

Transcription

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The Regan Homestead

Written by Frances (Regan) Davis - 1979

The story of a family homestead weaves the details on a giant tapestry. The land is the background, the dwellings form the middle distance and in the foreground the people play out their lives, generation following generation, linking the past with the future.

The ancestors of the Regan family were from Wexford County, Ireland. John Regan Sr was born in 1815 and came to America sometime after the potato famine of 1847. He had been a schoolmaster in one of the villages of Wexford but left his native land to find a new life in Canada. It is unclear, now, when he arrived or where; but eventually he made his way to Bedford Mills, south of Westport, where he was employed in the sawmills of the lumber industry existing there at the time.

John's work at the mills introduced him to the people of Bedford Mills. In July of 1856 he married a local girl, Mary Hamilton, the daughter of a farmer. She had relatives living in the Stratford area and the newly-weds joined them there to take up farming. Here in their new life the first five children were born; Bridget 1857 - Rose 1856 - Michael 1860 - Mary 1861 and John Junior 1863. . . The family stayed in the Stratford area about seven years, but eventually chose to return to Leeds County to establish a permanent home.

Thus, in 1865 John and Mary Regan Senior purchased at Chaffey's Lock a tract of land on the north shore of Lake Opinicon that was to become known as the Regan Homestead. A Mr. Fairbanks had owned the land previously. It had approximately 165 acres with three log buildings; a two-story, four room house, a hay-barn and an ox-barn. The dwellings stood on a hill overlooking the lake . . . Here the family continued to expand to include James born in 1866, followed by Margaret 1867 - Lawrence 1869 - Kate 1871 - Annie 1873 and Theresa in 1875.

John, Mary and, by now, their eleven children continued to increase their farming capacity. They cleared more land for pasture and for tillage and added an ice-house.

Homestead life progressed season following season, marked by good harvests and by bad, joys as well as sorrows. Tragedy struck when James, a toddler, died of burns following a kitchen accident; again the family grieved the loss of their mother with Mary's death in 1888. But joys came too, with good harvests, with weddings and in due time with grandchildren to expand the family yet again.

In 1893 the old two-story, four room log house was replaced by a frame one. On January 30, 1894 John Junior brought his new bride Mary Ann Burns, from Massassaugi [sic], near Westport to live and work on the homestead. Their six children were all born in the frame house; Vincent 1894 - James 1896 (died shortly after birth) - Wilfrid 1898 - Frances 1900 -

Herbert 1902 and James in 1905. . . This generation knew its sorrows too; in 1908 Vincent died after a long illness, Poor harvests reoccurred from time to time, but despite their difficulties the young family continued to add improvements to the farm. In 1905 a new barn was built with a horse stable behind it, and about 1914 the corncrib was bought and moved opposite the barn. A year later the old ox-barn was transferred to sit beside the corncrib and began a new life as a henhouse. Early in the 1920's John and Mary added the machine shed and the woodhouse once more changing the middle distance of the tapestry. John did all his own carpentry and masonry using lumber and gravel from the farm. The log house and the hay-barn were taken down and the timbers used in various projects leaving only the ox-barn of the original buildings.

Various severances reduced the farm's overall acreage until in 1933, when Wilfrid, John and Mary's oldest surviving son, married Hilda Jordan and took over operation considerably less property than the 165 acres remained. . . John and Mary assisted with the farm's management till 1944 when Mary died followed a year later by John.

Wilfrid and Hilda formed the third generation on the homestead. Under their guidance the house was wired and acquired indoor plumbing with a hot water system.

The new family continued an old tradition of hospitality by receiving a few tourists who appreciated the warmth of their host and hostess as well as appreciating the good fishing on Like Opinicon. . . Wilfrid and Hilda altered the look of the house somewhat with a glassed in sunporch gracing the west end, and with a dormer window brightening an upstairs bedroom; however, other than these minor differences the home remained pretty much as it had been built in 1893. Undoubtedly at this point it would have been possible to find portions of the original buildings tucked here and there through-out the farm, although only the ox-barn remained intact. The contours of the land changed too with the opening of a gravel pit in the former cornfield. It entirely obliterated the site of the first homestead.

The tenure of the third generation was brief. In 1950 Wilfrid died leaving his estate to Hilda, who later remarried. At her death in 1964 the farm passed on to her second husband and left the Regan ownership completely. Consequently after 99 years under one name, the homestead missed, by one year, the proud title of "A CENTURY FARM."

But the tapestry remains. The contours of the background alter from time to time; the shadows on the middle distance flicker. . . The laughter and the pain of the generations spanning 1865 and 1965 is now an intrinsic part of the land. All of it links those past times with those yet to come.

MARY BURNS REGAN / FRANCES REGAN DAVIS / FRANCES DAVIS JANS??



The 'Old
Regan
Homestead'
overlooking
Opinicon Lake.