

200-year journey comes full circle for founding farmers



By Brock Weir

When 84-year-old Joe Lundy was growing up, his family worked the land at the northeast corner of Leslie Street and St. John's Sideroad, essentially by hand, with a pack of four horses at the ready to help with the heavy lifting.

His family's roots on the land run deep, breaking ground on the farm in 1802. After the Second World War, the farmland changed hands, the farm industry changed drastically, and the land in question is now slated to be ploughed under in the next couple of years to make way for a business park.

And while they might have been the first family to make this land work for them, come hell or high water, the Lundys are determined to be the last family as well.

Steve Lundy, 54, carries on the farming tradition maintained by his father. Both men continue their work at Steve's farm in Queensville, but on Friday Steve had a surprise in store for his father. Working out a deal with the current property owner, Steve leased back the farmland for the growing season ahead ? and the remaining seasons until construction begins ? and in a covert operation, moved his farming equipment from Queensville to Aurora in the dark of night so his dad could hop up on the tractor to sow what might very well be the farm's last barley crop.

?Dad was born here in 1930,? Steve explained, waiting for his wife, Valerie, to deliver the guest of honour, without giving away the game. ?Over the years of driving by here, I had seen long grass and stuff and nothing was being done with it, but last year I noticed it was planted with soy beans so I got thinking.?

Visiting the land last year to take one last look at the family's old log cabin before it was dismantled, Steve took the opportunity to enquire on the land's current ownership and, through some talks with the landowners, they struck a deal.



Joe Lundy surveys the site where his birthplace once stood.

“I decided since we were the first ones to start it, we might as well be the last ones to do it.”

For the plain-talking Steve, who got emotional waiting for his dad to arrive, it could be summed up in one word: “Heritage.”

“But,” he said of his father, “I’ll probably get shit for it. When he finds out I rented the land for this year, the first thing he’ll probably say is, “Holy crap! How much did you pay for it per acre?” but...it started with our family and it will end with our family. That’s what I like.”

Shortly thereafter, the guest of honour arrived. He was not told where he was going, but Valerie made sure he was wearing what her father-in-law described as his “shit kickers” just in case.

It was a good move.

When he arrived, Joe’s attention was initially fixed upon the remains of the homestead, now little more than bare, exposed hardwood floors, steps leading down to a cellar, all blanketed in shards of broken glass and tile.

When told of the ruse to get him there, there was not a “Holy crap!” to be heard, and after an all-too-brief moment of consideration, Joe hopped gingerly up on that tractor to take a spin planting the first round of barley. Zooming around the perimeter of the field like the pro he is, after about five minutes he returned back to the starting point, betraying no emotion but bubbling over with memories.

“I didn’t know what was going on,” said Joe of the surprise. “Back when we had the land, we didn’t have a tractor. We did it with six horses and it was all plowed by hand. Farming was different in them days. Enos Lundy built this house in the 1800s and my dad planted all the trees around the outside in around 1920. He bought this farm just after the First World War right in the depression. Things were pretty tough in them days, but everybody was in the same boat.”

Joe’s branch of the Lundy Family plowed the 100 acres in Aurora, while the other branch of the family had the adjacent 100 acres, now bisected by Highway 404, home to the Region of York’s Works Yard. On their side of the farm, they kept cows, the milk from which kept many Aurorans well-fed.

“Everybody could milk, but my mother could milk faster than anybody,” Joe recalls. “Milk had to be in Aurora before 8 a.m., but the cows had to be milked and the milk had to be cool. We had to go into Town with the horses and my dad never owned a car for quite a while.”

Their primary customers were Cousins Dairy. At the time, Joe’s dad built a rapport with the then-operator, Lorne Cousins, but when his job was taken over “by some relation” their relationship soured. As luck would have it, however, this falling-out coincided with the development of the Aurora Dairy and the cows were not out of commission.

In a couple of years, however, this revitalized Lundy Farm will be. But, thanks to the efforts of Steve and Joe, they are more than ready to give it a last hurrah.