

Cornwall Township Historical Society

Newsletter September 2015

www.cornwalltwphistorical.ca

Editor: Don McIntosh

The following article was written by the late Mrs. Catherine Brownell in February 2008. It is her reminiscence of Big Rock Farm located on what is now called Atchison Road. Mrs Brownell (née McGillis) lived in a log house on a farm farther west on what is now called Pigeon Road. She was born there and as the story indicates, lived there until 1940.

BIG ROCK FARM by Catherine Brownell, February 12, 2008

“Big Rock Farm” was situated about two miles north of Mille Roches on what was known as the west “Headline Road”, back in the 30s.

The house was on a hill and one would arrive there by going up a lane, crossing a concrete bridge over a small creek (South Branch of the Raisin River). I can say that I can’t remember going further than the kitchen door of this home. Mrs. Abrams was a petit lady, and seemed on the quiet side. Mr. Abrams was a rather big man, a very nice man, had a bit of a limp, and always carried a good chunk of a homemade cane. He visited at my childhood home, quite frequently, as he pastured his herd of eighteen or twenty Holstein cows, nearby. He would stop and chat and I can see him yet, sitting in the rocking chair. Almost all his sentences started with the word “see”. My brother John was a farm helper in his teen-years, and picked up the word “see”. I guess after he got married his wife, Alice, broke him from the habit of saying “see”.

To the west of the farm house, rather on the lower part of the hill, was one of the most beautiful barns in the district, for that era. Another little building, called a granary, was in close proximity to the barn. I don’t know what grain they kept there, but I do remember this building when my Collie dog went missing. I walked about three miles looking for him, and calling for him. No dog showed up. A few days later, he came home. We heard that he had gone courting and had been locked in the granary. I believe that it was in the late ‘50s or early ‘60s that the big barn burned.

As I said, Mr. Abrams kept Holstein cattle. After morning milking, they came west along the road, (not too many cars then), making their way to the pasture. Someone would come, later, and close the gate. At evening time, it was almost always that I had to round them up, open the gate, and leave it open for morning. I would herd them half-way to their barn, and then they went the last half on their own, as they were anxious to be milked. Of course, there wasn’t any pay, in cash that is. One time, one of the sons gave me a box of chocolate buds. We did things in a neighbourly way, back then.

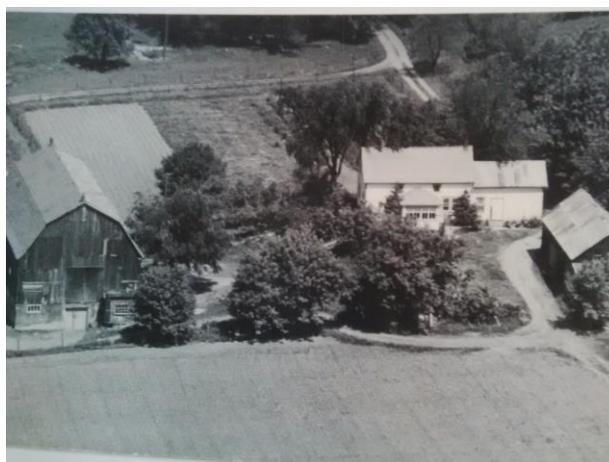
There was a maple bush at the south end of the farm. They did tap and made maple syrup. Bees were also kept at the Abrams’ farm. They sold the honey in five pound pails. I imagine an empty honey pail could be found at the Lost Villages Museum. The farm was called “Big Rock Farm” because a huge rock was located about half way between the farm buildings and the Headline Road.

Mr. and Mrs. Abrams, (John Simon and Catherine: nee Alguire), had three sons: Wesley, Everett, and Victor, and three daughters; Mary, Amy and Grace.

Mrs. Catherine Abrams died on May 12, 1961. Her funeral was held from Meldrum Funeral Home Parlour, in Cornwall, to Long Sault Pentecostal Church. The service was conducted by Rev. William Bowler. She was in her 93rd year.

