erle estimates they'll be staying in business for another year or so. He has five sons of his own, none of whom wanted to go into the business. He's never tried to persuade them to continue the family tradition. "They can make their living other ways more easily," he points out.

There haven't been any major changes in production methods, states Erle. "We've had some im-

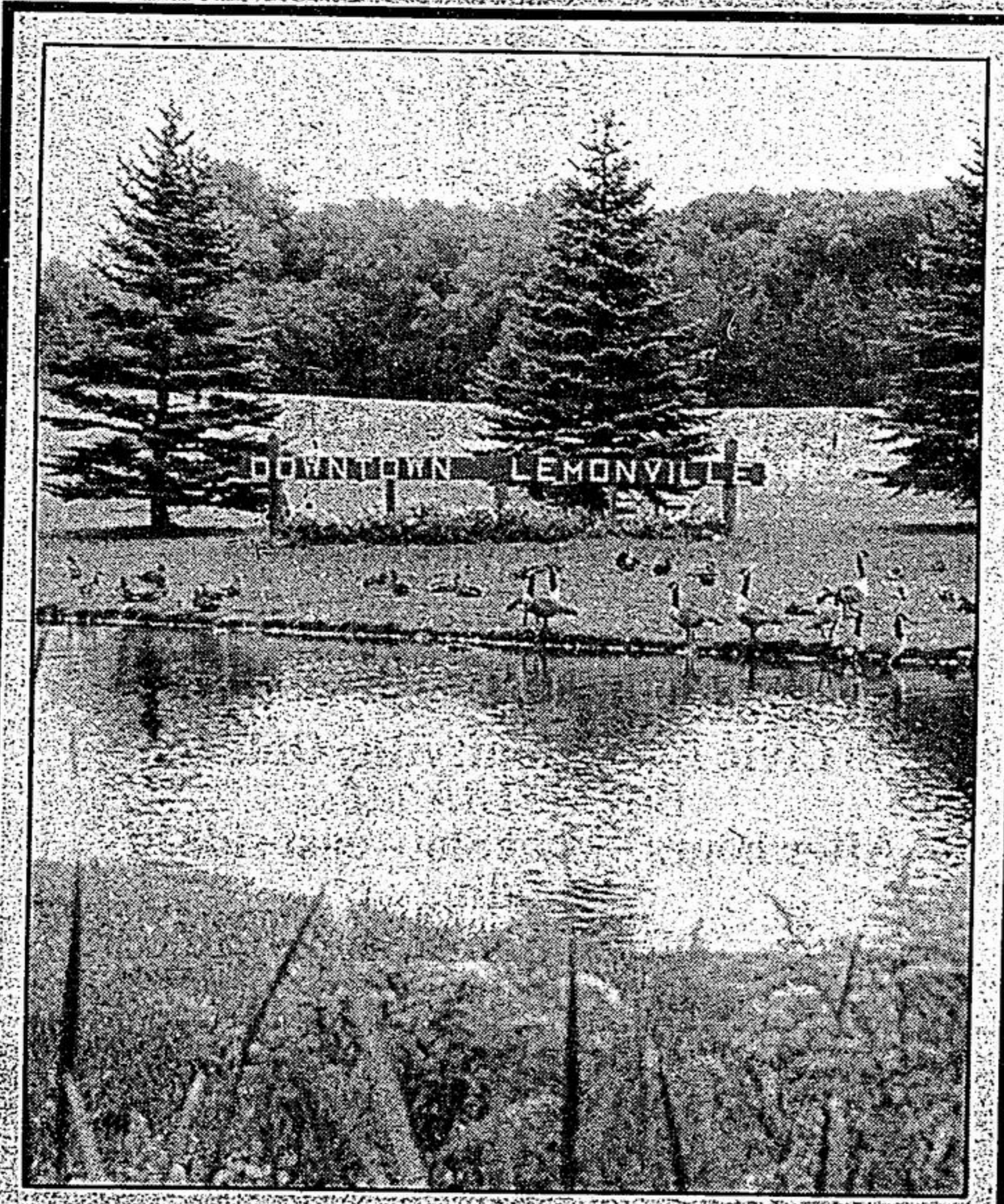
provements, but we're not mechanized very much. We're not big enough to consider putting in some of the expensive new equipment." They do have a machine which removes the wax seal on both sides of the honeycomb and extracts the honey.

"We used to do it by hand, and it was quite a job," he recalls.

