

# *Cornwall Township Historical Society*

## *Newsletter March 2011*

[www.cornwalltwphistorical.ca](http://www.cornwalltwphistorical.ca)

Editor: Don McIntosh

### **In Gratitude to the Farmer's Hired Man**



One of the most overlooked folks on the farms of days gone by was the hired farm worker. In the era before mechanization many farmers without large families to help with chores were forced to hire someone to assist with the farm duties. The hired worker had to have many skills. His duties would include everything on the farm: milking twice daily, haying, cutting fire wood, harvesting etc all on meager wages. The hours of work were endless, tools were hand operated and machinery was crude and horse drawn. Dairy cows were milked by hand; grain was stooked by pitch fork and later shoveled by manual labour. Haying was no different. Both horse and man had to sweat it out on long hot summer days.

For many farm workers money wasn't too important. The farmer who could provide a worker with a decent place to live, three meals a day and some pocket money was considered generous. Indeed in the winter time when the cows dried up and no milking was done, many farm workers were happy to work for room and board alone. With few farm chores to do, many cold winter days were spent in the bush hauling logs with a team of horses. Logs were cut into 4 ft. lengths with two man cross cut saws and then split with wedges. All of this demanding exhausting physical labour. Most farms required about 30 cords of firewood for winter heat so anything cut more than

that became a welcome revenue source for the farmer.

Starting in the late 1800s many alleged orphaned "Home Children" were sent to Canada from England to work as indentured farm labourers. In many cases these child labourers were abused by their host families and lived in squalor on the farm. Many were forced to flee their provider, sometimes at their own peril. WW I saw many of these Home Children quickly enlist in military service to escape the deprecation they were forced to endure and also as a way of returning overseas to England with the dream of reconnecting with their true families and reclaim their identity. Rejoining their families in England turned out to be nothing more than that, a dream. Home Children served valiantly in WW I, many making the ultimate sacrifice. But that's a story for another day.



*A two man cross cut saw*

Throughout WW II the doors to Canada were shut for immigrants wanting to settle here. In 1947 Prime Minister Mackenzie King was moved by the chaos he saw in post war ravaged Europe so it was decided that Canada should open the door to new immigrants willing to work as farm labourers. The Canada Settlement Scheme was devised by which Canada was willing to accept European farmers and farm workers who wished to settle in Canada. These workers were supported by willing hosts who sponsored the worker. The worker

had to commit to work for the sponsor for one full year after which his family from the old country could join him. The experience of these newcomers ranged from being housed in a chicken coop by an abusive farmer to becoming part of a loving Canadian family. It was the luck of the draw but countless brave immigrants were willing to take the chance to get to Canada and start a new life. Between 1947 and 1960 there were 142,500 officially sponsored Dutch farm immigrants alone.

A challenge faced by farmer and farm worker alike was the language barrier. Many of these immigrant farm workers had little or no exposure to the English language. The farmer may send the worker off to fetch a hammer and find him returning with a wheel barrow. Some others lacked any farm experience but signed on just for the opportunity to come to Canada. One British lad showed his lack of farm experience when a farmer asked him if he was familiar with a harrow. "Oh yes", he replied. "My mother was an O' Hara." This lack of experience was often tempered by the determination and ambition of the immigrant farm worker. The defining goal of these workers was to one day own their own farm. Many were able to achieve this. Several of the host farmers who took advantage of the Canada Settlement Scheme did so because they had no family to assist them on their farm and no succession plan to pass the farm on to the next generation. Over the years the immigrant farm worker became a loyal and trusted colleague so when the time came for the farmer to retire, often the farm worker was the favored buyer of the farm.

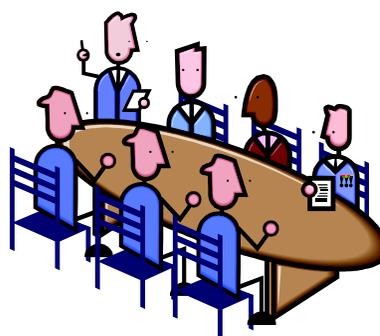
Throughout the 1950s and 60s farms became more and more mechanized so that the farm worker had to have more technical skills and training. Unlike in years gone by the farmer couldn't just put someone to work who showed up at his gate. It took an investment of months of training to ensure the worker could handle the mechanized equipment. The farmer needed assurance that this investment would pay off with at least four years of loyal and dedicated service. One strategy used by many farmers was to hire a young man without a car. Their logic: after a few pay cheques the worker would run out and buy a car on

credit and then have to stick around for another four years while making car payments. After four years it was usually time for the young man to move on to greener pastures in the city.

Despite the many challenges farmers face, probably one of his most stalwart assets is the hired man. Often overlooked in history for their contributions to rural life, they asked for little and gave much in return. In this day of advanced mechanization and computerization the hired hand is becoming a dying breed. Let's not forget their effort. They earned their place in history.