Mr. John Simon Abrams died on May 23, 1961. Information tells me that "...he was born on the old homestead, north of Mille Roches." He was in his 95th year, being ill for only three weeks, before his death. Mr. and Mrs. Abrams would have celebrated their 69th anniversary on May 24, 1961. They had been patients at MacDonell Memorial Hospital for sixteen months before their deaths.

N.B. I moved from my old homestead at the west end of the Headline Road in 1940, and know very little of what took place after that.

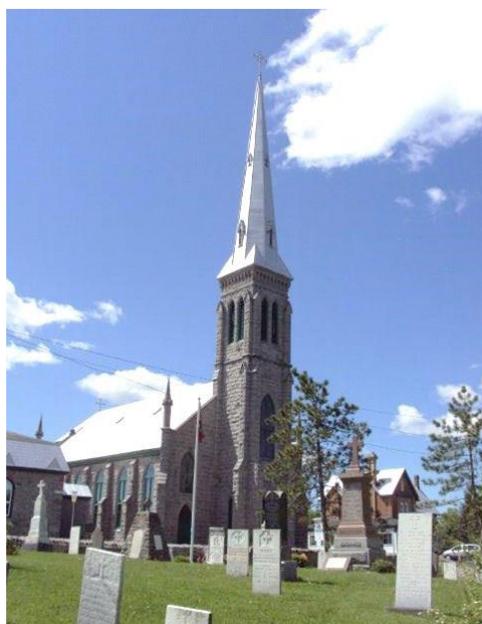


To the left a 5lb pail once held Big Rock honey. Pictures thanks to Jim Brownell from Lost Villages collection. Above, aerial view of Big Rock Farm looking north.

A special thank you to Sharon McCullough and her team of daughter Sarah, Ken McDonald, Karen Martin and all the others who helped out completing the early 1900s farm scene. Great work guys! The farm scene will be on display at the International Plowing Match near Finch this September 22-26.

We are still looking for volunteers to man the booth for our display at the IPM. Shifts are no longer than three hours. You'll have lots of fun interacting with interesting people from near and far. If you can help out please call Sharon at 613-933-6951.

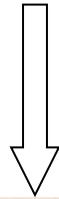
St. Andrews West A Walking Tour



Through the efforts of Maureen McAlear we have published a Walking Tour Brochure describing the historical sites in the village of St. Andrews. We have many visitors to the area outside of our regular Sunday open house hours. The brochure is now available at the old cemetery to all these visitors and will provide them with a self guided description of the various historical sites. Maureen has also distributed them throughout the counties at many other historical attractions. For our members and others planning a trip to the area we have posted a copy of the brochure on our website. Again, many thanks to Maureen who spent many hours compiling this attractive brochure.

Also, with gratitude we thank Maureen for her years of service as treasurer of the Society. Maureen is taking a well deserved break from the board of directors and we welcome Johanne Cameron as our new treasurer.

Several years ago we ran a story on Highland View Farm, just east of St. Andrews, once owned by the late Vincie Duncie John MacDonald. He and his wife Ethel (née Grant) had one daughter Margaret (Mardie) who married Don Waite and moved to Staten Island N.Y. Margaret died a few years ago and recently I received an email from her grandson Bryan Waite who while going through his grandmother's belongings found several pictures taken at Highland View and the St. Andrews area. Unfortunately, many of the individuals are not identified in the pictures though the faces are familiar. Bryan sent me a digital copy of these and if anyone would like to see more of them I would be happy to share them. Below, a few of the pictures that Bryan sent. From the early 1940s probably of Margaret's class at St. Andrews School. Bottom left, Margaret and Don at their wedding reception celebrated at Highland View. Bottom right, the Waites and MacDonalds, Vince and Ethel are the couple on the right.



Note the school sign. It is one of the few items retrieved before the school's demolition. It is on display in our museum in the Heritage Centre.



