

Memories of Isobel Watson

Gladys Anna Isobel Watson was born July 14, 1907 at the Watson farm located on Con. 4 Lot 7 north half in West Gwillimbury Township to parents William John Watson {1869-1951} and Ida Jane Milligan Banting {1872-1958}.

Isobel's ancestors emigrated from Northern Ireland in the early 1850's and settled in South Simcoe County in the vicinities of Bond Head, Beeton and Bradford.



Isobel, with her husband, Norman Bain Coutts (1903-2002), lived a long productive farm life raising five children: Duncan, Roderick, Karol Anne, Brian and Sharon.

Fortunately, before her death in November of 2007, Isobel recorded memories of her life from childhood on. In 2016 her granddaughter, Michelle Joyce, edited her notes and compiled "The Memories of Isobel Watson".

A Chapter (1907-1999) In the Life of our Watson Family Heritage

Gladys Anna Isobel Watson was born July 14, 1907 in the Scotch Settlement near Bradford and died November 24, 2007 in Barrie. She rests in the Midhurst Simcoe County Cemetery. The following are the memories of Isobel (Watson) Coutts recorded by her at age 94.

I can't remember much when I was 2-3 years old except Grandpa Watson sitting in the big rocking chair in the corner of our big kitchen with a little stove beside him to use if the kitchen wasn't warm enough with a spittoon (for spitting chewing tobacco) on the floor beside him. I don't know whether he smoked or not. People stayed in the home and were looked after by their families. I don't think there were any nursing or retirement homes then.

I started school when I was 6 years old. I had to walk over a mile to our school- no buses like now. Sometimes we drove with our little pony, Coonie. I had to know how to harness and hitch him to his little buggy. In winter when snow was deep (big drifts) dad would take us to school with the team of horses on the big sleigh. There were no cars then and they would not have gotten through the amount of snow.

Our clothes were mostly wool hats, coats, scarfs, sweaters and dresses. We wore long black woollen stockings and black long johns, wool vests, boots (ankle length) with laces and sometimes hooks at the top. In the winter we wore felt overshoes lined and cuffed with wool at the top. We had to change our school clothes when we got home so they would be clean for the week as we didn't have too many changes like they do now (2 or 3 dresses, skirt and blouses). Women wore long dresses with boots and later oxfords. The boots were ankle length and they had to use a button hook to get the boot fastened up. They also had spats which were made of heavy

felt and they had buttons up the side-both men and women wore them. They were worn over your ankles and had a strap that went under your shoe or oxfords to hold it there. When women dressed up they wore corsets to slim them down. They were laced up pretty tight. The corsets had garters on to fasten to their stockings to hold them up. Petticoats were also worn.

I don't think there were any hairdressing places in the early 1900's so mother used to put my hair up in rags to make curls and then we had hair ribbons tied to our hair on top of our head. Mother use to curl her hair with tongs she put in a lamp glass to heat and then twist her hair around it. She had to be careful not to get it too hot. Most women had long hair put up in a bun at the back of the head or on the top. Children sometimes had long hair and kept it in braids with ribbons or bows in it. If it was short, it was just cut at home. Most men had their hair cut in the home, but not always.

We had to buy our own school supplies (pencils, scribblers, ink etc.). At first we used slates and slate pencils, followed by pen nibs in pen handles and still later fountain pens. Classes were primer junior 1st senior 1st, junior 2nd and senior 2nd, junior 3rd and senior 3rd, junior 4th and senior 4th. High school included forms 1,2,3,4 then later 5 and 6 (junior matric, senior matric). We had to buy our own High School books as well (arithmetic, reader, speller, history, geography, hygiene, golden rule book and writing book).

