

SYRUP MAKING—Oxen, horses and boiling sap . . . these bring alive pioneer days in Elgin County. The open pans, their contents boiling over a wood fire, represent a bygone era. For the Bobier family the annual event represents a highlight in farm living.



WORKING OXEN—Looking very much like a scene in a century-old Currier & Ives print, this yoke of oxen is helping in the maple sap harvest on the farm of Carl Bobier, Dunwich Township. The oxen belong to Johnny Bobier of Wallacetown.

Operating Wallacetown Cheese Factory Was Family Affair for Keillors

Story of Wallacetown Cheese Factory Told in Paper by Mrs. Ermyrn Lucas

At the April meeting of Wallacetown Women's Institute, the following interesting history of Wallacetown and particularly a cheese factory there was given by Mrs. Ermyrn Lucas.

In the year 1813 a man arrived who saw possibilities in even this forbidding looking forest land and decided to make it his home. In that year, 50 acres, the front part of Lot 11, Con. 8, part of what is now Stewart Pearce's farm, was sold by Colonel Talbot to Charles Benedict. He remained 10 or 12 years and made the first clearance on the primeval forest on the present site of the village.

In 1847 the first shoemaker, Donald McTavish, opened shop, later adding a few groceries. In the early days the village was known as Frogtown; it probably was quite appropriate as there were so many pools and swamps around. This name did not meet with the approval of residents and they decided to choose a more dignified name. Mr. McTavish, who set up the first shop, decided on Oakville and had a sign painted and placed above his shop door, signifying that he was doing business. Previous to this in 1833, Donald Currie, a native of Argyleshire, Scotland, bought several lots on the north side of Talbot Street and also purchased 50 acres on the south side of the street.

There were several Scottish residents who wished to name the town for their national hero, Sir William Wallace. The matter was referred to Mr. Currie, who was highly respected and influential in the community and his decision was in favor of the name, "Wallacetown." Incidentally, this same Mr. Currie was the man after whom Currie Road, the road between Wallacetown and Dutton, was named.

In 1871, the following account was taken from a dairy magazine: Wallacetown, a village in the township of Dunwich, County of Elgin, 18 miles from St. Thomas, mail daily, population about 400.

There were three hotels, several stores, a druggist, a baker, seven shoemakers, seven wagonmakers, seven carpenters, a photographer, three coopers, two tailors, two doctors, a dentist, one livery stable, a joiner, an auctioneer, a fruit agent and a cheese factory run by John S. Pearce.

This is where my story begins, but I would like to add to the above. Later there were tinshops, cabinet makers, weaving shops, harness shops, woolen mills, and even a millinery shop owned and run by a dear elderly lady by the name of Miss McCrank in a shop next door to the present post office.

Cheese Factory Built

The first cheese factory was built on the farm of John Pearce, one of the early Talbot settlers, about half way between John S. Pearce's farm and that of John E. Pearce, in the year 1865. The son of John Pearce managed the factory. My father (Alvro Keillor) was born and raised in Tyrconnell and at the age of nine years went to work in this

factory in the summers, and continued to do so until he grew up to be a young man.

A number of years later, the equipment from this factory was moved to Wallacetown, as it was more central. It was located in a large building directly on the corner of Pearce St. and Talbot St., which had originally been a lodge hall. This was a very large two-storey building where the making of cheese was carried out on the lower floor, and upper rooms used as living quarters for the cheesemaker. The days were very long and it was necessary to be there at all times.

The upper rooms were partially finished off. On the south end were one room for a kitchen, with two smaller ones on each side for bedrooms. One other room with a smaller room off was on the north end of the building and in between was a huge barn-like structure with large beams overhead, that later had heavy rope thrown over for a grand swing for neighborhood children to play. There were no windows in this barracks; just a huge sky-light in the roof.