He'll miss the business in some ways, he admits, but is looking forward to having some time to himself. In the meantime, he and Lloyd will continue to sell their honey, opening for business as usual on Fridays and Saturdays.

Ironically, this year's honey has been the best they've produced in years, Erle observes.

Fortunately there's still time to sample some before Erle and Lloyd Byer say goodbye to their old home and the familiar honey building, as a historic family tradition comes to a close.



Photo/MIKE HAGARTY

Rush hour?

These Canada Geese seem to be the only creatures taking advantage of culture and recreation in downtown Lemonville. The skyscrapers are cone-bearing and the traffic is quiet; it's just the type of 'urban' centre for the feathered friends.

Lucky draw winners take home lots of loot

A number of Stouffville and area residents were the lucky winners recently of several prizes offered at the annual St. Mark's Fall Fair held Sept. 23 in Stouffville.

Alice Bragagnolo of Richmond Hill was the grand prize winner of a color television. A hand-made quilt went to Robin Ardila of Unionville, while Elaine Kalmach of Stouffville pedaled off on a 12-speed bicycle.

In other prize events, Pauline Green of Stouffville picked up a black forest cake from the bake table, while Stouffville's Heather Lyon won the chocolate spider cake.

And Michelle Martins of Stouffville has the opportunity to eat her way through a seven-pound Hershey Bar; her name

was drawn for the sweet treat.

A number of fun events and sights were offered at the annual fair, which attracted many local residents.

Support for stroke victims

Whitchurch-Stouffville stroke patients now have a place to go for support.

The Speech and Stroke Centre - York-Durham Branch, a community program for stroke survivors with communication disorders, began meeting Tuesday, Oct. 3 at Parkview Village, 70 9th Line S. in Stouffville. Meetings are held from 9:20 to 11:45 a.m. New members or volunteers can call 640-6284 or 852-7702 for information.

Mob mentality rules at baggage claim

As regular readers of this column will know, I've spent much of my spare time this year hanging out at Pearson International, either waiting for arrivals or taking off for foreign parts myself.

Last Tuesday I was there again, meeting my husband's flight from across the pond. As I fought to maintain my vantage point at the well finger-printed glass partition which separated us from them, I found myself observing rituals of crowd behavior which, however pointless, are deeply ingrained in most human beings.

On arrival at the baggage area, people rushed to stake out a place with a grandstand view of the carousel, which was not only innocent of luggage, but totally immobile.

By the time it got moving, the crowd was jostling for position, elbowing each other aside in order to enjoy watching three



kate's corner

kate gilderdale

solitary pieces of baggage embark on a fourth trip round in splendid isolation.

Suddenly, someone was galvanized into frenzied action at the sight of his suitcase, wedged on top of a host of others, just out of his reach.

Scrambling over those who weren't about to give an inch of their territory to an interloper, he managed to gain a precarious purchase on the bag.

This manoeuvre caused a landslide of luggage, causing one to burst open, flinging socks, underwear and souvenirs in all

directions. Over at the hatch where an under-abundance of trolleys were being delivered at regular intervals, mob rule reigned supreme.

Little old ladies and children were almost trampled underfoot every time a fresh supply arrived; successful trolley-catchers emerged flushed with exertion, clinging grimly to their hard-won prize.

I've found from experience that the fight to be first actually begins when the plane has just landed and is taxiing towards the airport.

Inside, the seat belt signs are on and cabin staff are vainly issuing instructions to their charges to sit down and keep their belts fastened. The majority of passengers, however, are on their feet, opening luggage hatches and dragging out flight bags, cameras and duty-free items.

The staff begins to get a little testy, finally resorting to the kind of tone adopted by grade school teachers when addressing the class hell-raiser.

They don't actually say, "We won't let you off if you don't behave," but that's the general drift. The last time I flew in, they announced with barely suppressed glee that there would be an immigration inspection, "so you'll all have to sit down because the inspectors won't come until you do."

Finally, the doors opened. By this time, the vast majority of

passengers were wedged like sardines in the aisles, ignoring the obvious fact that, even if they got to the dreaded red line at passport control before everyone else, they'd still have to wait for their baggage.

As the new crowd rushed to their coveted ringside spot at the luggage carousel, those who had been reunited with their baggage were roaring towards the customs hall, brandishing their trolleys menacingly in an effort to get through first.

Outside, the scene resembled the finishing line at an Olympic event as excited relatives and friends greeted the returning heroes.

If nerves of steel and a desire to win are attributes valued by businesses today, maybe they should consider staking out the luggage area at Pearson International when they're looking for raw new talent.