

FOCUS ON Plum Hollow

PLUM HOLLOW

Plum Hollow is a beautiful fertile valley surrounded by hills covered with sugar bushes. Both hillsides are very picturesque in the autumn as the sugar maples turn to red and orange foliage. It actually comprises Lots 1 to 10 in the Ninth and Tenth Concessions of Bastard Township.

Abel Stevens, who eventually founded Delta, first settled in Plum Hollow when he was given a land grant from the Governor. He soon gave this land to one of his old Vermont neighbours. It is said that he persuaded his sons to give up their land as they cleared it to other settlers from Vermont.

By the late eighteen hundreds Plum Hollow had grown to include two cheese factories - one built by Harvey Kilborn, burned down in 1917; a store; a blacksmith shop; a church; three schools and two cemeteries.

In time, the farmers left the Concession Road and built their farm buildings along the crest of the hill where most of the work land was. So now most of the Concession Road is closed and the main road is a forced road.

Plum Hollow is made up of three school sections - Plum Hollow, Lilliville and Sheldons. Lilliville is now used as a house - Plum Hollow school burned in the 1960's and Sheldons is used as a Community Centre. Our children are bussed away to larger centres.

The blacksmith shop was turned into a garage and is now closed. The store is now used as a home for the cheese maker and his wife. So all we have left is our cheese factory and two cemeteries.

Maple syrup from surrounding sugar bushes has been shipped all over the world and is known for its special quality.

POLITICS

Plum Hollow has always been very interested in municipal affairs. It has sent at least five Reeves to Delta to head the local municipal council - Thomas Percival, W.B. Newsome, Frank Tackaberry, Johial Newsome and Walter B. Newsome.

PLUM HOLLOW CHURCH

Most of the first settlers were Baptist including Elder Nichols and Abel Stevens, who was ordained a Baptist minister in 1804 at Plum Hollow.

A Mr. Ebberson, who was a minister at Stevenstown, held services and organized a church here in 1828. A stone church was built on top of the hill overlooking the valley beside the school house.

The church was the centre of the community for years. It celebrated its Centennial in 1928, but, as new families moved in and the older families moved away, the congregation dwindled. They met for awhile in their homes but in the middle 1930's merged with Athens Church.

The Women's Mission Circle was very active and held a Church social each year which attracted a very large crowd. The church is in very bad repair and its ruins can still be seen on the hill.



Left to right: Jim Knapp, Kenneth Mather, Ronald Jackson, York Wills, Doris Palmer, Clair Knapp. Picture loaned by Mrs. Ford Wills of 544 College Street, Kingston.

THE WITCH OF PLUM HOLLOW

Our most famous personage has to be "The Witch of Plum Hollow", who was more commonly known as Mother Barnes. Her real name was Jane Elizabeth Martin, a seventh daughter of a seventh daughter. She was born in Cork County in Northern Ireland on November 5, 1800 of wealthy parents.

Her father, who was a Colonel in the army, arranged for her marriage to a wealthy Colonel friend. On the eve of the wedding, she eloped with an army sergeant, Robert Joseph Harrison, to America. So, at twenty years old, her parents disowned her for marrying beneath her station and she never saw them again.

At the age of twenty-seven, she became a widow with a young son. After three or four years, she married David Barnes, a shoemaker from Connecticut and this marriage produced nine children - six boys and three girls. Two sons - Thomas and John - died at an early age.

