

## RURAL TALES

### THE BEGINNING

*Anna Jones*

As one travels through life, we periodically encounter stop signs. We have to come to a halt, assess the situation, and carry on according to our own assessment. Such a stop happened to me the autumn of 1996, when Katie Allen, a neighbour and friend telephoned and asked me to join a writer's group. This group's intended purpose was to assist each individual to write their own memoirs. Reluctantly, I thought about it. My head told me you are not a writer, you are 78 years old, you have no diary or scrap book to stimulate memories and besides, you don't type. The challenge to record some of my cherished memories gnawed at my reasoning.

I recently lost my Mother, who was born in 1897 and I realized that her passing was the end of many interesting family tales, local history and feelings and opinions of the period of her lifetime. I began to feel that I didn't want to leave the same vacuum of rich information to be lost to my own children. So, in October 1996, I made the decision to give a "try" at writing my memoirs. So I joined "Writers' Cramp", a group of approximately 14. We meet every second Thursday at 1:00 p.m. Each member is encouraged to write thoughts, ideas and memories during that two week period. When we meet, we read aloud, for a period of about 3 minutes, a portion of what we have written. Each one is choosing his or her own style and various methods of approach. We met at first as strangers, cautiously writing about ourselves. Bursts of enthusiasm and fellowship and meeting with others trying to do the same thing, certainly proved to be stimulating.

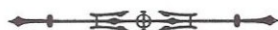
Soon there developed an interaction one with another. Memoirs of a fellow writer often trigger a memory in our own life. I soon realized how different were the molds of life to create each individual. Writings of males and females present happenings from different aspects. Now after almost two years, we meet happily exchanging greetings and jesting with each other. Members of the group are very complimentary and encouraging of one's writing efforts, but do offer helpful criticism when needed.

As for myself, being one of the older members, I found my ideas and writings were "old fashioned". Being a product of the sixth generation of pioneer settlers in this rural region, these ideals formed my beliefs. Living a simple life and closely connected with "tillers of the soil" created a great interest for me locally. I've always lived in the Copetown area and I'm extremely interested in this area's ancestors, in Copetown United Church, the only church my husband and I have belonged to all of our lives. With close connections to my own family and a firmly knit community, one develops a deep love and understanding of this area. I grew up and still have a deep passion for nature, earth, outdoors and a plain lifestyle.

To this day, I skeptically view modern ideas as compared to established and well-proven facts. My love of the "out of doors" means the culmination of a garden of one's only

always had a batch of kittens every spring. One kitten especially would be chosen by myself. This adopted kitten was special in every way. I had a wicker doll carriage and a china-faced 'by-low' doll. This doll had lots of lovely hand-knit articles and hand-made dresses, but it was much more fun to play with the kitten. My beloved little kitten would adjust to wearing dolls' clothing and would snuggle in an old wool blanket to sleep in my carriage. As each cat grew older, they would retreat to the barn, so each spring I had the gift of a new kitten. I didn't have a wagon or tricycle, but when my brother Murray was about 8 years old, he acquired a wagon. A special treat for me was to go with my Dad when he was working in the fields near the house. He would put me on the back of "Sid", a gentle Clydesdale work horse. For hours I remember riding the horse holding onto the reins. When I was about twelve years old, my brother Murray got a brand new CCM bicycle from the CCM Shop on James Street in North Hamilton. What a temptation to ride my brother's new bicycle. Murray would be 10 years old in 1931, when he received this bicycle. It was carefully sheltered in the shanty, near the house. I being two years older was told the shanty was forbidden territory. One July day my brother was away visiting a friend, a golden opportunity to go for a "spin". Previously I had sneaked attempts to master the art of riding this two-wheeled beast, but today I was going to hit the open road. Out in the lane riding a short distance to Copetown store, I felt I had mastered the bicycle by staying upright. Now I would get brave and go down a hill to Mill Street near the church. Problems overtook me, with the accelerated speed going downhill, it seemed impossible for me to manage: the result was a good tumble into the ditch. My pride was damaged mostly, as I arose from the long grass with skinned elbows and a bruised arm. Fortunately the bicycle was not damaged. Like a whipped dog, I struggled to get the courage to return home. Once I reached the old shanty I grabbed a rag to polish the bicycle before I placed it in its cherished shelter. I sure learned a lesson from this situation: Pride goes before a fall. Never again did I assume I was so capable of handling other people's property, especially without permission.

