

HEARD STORIES OF BEARS, BUT ONLY SAW HERD OF DEER ONCE

Mrs. Maria McDowell, Nonagenarian resident of Tillsonburg, recalls early days of Bayham Township, near Richmond.

by A.S. Paragus
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The stories of aged pioneers reveal the fact that land nearer the lake was settled much earlier than land as far back as Dereham and Dorchester. The story of the octogenarian pioneer of either of the townships named will be full of bears, wolves, Indians, deer and virgin forest. On the other hand the story of Mrs. Maria McDowell, who is ninety, and was born as far south as near Richmond, says her father's land was pretty well cleared up at her first memory.

She had but one recollection of seeing deer. On the south end of her father's place, near the little Otter she remembers a band of them appearing suddenly before her childish eyes. They were no sooner there than gone. It was like a flash.

Tales of bears haunting the deep gullies about the Otter she heard in plenty. And her father, David Hatch of Maple Grove, was followed, coming along a gully from his father's, by a bear. But they were getting scarce by little Maria's time. She ran between Granddaddy's and her home quite fearlessly.

But all the buildings and building sites of Mrs. McDowell's first memories have disappeared so long ago that average inhabitants of the district do not dream they ever existed. Even the "new" houses erected in this old lady's "teens" to replace the settler's shacks have themselves either vanished, are in ruins, or at least are considered ancient. So flies time even in our young country.

"When I first used to go down to Granddaddy Hatch's to play, says Mrs. McDowell, "their cabin was just above the Little Otter flats" (mentioning a spot, where within the memory of present citizens, only a low tottering post for a time existed to witness former habitation). "The cabin had a lovely wide platform running the length of the house in front. You could do any kind of work you wanted there, outside. And the spring was delightfully handy to get to and from. Aunt Lucy and Aunt Margaret were girls at home when I remember the place."

Incidentally the grandsons of these long-departed pioneer maidens are now the "fathers" of the district.

WAS QUITE A MANSION

"I played also," goes on Mrs. McDowell, "at my other grandparents; Granddaddy Bowes' house was on the north-east corner of the farm where I have been staying until recently with my son Russell. To us children it was quite a mansion. Granddaddy had money when he came in and settled. So he built a large two-storeyed house with many windows and commodious living-room, dining-room, and kitchen. The house had three fireplaces and was furnished complete from top to bottom."

"There was an Aunt there who used to fix me up a doll to play with. She let me draw her baby in a sleigh all about the farm one happy winter's afternoon. When I stayed overnight I slept with grandmother in the nice east bedroom upstairs. I would have thought it a little heaven on earth to have been allowed to live all the time in that pleasant place."

"At home our cabin was back on father's farm near a good spring. There may be an apple tree or so left. Father had the loveliest melon patch one year back there. Literally hundreds of melons."

"One day when I was three years old I was playing the game of carrying water from the spring in my little pail to fill mother's big pail. Thomas, the baby younger than I, tottled after me. And fell in the spring."

"I came running to the house crying as hard as I could: 'Toddy fell in 'ping.' They couldn't understand my baby gibberish but the hired man rushed on general inference to the spring and pulled Thomas out just in time."

HAS SEEN LOVELY TIMES

"There were ten of us children. When father built our new house - the one everybody thinks of as old now - he made five bedrooms. And then some of the boys had to sleep in a bunk turned down from the kitchen wall, while I remember occupying a shakedown in the loft when there was company."

"That old place has seen some lively times I can tell you. Pioneer children certainly played, if they didn't have toys. In the wintertime it was sleigh ride down hill. In summer our favourite game was hide-and-seek. A spot at the end of the corncrib was always 'Home' for this game. And every hole and corner of the big old yard was known to us children like a map."

"When my father and my mother would go away, we girls used to take mother's baby clothes and imrovisе dolls - all the dolls we ever had - for the day, carefully replacing all borrowed materials before our parents got back."

"Another 'stolen' game was to crawl into one of the bedrooms through a window-pane hole; perform the daring sacrilege of standing on the footboard of the bed, and letting ourselves fall - pretending we were falling trees."

"Our large family was all needed on the farm those days. 'Manpower' was in high demand. Before the boys got grown, father came to me one summer, 'Maria' said he, 'I'll give you twenty-five cents a day if you'll get in the harvest this year.' So I spent the summer raking and binding grain behind the men cutting with their cradles; or raking or loading up for the barns."

