



THE 'HORSE AND BUGGY AGE' STILL THRIVES

Horse-drawn vehicles are still a familiar sight in the Elmira district, centre of a flourishing Mennonite population, 15 miles northwest of Kitchener, Ontario.

Moreover, the carriage-building industry, which some years ago seemed to be dying, is now alive and well and expanding in the area. Situated within a ten-mile radius of Elmira are two buggy-building factories, five blacksmiths, six harness-makers, and a wheel-and-shaft manufacturer who sells his products from coast to coast and has a growing export trade with the United States.

GREATER DEMAND TODAY

According to Simeon B. Martin, owner of Rural Carriage Supplies, there is a larger demand for his goods than when he opened his shop in an old barn on Highway 86 eight years ago. He attributes the expansion of business to the traditional adherence to the buggy and carriage as a means of transportation by Old Order Mennonites and Amish — even among younger members, who want to have their own vehicles as soon as they marry.

Church rules and custom forbid them to drive cars or trucks, which are regarded as symbols of worldly living. Elmira and other villages in the area, which provide hitching posts, are thronged with buggies and carriages on market days. Another factor in the growth of the business is the increasing popularity of the buggy as a hobby. Farmers, and city-

dwellers with homes in the country, are eager buyers of rebuilt older buggies or custom-built new models.

Simeon Martin learned his trade from another Old Order Mennonite, Silas Martin, who with his 16-year-old son, Ishmael, operates the Homestead Carriage Works in nearby Heidelberg. Silas has been in business for more than 20 years. Simeon employs three men at his shop.

THREE MAIN TYPES

The main types of vehicle now used in the Elmira district are the buggy, the carriage and the democrat. The carriage and the democrat are both two-seaters; in the democrat the seats are adjustable and may be removed to haul grain or other produce or equipment, which makes it a handy, all-purpose wagon. All three are rectangular-shaped with square sides and exposed tops. Users prefer to brave the elements rather than cover in the top.

With the improvement in roads, carriages are generally drawn by just one horse instead of two as in the old days.

A new buggy retails at \$350 plus taxes, while a carriage or democrat costs up to \$500. Actually, "new" vehicles are not entirely new. Axles, springs, steps and some of the other hardware pieces are expensive to reproduce so the manufacturers use old parts from worn-out buggies and carriages. The rest of the ironwork is fashioned in the shop forge. The Martins also do their own upholstering and painting.