I was very fond of my two aunts for they would give me clothes bought "in a store". Probably when I was about 10 years old, I remember receiving for my birthday, a red silk skirt with a pretty blouse with frills down the front. My Aunt Ora and Aunt Sara both loved music. Ora sang beautifully and Sara would play. They had a lot of sheet music and many good memories of families gathered around the piano to sing favourite songs. I enjoy music, but unfortunately have no ability in this art.



### SATURDAY NIGHT BATH - APPROXIMATELY 1923

Next time you enjoy a relaxing, soothing bath, stretched out for comfort, enjoy it! It wasn't so easy in olden days. In 1923 a bath was a weekly event, in a washtub. Every Saturday night, the country kitchen turned into a bathroom with the washtub in front of the

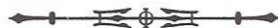
kitchen stove. For a family, Mother, Dad, Brother, and myself, privacy was obtained by chairs turned backwards in a semicircle surrounding the tub. Each had their own bath towel draped over the chair.

The water used also required a great deal of effort. Saturday afternoon, the reservoir on the stove had to be filled with water pumped from the cistern outside. Extra water was heated in two large preserving kettles on the stove. The same bath water was used by all the family with the addition of warm water for each person. The temperature of the water was always carefully tested by immersing one's elbow, so no one would get burned.

The weekly ritual started early Saturday evening by making sure adequate wood was in the wood box, so the heat of the stove would be sure. Blinds in the kitchen were pulled for privacy and also to keep the heat inside. I started the ritual being four years old, my brother two years old, and Mother and Dad followed. Space-wise a tub was adequate when one was small but soon one's knees supported your chin. Mother always provided inspection for cleanliness and then each of us was allowed to dry ourselves and put on clean clothing for the next week. More water would then be added for the next bath. Poor Dad was always last with probably half dirty water, but he would savour a relaxing time, in the heat of the kitchen. Dirty water was saved until Sunday morning to be emptied by pails. In the summer it was used to water flowers and vegetables and in winter it was carried away from the house and emptied on the ground. Sometimes the water was reheated and used to mop the kitchen floor after the bath ritual. Soap used was a bar soap and I remember the clean smell of castille soap or sunlight soap.

This bath night always included a weekly shampoo. I was instructed to kneel on my knees outside the tub, while my Mother shampooed my hair, rinsed it and towel dried - then hopped into the tub. One fondly remembers Saturday nights - all family members, sparkling clean, enjoying popcorn before bedtime. Another memory of the past which has shaped my appreciation of my heritage and modern inventions.

Daily washing, if it included the washing of your hands and face, was done at the kitchen sink. The sink was near the stove reservoir so one had warm water. In the summer the wash basin and towels were placed outside near the cistern. One pumped your own water as needed. For a private sponge wash, a china pitcher of warm water was taken to your room to the wash stand. A large bowl and soap in a dish was in readiness. A wash stand had a bar attached to the back to dry your towel. These towels were linen, usually with a monogram of your family's initial carefully embroidered. Below the table area were two doors which concealed a utility pail. The used water was then carried outside to be dumped. The wash stands today are valuable antiques. I have a wash stand with a complete matching china bowl, pitchers and dishes.



## SCHOOL LIFE

My school life started in 1925 at 6 years of age when I walked one mile to a one room school house. The school was known as Ancaster & Beverly 12 & 20 at the intersection of what are now Highways 99 & 52. Pupils entered this building from the north end into one large room. Across the south of the classroom were blackboards with a platform six inches high and approximately five feet out from the wall. Teacher's desk was in the centre of this platform. The teacher stood on the platform for all her instructions. The school system was known as Jr. First, Sr. First, Jr. Second etc. until Sr. Fourth. All pupils bought their own supplies which included a slate, slate pencils, one lead pencil and a pencil scribbler with lines and for books, a reader and a speller. I still have my Ontario Reader costing four cents, Jr. Third Reader, thirty-five cents and an Ontario Grammar, twenty-five cents. There were thirty-six desks altogether of graduating sizes. My entire public school life was with the same pupils - Rae Gibson, Irene Brennan and Ruby Hildreth, graduating from class to class. When it was time for our class to receive instruction, teacher would say "'Jr. First' stand - March forward".