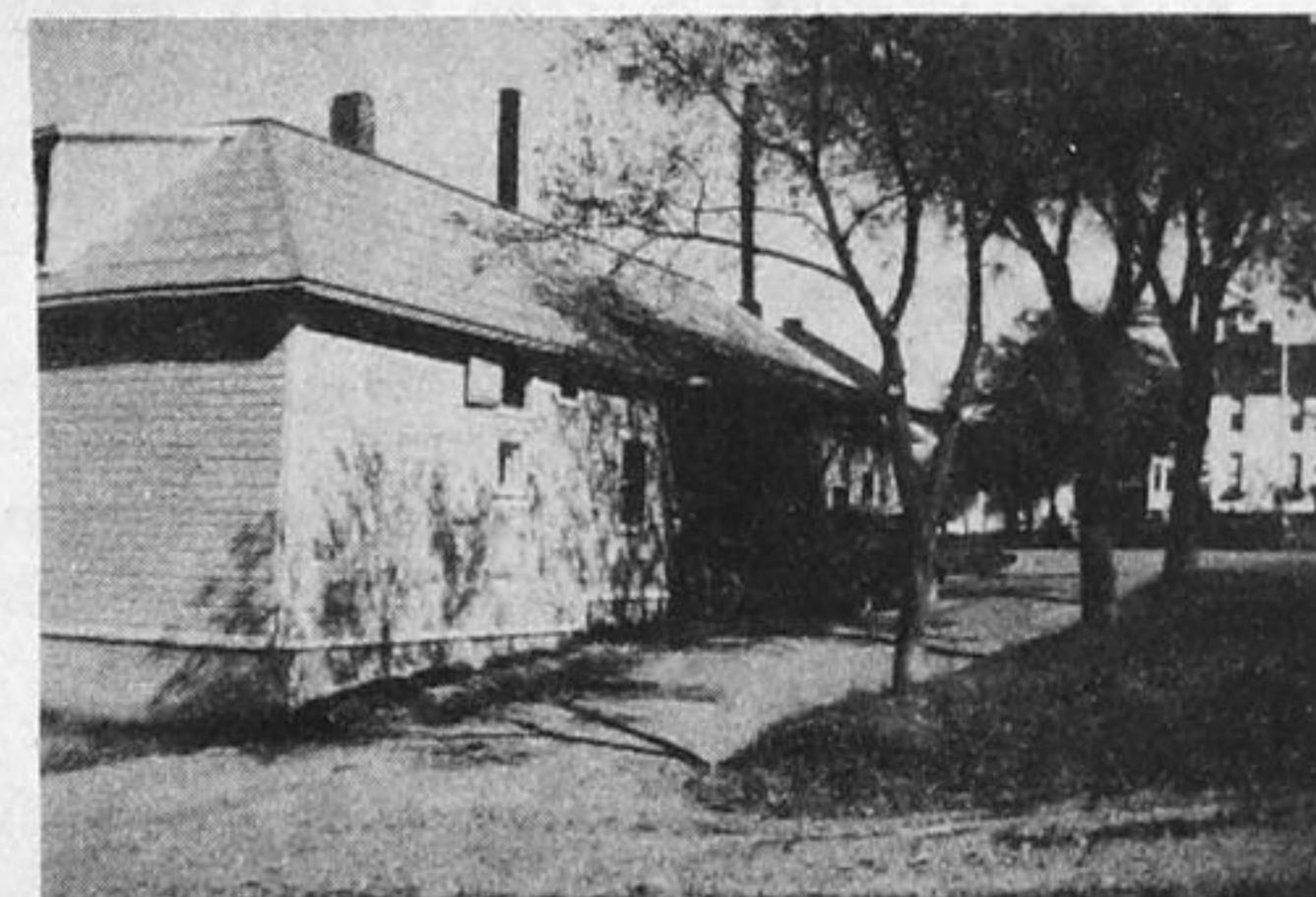
The Barnes moved to this area in 1843. While some of the children were still living at home, David Barnes moved to Smiths Falls to live with his son Sam who was a blacksmith by trade. Sam had ten children of his own.

To support her family Mother Barnes turned to telling fortunes. This was something for which she was highly gifted, but up to this time she had never taken payment.

So successful was she that she soon became famous. She moved to a small house near Lake Elvida which is still standing, but badly in need of repair. Here she told hundreds of fortunes - the future and where to find lost articles. People came from all over Canada and the United States. One of her most famous cases concerned a man called Morgan Duxtater who disappeared in Charleston Lake. She directed the searchers to the spot where his murdered body was buried and there were clues to his assassins who were tried and convicted.

She died on February 10, 1891 and left 68 direct living descendants - 7 children, 47 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren.

Mother Barnes is buried in Sheldon Cemetery and her grave is covered with cement to keep vandals out. In 1976 Claude Flood put up a stone at the front of the cemetery in memory of Mother Barnes.



PLUM HOLLOW CHEESE FACTORY

The cheese factory is our only industry besides farming. Originally built on this site in 1866 - burned and rebuilt in 1886 - again burned and rebuilt by W.B. Newsome.

In 1924 Claude and Ella Flood came to make cheese and then bought the factory the next year. The Floods lived over W.B. Newsome's store until 1941, when they built a new house beside the factory where Claude still lives. (Ella died in 1973.)

Claude sold out to United Dairy and Poultry Co-op in 1960. He was kept on as manager and in 1967 the farmers formed their own Co-op and bought it. The committee has a very difficult time keeping the factory open due to Ontario Marketing Board quotas.

They have opened up a shop to sell directly to the public. It is very successful and Plum Hollow cheese is very popular. The cheesemakers, Louis and Francis Keller manage the store very capably with the help of local girls.

Now, instead of a steady stream of horses and carts bringing their milk to the factory in the early morning, as it was years ago, there is a steady stream of cars to purchase cheese and curd in the afternoon.

Although Claude is supposed to be retired, he can still be found busy doing things and helping out around the factory.

Our thanks to Phyllis Tackaberry for putting together the history of Plum Hollow.