

# Doctor recalls early days

Wouldn't you think a town that let hockey players bunk down in the hospital and had nothing but mud just west of its main drag would smarten up after awhile?

Well, it did. The only mud around Newmarket today is called potting soil and is sold by the bag. And if there is a hockey player in the York County Hospital, he is either sick or injured — not bushed from two periods of overtime.

Which goes to show how much can be made to happen in 40-odd years if you're a town and you put your mind to it.

But when Gordon Cock showed up on the frosty afternoon of February 1, 1933 — more or less fresh out of medical school — the Memorial Cup playoffs were about to begin and before long, visiting players were quartered in a five-bed ward on the hospital's second floor called the Sunroom. It now is the board room.

"It shows how busy the place was," says Gordon Cock.

At 65, he has been mending ills and delivering babies in the Newmarket area for nearly 40 years except for wartime service in Europe as a 5th Division medical officer.

He is a white-haired, bluff, gregarious man who claims to be on the threshold of semi-retirement from practice. Yet while he chatted and chuckled and reminisced aloud, the phone in the office he keeps in his Botsford Street home rang repeatedly.

In the early and mid-30s, when Newmarket's population hovered around 3,800, its hospital had 25 beds.

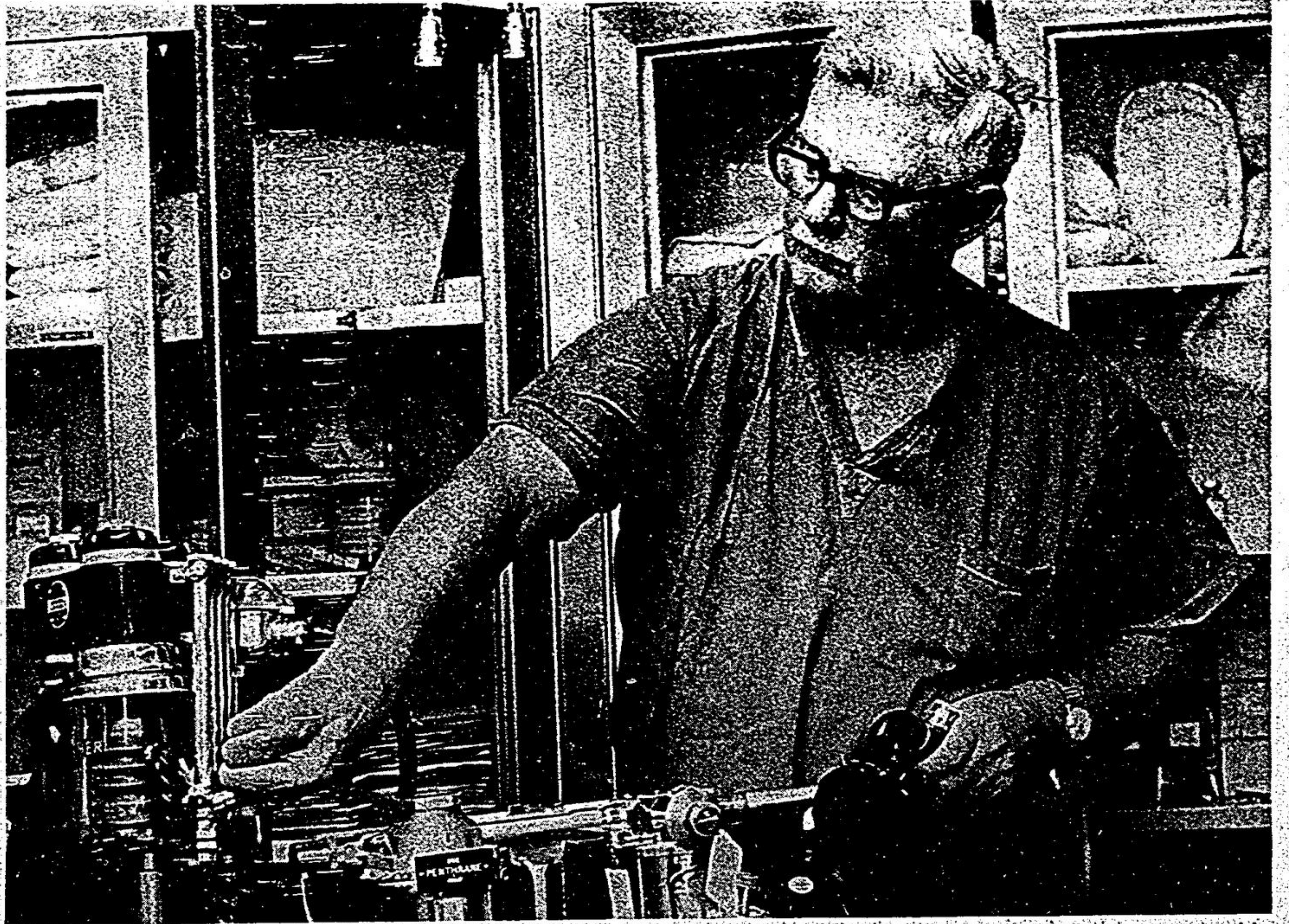
There was an x-ray machine but it was wholly owned by a less than obliging and aging doctor. "He was a cantankerous old fellow and you could never push him," says Cock. "What's more, you could never tell when he was going to be there."

