Lot 15, Con 8 Harvey Coleman's Farm

From things told me by my husband and also by his father, I can go back in time to a few years before the turn of the century.

The owner before 1900 was David Moore but his name is all I knowabout him. My father-in-law,George Coleman,who was the eldest in his family of 10 children,left Ireland withxx his parents and the family in 1886 when he was 13 years of age. The family first settled in the Mt.Vernon district but shortly before 1900 the father of the family bought the farm next on the east to Lot 15,Concession 8,and Geirge,who was about to be married to Sarah Teskey,bought the Moore farm next to his father -Lot 15.

They were married in April 1900 and their first home was west of the present barn,in the orchard. About 1908 this little cottage was moved out to the front of the father's farm,where it still stands today,The larger frame house,in which we later lived,was moved from east of Mt. Vernon and was placed nearer the road and directly north of the barn, where it stands today.It was moved by at least two steam engines by Harvey Lyons and his workmen.

The first year that George Coleman paid taxes,the whole amount was $25 for the year on the hundred acres. Education,roads,etc.were not such a drain on the public purse those days.Roads were maintained by the farmers who lived on them.The township council either received applications from farmers wanting the job,orappointed someone to do a certain piece of road maintenance for a year or longer if they wished. George Coleman,at one time,was responsible for the road from Yorke School corner to the next corner west--the Quarter Road. Highway 73 was then known as the Centre Road.

The only equipment the township provided was a small horse drawn scraper and the farmer supplied the horse power.In those days the roads were not gravelled so it was mud to the hubs in the wet seasons.Around 1920 gravel was drawn by horses and wagons from the county pit east of Avon and the roads were built up. Maintenance was still done each few miles by a different farmer but he had a bigger grader with a blade, and it was still pulled by a team or perhaps three horses.This road worker would send in his bill each month to the council meeting,stating the number of hours he and his team had put in on the roads that month. He would receive his pay by cheque from the township treasurer.Roads were maintained only from Spring to late Fall. In winter,horse drawn bobsleighs and cutters travelled the snow covered roads and there was no such thing as snow removal. Rhose who had cars put them up on blocks in their garages and didn't expect to drive them until spring.

The first car the Coleman's owned was a 1918 Ford touring model. The roads were not yet gravelled so if they were away and it began to rain,there was a big rush to get home before the mud road,that was Concession 8, became impassable.

Threshing and silo-filling bees were fun but lots of work too.All the neighbouring farmers would gather with their teams,wagons and pitchforks and the job would be done in 2 or 3 days unlessrain prolonged their stay. In the earlier days threshing was done with a steam engine and separator run by Archie Jones of Belmont.Later,in turn,came John MacVicar,Owen Percy,and George Jenkins with their tractor powered separators. In the days of the steam oytfit the farmers of the area would be summoned to the scene by the whistle on the steam engine-the signal that the thresher had steam up and was ready to work. Huge meals had to be prepared for the 16 to 20 or more men for 2 or more days. Mammoth roasts of beef,great kettles of potatoes and vegetables,bowls

PIONEER FARMING

of delicious applesauce made from the fresh early yellow harvest apples and pies of all kinds. Simple every day fare but nourishing, tasty and in bountiful supply. I remember making 16 pies one morning for the silo gang, after we took over the farm in 1940. By that time the war was on and the taxes had climbed to around $200. a year on that same hundred acres.

When we began farming we still used horse power but tractors were beginning to appear here and there. We still kept a team or two of horses but purchased a little Allis Chalmers tractor around 1942 to speed up the job a bit.

During the winter of 1942-3 we had a very heavy snow storm around mid-January and cars could not get down our road. The last car out for several weeks was Doctor Beattie of Belmont, who took me to the hospital in London when our first daughter decided to make her appearance.

Again in 1945 we were snowed in for most of the winter. The snow piled up through January, February and March with never a thaw. Horses and sleighs travelled the road but on the hill west of our gate, even the horses could not get through the deep snow. It was up to the tops of the fences and level right across. Travellers came in our lane, through the orchard and west field and out through a place we cut in the fence down the road at the bottom of the grade. The township had a snowplow ordered because of war priorities it was not delivered until sometime in March. When it did get around to coming up our road, the snow was so packed it was hard as concrete and the plow hadn't enough power to break through. Gangs of farmers on our road, armed with picks and shovels, went ahead of the plow breaking up the solid snow and helping the plow get through. It took them 2 days to get from Yorke School corner up to our place, a distance of seven-eights of a mile. The first day they were all given their dinner at Clayton and Wilma Shackelton's, and the next day they were working on our hill so we fed them. Every farmer on the road turned out to open our road and our second daughter was considerate enough not to appear until April 5 that year, about a week after the plow and neighbours dug us out. In 1948 our third and last child was born- another daughter.

