

BIOGRAPHY OF A. E. BUCKE

Alfred E. Bucke, who lives on his 100-acre farm on Conc. 11, Yarmouth Township, celebrated his 90th birthday last weekend.

For a man of his great age, Mr. Bucke has a memory that is little short of amazing. His fund of local knowledge starts well before his time, because he has not forgotten the many facts passed on to him by his father, the late Samuel Bucke, and it is well matched by his great store of yarns, most of them humorous.

The opportunity to chat with a man like Mr. Bucke is as rare as it is enjoyable. In complete possession of his faculties, Mr. Bucke sits quietly in the living room of his farmhouse and delves into the fascinating past to entertain his visitors.

Few questions are necessary for Mr. Bucke relates the conditions of his early life with clarity and interest, spicing his words with tales priceless in humor.

Mr. Bucke at present lives on the farm that was bought by his grandfather, George Bucke, in 1854, and still holds the original deed to the property. The deed headed "Province of Canada," is on parchment and is still fully readable in spite of being 101 years old. The farm, which was bought for £68, 15 shillings, or the equivalent at present rates of exchange to about \$180., was formerly a clergy reserve.

Mr. Bucke explained that every seventh acre of land was given to the Protestant clergy as a clergy reserve and these, for the most part, remained uncleared. These clergy reserves were not popular with the occupants of neighboring farms, who regarded the uncleared acreage as a nuisance and a haven for wild animals.

Mr. Bucke, after attending high school in St. Thomas, became a school teacher and taught school for three years at S.S. 24, Yarmouth and S.S. 7, South Dorchester.

Dogged by illness, Mr. Bucke was told by his doctor that unless he took work out of doors and kept away from the stuffy confinement of the schoolhouse, he would not live for long. Mr. Bucke followed that advice and went to work on the farm. Nor could the advice have been sounder for it has resulted in Mr. Bucke living to the grand old age of 90.

There is hardly a phase of Mr. Bucke's interesting life about which he cannot tell a story.

Of the tapping of the maple trees for their sap to make syrup, Mr. Bucke tells of a man who, before going home to supper, filled up five large kettles with sap intending to return afterwards and boil them. He felt tired and decided not to return until the following morning. He did so, but on arrival found the kettles completely empty, not a trace of sap remaining. Somewhat mystified, the man set about re-filling the kettles and during the course of his work happened to glance up the hillside. There in among the trees was a group of about 24 deer peering down at him from among the brush and waiting for another long, long drink of cool maple sap.

Odell, the railroad stop near Mr. Bucke's farm, was on the C.P.R. tracks between Woodstock and St. Thomas. On one occasion Mr. Bucke was waiting in the doorway of the tiny railroad station in which some 30 people sheltered from the cold and rain. As the train neared the station, Mr. Bucke spotted an acquaintance on the road nearby and waved his umbrella to him in greeting. The locomotive engineer took Mr. Bucke's wave as a signal to keep on going and acknowledged it with a "toot-toot" on the whistle. Mr. Bucke was left to face the irate would-be passengers who had wanted to go into St. Thomas on a shopping trip.

Mr. Bucke has seen great changes in the world in his lifetime, particularly as far as transport is concerned. He began his days when horses were the main form of transportation and is now living in a time when an atom-powered submarine has become a practical vessel.

He well remembers the first automobile in these parts. It was owned by an Aylmer man who, on his twice weekly trips to St. Thomas "just about turned the countryside upside down." The only way to handle horses when an automobile came along was to turn them off the road into a side lane or field. If there was no such escape from the rattling contraptions Mr. Bucke said the driver had to take a firm hold of the lines and use his whip on the horses severely enough to distract their attention from the automobile.

Some people even went so far as to draw up a petition protesting against the advent of the automobile which, they said, was striking terror into people and animals, but the government to whom the petition was presented treated it with scorn. Automobiles, said the government, are here to stay and, strangely enough, they were right, said Mr. Bucke.

Mr. Bucke remarked that the amount of snow to fall in present day winters is much less than in the days of his youth. One of Mr. Bucke's pleasant memories is the sound of the sleigh and cutter bells echoing among the low rolling hills of this pretty part of Yarmouth Township.

