

"Reflections From Memory's Mirror"

Reminiscences of the Old Days by
Mr. James Craig, of Watford.

"I love to hear the Old Pioneer tell of the days of yore, And why he left his native land to seek a foreign shore, To brave the breeze, where forest trees were almost hid with snow, And there to build his cabin home some sixty years ago."

Some weeks ago the Guide-Advocate dug up some records of Forty Years Ago. They were not buried as long as King Tut's treasure, but forty years is long time for Watford. There seemed to be an abundant supply of Auctioneers and Blacksmiths. I presume those blacksmiths of forty years ago were the successors of the Old Pioneers of Sixty Years Ago, who came with the early settlers, located homes, built their shops at the roadside, pounded iron and shod horses, while their boys cleared the farm and burned charcoal. These were men who had learned to make things. They spent three long years at their apprenticeship (and more if their trade was learned in the Old Country.) They were experts at making and tempering knives and other edged tools and they were always to be found at their forge when a customer came in.

The first of these old-timers whom I remember as a boy was Joseph Goodhand. His farm and shop was near 27 sideroad on the 4th line south. He must have been there as early as the year 55. He conducted a shop for several years until he was disabled by an accident. The business was then taken over and continued by a man named Bartlett. He it was whom I remember seeing making horseshoe nails from the back of an old grass scythe.

To the west he had Richard Morris on Lot 12. He was a typical Englishman. He had several boys, some of them learned the trade, but none of them remain in the neighborhood now.

About the year 1857 there came an old German blacksmith into our neighborhood. He built a shop on 27

sideroad. He did not shoe horses, but would tackle anything else that came to him. He made wedges for splitting rails out of little scraps of iron. For the benefit of those housewives of today who complain that their lot in life is hard, I might add that this man's wife did the striking for him.

Wisbeach Corners was noted for blacksmiths. In my remembrance, there must have been six or seven at various times. About the year 65 the Parker brothers (father and uncle of our present townsman, Mr. Ben Parker) started and carried on a successful shop at Wisbeach. They were not only good mechanics but were very skillful in the treatment of ailing horses and cattle. These men and their successors are gone and the name of Wisbeach is little else but a memory.

We shall now take our readers a few miles to the south. There are a few residents still living who will remember Father Cook, a mile east of the townline on the 6th. He pounded iron and shod horses throughout the week and preached the Gospel on Sundays in the little bass-wood schoolhouse that stood on the corner of Harry Eastabrook's farm.

On the farm owned and occupied by James Searson, on the Brooke side of the townline, John Hastings operated a shop for a time. He experimented and finally made a Drag Cultivator which proved very efficient with the farmers of that time.

Some distance further west, George Thorner had a little shop. He was one of the few oldtimers who came into town and started business after Watford was incorporated.

Directly south of Watford, then known as 6th line Corners, at one time there was quite a little industry. The Methodist people had a church on the corner of the Hume farm, while on the Brooke side there was a general store kept in succession by three men named Kent, Bentley and Murphy. This store was started in the early Fifties. Dr. Mott had an office and dispensed "physic, pills and liniment" to the sick people of the neighborhood. On the Warwick side there was a blacksmith and wagon shop managed by the Newell brothers. Then there was a cooper's

shop, and last, but not least, a shoemaker's shop, presided over by a good loyal Irishman named Tom

Duncan, who, when it was proposed to gravel 18 sideroad, offered to subscribe Ten Dollars, saying that the people would then wear off twice as many half-soles walking on the gravel as on the mud road. Duncan and Tom Patterson, were continually playing tricks on each other, one of which I will tell as I heard it from Mrs. Duncan.

It was the 1st of April. Duncan called over to Patterson that his wife wanted to speak to him. The cooper, who was a bachelor, took off his apron, donned his coat and came in to see what Mrs. Duncan wanted. After some casual chat he hinted that Tom had told him she wanted to see him. She saw the joke and laughingly asked him if he did not know "this is the 1st of April. You are not worth a cent if you don't get even with him."

The cooper sneaked home, found a piece of turnip, out of which he whittled an excellent imitation of a half-burned candle. (These were the days of tallow candles.) Back he he came, took Mrs. Duncan into his confidence, and asked her to place the "candle" in the holder. That evening just about dusk he came back with a newspaper in his hand and asked the shoemaker to light the candle as he wanted to show him an item in the paper. Duncan got the "candle", lit a sliver and touched it to the wick but the candle would not light. He got an awl and attempted to divide the wick, but it snapped off and the joke was sprung.

Some of the tradesmen were born mechanics and like our townsman, Isaac Hastings, they could make anything out of wood or iron that they were called upon to do. One of such men I have in my mind's eye was my uncle, Hugh Maxwell. About the year 57 he built a shop for woodwork on the corner of 24 sideroad, now occupied by Thomas Westgate. He later added a blacksmith shop and some machinery. For power he had a windmill, assisted in calm days by a horse. There he had a turning lathe, a small upright saw that would cut plank 10 inches wide, and set of chopping stones with which he did custom work. All these were made by his own hands. He was an expert rifle shot and killed many a deer in the early days. He was called upon to make many useful articles long since passed out of use, such as reels, spinning wheels, looms, drags for new land, signboards, cradles to cut grain, cradles to rock sleepy babies, and as undertakers were yet an unknown necessity, occasionally a coffin. This latter order was usually accompanied by sufficient black walnut lumber to make the coffin.

In those days coffins were lowered into the grave minus a rough box. The graves were a work of art. They were dug gratuitously by friends of the deceased. Dug to the depth of about five feet, they were made perfectly level at the bottom, then a further trench the exact shape and size of the coffin so that two inches lower than the surrounding ledge. Short pieces of boards or plank were laid crosswise with their ends resting on the ledge so that when the grave was filled in, the clay did not come in contact with the coffin. The

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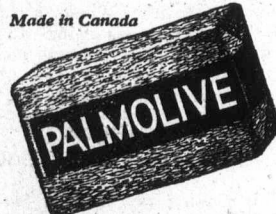
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introduction of the rough box did away with this old time custom. These were the days when people were healthy, contented and happy and knew little of what was going on outside their own immediate neighborhood.

FALL FAIR DATES

Strathroy	Sept. 15-17
WATFORD	Sept. 18-19
Petrolia	Sept. 22-23
Wilkesport	Sept. 23
Sarnia	Sept. 24-26
Brigden	Sept. 29-30
Forest	Sept. 30 Oct. 1
Theford	Oct. 2-3
Wyoming	Oct. 2-3
Florence	Oct. 2-3
Alvinston	Oct. 6-8
Indian Reserve (Sarnia)	Oct. 7-8

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