"But didn't I get tired! We'd have supper at five o'clock. Then out to the fields again as long as we could see. After that, I'd wash my heated face and go straight to bed. To sleep like a log! One night I was so dead tired I fell asleep with my mouth full of pins. And from between my lips those pins were still protuding when I woke up in the morning!"

HER FIRST CANDY DOLL

" I think my father was one of the kindest and most indulgent parents that ever lived. And a good provider. We always had an abundance of good things to eat. He'd buy a whole box of raisins at a time for us - a treat. And one Christmas, I think it was, he brought us all home a candy doll a piece. I thought mine so wonderful I wouldn't eat it for a long while. And I can remember father taking us all down to Vienna (then the biggest town around) to show us the wild animals in the circus."

"Father used to walk to London and buy mother and us girls a dress all round, packing the goods home on his back. He was handy at anything you could mention. If mother was sick he would come in off the land and cut a pair of overalls at a moment's notice, or turn off any kind of cooking needed; I've seen him make a dozen mince pies after supper - we youngsters helping to cut the fruit and meat for the mince. And father's pies were just grand. We never had anything but maple sugar to put in them, till I was eighteen years old."

"Father was a famous walker. He used to carry a sack of flour home from St. Williams on his back. When he was a young man he walked from home, first to Hamilton and then on to Toronto, following a blazed trail through the forest. He had to go to get the deeds for his own and his father's land."

"You hear a lot about pioneer hospitality, but it didn't extend to the towns, even at that early date. After his long trek, father wasn't given time to rest in either of these towns. Directly his business was attended to, he felt he was expected to leave the offices at once. The inns in those days were often very rough places to stop in if you had anything valuable on your person. So father started back home again, the wild animals howling about him through the forest as he went."

"And father was a 'father' to the neighbourhood as well as his home. He was the one who built the church at Maple Grove. And he was class leader in it for forty years. Those were the days of far-reaching circuits, I recollect very well going to Aylmer for quarterly meeting. We went on Saturday night, and stayed over with friends for the service next day."

Outside of nine years spent with her husband in Charlotteville, Mrs. McDowell has lived her long life in the vicinity of Straffordville, Eden or Richmond. At present she is with her daughter, Mrs. Neil Ketchabaw, Tillsonburg.

She was married, when quite young, to Albert McDowell, who was born in Whitby, but moved at seven with his father's family to Dereham. Mr. McDowell, senior, was a well-known pioneer preacher. He used to go from Dereham down to Hamilton to preach. It was through his son's coming with the father on a preaching trip to Maple Grove that the girl Maria met her future husband.

Mrs. McDowell has children living. Her husband has been dead for some years. The children are: William, and Mrs. Alex McKie and Walter, all of Eden; Russell, of Richmond; Maitland, of Five-points, near Tillsonburg, and Mrs. Neil Ketchabaw, of Tillsonburg. There are fifteen grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.