When Mr. Bucke was at school, the first person there who should have been the teacher, frequently was a pupil. The pupil built the fire. At noon the pupils used to take turn about at sweeping out the classroom. Later one of the boys was hired for the job and paid five cents for lighting the fire and five cents for sweeping.

Only one man who went to high school with Mr. Bucke is still living, as far as Mr. Bucke knows. He is J. B. Davidson, Q.C., of Rosebery Place, St. Thomas, and both men are still the warmest of friends.

Harking back to his youth again, Mr. Bucke recalls his grandfather carrying a bushel of wheat on his shoulder all the way to the nearest grist mill at Long Point to be ground into flour, then returning with the flour to his home. The trip used to take three days.

The Yarmouth Mutual Fire Insurance Company was founded in 1881 and Mr. Bucke's grandfather, William Cole, was one of the organizers, along with Mr. Bucke's father who also became one of the company's first directors.

When Samuel Bucke retired in 1910, Mr. Bucke was appointed director in his stead and later, in 1918 he was appointed secretary-treasurer. He continued in this job until 1947 when he handed the task over to his daughter, Florence.

Mr. Bucke's wife, the former Isabel McIntyre, died in 1953. They had been married since 1901.

Mr. Bucke is a member of St. James' Presbyterian Church, which is located about a mile from his home. He was active in church work in his earlier days and for many years was on the board of managers and superintendent of the Sunday school. He is the last living member of the building committee of the present church, which was erected in 1905.

Mr. Bucke leads, of necessity, a quiet life and spends his time listening to the radio and taking a great deal of interest in life around him. His daughter, Florence, herself a former high school teacher, cares for him in the homestead on the little hill above the county road.

As one leaves Mr. Bucke's company, one feels a great respect for the long and interesting life he has lived and the fullness of living which he has enjoyed. One feels not a little sorry that one could not spend much longer with him and record for posterity the immense amount of local history and knowledge he has stored away in his alert mind.

Alfred E. Bucke died November 10, 1957 at the age of 93.

The Bucke farm buildings are now the site of The Kettle Creek Conservation Headquarters.

RECOLLECTIONS OF ALFRED E. BUCKE

People who attend the Centennial Spectacle and see highlights in the history of Elgin County unfolded in dramatic sequence may wonder if the men and women who pioneered this magnificent garden spot of Canada were actually like that.

Talk to some of the veterans of the past and one learns that the early settlers were first and foremost human beings who had their virtues and weaknesses, their individualities and peculiarities the same as people today.

Mr. and Mrs. Alfred E. Bucke, lifelong residents off the 12th Concession of North Yarmouth, have a wealth of reminiscences about the strong-willed, strong-armed pioneers they knew in their youth.

One of them was George Fred Howse, a United Empire Loyalist, who was noted for years for his strength and his skill at fisticuffs or what is now politely called boxing. Mr. Bucke described the case of George Fred Howse and the boxing instructor in these words: "It must have been nearly a hundred years ago that a man came into the Dewar's School, Section (now S.S. No. 24, Yarmouth), leaving word at the school and at some of the homes as well, that on a certain night he would be at the school house to start a winter's class in boxing. All the young men who thought they might like to join such a class were invited to the first night when the instructor would give a demonstration and explain how the class would be conducted.

"On the night set for the demonstration the school was well filled with men from the section. It was evident interest was high. In those days any occasion which would bring a group together got an eager response because they did not occur very often and also the idea of boxing was novel to the community. The would-be instructor was on hand and quite evidently pleased with the response. He announced that he would start off by giving a demonstration and called for a volunteer to box with him. There was the usual show of reluctance to be the one to step forward, coupled doubtless with knowledge of their own lack of skill. The the instructor said, "Well, tell me someone who could do this." Immediately there were calls from different parts of the school "George Fred, George Fred". "The instructor asked if Mr. Fred would please come up. A man, from his appearance, over eighty, moved forward. The instructor was evidently surprised and asked him his age. "Eighty-one" was the reply. Since the other men were reluctant to step forward the instructor said, "Now you are an old man and I will be careful. I won't hit you very hard but you strike me as hard as you can." Well, that was all right with Mr. Howse. The demonstration began with the exchange of a blow or two, then Mr. Howse's arm shot out and the would-be instructor fell to the floor. Soon he gathered himself up, put on his coat, picked up his belongings and strode out into the darkness never to be seen or heard of again in the community.