Father continued to make cheese for Mr. Pearce for a few years until he sold the factory to Robert McMillan, Dutton, and Mr. Pearce moved to London where he bought a seed and grain store. In 1880, my father married my mother and she helped dad in the factory for a number of years, until the boys got some size and could help. I remember seeing my mother with a small baby that she would lay on a quilt in an empty vat while she helped dad "dip the curd" as we called it. It was the time when curd was ripe and had to be dipped with scoops from vats into a huge sink to let the whey run off. A very hot job it was. I can see the perspiration running off their faces at the hot noon hour.

Keillors Buy Factory

A few years later, dad bought the factory from Mr. McMillan and had the building moved from the corner to the boundary line on the east, next to the Catholic Church property, but at that time there was a nice orchard there and a small house with lilacs surrounding it. It was the home of the "Gilleys", one of the early families in Wallacetown.

Moving the building made it much more convenient for patrons to drive in off Talbot St. to the weigh stand and have their milk weighed and continue on around the curve to the whey stand for their whey and out the gate to Pearce St. Dad put a good picket fence around the property with two large gates that we had to be particular about keeping shut in the evenings, as the townspeople usually owned a cow, or cows, and they were allowed to roam the streets after the evening milking. So, woe to those that left a gate open — no garden in the morning.

At this time, dad also made a change in the upper rooms where we lived. That was the home of the Keillor family until we each went to homes of our own.

Following is the second instalment of a paper given at a meeting of Wallacetown Women's Institute on the cheese factory which was built at Wallacetown in 1865. The paper was prepared by Mrs. Ermyrn Lucas, whose father, Alvro Keillor, operated the factory for several years.

Running a cheese factory was a family affair; everybody had a job to do. Dad bought a dozen cows that we kept in a small barn in the winter but took them to pasture on the Gunn farm at the edge of Wallacetown, where the public school now stands. In those days the farmers did not keep many cows. Dad tried to encourage them to get more to increase their income as well as his own. It was at this time a great deal was being said about silos to increase milk flow. That year, John L. Pearce and dad each built a silo, the first ones in the township. Mr. Pearce built his circular as was recommended, but father made a high, square one, double boarded and painted inside with tar. The neighbors weren't too happy about it as it shut off their view.

We did not keep the cows very long as it bothered the neighbors, but father felt it did help to show farmers what could be done. The silo was turned into an ice house as it was necessary to keep ice in the curing room in the summer to keep the cheese cool while in the curing stage.

A few years later, he again changed the silo. This time, into a horse stable, and we kept horses with light wagons, which had low platforms to bring milk to the factory, when my two older brothers were big enough to run a route. Up at 5 a.m., dad had the horses hitched and ready with return cans of whey for the farmers, to be left at their milk stand and pick up their cans of milk and home again, had their breakfast and off to high school, and walked at that. No bicycles then.

Early Start

The days started very early in this business. Every morning exactly at 5:30, Malcolm Blue (Clarence's father) and his brother, Dan Blue, would drive in with their can of milk and deposit at the weighstand and get their whey and be back home for breakfast. One could set the clock by these early risers. Then there were the Pearces (three families), the Dockers, the Gows, the McKillops and many, many others that brought their milk direct from farm to factory. Others from a distance were brought in by men hired for the purpose. Tremum Shipley (Earl's grandfather) brought milk from Eagle way, Billie Patterson from Hogg Street West, Peter Cameron, a grand old gentleman, brought neighbors' milk from Clay Street West; Thomas Woodridge brought a big load from Shackleton Street West; Jack Galbraith from Shackleton Street East; Jonah Page from Lake Road West; Charles Bradt (Harry's grandfather) from Lake Road East, and last but not least, James Small (Clarence's father) brought twelve or fifteen cans with a team of horses from Concessions 9 and 10 and Back Street (now Highway 3). It was usually 9:30 before the milk was all in and operations began inside the factory.

Making cheese wasn't all sunshine; we had our troubles, too. One thing, I remember quite well, was, human nature being what it

is, some people could not resist the temptation to water their milk. You know what I mean, pour a pail of water into the can of milk to make it add up. Well, everyone knows you can't make cheese out of water; it looks pretty blue, and dad accused one patron of doing that, and, oh my! They were so offended. Dad had no way of proving it at that time and the accused party went to court over it.