Welcome: We are pleased to welcome Mayor Jim Bancroft from the Township of South Stormont as the Township's representative to the Historical Society. Jim says he looks forward to an enjoyable relationship with us and thanks us for our commitment to preserving local heritage.

He has also taken up the cause to find a solution to the stone fence damage at St. Andrews. As you may be aware, the fence being hit by motorists at the intersection of County Rd. 18 and Hwy 138 is a recurring problem. In the past CTHS has made unsuccessful requests to the Ontario Ministry of Transportation to rectify the problem by installing some sort of barrier. Let's hope this time they listen to our mayor!

It is with great sadness that we say goodbye to two of our long time, dedicated members. Theresa Wheeler died May 13 and Angus McIntosh died August 17. Until her illness began to slow her down Theresa was active in many aspects of our organization. She served as treasurer for many years and fund raised thousands of dollars through the quilt raffles. CTHS made a donation in memory of Theresa to Hospice Carefor in Cornwall. Angus had deep roots in Cornwall Township that went back many generations and he was known for his love of music and his guitar. We extend our sympathies to Angus' wife Winnie and family.

Editor's Note: *From our website, our Society receives one or two genealogy related inquiries per month from people tracing their ancestral roots to this area. For years, member Don Kenny has volunteered to try to answer these questions. In the following he narrates some of his successes and techniques used in his research.*

My interest in this hobby goes back some 25 years. The biggest push I had in acquiring a passion for genealogy was being a member of the now defunct SDG Genealogical Society. It was there that I was exposed to REAL genealogists like Lyall Manson and Lilly Worrall, to mention just two. Learning about ones ancestors is much, much easier today. In the old days before the internet, many interested persons had to hire a local genealogist, who went go to the government or church repositories and manually searched through census and other records. This could have limited results and sometimes become a little pricey.

To help someone who has posted a question to me, first, I try to categorize the questioner as to their experience and the depth of their findings to date. There is no point in me redoing work that has already been well done by them or someone else. Of course, you have to do enough to ensure that you are working on the right family tree. My approach upon receiving an inquiry is to go through my own stash here at home and to access various internet free or subscription based data sites. For example, I have a copy of Lyall Manson's Family Tree Maker file containing his life's work. There are 64,000 Cornwall Township (and area) connected entries. Did you know that Cornwall Roots has all cemetery stones within 75 kilometers, photographed and digitized, for free? The Northern N.Y. Library system has all the newspapers copied and digitized, for free! We have the Franco Ontario Society housed in the Cornwall Library. This is an amazing resource, and I am a life time member. Ancestry.ca costs me less than a dollar a day, an amazing bargain, yet some researchers resist paying. I generally get back to the inquirer right away, with the information found, or to ask questions as to what they want specifically. Unfortunately, this is the stage where sometimes the inquiry goes into limbo, for a number of reasons. Usually, getting out and researching at remote locations is too time consuming, plus newer questions have pushed inconclusive research to the bottom of the list of things to do.

Finally, I will tell you about two of my very successful results, one from an inquiry and one personal. I had an inquiry from Pauline Eamer, Ottawa, and a long time friend, married to Clifford Eamer, originally from the Smithville District. One of her close friends was looking for her birth mother. The government had just released some previously unavailable information, so I was able to locate her family members from her mother's later marriage. We were all on pins and needles wondering if they would accept her into the extended family. They did and everyone was very pleased and happy. I was considered a bit of a hero at the time, and all because of a few well chosen keystrokes. On the personal side, no one was ever able to discover the name of neither my great, great grandfather nor exactly where they lived in Co. Fermanagh, Ireland. I found Roots Chat, a British Isles site, where I posted my inquiry. Due to this fantastic site, and a number of very generous people, I know his name to be 'Thomas', and his homeland's name to be 'Tattenbar'. There was also a wealth of peripheral information that became available. This specific inquiry has had 22,000 hits since its inception several years ago. **Don Kenny.**

Our next regular meeting is Tuesday September 22, 7:30 pm at the Heritage Centre. Hope to see you there.