For recreation, we played ball on the front lawn and a game of croquet, walks to the bush and around the farm, horseback riding, and skating on ponds in fields. Sometimes skates didn't fit too well so we had to put on more socks. Sometimes bob skates were used to start with (2 runners that hooked onto the soles of boots but they weren't too good for our boots). When we got to high school we boarded in town and had 10 cents to go to the rink to skate once a week. We had a good time,

as there was music to skate to. Other times we would go in sleigh loads 20-30 people to the Bradford rink or Bondhead outdoor rink. We didn't go out at night too much as we had too much school homework. Families around would take turns in having house parties, dances or cards. We would take lunch and coffee made in a big wash boiler on the stove. We would wrap coffee up in a cloth bag and drop into hot water in the boiler. Sometimes we had social evenings in homes and box socials (I think for money for the church). Each girl or woman took a box lunch and the men would bid on them and he was your partner for the rest of the evening. When we got older we went to dances in Bondhead, Bradford and Schomberg. I think they were a dollar or less per couple. We had a girl's ball team in the Scotch Settlement and played quite a few other teams. Marion (my sister) and I belonged to it. We wore bloomers (baggy pants with an elastic at the knee) playing ball which was the first of getting out of dresses and skirts. As we got older (in High School) we learned to play cards (euchre, etc.) but not before as mother and dad never played them. Checkers and crokinole were also played. The fall fairs were big attractions 25 cents for admission and there was always a big dance after it which we all looked forward to when we were in High School. Sunday evenings we had quite a bit of music, as dad liked to get Karolyn (my older sister) at the piano and have some singing. Sometimes people would be visiting and that would make for more voices. There were no sports on Sundays and Dad taught adult Sunday school class. For holidays in the summer, maybe a week, we would spend at Aunt Annie Agnews up at the cottage near Jackson's Point. Other times we would spend a few days with Aunt Isabelle Rowe at Newton Robinson or in Bradford at Grampa Bantings.

The church was on the corner of our farm so we always went to church and Sunday school. I recall that Dad always had bible reading and prayer after breakfast. On Sunday morning we would dress up in our best clothes and shoes with a strap across the top. We always had a new hat, coat and gloves (if we needed

one). For Easter Sunday sometimes we had white stockings with our patent leather shoes. Now they wear anything even jeans and no hats. Mother always had coffee for Sunday dinner. Sunday was a rest day or sometimes we would visit relatives. Dad would hitch the team of horses to the vehicle which was called a Gladstone (would seat six people). It had 2 seats and the back one could be turned to the front or the back and had a canopy with fringe around it. Lamps were located on each side for nighttime driving. We would take a drive Sunday evening around the community especially around the third line of the Scotch Settlement which we called the Banks and it overlooked what is now the Holland Marsh (which was just a marsh in our time). In those older days the marsh grass was harvested and used to stuff bed mattresses then they used to have big marsh fires to burn off the old grass which they had to watch.

When we got home from school after change of clothes we had chores to do such as filling the wood box as we had stoves and furnaces, hunt eggs and help with a few chores at the barn like putting down feed for the horses and cows. Dad had quite a few horses so they took quite a bit of looking after. We had to milk the cows and separate milk, although we didn't learn to milk too well. We had to make sure the lamps were ready for the night by filling with oil, clean lamp glasses and trim the wicks on the burners. A man delivered coal oil about every week, so you got a 5 gallon can filled each time. Later we had kerosene lamps and lanterns. On Saturdays we had to help clean the house-sweep the carpets; bare floors were dusted with a dust mop and all the furniture needed dusting. There were no vacuums. We washed toilet sets and chamber pots as there were no bathrooms in the houses, just a little building across the yard which had to be house cleaned too and make sure the Eaton's catalogue was in the corner for wipes. We did have a bathtub in our washroom and a sink and pump for soft water from the cistern, but we had to heat the water in a boiler and kettles for washing and baths. It was cool in the winter so baths were taken in a tub beside the stove in the kitchen (mostly on

Saturday nights). Monday was usually wash day, we had to heat the water in a boiler on the stove. We generally boiled the white clothes, and then washed on a washboard in a tub. Later washing machines came in which made it easier. Sometimes washing machines were run with a little gasoline engine. The clothes were then rinsed and white clothes put through a blue rinse (a little block of blue wrapped in cheesecloth to colour the water) which was supposed to whiten the clothes. Clothes were then put outside on the line where they froze in the winter and sometimes had to be dried inside on lines over the stove. Clothes didn't get washed as much as nowadays (no electricity for washers or dryers). All the clothes were ironed. Irons were heated on the stove and a great deal of effort was made on ironing sheets, tablecloths and hankerchiefs. (there were no Kleenex). It was hard work washing, ironing and preparing meals as families were larger in those days. The soap used especially for washing and cleaning was made from water drained through ashes which were in a wooden trough, called a leach. The liquid was then put in a big iron pot with gillies, lye, grease and some other stuff. A fire was built under the pot and it was boiled to a certain consistency then cut up in blocks and allowed to harden. If it wasn't boiled as much it was more liquid and was stored in earthenware jars (both kinds were hard on the hands). I think you could buy Sunlight Soap and maybe other brands. Lifeboy was one kind of hand soap used every day.