By 1950 threshing and silo filling bees were no more. Combines were coming into use and a farmer who owned a combine would do custom work for his neighbours in turn. It was faster and less work for both men and women but not nearly so much fun. We were getting better prices for milk and grain crops and so were able to do some improving, such as converting the coal furnace to oil, putting in a milking machine in the barn, and installing a water system and bathroom in the house. Our well, drilled in 1938 by Lloyd MacBeth with his steam powered outfit, was 315 feet deep and we were never without good cold water.

The years passed by. We got older and less able to do all the work so after renting out the land for 2 or 3 years, we decided to sell and retire to Aylmer. It might be interesting to note that the taxes which had been $25 in 1900 were now up to $450 after 70 years.

In 1971, after being in Coleman hands for more than 70 years, Lot 15 Concession 8, passed to the present owners, Harold Paton, his wife and young son.

Harvey and Irene Coleman.

Aylmer, February, 1974.

Lots 4 & 5 Con.11 Harvey Woolley Farm

Back when London was only a village in the year 1834 Henry Woolley bought the parcel of land Lot 5 north half, in the eleventh concession of South Dorchester. The deed was registered in Middlesex because Elgin County was not separated from Middlesex until 1852. Henry's father, John Woolley, had come up from Pennsylvania via the Niagara Route and settled on the first Concession of Malahide, west of Port Burwell, straight south of Sprindfield. Later, three of his sons, Henry david and George went north into South Dorchester and bought land in the area north of Springfield.

Cutting trees was the first job in clearing the land of its huge trees -often pine stumps would be 2 feet across. It was said that Henry Woolley built the first frame buildingsof the area and had the first painted house, which happened to be red in colour. Square nails were used in the nailingand the beams were hewn from the tall trees. It was very common to find notices posted in Springfield or even read in church meetings of the loss of animals which had strayed through the thick woods in spite of the stump fences.

Bees were held to help each other out, and when there was a "barn raising" allthe near-by neighbours joined in and the women all came to help feed the crowd. The men would choose up sides, nail the boards together and then use long poles to push the sides up and with the shout "Ho Heave", up would go the sides.

Henry Woolley married Eliza Brooks For his First Wife and Maria Little for his second. He had twelve children and many of them set up homes in the area, choosing mates from nearby neighbours.

The Henry Woolley farm has had four generations owning it-- Henry, Joseph, Harvey and his daughter Violet Harris. Farming methods have changed beyond comprehension. Imagine these pioneers seeding by hand . As the years have passed, the combine has taken over from the sickle, cradle, reaper, binder, threshing machine, and the bull dozer from the scraper.

In those early days our farm had a pond from which the cattle could drink; the sheep washed before shearing; or the wagons be pulled through to swell the wooden spokes so the metal rims wouldn't loosen and fall off. The sheep would be sheared and then much of the wool would be carded and spun into yarn so it could be woven into cloth for blabkets or clothing.

Pedlars frequently called on the homes to sell medicines or fancier cloth etc., but the early homemakers were quite adept at making their own supplies. Soap was made by leaching the ashes from the trees to make lye, and then with the addition of grease from the pigs or sheep it could be used as soft soap or made into bars. Vinegar was made from the apples but an additive, called "Mother" had to be used with it. People had large barrels or jugs of vinegar. Apple trees must have been brought in by the earliest settlers for each farm had an orchard. Apples were dried on racks suspended over thetop of the stove, and they took days and days to dry sufficiently to be stored in cloth bags. Apples were stored as well in wooden barrels in the basements. Potatoes and mangels were stored in a root cellar or often in pits inthe ground.

Vines producing pods provided yeast to make the bread. These were called "hops". Skimming the cream from the milk which was stored in flat pans, was a skilful job. The cream was churned and the butter put in molds called prints. The cream separator was a welcome improvement.

Saw mills, buggy and blacksmith shops were busy places. Whenthe

Michigan Central Railway came through Springfield in 1870,business picked up for that place and area.Farmers could now load on their pigs and cattle from a loading yard in that village.

Roads were laid out and each owner on the road had to be responsible for a certain number of loads of gravel in order to get a gravel road In our area my father would leave very early in the morning to go to the gravel ptts at Avon.Hauling the loads out of the pits and up the Douglas Hill was quite a test for the drawing power of the various teams of horses.