Our weekly music training consisted of a two-hour period with a traveling music teacher. Mrs. Hood spent one hour with the Jr. grades and one hour with the seniors. All instruction was with a pitch fork. We learned "do-re-me" in many combinations. Any physical training instruction was given to the pupils by standing in the aisles. Different arms and legs positions were followed as directed by the teacher. In the senior grades, four pupils at one time would be chosen to do movements with dumbbells at the back of the classroom. We attended school in First and Second Grades from 9 am to 2:30 pm. Senior classes remained until 4 pm. Recess time and noon hours were always an exciting time. All ages played together. We played scrub baseball, run-sheep-run, anti-eye-over-prisoner's base. In the spring girls skipped and boys played marbles.

In the winter we all brought our own sleighs and used a small hill, across the road west of the school. Each week monitors would be chosen; one senior and one junior pupil to do errands around the school. Drinking water had to be carried from Mrs. Hyland's well, which was the property next door to the school. A stile was built over the fence so we could manoeuvre carrying a pail full of water, spilling as little as possible.

For special times at school, the pupils would be divided into teams for spelling contests. Once a month the Department of Agriculture would deliver to the school slides or 16 mm. movies. Our library was small possibly in a space three feet by six feet. Report cards were issued once a month. Believe me when I say standards were set strictly by my parents.

A big step in my education was entering Dundas District High School in 1932. Subject options, rotating classes, new friends and a three storied building, all seemed very baffling to me. All students had to buy all their own supplies and books. There were 10 pupils from Copetown attending High School. Transportation was supplied by Herb Patterson who owned a truck with the back lined with seats. Later John Boughner drove the pupils to school using a large three-seated car. Each pupil paid \$1.25 weekly for this service. At High

School, the "Copetown Van" had a special honour. Our drivers were always very polite and for safety's sake insisted on good behaviour. All pupils walked to "Governor's Road" for our pick-up and delivery. In High School I was on the basketball team and won many athletic awards.

Attending McMaster University in the fall of 1937 was my next step. Circumstances dictated that I should board with my Grandmother Vinton. This meant transportation using the Belt Line Trolley car to the terminal end of King West. There was quite a walk across the wide open campus. First year was very thrilling - many new friends, basketball team, fencing lessons, debating team and exposure to many new ideas. Plans changed the spring of 1938 when I accepted the engagement ring from my local lover Carl Jones. He had just purchased a farm - conscription for war service was imminent, so we decided to be married in 1940 to actively preserve our investment of property. Neither of us had any money, so in the spring of 1938 I quit university to go to work at Eaton's. I continued to take night courses but still lack a few subjects for a full B.A. Degree. In 1940, I started the "School of Life" being a young bride, farming, budgeting, and managing a large home.



## CHURCH LIFE

Copetown Church has been such an important part of my life that memories speak loud and clear. History of our church dates back to Methodism, when there were no roads only a blaze in the forest or trails made by Indians. There were few settlers and the nearest grist mill and post office was Niagara Falls, 100 miles away. The first minister in our area was Reverend William Case. He was assisted by laymen: Cope Brothers - Conrad, Henry and Thomas. Copetown was named after this family. The first religious building in this area



*Copetown Church - Renovations - 1968*

was a frame structure built in 1820 on the North side of the present cemetery. After the C.N.R. was built, a new site was chosen in 1859 west of the present church. This building proved inadequate so in 1908 the present church with a basement was built. The foundation of this church was dug out with teams and scoop shovels. My Grandfather, William H. Vinton, was one worker and my husband's Grandfather, John K. Jones, also donated his time for this excavation. In this present building of 1908, I was baptized, confirmed and married. My entire religious life has been associated with

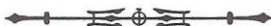
this church and community. After World War I many settlers and religious churches developed and in 1925 the United Church was created, uniting Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Methodists. I was 6 years old at this time, so attending Sunday School was a big event. My Father and Mother and Murray would drive to church for the 11am service, followed at 12:15 by 1 hour of Sunday School. We would walk one and a half miles back to our farm home afterwards. Sundays were mostly religious activities and it was very important to have studied the S.S. lesson and also to have mastered by memory certain Scriptures.