We always had lots to eat and was mostly homemade-bread, a staple, was baked twice a week. Yeast used was made from hops and kept in earthenware jars. Bread was set at night and then finished up the next day (big loaves). Buns were made 2 or 3 pans at a time in big pans (about 10 inches by 16 inches). Biscuits, tarts, pies, cakes, cookies etc.—a lot of food as we generally had 2 hired men especially in the summertime. We had our own meat in wintertime usually pork beef and fowl. For summer the pork was either canned, pickled or smoked. If it was pickled it was kept in a liquid in a wooden barrel. A butcher generally travelled around in the

summer and we bought beef from him. Some places had beef rings where a beef was killed each week and divided up amongst the group. It was hard to keep meat as there was no refrigerators. Some people had big blocks of ice cut in wintertime and packed them with sawdust (butchers mostly). Cutting big blocks of ice was a really big job. We didn't have too many fresh vegetables only what we could save from gardens. Most were canned, like beets corn and peas etc. We always had all kinds of fruit (home canned) and barrels of apples (we didn't seem to have too much problem with worms in fruit and people didn't spray like they do now). We used to churn the cream and make our own butter. Some sold butter to people in town for 10-15 cents a pound. Butter bowls, ladles, prints and butter makers were used. Buttermilk was used a lot for baking and drinking (working men drank a lot of it). In fall and winter we had fowl to sell (geese, ducks, chickens and some had turkeys) which we had to prepare for market. We had to make sure all the feathers were off them. Jewish buyers came every week, mostly Saturdays to Schomberg and Newmarket and you had to be there fairly early and that was before we had cars. I don't think we had a car before 1917 and I can't remember what price they sold for. No cars were used in the winter as the snow was too deep. The cars were usually put up on blocks until spring. Not too many cars until 1920. People generally went to town Saturday to shop as well as other times. When dad went he would generally bring home a brick of ice cream (maybe 2) wrapped up in papers to keep frozen. We would be in bed asleep but would have to get up to have the treat which really was a treat!

I guess there were problems with sickness but doctors weren't visited like now. Doctors generally kept a horse in town and had to travel to houses if you were too sick to go and see him. He would sometimes come every day if a person was really sick. Sometimes we had to meet the doctor or go and get him in the wintertime. There were no medications like now. We used mustard plasters on our chests and camphorated oil rubbed on our throats and chests. Mostly you just stayed in bed

or in the house if you had a bad cold. On weekends you sometimes had to have a dose of Epsom salts or castor oil (which was worse) to cleanse your system. In the first world war there was the flu epidemic that killed over 50,000 or more people. We didn't have any medications to cure it. It was the worst in 1918 and 1919. We had it, some of us worse than others. I know I was in bed over 2 weeks and was so deaf with it. I don't think mother or dad took it. There were no medications at the time not even aspirin. We used hot water bottles and hot irons wrapped in cloth to relieve pain. Karolyn and Charlie had their tonsils and adenoids removed by a doctor and a nurse while lying on the dining room table. We didn't go to hospitals like now - there was no OHIP.

On the farm horses were used all the time as no tractors were made at the time dad was farming. Implements were not as big and sometimes we just had single furrow plough - they gradually got bigger but you had to have 3 horses or more on them and you had to walk behind the ploughs, harrows, seed drills etc. We had to fork manure into the wagons, take it to the fields and pile in heaps to be spread by fork and hand later. Harvesting was "hard work", after the grain was cut sheaves were put up in stooks or shocked, and later was thrown on the wagon and taken to the barn. The threshing machine which was run by steam engines was used. They had to have water hauled for the steam engine and wood ready to burn too so it took a lot of men to keep things going-sometimes 15-17 men. Very often neighbours were called in to get the threshing done. When wheat was threshed in the fall the bags were taken to the flour mill (I think in Holland Landing) and ground into flour. It was bagged and several bags were brought home and stored for winter cooking. We used to keep big bags of flour and sugar on a big heavy bench in the backstairs. Dad had to take grain to be chopped for livestock to the chopping mill in Bradford at Luke's Mill. In later years he got a chopper which was a real help. Before the harvesting it was hay time. It had to be cut, raked and coiled up in heaps (sometimes done in the evening when it was cooler). The heaps

were then forked onto wagons and later taken to the barn and packed into mows. Nowadays that is all done by tractors and balers.