The old doctor employed a girl to take x-rays of patients brought in by other physicians — which was a good thing because none of them knew how to operate it. But the owner of the machine was the only one who could develop and read the film, a task he did only when the spirit moved him.

"There was no staff organization at the hospital at all," says Gordon Cock. "Anybody who wanted to put a patient in there just did and he treated the patient as he saw fit."

Blood transfusions were uncommon. But when one was needed, donors were practically buttonholed on the street if no immediate relative was available. Blood typing was an infant science. The doctor who proposed to administer the serum first had to rummage around for a needle and then boil it to avoid infecting his patient with something worse than he already had.

The paralyzing misery of the Depression lay heavily on the land



and Newmarket's few factories worked only two to three days a week. Wages were about \$12 to \$15 for a six-day week — if there had been a six-day week to work.

Ninety families were on total relief, says Cock, and scores more subsisted on partial relief.

Under the village welfare program, a doctor was paid — on paper, at any rate — 50 cents a month for looking after a welfare patient "and all welfare patients required medical care," says Cock, partly because of dietary deficiencies.

"We had no antibiotics in those days and that meant you had to see a patient with pneumonia maybe twice a day for a week or more."

A welfare maternity case carried a fixed fee of \$3 — again, on paper.

When a doctor submitted his bill to the welfare office for a month's work, "any more than three items were crossed off," Cock says. He never got more than 12½ percent of the accounts he submitted.

The first year of his practice in Newmarket, he grossed \$1,000 and out of that had to pay \$50 a month rent.

"Patients paid me in vegetables, the odd piece of beef or I might get a tire for the car from another," he says. "There was one farmer who showed up one day with a handful of radishes and asked me to take them off his bill. When I went overseas he owed me \$1,500."

When Gordon Cock settled in Newmarket, "there was almost nothing east" of the present hospital site on Davis Drive, then known as Huron Street. To the west of Main Street, the village quickly petered out into the farmlands along Yonge Street. The bush began a half-mile from Main Street and the road to Orangeville wasn't much more than a dirt track.

In fact the roads were so bad in winter, says Cock, that he often made better time by taking to the frozen fields in his car. When a Newmarket physician — Cock was the fifth when he arrived in 1933 — headed out of town to deliver a baby on a farm he

had to count on being gone for a full day and perhaps longer.

York County Hospital, meanwhile, was charging \$5 a day for a private room and \$3 for a bed in a ward.

"But the hospital never collected their bills either and I don't know how they made out," he says. "It always seemed people, sympathetic citizens, managed to kick through with something when it was most needed."

The hospital, despite the fact that it had only 25 beds, was never full and it never closed its doors. Doctors could take patients in and put them to bed whenever they wanted to and the only requirement was that they possessed a medical degree.

"But you couldn't really go on forever like that because a hospital has to have some remote idea of how many patients it's serving," Cock says. "You have got to have some kind of control over what's going on inside the place."

The Newmarket doctors did appendectomies, gall bladder removal and other minor to medium-risk surgery but the major cases were referred to specialists in Toronto who sometimes drove to Newmarket and performed operations there.

"We were a little diffident about turning gall bladders and other relatively minor cases over to an outside doctor because we'd never see the patient again," Cock chuckles.

"After all," he says, "if we sent a patient to a Toronto doctor for a gall bladder removal, the fellow would be bound to say to himself, well, if this man can handle the gall bladder he can handle the rest of it, too."

Cock once was summoned to a farmhouse where, he was told by an anguished relative on the phone, the farmer had died.

When the physician got there, he found the farmer stretched out on a living room sofa — apparently peaceful in death — and the distraught family indulging its grief in the backyard.

Cock examined the patient, got neither pulse nor heartbeat, thrust his

head out the back door to murmur his condolences and returned to the parlor where it occurred to him that he had never tried to locate a heart with a hypodermic needle.

He dug a syringe out of his bag and stuck the unsterilized needle into the victim's chest. He pulled the plunger slowly, saw the syringe begin to fill with dark red blood and concluded that he had been successful.

Cock went to the kitchen, washed off the needle in the sink and returned to the parlor to pack up. Then he heard a noise "and there was nobody in that room except him and me".

Suddenly excited, he started pumping the farmer's chest up and down. The man began to breathe.

The farmer regained consciousness shortly afterward and went on to recover completely. He suffered no apparent brain damage from the lack of oxygen although, says Cock, "it was at least 10 minutes and perhaps longer from the time I got the call until I started working on him. Nobody would believe that story but it happened".

Today, years later, Gordon Cock says "I don't like the drama in medicine any more". Why?

"Part of it is my own ignorance as a doctor. Things have become so sophisticated. And in this day and age when they can sue you for everything you do, it's perhaps just as well to turn the job over to someone else."

Again, he says, "there is so much politics in medicine now". He dislikes working within medicare — "I think they've got us by the throat" — although he concedes readily that it has benefitted the public.

With that view of the present, memories of the past are all the more important to Gordon Cock. The warmest ones?

"Obstetrics is the most satisfying thing in medicine," he says. "There is nothing more satisfying than seeing a happy mother with a new baby."

And Gordon Cock ought to know. He has delivered more than 40 grandchildren of the "babies" he delivered when he first came to Newmarket.

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