



FOCUS ON CROSBY

(top left) A picture from an early postcard. At the bottom it reads: "Erected by G. Stout 1818, Crosby, Ont. (bottom left) An oil painting of Crosby Public School by Ottawa artist, Patrick Cowley-Brown. Owned by Harold & Etta Proud. (right) Crosby United Church, 1967.

Last month we featured Cheney's Corners, the village that never was. This month we salute Crosby, the village that almost isn't any more. At one time Crosby was a centre of activity. It had a grist mill, blacksmith shop, church & hall, 2 general stores, barber shop, shoe repair shop, garage, butcher shop, post office, railroad station, service station & lunch room & cheese factory. And what do we have today? A general store, 2 service stations, a car dealership, Department of Highways sheds, a farm supply dealer, and a hall full of china painters.

When the Brockville-Westport railway was built, this community really flourished. There was one difficulty, however. The railway station was called "Crosby" (meaning near the crossroads) Station, and the Post Office, "Singleton's Corners". Confusion developed. W.T. Singleton began a petition for the name of the station and village to be Singleton's Corners. However, he was outnumbered by a petition for it to be called Crosby started by Charles Leggett. The latter won out.

The following interview with Mrs. Blake Merriman gives us a good impression of Crosby's history.

Last April Mrs. Blake Merriman, long a resident of Crosby, celebrated her 90th birthday and 200 well-wishers crowded into Forfar Community Hall to offer their congratulations. Older people are sometimes said to be lonely because they have outlived their friends. Mrs. Merriman has no such cause for complaint.

Mrs. Merriman's recollections of Crosby go back to September, 1917. Her brother, Will Freeman, was the station agent at Crosby and that summer, with the First World War on, the school board had been unable to find a teacher. Miss Millicent Freeman, after 10 years of teaching, had plans for a year off - until the trustees persuaded her she was needed in Crosby at an annual salary of \$550.00.

That fall the new school mistress boarded with Mr. & Mrs. George Church. The Churches, with daughter Grace, lived in the same house as Mrs. Winnifred Welch now does, and they had other boarders besides Will Freeman & his sister. There was Elma Welch, later Mrs. James Gillespie, and Lucy Brown (maiden name of Mrs. Hugh Hull).

The Church family made an important contribution to the community. Mrs. Church ran a store (it burned in 1922) on the corner where Harold Proud has his service station. George Church was a blacksmith and his forge was kept busy shoeing farm horses and mending farm machinery. His shop occupied the corner across from his wife's store. Later the family moved to the white house beside the shop.

Singleton's General Store dominated a third corner, and its opposite number was Harrinton's Butcher Shop. "The Corners", Crosby was often called, as if it was the crossroads of the world. It looked the part on Saturday night when farmers' rigs were tied to every post, and farm families filled the little square. Inside the stores, you could hardly move.

Often it was the women who did the week's trading. They'd leave

babies on the counter while they gathered up the mail and carried out the bags of store-bought goods. The men sat outside on the steps, yarning about the crops.

With the school, the railway station, the church, the post office, the cheese factory, the stores and the smithy, it was a busy centre. Some of the buildings remain, but all of the services are gone, except the Singleton store, now owned and operated by Frank and Norma Bauer. Mrs. Bauer is a niece of Mrs. Merriman.

As it happened, the 4 young people who roomed at Church's that fall never went very far away. Will Freeman married Elva Moore in January, 1919 and settled in Delta. Millicent was invited to dine at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Norman Merriman and met their elder son, Blake. He had bought the old Preston place beside his father's farm, and there, halfway between Crosby and Forfar, they took up residence after an Easter wedding. Soon Lucy Brown and Elma Welch followed their romantic example.

Not everybody stayed. Some of the people Mrs. Merriman remembers as being there then are Dowsetts and Leggetts, Knowltons and Toppings, Cannons and Church, and Mustards and Prouds, Merrimans and Stouts, Bakers and Barkers, McCanns and DeWolfes, Singletons, Whalens, Harringtons, Pynes and Kerrs. Many of the names are still familiar to the current Crosby resident.

"What was your house like?", we asked Mrs. Merriman. "It seemed beautiful to me as a bride", she answered. "Of course we didn't have electricity or