Clearing land of the large beech,maple,elm and pine was slow and tedious but there always seemed to be time for many social gatherings even if they were in the form of bees for quilting,cooking,etc.Music was a high light in our family and each one had an instrument of some kind to add to the family fun. Checkers were very popular too ,and in springtime there were the"sugaring-off" parties,since many farms had their own maple sugar bush.

By the end of the 19th century pianos began to appear and Harvey Woolley told of being invited down to play at the Coyles who were among the first ones to have a piano. They lived a few farms to the East. Also he tells of a music store in Springfield who sold pianos,and he and Norman Charlton would be asked to provide duets on two pianos which were on display there.

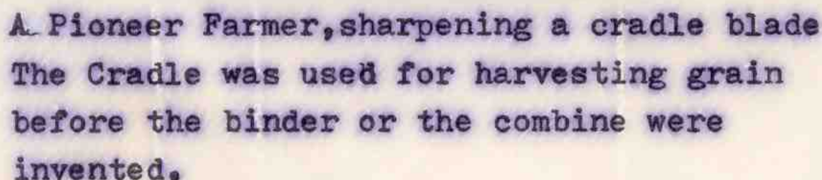
Ice Cream parlours came into existence around this time too,so that Saturday night in Spring field was an interesting one. However the families of the whole community were great on visiting each other,and their homes were open to the young people so frequently that two or three parties a week would be held during the winter season.The horse and buggy or cutter would be the usual means of transportation and a new harness or buggy made in carriage shops of nearby Aylmer or Tillsonburg was the delight of the young men. Needless to say there was a bit of horse racing too.

Churches were within close driving distance and each church had its shed which sheltered several horses and "rigs"during services. On the Main Street of Springfield were hitching posts to which the horses were tied for a short stay,and livery stables where horses could be fed and watered for a longer stay or horses could be rented out if someone required transpiration out from the village. Occasionally gypsies camped on quieter roads and horse trading was carried out to some extent.

On our farm,in one of the back fields,flint stones and skinning stones have been located,indicating the likelihood of roving bandsof Indians.

Though ours is a "Century Farm" and is now sold,it is interesting that a great,great grandson of Henry Woolley's brother,George,who lived across the road from each other,is presently the owner of the farm, namely,Douglas Shackelton. His methods of farming will be vastly different from those who cleared the land in the 1800's but the challenge to succeed will be much the same.

compiled by Violet Harris
Springfield, Ont.



A Pioneer Farmer, sharpening a cradle blade
The Cradle was used for harvesting grain
before the binder or the combine were
invented.

PIONEERS

He never owned a Combine or a Tractor,
He never saw a power-driven mower;
My father cut the grain with scythe and cradle
As men had done for centuries before.

He split the rails to build his wooden fences,
He walked uncounted miles behind the plow,
He drew his wheat to mill with team and wagon,
He pitched the hay by hand from load to mow.

My mother baked her bread and churned her butter,
She had no luxuries to buy or sell,
She made her yeast from hops, and soap from ashes,
She carried pails of water from a well.

She worked unceasingly from dawn to sunset
With patient hands that never seemed to tire,
She never turned a switch or pushed a button,
To make a cup of tea she built a fire.

And yet I wonder if this world we live in
Is better than the one that went before,
When men had never heard of atom bombing
And constant threat of suicidal war.

Our parents lived their days as God intended,
In sunlit valleys, close to birds and flowers,
In spite of all our vaunted march of science
Their quiet lives were happier than ours.

- Michael Foran

Where is the heart that doth not keep,
Within its inmost core,
Some fond remembrance hidden deep,
Of days that are no more?

HAYING TIME

It was a big day for a child when he or she became old enough to drive the horses for unloading hay or grain from the wagon into the barn.

LEST WE FORGET

The History of this Community also includes those who served Home and Country in the two World Wars.We cannot name them all. but we hereby pay tribute to them.

The poem on this page and the essay on the next page were by two 4-H Club members,Cathy Baxter and Patsy Jacklin,who were winners in Canadian Legion Contest.

REMEMBRANCE

R-is for Remembrance Day.
E-is for Eleventh.World War I ended at the Eleventh hour of the Eleventh day of the Eleventh month.
M-is for Many Men who gave their lives that we might have a free country.
E-is for an end to all wars.
M-is to remember the Mothers of those brave boys who didn't come back.
B-is for the Battle of Britain "Never did so many owe so much to so few." (Churchill)
E-Every Time You buy a Poppy,You help a disabled soldier.
R- The Red Poppy is the symbol that we care.

O Remember,yes Remember,
All the Men that fought,that we
Might have Freedom,yes have Freedom,
In this Land of Liberty.