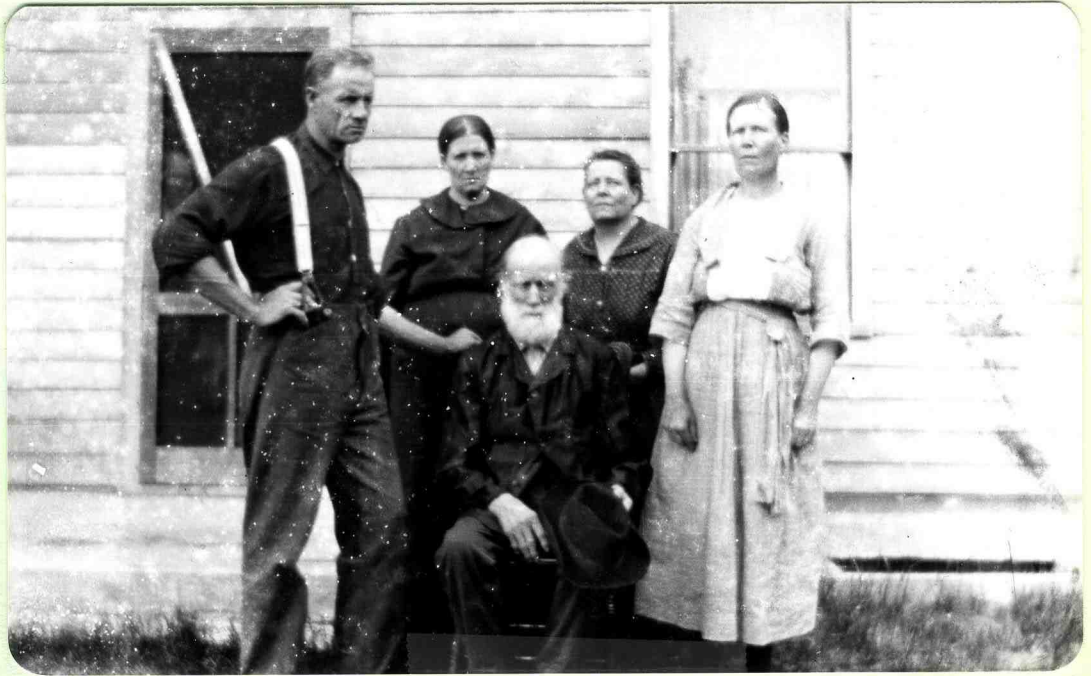
CATHARINE
MCDOWELL

SILAS +
ALICE BURWELL

WESLEY
KENNEDY



ROBERT ADAMS JESSIE KATE IDA ARTHUR
EZRA ADAMS ANNA



ART EZRA JESSIE KATE ANNA
ADAMS

CAIRN BUILT BY WALTER
MCDOWELL



MCDOWELL HOUSE

Although I joined the other beasts on earth, three years before, the first thing I remember of seeing was a drag saw-cutting wood. It was a machine powered by horses, and was called a horse-power. It was wintertime and my mother had taken me on the hand sleigh to the woods, so that I could see this wonderful machine cut wood. The Horse Power, with the drag saw; wood was a necessity at that time, as it was the only means of heat for cooking food and warming houses.

Sticks of pitch-pine (a pine abounding in resinous matter) were used for lighting, also kerosene oil lamps and lanterns were used. Sulphur matches were used for lighting fires and lamps. Tallow candles were also used for lighting.

As I grew older, I began to realize that there were many wonderful things to know about. I began to attend school, when I was seven, at Eden. Children grew into a useful existence quickly in those times, as they did not let going to school stop their learning. As it often occurs; the longer a person goes to school, the less they know.

It was recorded that my grandfather built his log house when he was eight years old. Carried a bag of wheat from three miles south west of Eden, to the Backus mill at Port Rowan, to get it ground into flour when he was nine years old. When he was ten years old, he walked to Toronto, through the woods, to get the Patent for his farm. He got the Deed for his land all right but the Registrar did not even ask him to sit down after he had walked over a hundred miles. My grandfather thought that was a very unsocial way to use a new settler.

We had good roads, good mail service and good communication. There was a plank road from the railroad at Ingersoll to Port Burwell, a distance of approximately thirty-three miles. There was daily mail delivery at the following post offices along the route;- Ingersoll, Salford, Mount Elgin, Ostrander, Tillsonburg, Acacia, Eden, Straffordville, Griffins Corners, Vienna and Port Burwell. The stage coach also carried passengers. This service was fast and sure of being on time, as the driver was supposed to have one shot of whiskey at every stop.

There was telegraph communication with an operator on duty at all times at the towns and villages. The main roads were built and repaired by private enterprise and toll gates were built at intervals along the road where toll was collected from persons using the road for travel.

The Township or country roads were built and financed by the Townships in which they were located and each land owner had to do road work each year, probably three or four days; - (of one man and a team of horses) supervised by a road boss who was appointed by the Township Council, thus the roads were kept in a passable condition, with very little expense. The machinery for building and repairing roads were powered by men and horses. The machinery and tools used were an axe, shovel, slush scraper and a split log drag.

When I had grown big and strong enough to do a man's work, my first job was working on a farm. I received eight dollars and my board per month. Other times I worked for five cents an hour. My neighbour worked in a saw mill for seventy-five cents a day. (He had a wife and two daughters to clothe and feed) and also boarded himself and became the most wealthy person in our district). (Walter worked with Walter Stensell building the Milt Inman house across from the cemetery.)