"George Fred was George Howse, but since there were two Howse families each with a son named George, the boys were distinguished by adding to their name the given name of the father soone was George Fred Howse and the other George Coon Howse. The Howses settled first in the vicinity of Toronto and later moved on to Elgin."

Mrs. Bucke's favorite reminiscence has to do with an eccentric and strong-willed Scottish woman in Skelding's school area (S.S. No. 27) named Peggy McDonald. She lived on the 14th concession of Yarmouth and might be described as being a pioneer of social service and reform. Periodically, she would visit Skelding's school, enter the classroom unannounced and uninvited and address the children from the front of the room. They listened attentively to what she had to say. "Peggy McDonald was interested in the rights of women and children, but had little use for men." Mrs. Bucke recalled in her Centennial interview with The Times-Journal. "She thought that sidewalks should be built to the schools for the use of the children and she promised the youngsters that she would see that they got the sidewalks. She pioneered also for Bible teaching in the schools. She interested a young minister named Fraser who became a volunteer to her cause with a promise to see that the plan was carried out. Peggy McDonald considered that young preacher as being quite perfect. But all ministers were not perfect in her eyes. She was out to criticize and reform the church also. She would attend the service in Kilmartin Presbyterian church (on the north-east corner of the 11th concession and and the road running north from Yarmouth Centre.) When the minister finished his sermon she would rise from her pew and criticize the sermon, adding some of her own ideas. She spoke in a quiet manner but was not to be silenced. Her presence so troubled one of the ministers a Mr. McKinnon, that he told the elders they would have to keep her from attending the church.

"One Sunday in summer two of the elders, Dugald Campbell and a Mr. Cameron, were placed on guard, sitting under a tree beside the road a short distance north of the church. When Peggy came along they innocently asked her to sit down and rest. Peggy also innocently complied with their request, but she saw through their plan. Soon she offered to sing to them and they welcomed her suggestion as an act of Providence to help them carry out their plan of detaining her.

"It was a hot drowsy day and Peggy's voice was very soothing. Gradually the heads of the staid elders began to droop and when she had put them sound asleep she flew on to the church to have her say. This time she didn't wait until the sermon was finished, but breathlessly she began to talk as soon as she entered the door—telling how she had sung the elders to sleep out under the tree."

"Although Mrs. McDonald was eccentric, she was, always neat and clean in appearance, distinguished by a spotlessly white sun bonnet."

Many people called Mrs. McDonald "Peggy Isle Uist," because she and parents came from the Isle of Uist in the Hebrides, off the coast of Scotland.

Mr. Buck likes to tell of the youthful tricks that the schoolboys of his day played. One of them was to snatch an egg from a hen's nest every morning, before going to school the going to the store during the noon period to trade it for a stick of gum or some candy drops. "We became quite expert at keeping an egg concealed in a pant's pocket without breaking it," he said. The boys also got great fun in winter snowballing the loads of cordwood, bound for the St. Thomas market, which passed the schoolyard, or stealing rides on the bobsleight, often to the annoyance of the drivers.

Mr. Bucke attended Skelding's School, went from there to the old St. Thomas Collegiate Institute, with J. B. Davidson, Q.C., a school chum, then attended the old Model School in St. Thomas to qualify for the teaching profession. He returned home to teach for two years at Skeldings and also at No. 7 South Dorchester, but inside life did not agree with him and he was advised by doctors to engage in outdoor work. He returned to the farm and has been farming every since. His early plans were to teach for a few years, then to study law.

Mr. Bucke and his father and grandfather before him have been associated with the Yarmouth Mutual Fire Insurance Company since its inception. His grandfather was secretary; then his father; and since 1918, Mr. Bucke has been secretary. He has been a director of the company since 1911. As a boy of 11 years he read the papers for his grandfather and also letters pertaining to the fire insurance business, so his schooling in these duties really started early.

