

From the June 2013 Beacon
Sombra Farms charts rapid changes
in local farm life

Agriculture has been changing rapidly in the past couple of decades as farmers are forced to keep increasing production in order to compete in the new global markets. As a result of these expanding farms, many of the smaller family farms are disappearing.

Even here in Lambton County, we see the old family homesteads replaced by large fields stretching from road to road, leaving no evidence of where our pioneer ancestors had once built their farms.

With the printing of *Sombra Farms*, the Sombra Township Historical Society hopes to preserve the memories of some of these family farms. All farm families have their own unique story to tell but too often these farm memories have died along with the pioneers. In today's fast-paced world, we whiz past these huge farm fields not realizing that all of Lambton County was once a huge forest covered with swamps and infested with deadly mosquitoes that spread disease.

We hope the memories of those who cleared the dark forest, drained the dreaded swamps, and built our roads and communities will never be forgotten. We hope that, by preserving these family stories in print, their memories will live forever.

We chose a different format for this book by asking families to record their own farm stories. Some families were eager to write their own story and they presented some excellent manuscripts. Others told us of their family memories and we were able to prepare their farm stories with the information they provided.

Sombra Farms contains 17 farm stories. Some are of families who crossed the ocean in the early 1800s and eventually settled in Sombra Township. Others came later and, though many families have left the farm, they still cherish their memories. We have found that even though most of the pioneer farms are similar, each has its own individual story. The pioneer farms start with clearing the land, next on to mixed farming with horses, then tractors, then cash cropping, but we find that each family story has its own problems and triumphs.

Our committee is pleased with the experience gained while printing this book and we hope everyone will enjoy the personal family histories which are now preserved for generations to come. *Sombra Farms* may generate more interest and perhaps encourage other families to preserve their farm stories at the Sombra Museum for future generations.

Editor's note: Sombra Farms is indeed generating a lot of interest about the by-gone days of local farming. Mr. Hodgson's book sold out during its debut book launch on May 18 and a reprint was ordered so that more copies would be available to the public at the museum.

IBC marker 48 in St. Clair Township denotes Canada/U.S. border

Motorists passing this curious white concrete marker on the east side of the St. Clair Parkway just north of the Shell Canada Corunna facility entrance gate are probably unaware of its meaning. They probably don't know that this unassuming lump of concrete is of international significance. In fact, a series of these markers was placed along the St. Clair River shoreline around 1911 to 1924 to serve as reference points to establish the actual location of the Canada/U.S. border somewhere down the middle of the river.

A heritage plaque, placed near the marker by the Ontario Archaeological and Historic Sites Board, reads: "The nearby marker was erected in 1911 as one of a series of markers used by surveyors to determine the exact boundary between Canada and the United States. The St. Clair River was originally designated as a boundary line by treaty in 1783. The first detailed survey from St. Regis on the St. Lawrence River to Lake of the Woods was carried out under the terms of the Treaty of Ghent 1814. It was directed by a British Commissioner John Ogilvy, his successor Anthony Barclay, and an American Commissioner Peter B. Porter. A more precise delineation of the whole international boundary was ratified at Washington, D.C. on January 11, 1909."

Beacon contributor Allen Anderson says that 35 kilometres of the border lies within or along the shores of the St. Clair River that passes through St. Clair Township. The Canada/U.S. border stretches across North America from the Strait of Juan de Fuca on the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean and the St. Croix River.