

STEWARDSHIP: A FAMILY AFFAIR

As told by Cherish Elwell

60 years, 9,000 trees, 9 children, and 1 newspaper clipping later; Ron and Agnes Crawford

"It was like a desert – nothing but stone and rock." recalls Ron Crawford vividly, his eyes gleaming. Sitting under the shade of the screen tent, with the hues of spruce and pine not far off and the occasional chatter of cicada's and finches catching my attention, it is very hard to believe he could be talking about this space.

In 1948, Ron and his WW II bride Agnes purchased a 30 acre parcel of land in West Flamborough with assistance from the Veterans' Land Act. The homestead, built in 1905, was purchased from the original owner; the remainder of the property was marginal farmland, the only trees standing marking property lines and hedgerows.



The acreages nourished what would become a family of 11 (6 sons and 3 daughters) over the years, with crops like corn and potatoes. At one time, a small orchard sat on the southern edge of the property. "This property heated the house" states Ron and Agnes's son Bruce matter-of-factly, and with a smile, "...provided the odd Christmas tree".

Agnes and Ron were active members in the community, and the couple played an important part in the establishment of the Strabane Community Park in the 50's and 60's.

In 1975, a newspaper ad from the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) caught Agnes's attention. The MNR was looking for people with marginal farmland who were interested in having woodlots planted on their property. Agnes and Ron signed an agreement and 9,000 trees were planted on the property, consisting of black walnut, spruce and white pine.

In 1982, the saplings took off and the planting flourished. Over the years, Ron and Agnes attended MNR and Conservation Authority workshops to keep abreast of current management practices even though the original agreement noted that the MNR would be responsible for maintenance of the planting. As MNR program resources dwindled and budgets were cut, the responsibility of maintaining

Landowners Sharing their Stories

Written for our 2010 Landowner Contact Annual Newsletter, this story is one in a series of stories told by local landowners who have a passion for protecting the natural features on the land they steward and for protecting the water that flows through that land. Many of these landowners are recipients of the Watershed Stewardship Award. The award is a sign that landowners proudly display on their property acknowledging their commitment to be good stewards of land and water.

the planting fell to Ron and Agnes (then in their late 60's).

Despite the lack of extension services available through the MNR, Ron and Agnes wrote to the offices, voluntarily offering to renew the protection agreement they had originally signed.

In 1995, the couple made contact with the Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program (HHWSP) and recognized the program, in connection with other community organizations, would assist them in filling the void left by the MNR extension services. Their passion and commitment to the management and care of the natural areas on their property was recognized in 1995 when the Crawford's received a Watershed Steward Award through the HHWSP.

Their 9 children, 28 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren have kept them both quite busy in recent years, and while the couple do appear to be "winding down", the term seems a bit out of place for this couple (Agnes is in her late 80's and Ron is 93) who are still quite active.

In 2008, the Crawford's sold the property – a transition made much easier thanks largely in part to the new owner – their son Bruce.

Ron and Agnes are excited that the homestead is staying in the family and Bruce, their son, hopes this is just the beginning.

Ron and Agnes Crawford's property welcomes new owners Bruce and Linda Crawford

"It was the typical idyllic country life" recalls Bruce of his childhood, who recounts barn sleepovers, catching tadpoles and picking berries. As 1 of 9 children, he notes that the ability to send the kids out playing on the farm property at times gave his mother some much needed relief. The property, he noted, was like a drop-in centre and a "constant hive of activity" for the neighbouring friends and the occasional farm escapee. Bruce recalls his mother and sister having a quiet afternoon in the house when his mother looked up to see one of the neighbour's giant Belgian horses, nose to the glass of their living room window, which gave her quite a scare!

In 2008, Bruce and his wife Linda purchased the property from their parents, feeling passionately that their parents should reside on the farm as long as possible and that ownership of the property should remain in the family.

While it is the both of them who have worked in the past year to make improvements to the home and outbuildings, "It is really Linda" says Bruce, citing her passion to continue the maintenance of the woodlot and enhance the natural areas present in honour of her mother-in-law Agnes's efforts. This year, Linda made contact with a local Forester, and is planning on applying to the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program, planning management activities within the woodlot such as thinning, pruning and additional plantings to add diversity and acreage to the existing woodlot.



Bruce recalls the number of farms that once frequented his former work location on Appleby Line, and notes the new housing complexes that have taken their place lack a community aspect, and that one must

"plan for progress". Ron points to the changes he has noted in the community throughout the years, including increased traffic to and from local attractions.

Bruce and Linda enjoy watching the Pileated Woodpeckers, salamanders, white-tailed deer and turkeys that grace the property. "Our children won't leave!" exclaims Bruce jokingly when asked how his offspring feel about them purchasing the property. Bruce supports the former "drop-in centre" policy, and is pleased that his siblings and their families continue to frequent the farm and enjoy the property his parents nurtured. Bruce plans to acquire a golf cart soon, so Ron and Agnes can continue to tour the trails that wind through the property as they have for so many years. "This is a family farm" he says.

While rural living may not offer the amenities that urban life has at hand, Bruce remarks that he has already noticed a strengthening in his and Linda's quality of life which he directly attributes to the increased amount of recreation and time spent outdoors that comes with rural living. Watching the sparkling eyes, and witnessing the sharp wit, good nature and warm personality of his farther Ron across from me, I'm inclined to agree with him.

Photographs taken by the Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program.

Interested in learning more about natural features on your property? Call to arrange a free on-site consultation!

Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program

c/o Hamilton Conservation Authority and Conservation Halton

www.hamiltonhaltonstewardship.ca

Hamilton Conservation Authority: 905-525-2181, Extension 181

Conservation Halton 905-336-1158, Extension 2263

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