When I was sixteen years old, I got a job at the Maple Leaf Harvest Tool Co. shop at Tillsonburg, Ontario. One night as the men had gathered at the door waiting for the whistle to blow, I heard one man say to another one "I made eleven dollars (piece work) this week." I knew it was a lie, for no one ever made eleven dollars in a week, (then) and to this day, I still think he was telling a lie as I had not heard of anyone getting that amount of money in one week at that time. I hired my board there in town for one dollar and a half per week.



MRT + MRS ALEC (+ ALICE) MCKIE
CATHARINE McDOWELL Guy MCKIE



MC DOWELL HOUSE
CATHARINE



EMMELINE WILSON ANNA McDOWELL MAUDE WILSON
CATHARINE



EXAMPLE OF STONE FOUNDATION
FOR BARN



WALTER LILLY MATLAND HILDA JESSIE RUSSELL ANNA ARNOLD
CATHARINE CHARLES JESSIE
(AT THE ROLOSON HOUSE)



EXAMPLE OF STONE FOUNDATION
FOR BARN

Eighteen and Eighty-six versus Nineteen sixty-five

At the hotels a person could buy six bootlegs of beer for twenty-five cents; the barbers charged ten cents for a hair cut and fifteen cents for a shave and became the most prosperous persons in the neighbourhood.

I suppose I should state my status in my family and the status of my family in the neighbourhood. I was the youngest of a family of seven and of the least value. My father was the greatest and smartest man I ever knew. He could break a wild colt or lick any man, any time of the day or night. His father was a Scot that moved from Scotland to Northern Ireland, (County Down) then emigrated to Canada and settled at Whitby, Ontario, then moved by ox-team to Delmer, Ontario. He was a Methodist preacher and my father used to drive with a horse and buggy taking him around to the churches. At the Maple Grove church he met my mother, the daughter of the head of an old English family and they were soon married, thus joining together two honest and thriving families and eventually acquired four sons and three daughters.

My mother used to sing from morning until night as she and her daughters took care of the house work of a pioneer family, while my father and his sons cut and cleared, and stumped and fenced three farms between Eden and west to the Otter Creek.

In those times the people were honest, kind and sociable, excepting one (chicken thief). A neighbourhood always had one chicken thief who would fit evenly into the curriculum of the neighbourhood. The thief would pray for the Lord to send him a chicken, but if the chicken did not come, which it never did, then, he would change his prayer and pray for the Lord to send him to get the chicken and his prayers would be answered that very night. But one night our thief went after the chicken but did not get it.

One of our neighbours wanted to go away for the weekend, and so he asked a villager to do his chores while he was away. The only thing he said I warn you that I have a vicious dog. I bought him to keep the chicken thief away. I have him tied up at the dog house where he can also watch the chicken house. When the villager went that night to do the chores, he found the dog vicious all right and the dog made a speciality of keeping him away from the dog house. So, he took a look into the dog house, using his oil lantern and found the chicken thief sitting in the back corner of the dog house.

The thief had a bag with him, already to fill with chickens. The thief was getting a pension from the Township because he had a bad leg, and was crippled but when the villager flushed him out, he ran away like a deer.

The air was fresh and clean and mildly pungent with the scent of pine and the people enjoyed living, being strong and healthy as there were no hospitals and the air was not fouled up by internal combustion engines, there being no automobiles.

The safety bicycles were just being invented. They were called safety bicycles because it was possible to ride down hill on them. The high wheeled bicycles could not be ridden down hill as the rider would then fall forward. These safety bicycles were first used for coasting down hill. If a person fell off of a bicycle and broke a leg, or became otherwise injured or sick, they could get a doctor to come within an hour, as there were doctors in those times. Also, there were undertakers. A person could get a doctor for two dollars and an undertaker for ten dollars, take your choice. The grave digger would charge two dollars.

My father saved a man's life. The man got an artery in his neck cut off by accident, at a barn raising. My father put his thumb in the hole in the man's neck and held the blood back until the doctor came, in approximately forty-five minutes. As I said before, you could get a doctor in those days. I had a doctor drive out thirty miles to see me, which was a very ordinary trip, and was done a lot quicker than a doctor would do it in 1967. The motive power was a team of horses with a man to drive them. The sixty mile trip was made in the middle of the night and the total cost for a doctor, drive and medicine was two dollars.