



National Film Board of Canada

HARTLAND, N.B.

By **Wilhelmine Thomas**

IN the middle of New Brunswick, there's a small farm. It forms the centre of a star. The star's points are the villages of Lakeville, Centreville, Hartland (and Premier Richard), Waterville, Woodstock and Florenceville, home of McCain Foods. Crowning this land is a white house with many windows. My father sits reading on the sun porch. He is a World War I veteran, 80 years old and 50 years married. He is a rarity. The last of the pioneers. The independent farmer.

The farm is his, scratched out between crop failures, fires, stock losses and the changing times. He built the big white house from the ground up. He built it large to accommodate his children and theirs; the children who have grown and long since left for the cities. The house is empty except for him and my mother. Five years have elapsed since the farm was harvested. He's had an offer to sell the land, but not the homestead.

There are 10 deserted farmhouses between my father's farm and Centreville. The Kirkbride house is vacant and black; the Giberson house sweeps the ground; the Prosser house, lacking windows and doors, leans into the swamp; the Purrinton house, lifeless as an addict's face—and so on up the road. These deserted houses, empty as barren windows, teeter in the middle of prosperous land, rich in green potato fields and yellow grain.

Where have all the farmers gone? Well, eternity takes care of the older ones. Their families have moved to Ontario. The rest have sold out and work for McCains, men, women and children. They work for "the man."

Why? If the small farmer is lucky enough to harvest a good crop, he may or may not make a profit. There are no effective marketing controls to protect him. Prices vary drastically, daily. One summer hailstorm can ruin a field of wheat in half an hour, that same field he's been ploughing and harrowing and raking and sowing and fertilizing and spraying since the frost came out of the ground.