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## Upcoming Meeting



Don't forget our next general meeting at the Heritage Centre Tuesday

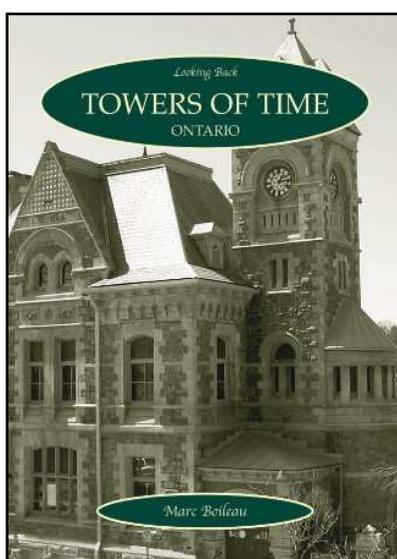
March 22 at 7:30 pm. After a long winter's absence we are sure to have lots to discuss. A great way to celebrate the official arrival of spring. Bring a friend.



To a special meeting sponsored by the S.D. & G Historical Society. In conjunction with their annual meeting on Saturday March 26<sup>th</sup>, the Society will welcome a special guest speaker Dr. Marc Boileau. Marc is the author of the recently published book "Towers of Time: Ontario". He will speak on the architecture of Public Works Canada

focused through the history of our Customs & Post Office buildings. Since the publication of his book "Towers of Time: Ontario" Marc has been an invited guest speaker at numerous Historical Societies in Ontario. His slide-talks have also been presented to LACACs, Archives, postal history clubs and museum organizations.

The book covers all the Post Office towers from Ontario-including the former Cornwall building. His talk also uses images of other regionally important Post Offices/Customs Houses like Brockville (former) and Alexandria to illustrate their architectural and historical context. They form the nucleus of a presentation on the topic: **"Canada's forgotten Nation Project"**



His book will be available to purchase at a special rate of \$22.95. The S.D. & G. Historical Society is covering the cost of bringing in this speaker from the University of Guelph. Please, let's show CTHS support and attend the event. If anyone is in need of a ride perhaps we can carpool from the Heritage Centre.

Here's the schedule:

**When:** Saturday March 26

**Where:** Schnitzels Restaurant 158 Pitt Street in their private meeting room.

**Time:** Lunch will be at noon, open menu. Lunch is optional.

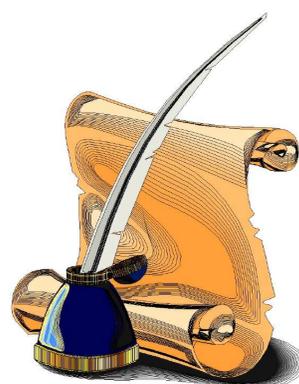
At 1:30 pm the S.D.G Historical will have a short meeting. The speaker will be introduced at 2:00 pm. No need to reserve or order food, or attend anything but the talk. Just make sure you arrive before 2:00 pm if you plan not to take in the lunch.



### An Old Irish Blessing

**May the road rise up to meet you.  
May the wind always be at your back.  
May the sun shine warm upon your face,  
and rains fall soft upon your fields.  
And until we meet again,  
May God hold you in the palm of His hand**

### The President's Pen



Greetings once again from the President's Pen. With help of some good weather we may have seen the worst of

winter, although we certainly had our share of snow recently. All in all though, the winter was not too bad. Now we can look ahead to spring and the prospect of dealing with unfinished business from last year. The most pressing of the unfinished projects is surely the Simon Fraser Plaque.

The Municipal Council of South Stormont has invested considerable effort and expense in this project, and we of the Cornwall Township Historical Society are similarly committed.

Let's make it happen. See you on March 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Bill Costello



On our website we had a request from a gentleman in B. C. doing research on the Laflin family. He was aware that there is a Laflin St. in Cornwall and he was wondering how that street got its name. Laflin Street runs off Brookdale Ave. just north of 14<sup>th</sup> St. If anyone knows how this street got its name please get in touch with us. Email: [info@cornwalltwphistorical.ca](mailto:info@cornwalltwphistorical.ca) or call Don McIntosh 613-524-2075

As you are no doubt aware, CTHS is struggling to recruit new members. For various reasons, over the past few years we have lost several members. The future viability of the Historical Society depends on new membership: if we have no new members we will eventually have no Historical Society.

Do you know someone who would like to support a worthwhile organization? Below is a membership application. Pass it along to someone. Remember, we need new younger members to keep this organization going.

***Cornwall Township Historical Society  
Membership Application***

***Name*** \_\_\_\_\_

***Mailing Address*** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ ***Postal Code*** \_\_\_\_\_

***Tel:*** \_\_\_\_\_ ***Email:*** \_\_\_\_\_

***How do you wish to receive the Newsletter? Regular Mail*** \_\_\_\_\_ ***Email*** \_\_\_\_\_

***Membership Type: Individual \$5.00; Family \$8.00; Life \$35.00***

***Mail to: Membership Chair Marg MacDonald, 17109 Valade Rd, St. Andrews, ON***

***K0C 2A0***