Mrs. Bucke is a member of the McIntyre and Campbell families of North Yarmouth, sturdy Scottish immigrants who settled on the 12th Concession. She was one of 14 children, seven boys and seven girls.

The old McIntyre homestead was a self-contained, self-sufficient farm. Not only did the McIntyre womenfolk make some of the finest handloomed bedspreads and rugs from the wool of sheep raised on the farm, but the menfolk operated a busy brickyard for years. The McLarty Block on Talbot Street, St. Thomas and many other St. Thomas structures were built from bricks made on the McIntyre farm.

For the last 51 years, Mr. and Mrs. Bucke have lived in the comfortable old house between the 22th and 12th Concessions, on what is known as the old Edgeware Road to Belmont. This farm has been in the family since acquired from the Clergy Reserve over a century ago. The house stands at the crest of a hill and commands a magnificent panoramic view of Kettle Creek and the rolling hills and valley lands to the south and west. It is a favorite sketching place for Clark McDougall, well-known St. Thomas artist.

Except for alling eyesight, Mr. Bucke is still quite advice. Mrs. Bucke has been invalided for 20 years, but both she and her husband have excellent memories and can recall many other musing incidents of their childhood. They are keenly interested in the coming Centennial and regret that their health will not permit them to attend some of the events. However they will follow them through the medium of The Times Journal for Mr. Bucke has been a reader of the Times and the Times Journal since he was a young man. In fact he believes he possibly holds a record for uninterrupted reading of the two papers.

ALFRED E. BUCKE OBITUARY

One of Elgin County's best known residents, A. E. Bucke, died at this home on Radio Road, St. Thomas on November 10, 1957, after an illness lasting one week in his 93rd year,

Mr. Bucke was retired. farming all his life on the 100 acre farm his grandfather George Bucke bought in 1854. Mr. Bucke taught school for three years at S. S. 24 Yarmouth and S.S. 7, South Dorchester until ill health found him to follow a carrier in the out doors and he took up farming. Mr. Bucke became a director of the Yarmouth Mutual Fire Assurance Company in 1910 and in 1918 was appointed secretary-treasurer, a job he carried out until 1852, when he handed the task over to his daughter Florence Bucke. His grandfather William Cole, was one of the founders of the Company. Mr. Buck's wife the former Isabel McIntyre died in 1953. They were married in 1901.

Mr. Bucke was a member of the St. James Presbyterian Church, North Yarmouth and was active in church work for many years. He was the last living member of the building committee of the present church, which was built in 1905. He was chairman of this committee. He was also a member of the Independent Order of Foresters.

Mr. Bucke was survived by his daughter, Miss Florence I. Bucke, and a sister Miss Ida Bucke. He was predeceased by a brother, the late Arthur Bucke and by two sisters, Miss Mary Bucke, after whom the public school is named and Miss Alma Bucke.

CLARK McDougall BIOGRAPHY

In 1853, Vincent van Gogh was born a crow's flight from The Hague, and how he lived and worked and died is the stuff of familiar legend. In 1921, Clark McDougall was born in St. Thomas, a stone's throw from London, Ont. With the exception of the war years, he lived and painted and died there. He makes a flicker on the art horizon as yet, but it is bright enough to see a common fire between the two men.

Two years before he died in 1980, McDougall was painting his St. Thomas landscapes in bright flecks of oil encased by or containing black enamel paint in the manner of van Gogh and his Cloisonnist contemporaries.

A survey of his paintings (15 canvases and four watercolors) open Saturday at the Mira Godard Gallery, and will continue until August 24. The creative fire is there, banked, awaiting the stoking of wider opinion which he took pains to avoid in his lifetime.

"Reclusive," he described himself in small, precise handwriting in one of the letters he wrote to a dealer friend, an admirer of his paintings. "I'm reclusive particularly when I am rolling along in great shape. I don't like to do anything else but take advantage of the work rhythm."

That aim of Clark McDougall began when he was 11 and discovered who his real heroes were. They were not your cowboy Tom Mix not your swat king Babe Ruth, but two St. Thomas painters, Ross Osgoode and W. St. Thomas Smith, who gave time and criticism to encourage the small boy.