Two high tiers of steps gave access to the church. One set to the north and one set to the west each having eleven steps. For the horse and buggies there was a U-shaped building on the southwest and north sides of the present yard. The physical structure of the church basement in 1930 was very different from the present building. In the basement at the North end was a large pipeless furnace fueled by coal. The coal bin was nearby, as was a small kitchen. Water had to be carried into the kitchen for any event. There was a small sink and a two element oil stove. On the opposite end was a platform for concerts with two small classrooms on each side. A hand crafted pulpit, which stood in the aisle was the superintendent's domain. Respect for the building and our leaders was essential and one was severely reprimanded if one didn't comply.

Because the church represented all community social life, many good times were planned. Church suppers brought everyone out for much needed fellowship. The wooden tables and sawhorses were carried in from the outside shed and set up in three long rows. White linen tablecloths were used and tables set ready for the feast. Copetown Church's Thanksgiving festivals, which ran from approximately 1925 to 1935, were times I really remember. There was no other celebration within a radius of miles, no TV, very few radios, few cars, so the coming together of friends and neighbours was very special. At Copetown month long festivities were planned with Youth Week, Men's special services, Women's activities climaxed by Harvest Home Dinners and services. This anniversary celebration was and still is centered around the third week of October. Tickets were sold in colour - red, white and blue, for selling 1-2-3 the cost was \$5.50. The social suppers surely impressed me for being such a big affair requiring months of planning and work. Farmers were expected to donate bags of potatoes and vegetables, peeled and brought to the church cooked and mashed. Cabbage was grown locally and tubs of shredded cabbage prepared using a kraut board. Pies were made in the homes and brought to the church. Turkeys were roasted in home ovens and brought to the church wrapped in blankets to be kept hot. I can remember Erland Betzner, Roy Bonham and Albert Garland, sharpening large knives and taking turns carving the platters of turkey. Tea and coffee making forms another memory. Mrs. Frank Head always supervised this part. She worked with a clothes boiler over a two-burner coal-oil stove. She prepared 200 cups of coffee at one time. Cups of ground coffee mixed with one egg were placed in cheese cloth bags. Eggs prevented any sediment in the coffee. When the water neared boiling, these bags were dropped into the boiler and she stirred constantly with a large paddle until the desired flavour was achieved. All dish washing was done by hand - quite a chore as each of three table settings needed all clean dishes. These dishes were heavy white porcelain and were church-owned. Tea towels were

brought from home and even young girls and men were recruited for drying dishes. Shelves under the church steps were built to hold massive piles of plates, cups and saucers.

Christmas soon followed with celebration plans starting the end of November. For the Christmas concert S.S. teachers took the lead and each class planned a special event. Under the directions of Mrs. Edith Echlin, our group prepared a girls' drill. There were 12 of us all dressed in white cheese cloth gowns embellished with glittering tinsel at our waist and a halo for our head. The routine of marching in different formations was quietly performed in stocking feet. The musical Accompaniment "Country Gardens" was played by Edna Harris. For such concerts a large platform was built over the church podium and extended to the east wall of the church. The Christmas tree was placed to the side of this elevated platform and old red curtains were strung across the front of the stage. The concert evening was climaxed by a visit from Santa. In his bag was an orange for every child and a small brown bag containing a few hard candies. There were no gifts unless parents brought a toy for their child and placed it under the tree. Sunday School awards were given out for attendance as well as memory work. The awards were usually small editions of "Book of Psalms" or scripture cards to put in the side of your mirror. Santa Claus was always a local person dressed in a broadcloth Santa suit trimmed with white cotton. Much to be desired! The weird cotton beard often frightened children. My Father, Roy Bonham played Santa Claus frequently. His part was quite enjoyed as he had nonsense gifts for local people. My Mother always shuddered in horror in fear of what he might say or do. The entrance of our church was remodeled in 1968 and 1993 our church basement was updated.



## BIOGRAPHY

### *Anna Jones*

*The start of memoirs of Anna Louise (Bonham) Jones, who was born August 4, 1919. In a very amateur way, I'm attempting to write a book of my tales and stories of rural life in Copetown area. I've lived my entire life in Beverly Township, Wentworth County, now known as Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth.*