If we had cream to sell we had to take it to Bradford to go on the train. I used to do that sometimes driving with horse and buggy. We felt safe on the road and at home there was no violence or sexual assaults like now. We never had eggs much in the winter as hens weren't fed for laying. It was a treat to have eggs for breakfast on Easter Sunday. Eggs were stored in a liquid called waterglass and used mostly for baking and cooking. In the spring hens would want to hatch baby chicks so they would sit on their eggs for 3 weeks. We would have to look after the chicks when they hatched. The chicks (poulets) were housed in coops around the yard and they had to be fed and watered and covered over at night. Later on people had incubators and brooder stoves which was a lot of work too.

At home on the Scotch Settlement, we didn't keep our lawns mowed like we do now, as we didn't have lawn mowers. Sometimes they used the mower they cut the hay with but mostly the horses were brought in and we either tied them to something or held them by a rope on their halter and they soon ate the grass. We finally got a push mower in 1920 and our lawn did look better!

I went to high school in the early 1920's and then to Normal School (called Teachers College now). I didn't get a school the first year as schools were hard to get. Marion died in 1929 of T.B so I stayed home and helped. Mother had had a heavy year looking after Marion, Jean was out West in Calgary but came home. She developed T.B and was laid up for a year or so; she was in Gravenhurst for a while but then got better. She returned to the city and worked at Ontario Hydro.

Dad and mother bought a 50 acre farm on the Bradford Road in 1929 as Charlie wanted to take over the farm on the settlement. Charlie married Dorothy

Scott in 1930. Charlie wasn't a very good farmer and it was rather hard going for a while when the depression was on. I had been teaching for a couple of years but schools were hard to get so I was home helping out on the farm. I did a bit of supply teaching in the city where Karolyn was and at Fishers Corners school. I should have taken that school but Uncle Harry was on the board and had 2 children going there so I thought I should not take it. How foolish I was, as I had the chance and schools were so hard to get.

In 1934 Karolyn suggested that Norrie and I take over the Bondhead farm as mom and dad were getting older and I was helping out as much as I could so we decided to get married and do so. We had gone together for 8 years. But the farm was not in very good shape and the barn was not good so Norrie decided to buy a bigger farm-so went looking and moved to Cookstown after 3 years at Bondhead. Duncan was born at Bondhead and was 18 months when we moved in 1937. It was rather hard going for a few years because of the depression. We didn't have much money and the farm had to be built up as it was rented for a few years; the barn had to have a new roof; the house was good but had to have some fixing up as the plaster was loose and falling off. We just had eggs (15-20 cents a dozen) a little bit of cream at about 15 or 20 cents so we didn't have much money coming in. We bought some old tables and chairs at sales and bits of furniture at low prices (25 cents to a dollar). We used straw mattresses to start with; we would stuff them each year after threshing. We always had enough to eat as we had a good garden, eggs meat etc. We had to have some hired help in the summer but not the winter. Wages were 15-20 dollars a month plus board. After a few years we were able to make a few improvements. In the winter we had to cut wood as we had two woodstoves one in the kitchen and one in the living room. Sometimes we used some coal in winter. In the fall grain was cut with binder-sheaves in stooks-taken to barn and threshed. Corn cutting was done with a sickle at first later a corn cutting binder. Corn was stoked in the field and had to be brought in during the

wintertime when it was needed. Later we had a silo and by this time the threshing machines were powered with tractors. There was always lots of meals to prepare as the men were really hungry. A few years later people got their own threshing machines (maybe 2-3 families) and they didn't exchange with neighbours. Later combines were used, but that was after tractors came into use. I think Norrie got his first Allis Chalmers tractor in 1949 (an old Ford a couple of years before) \$530 and gradually implements to go with it. It made work much easier as we had horses to look after before that. We had a nice team of percherons and a good set of sleighs which we used in winter when the snow was much deeper and the roads were blocked. There were no snow ploughs but they gradually came along and people started using cars in winter. Our first car Norrie bought when we moved to Cookstown in 1939. It cost \$40 and was a 1927 Chevy sedan. The Second World War between 1939 and 1945 meant rations for sugar and gasoline. We boarded a teacher for \$5 a week for a few years until Roderick was born in 1940. After that there was always much to do as our family seemed to increase.