His spark was fed in the old St. Thomas library where he learned about watercolors from books such as The History of British Watercolor Painting and Technique of Landscape Painting in oils.

The young individualist had the courage to go to the source for advice. He saw reproductions of paintings by Charles Burchfield in the old Life magazine. He went to Buffalo to meet the American landscape artist. "Avoid art schools," Burchfield advised him. Stick with painting from nature. McDougall took his advice. He dropped out of school at 16 and for the rest of his career he deliberately kept his subject range limited, but his eye open to influence. He knew his own score; to be a painter, the other world well lost.

In 1950, McDougall visited Montreal and saw his first Henry Matisse at the height of his Fauve period. He saw the Canadians, John Lyman and James Wilson Morrice. In an entry in his notebook dated Jan., 1980, he recalled that experience: "I knew that from then on, painting would never be the same for me again and I could hardly wait to come home and start in to a series of paintings applying new color knowledge. From '50 on, I kept working in a series, with each series being a forward surge from the previous."

The exhibition surveys the work from his early watercolors to his Fauve-influenced oils ("the French concept," he called it) to the final stage of his black enamel paintings which he related to the influence of van Gogh.

"As this wild color took over, I had to control it," he wrote in 1970. "Therefore I had to become more cerebral and concentrate much more on the design. When I introduced the first black in my oil paintings, I did so in order to make it free me to concentrate on the color problem. I painted or drew in the black first, and laid colors in a flat way alongside the black. The black showed the form up and at times the line was swallowed up a bit so that the thickness varied. Van Gogh used a similar method at Arles. I suppose in a sense, I was undergoing the experiments he had carried out there."

The black enamel skein which held his colors in paintings such as Summer Wildflowers (1961) and Stelco Gate - Bear Lewis Farm, N. Yarmouth (1977) caused a powerful vibrancy. Form in the recurring bubbles of paint asserts itself tirelessly against the black. Patter of petal or road rut or the insistent weed growth around a headstone to an 8-year old boy (In Memory of Francis - Salt Creek Cemetery, N. Yarmouth, 1969) seems a matter of McDougall's painstaking control.

The dominance of the black enamel paintings troubled him.

"I can't help the fact that I'm my own most severe critic," he wrote in a letter in 1978. This problem has to be solved. In winter, when the whole of nature is subdued by low-key coloring, I react against the black enamel. I realize that some of my hostility which is directed against the style now is a seasonal one."

Mira Godard first encountered McDougall's work when she was associated with the Agnes LeFort Gallery in Montreal in the late sixties. "But he didn't want to sell his work, his wife was musical and he would send me tapes of her radio programs - but not his paintings," she recalled.

For a thoughtful painter who worked and reworked his familiar territory, McDougall left an impressive body of work. The subject, as in an early painting such as CN Baggage Cart (1956), is secondary to color. The daring calendar-pink of his sky is justified somehow in the way he pulls it down to the painting's base of railway tracks and ties. In Talbot and Inkerman Streets, St. Thomas (1958), that passion for uncompromising black begins to contain his winter colors in an exploratory way which continued into his last canvases.

In his lifetime, his work was included in several group exhibitions in Ontario. He had a few solo exhibitions, including the one at Art Gallery of St. Thomas-Elgin in St. Thomas in 1974, and the one Alvin Balkind gave him in 1977 when Balkind was Chief Curator of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Whether he would agree or not, McDougall's time for a wider circuit has come.

St. Thomas-born artist Clark McDougall of 56 Inkerman Street has opened a one-man showing of 45 oils and watercolors at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

The show, which consists of a combination of black enamel oils and traditional style paintings, will remain at British Columbia's targets gallery until early May. Included are works dating from 1953 to 1976.

Among Mr. McDougall's works in Vancouver is a painting of a local former horseshoe pitching champion, Dave Summers of Yarmouth Township.

The painting was shown last year as part of the Art Gallery St. Thomas-Elgin's presentation The Artist and the Olympic Idea.

Mr. McDougall's most recently completed work was commissioned by the women's committee of the London Art Gallery.

About 500 prints of this latest painting have been made, and an extra 60 signed p prints have been made on 100 per cent rag paper, according to the artist.

Most of the 60 have been sold.