

Tell your stories

By Jim Eadie



Living on and operating an old small farm in North Hastings means a daily experience of passing over and thinking of the past hoof prints, implement wheels tracks and footprints of original settlers and those who followed them in a dangerous gamble to survive and possibly prosper. Most did not particularly prosper, but most did survive and some moved on to a better plot of land.

In our annual harvest of about 1,000 bales of hay for a small flock of sheep, many hours are spent going around and around the fields, studying every inch of land, fencerow and stone pile. Living in what used to be Rose Island in Wollaston Township, I know that across the road from the field I was working in next-door, there used to be the post office. The current owner proudly tells me that his grandfather and grandmother ran that post office over 70 years ago as he points out the spot in the bush where it used to be. Down the road I know there used to be another farm, now long gone; a general store; a sawmill; and I have been told a thriving little community. A little further down the road was a settlement named Salem, which at one time held a fall fair. No sign of any of that now.

Using vintage farm equipment, and old tractors from the 1940s, people often slow to watch, and wave to me. This year, I actually had two people stop to talk.

Neil McKee introduces himself, and tells me he is from Pasadena, Maryland, USA. He has come to Rose Island to research the story of his great grandparents John and Mary McKee who settled in Rose Island in the 1880s and built the store and sawmill. He shows me pictures of his relatives, maps of the area, and original letters written and posted from Rose Island before the turn of the century.

?You should write a book,? I told him. He assured me that he has a book almost completed, and shows me a copy. After a long and interesting conversation he departs, after promising to see that I get a copy of his book when it is completed.

Next, along comes an old one-ton truck, and William B. Wallis introduces himself to me. Inside the truck I can see a pile of papers, pictures and maps which reminded me of Mr. McKee. William tells me he has returned to the area after many years mining, prospecting and painting pictures in the Yukon. He tells me that his mother was also a painter, and a taxidermist. I am shown a series of original paintings he has done of local barns, and he tells me he is very interested in painting many of the different local barns, sheds and shanties before they are gone. ?You should write a book,? I told him. He promised to keep in touch.

There have been an amazing number of locally written books of local memories and history published in the last several years, and more have been promised. Wollaston Heritage will have two new publications available in time for the Coe Hill Fair this year. Limerick Township has a new book just completed, although stalled in publication. Kirby books have republished a number of out of print local history books, and some new publications with a promise of more in the next year.

Three times in the past several months, people have told me they are working on local small community history or memory books, that are at various stages of completion.

I have kept my promise and will keep checking in to see how they are coming along.

I encourage everyone to write down their stories, and document your photographs, even if you never write a book. If you ever catch yourself saying: "I should write a book?" then write a book!

My mother gave me a huge collection of family photographs going back many generations with documentation on the back of each photograph of the people and places depicted. Make sure to share copies of your photographs and documents with a local heritage or historical group.

Generations from now, I promise, someone will be seeking that information and you will have generously allowed them to prepare the foundation upon which they build their life stories upon, and their children's.