

MOUNT ST. FRANCIS COMMUNITY

(Transcribed by Fiona Cowles, King Heritage Committee 2005 from notes made by Mrs. Doris Carson, May 1956 for the King Ridge Women's Institute Tweedsmuir History)

Twenty-two years' ago in 1934, a community was started on the fifth Concession of King Township on King Ridge Farm.

Five acres of land were loaned to the Rev. Father McGoey by Mr. John McCabe to start this community. There was a church already built here about 1929. The land for the church was donated by Mr. McCabe and the farmers living around this area formed a bee to build the church which was called Sacred Heart Church.

The first year, 1934, five men and their families who, because of the Depression were unable to make a living for themselves and their families (in the city) moved into the community. Three families had quite a few children, the other two were young married couples without children. Four small houses were built by them and one of the young couples lived in the big barn on Mrs. Bertrand's land. Here the first baby of the Community was born, in a January snowstorm and both the baby and his mother were moved to the hospital as soon as they could be moved out.

The second year, 1935, 50 acres were bought from Mr. McCabe on the Sideroad between the 5th and 6th Concessions which is now known as the Community Sideroad (16th S.R.) Then there were fourteen more families selected to come out to live here. These men built five two storey houses for the first five families and they each got 10 acres apiece from the 50 acres. These five families also each got a horse, cow, chickens, pigs, and implements such as a wagon, harrows, disks, sleds, and other things that are needed on a small farm. While the five big houses were being built, the other fourteen men were also building small one storey houses 15' x 30' so they could bring their families to be with them.

There was one family who came out on their own. They lived for a while in Mrs. Bertrand's house, then in the McCabe homestead, and then they bought John Gould's house on the hill on the sideroad. By this time there were quite a few children in the community. Each of the 14 men was given a small piece of land for a garden. They and their wives produced a lot towards their food for the year. The women went out in the bush, of which there was much more than there is now, and picked wild fruit such as raspberries, strawberries, chokecherries, and sugar plums to preserve for the coming winter. They also received quite a bit of domestic fruit, such as peaches, pears, and apples which they preserved making pickles, relishes and jams. There was quite a bit of competition between the ladies as to who could preserve the most food and fruit for winter. There was also wool and material for socks, sweaters and clothes for their families which was quite rugged (?) as some of the ladies had never done anything like this in their lives. They also had to do all their housework such as washing and cooking in the old-fashioned way.

There was no well, so the men had to take big wooden barrels on a wagon and go about three miles to bring water to drink and for cooking. And they had big barrels to catch as much rain water as possible for washing and scrubbing. What money was to be had was spent at McDonald and Wells' General Store in King City for the staple foods that were needed. But with all the hardships, there was quite a bit of fun, visiting neighbours, learning how to knit and sew, trading receipts, and ideas for fixing up the homes to make them more liveable.

There was one small house built for a school and every Friday night there was a dance, with a fiddle for music, and the ladies provided food and tea and coffee. By the end of the second year there were about five new babies and more on the way. Dr. Devins of Aurora was the Community doctor and the babies were born in York County Hospital, Newmarket.

Towards the end of the second year, all of John Gould's farm was bought. It extended from the Community Side Road south to H. Gilliams (?), and west to the 50 acres bought from McCabes, about 100 acres. And 68 acres from Mr. Campbell of King Horn, which was lot 18 on the 5th Concession. All this was divided into 10 acre lots. These were drawn for by each of the second year men. One 10 acre lot was kept for the school property.

After the land was divided, the men cut their small homes in sections and moved them onto their 10 acre lots. Then they started farming in earnest. They also received stock, chickens and farm implements.

In 1936, there were thirteen more families brought out from the city. Four of these were put on land bought in Tecumce. During the third year it was decided some of these families would not make good on the farm, so there was a decision made to re-establish them back in the city. Out of the twenty-eight families, the original five families went back of their own accord, and 15 more were re-established back in the city.

The land was re-divided into 20 acre lots on the side road, and two lots of 34 acres each on the 5th Concession.

The men then started to build their permanent homes and the school. Then the Sisters of Providence came to teach, and a house was built for them. Since then there have been two new additions to Sacred Heart School, and a High School. And the seven who are left have paid for their land and houses, and have deeds to them.

Some of the 20 acre lots have been divided again, and sold to people who are not of the first settlers of the Community.