All that was over in a few years when the Babcock tester came in. Every day each can of milk had to have a sample taken out and kept in a pint sealer with a preservative in it. At the end of the month a sample was again taken from the pint sealer and put in a machine with an acid and whirled around in the machine for several minutes and the fat would come to the top of the vial and measured with a small instrument and patrons were paid for their milk according to fat registered.

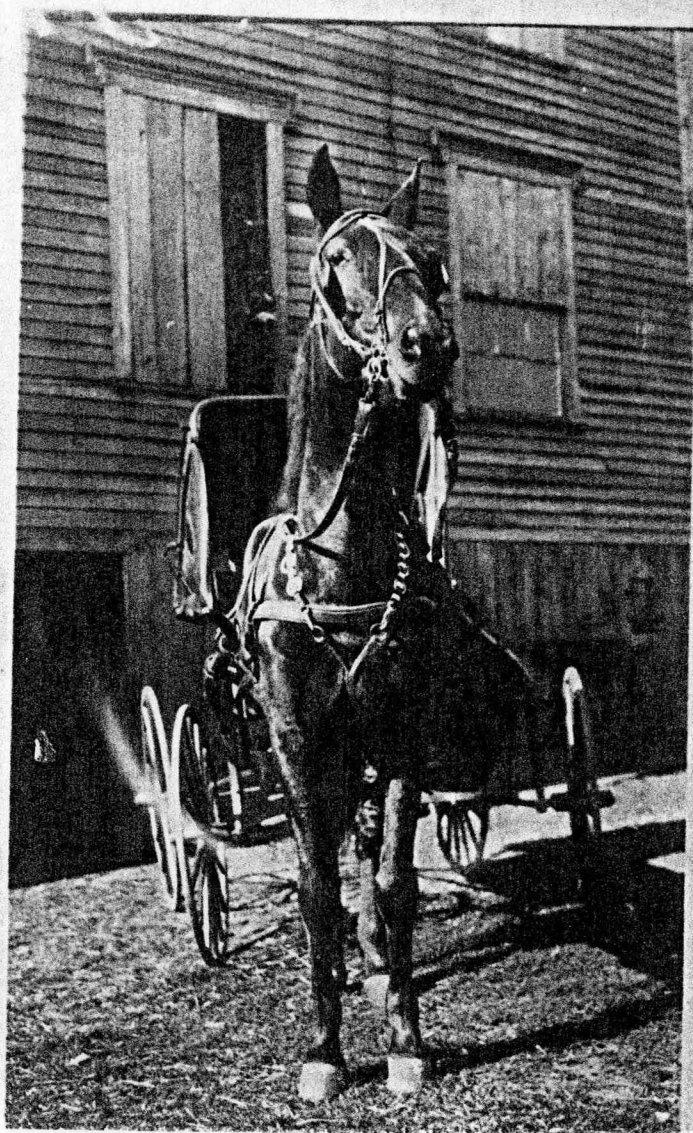
Dealing Out Whey

Another problem we had was the dealing out of whey which drains from the curd during process. And farmers did like to have this whey to feed their pigs. Whey was run off into a large tank with a platform over top and a pump inserted into the tank. Patrons would drive to the tank and pump up their share according to the quantity of milk they brought. But a number of patrons would bring in ¼ can of milk and pump up a full can of whey. Therefore, those at the last would have no whey left for them, and it annoyed them very much, and they complained about it. So my dad figured out by scale how many inches of whey they should have for their quantity of milk, and I was given that chore (how I hated it).

I was still going to public school and many mornings I would be late and have to stand in the corner, but father spoke to the teacher and all was well. So I took my rule (special one) and my sheets of paper that had previous day's weight of milk on. I had to climb up on the vehicle and measure the whey as it was pumped in a can and raise my hand for them to stop when they had their share. You guess at how many stopped when I raised my hand. They even laughed at me and kept pumping. I never forgot those people. But, I will say, some were very, very nice about it.