When we moved to Cookstown the church at Bethesda was still open but had a very small congregation. It closed finally and we went to Cookstown United church. They had a good congregation and Sunday school which all the kids attended. They each got pins and diplomas for each year of attendance. Sharon was baptized at Cookstown United church, Rod, Karol Ann and Brian at Bethesda church and Duncan at Bondhead United. Norrie was secretary for Sunday school in Cookstown for about 20 years.

The school was at the corner of the farm so the kids were able to come home for lunch. They seemed to get along well at school and were quite a help after school. They didn't seem to get bored like the kids in town and they didn't seem to get into much trouble. From Bethesda school they went by bus to continuation school at Lefroy until about 1954. Finally the school at Lefroy closed and children went to

Barrie or Alliston High Schools by bus. Schools had Christmas concerts and the pupils and community really enjoyed them but it was a lot of work getting them up.

Gramma Coutts and Myrtle (Norrie's sister) used to come and help out when the children were born and it was sure a help. Myrtle married Dave Sutherland (Dave's sister lived with them) so she was able to come too. Gramma Coutts stayed with us quite a bit but took turns with the other sons too. She was with us when highway 400 was being built. (1940's) Norrie was sitting in the rocking chair with one of the kids when the window beside him was smashed by a blast from them blowing stumps and stones out from where the highway went through. The highway went through our farm between the 100 acre and 50 acre on the east side.

One memorable incident happened when Norrie was having some drainage tile installed next to highway 400. The tiling machine cut the huge Bell cable running to Barrie. Fortunately, for us the cable installers had not buried the cable the required depth; otherwise we would have been in deep trouble.

I think we got hydro at Cookstown about 1947 and finally got the different appliances. We got a chopping mill at the barn and other things that needed electric power (milking machines so no milking by hand now). The work sleighs we had were sold to Black Creek Pioneer Village and we often see them being used on television.

Duncan and Roderick played some hockey at Thornton. They learned to skate on ponds in the fields and then finally all the kids went to Thornton to skate at the rink. They also held dances there and of course other places too. Duncan and Rod worked at BA service station on highway 400 in the summer and on weekends, but helped out on the farm also. Finally, the children were through high school -

Karol Ann in nursing, Duncan at Bell telephone, Rod in Waterloo, Brian in Ryerson and Sharon in teaching. They each chose their partners, married and settled in their own homes.

Norrie didn't feel able for all the work on the farm so we put it up for sale in 1967. We sold it to Italians and they divided it into 10 and 15 acre lots; the price was 62,500. We went looking for a retirement home and bought 14 Letitia Street in Barrie for 14,500. We had a farm sale in March 1968 and moved to Barrie. The first thing we did was build a garage at the back of the house, made some rooms down in the basement and we changed the oil heating to gas.

After retiring in 1968 the first thing we did was take a trip to the West (1969). The next year we took a trip out East, then to Florida. Later on we took a trip to California, and went on a European tour. We enjoyed them all, as our health was good. Throughout our retirement we kept busy helping family when their families were born and any other help that was needed. We built cupboards for Rod and Sharon, when they bought their properties. Norrie enjoyed helping on Karol and Bill's farm in Gilford. Norrie and I stayed at Letitia for 10 years and then we sold and moved to 1 Valley Drive, Barrie (just down the road). We are still here and have a wonderful family who keeps their eye on us.

Certificate of Marriage

This is to Certify that, on the 28th
day of April A.D. 1934, at Bond Head
in the Province of Ontario, I solemnized the Marriage of
Norman Blain Coult
Gladys Anna Sobel Watson under Marriage License
No. G 22189 issued on the 24th day of April A.D. 1934

Witnesses:

Charles B. Watson

Jack M. Coult

(name of person solemnizing marriage)

L. Moeller

(address)

Presbyterian, 1123

(Denomination)

(Registration Certificate Number)