He lay there resting in the trench,
The days had left him worn,
Torrents of rain had made him drenched
His uniform was torn.

He was just a fair-haired boy
Not over seventeen,
Yet he'd been called to fight this war
The worst the world has seen.

The shooting sounded overhead
And then, a hideous cry
The terrors of a dying man,
Why all this bloodshed? Why?

Tomorrow, just another day
Before he started home,
To feel secure without a fear
Far from the screams and moans.

He thought of seeing all his friends
- A bullet singed his cheek
He pulled the trigger - firing back.
His legs were getting weak.

The enemy was closer now,
There was no place to hide,
A bullet hit its mark, and he
Turned on his back and died.

How are you and I to know
Of misery suffered for
The love of one's own native land
In that cruel, senseless war?

Remember he who almost saw
Again his own country
Remember those who gave their lives
That others might be free.

Cathie Baxter
Grade 8
Davenport Public School (Senior)

LEST WE FORGET

THE APPLE TREE

He sat rocking silently, on the front porch of the now empty farmhouse. Clasped in his calloused hands was a photograph, marked with all the signs of age — faded, turning brown, and worn in a way that revealed how many times it had been taken from its album and held, close to his heart, treasured. There was much to think about on this particular day; when you reached the age Sean McGregor was, there was always time to think. But, today, today was different. Thirty years ago to this day, Sean had lost the one person who was dearest in the world to him, Davie, young Davie — gone, lost to him forever.

He spoke aloud for the first time to himself, then to the photograph, as if speaking to it brought back his departed loved ones, his son Davie and Flora, his wife.

"There were letters, oh, not many, but they were long and it was like having him here with us once more. How Flora and I looked for them and prayed for the day when he'd return home to us again. Suddenly there were no letters, none, nothing, no word for months, months on end. Then one day an envelope bearing a registered seal arrived. Inside it stated simply and precisely,

'We regret to inform you that your son, Private David James McGregor was killed in action on the 9th day of November, 1943.'

That was all, nothing else.

"We couldn't believe it, could we Flora? We kept on deceiving ourselves, saying it was a mistake, it didn't happen, not to our Davie. A gross mistake just like the war itself. It was like a nightmare and we thought when it was over everything would be as it was before. Then the end of the war came, and you didn't come home Davie. We watched and waited and then we knew it was true, you were not coming back to us."

"O Lord! Why us, why Davie? He was so young, he had so much to live for, so much to give and to receive." He spoke, without bitterness or rancor, but rather with regret and sorrow.

He addressed his words to Davie once more, "My son, oh my son, I loved you so much. We were happy, we three. The world couldn't touch us, or hurt us in any way. There was laughter in this house, and joy and love. Why did you have to leave us alone, your mother and I?" He paused, as if waiting for an answer, then continued. "Aye, I know laddie, to serve your country and serve it well. But, eighteen is such a young age to have to become a man. A man overnight, with all the maturities and responsibilities that take most men years to grow to accept. These are sometimes hard to accept in normal times, laddie, but even harder in war. You felt you were ready to accept those responsibilities. It was your decision and I respected you for it.

'Yes; quaint and curious war is!
You shoot a fellow down
You'd treat if met where any bar is,
Or help to half-a-crown.'

"I read that a very long time ago, I can't remember when. But you found that out for yourself son, you shoot someone because he is your foe, your country's enemy. God knows you don't want to kill and I know too.

"War brings about a great wound in a man's heart, Davie boy, one of sorrow, pain and hate. Please, don't hate those who shot at you, son, forgive the ones who killed. They fought for the same reason you did — to serve your country, to protect her people.

"I pray none will close their minds and memories to that awful lesson taught us by millions of soldiers like you, oh Davie!

"Lord, I miss you more each day laddie. I'm proud of you to be sure. You sacrificed your life for your country, and did so bravely. But, I'd give all my tomorrows if you could have come home to me, and for a chance to do all the things a father wants to do when he has a son like you. A chance to watch you grow, in mind as well as body; a chance to share your troubles and your joys; to see you in love, see you marry, to see you become a father with a child of your own. I can recall so many times, son, when I should have shown you how I felt, should have told you how much you meant to me, and said so many, many things that now must remain unsaid.

"God rest your soul, son." He spoke softly and heartbreak was in his voice. Rising from his chair, he stepped forward and gazed at a forlorn apple tree, one they had planted for Davie when he was born.

The apple tree, beneath whose branches Davie had played as a child, in whose leafy boughs he had climbed, told him that Davie might be dead and gone but his memory could never die, would never be forgotten.

Patsy Jacklin,
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