S.S. NO. 1 DUNWICH SCHOOL — This picture was taken of students at this school, the last year Mrs. Annie Brown taught there. Pictured, left to right, front row: Carol Anne Bobier, Barbara Lackey, Janet Waite, Rosita Lidster, Karen Anderson and Eric Lunn. Second row: Doug Anderson, Aubrey Lunn, Jim Lackey, Floyd Bobier, Wayne Bobier, Beverley Waite and Brenda Lunn. Third row: Neil Bobier, Elizabeth Lidster, and Barbara Bradt. Back row: Ivan Lackey, David Lunn and Nancy Waite.



King (19-21) 5 yrs.

Had a mark 212.

Trot in old time

Cast had a splint.

Alma loved both of us.

Beat Carmon Lyons on
Sat, night, lost two spooks.

Family affection eases burden of sickness

by Dorca Ballantyne

March 10, 1978

Four years ago when Lynda and Allen McDonald moved permanently to RR 2, Wallacetown, with their three teen-aged daughters, everything looked great.

They jokingly referred to the place as "Old McDonald's Farm" because there was just about every kind of beast on it. And it was home to the sick animals and strays that were wanted.

Lynda McDonald loved them all and they in turn loved her. She talked with them and they followed her around and knew her when she approached.

But starting two years ago this all changed. Lynda became terminally ill and for a while was able to carry on but now for the last year she has had to let others take over.

And her husband and three daughters are now trying to fill her shoes while they run the farm. Allen has a job in London with the Coca Cola company and continues to commute. Kim, 19, Diana, 18, and Dale, 17, are all trying to continue with their school work at the West Lorne High School.

Kim was the spokesperson and said that the 200 acre farm is at the present time being partly rented to other farmers, some acreage is used for grazing land and they grow some hay and straw. Beef cattle number around forty-five.

"We do a lot of work and I think I can honestly say that the farm wouldn't be around if it wasn't for the help that the girls give," Kim said.

The work is divided up and while I take care of the chickens, ducks and geese and do the cooking Diana and Dale do the barn work connected with the cows, pigs, cattle and horses. Right now, because of the fact that our mother is very ill, the responsibility is quite heavy on all of us".

"We have had to miss a lot of school as a result. Grandma comes and sits and sometimes dad takes some holidays. The people where he works are very understanding about letting him have extra time off".

"We have an assortment of animals as I have mentioned, 10 kids and 8 goats including a billy, plus house pets and a jersey cow for milk. We make our own butter and Dale and Diana bake the bread. I bake the pies and other desserts. In the summer we have a big garden and between us we do the canning, freezing, jam and jelly making. And I get stuck with whatever sewing has to be done".

"Diana and I do most of the housework and Dale is good with the animals and gets up at all hours of the night. Sometimes we end up with baby pigs in the house in the middle of the night, and we take turns getting up during the night and feeding them".

"This farm belonged to our grandparents and we ended up here because grandfather was sick and we had to look after him. When he got worse we took over the farm and dad became a farmer to the best of his ability".

"We lived in London originally and were used to more facilities and a slightly different way of living. It has been two different worlds, and sometimes I think maybe we have been lucky in having lived in London and then living out here".

"It meant changing schools and getting used to a whole new way of life. While I don't really like it and would rather be back in the city Diana and Dale like it very much, so there you are. With all the pressure of things on us right now, maybe sometimes I show what seems to be a dislike for something when I don't really mean to, but it is just that we are having to grow up in a hurry, and it is a little hard".

"Now both Diana and I have steady boy friends and we have learned to make our own fun. We go roller skating in Dutton, go to school dances and movies in London and St. Thomas. My boy friend and I go out to supper and lunch quite often and go for Sunday drives to places like Detroit. We toboggan and go to the beach a lot in the summer. We also run errands to London for mom's medicine, do the shopping and do a lot of horseback riding".

While Lynda McDonald can no longer participate in any of these activities, she is surrounded by the

love and affection of her family who are doing everything they possibly can to make things comfortable for her.
