

Alexander Hastings

Alexander Hastings was born on the Hastings farm at Chesterfield, Ontario, on the 6th March 1849. Both of his older brothers, William and Daniel, had left home, so Alexander decided to remain on the farm, although he had had some thoughts of becoming an engineer on the railroad.

On the 3rd June 1880 Alexander married Jennet Little of Ratho and at this time took over the farm from his father James. Jennet Little was born at Ratho on the 2nd June 1858. The Littles' lived on a farm just west of the Ratho church.

Life on the Hastings farm was active in Alexander's time. The extensive farm machinery so familiar to the farm scene today was very limited in those days. The women carried out the many household chores without the modern facilities we take for granted. The men devoted their time to the many farm chores. In addition to the three boys, Lindsay, John and Stuart, there were as many as two hired men at times.

Stuart Hastings recalls how his father, Alexander, was very fond of bush work, working from early morning. The boys helped too. They often played hockey the nights before and hated to get up early, but dared not say anything. There was some consolation in the fact that the women would drive out to the bush with a hot dinner.

While the work was hard and steady, there were moments of relaxation and recreation. There were many social evenings and sing songs at the Hastings farm. There was a sing song pretty well every Sunday afternoon. Alexander loved these gatherings, particularly the singing, since he was a good singer as were all the Hastings. Indeed, the Hastings mixed quartet, known as the "Blenheim Quartet," sang at many concerts. Alexander was the bass singer; his brother James was the tenor; his sister Jane was soprano; and his sister Margaret was the alto.

In the winter there was a home made ice rink just south of the house. Many young people and others used to come there to skate. Most of them left their skates at the Hastings farm. After skating the young people would go up to the house to eat apples and have a sing song. The young people, after young people's meetings at the church, would go to the Hastings farm to flood the rink.

Transportation in winter was by sleigh or cutter. There were no snow fences in those days, but many drifts and deep pitch holes. The younger boys liked to give the girls a scare by driving through the pitch holes. Winter parties usually included a sleigh ride on Friday nights and the driver was expected to dump the passengers out at least once.

Chesterfield was always noted for having a good Christmas tree program. Everyone helped to take part and it was considered a highlight of the year.

The 24th of May was usually the first fishing day at the Hastings farm. Jess Hastings recalls the many times she and others went fishing along the creek below the barns.

In the summer there were many congregational picnics. The young people organized numerous corn roasts and oyster suppers. Even during the harvest season when hard work was the order of the day there were moments of laughter.

The boys used to have fun when drawing in the hay by typing the rack lifters together and swinging between loads.

My mother, Jessie Hastings, recalls with amusement now how exasperated the younger members of the family would get when waiting for their father, Alexander, who was not accustomed to being punctual. When the dinner bell rang he would always plough another furrow or two before coming in from the fields. In the meantime dinner would wait. When going out to social functions Alexander would be late getting ready.

Alexander's wife, Jennet, died on the 12th February 1892 at the age of thirty three. Jennet's mother came to the Hastings farm then where she remained for eleven years raising the children.

Alexander's mother, Christiann, had her own part of the house during this time and helped out by doing a great deal of mending and knitting.

Alexander Hastings died on the 16th October 1914. Both he and his wife Jennet were buried at the Chesterfield Church cemetery.

Agnes Carlton Hastings

Agnes was born on the 17th April 1881 at the Hastings farm. She was eleven years old when her mother died. At that time her grandmother Little came to take care of the children and remained eleven years. After she left Agnes and her younger sister, Jessie, were able to look after the house and the younger children. Agnes was the oldest and took charge until her death from typhoid fever at the age of twenty four. She died at the farm on the 10th July 1905 and was buried at Chesterfield cemetery with her mother and father.

Jessie McArthur Hastings Hall Bean

Jessie Hastings was born in Oxford County, Ontario at the Hastings homestead, at Chesterfield, on the 31st December 1882. In her younger days she walked barefoot through the fields to attend school at Blink Bonnie. Even in the winter the children walked, except for stormy days when Jessie's father took his own and other children by sleigh.

In the summer Jessie and the other children went barefoot everywhere. When she was too small to help in the barn she was kept busy spudding thistles and cutting weeds along the flats. Later on she helped with the harvest, haying in the mow, hoeing and other farm chores.

When her mother died Jessie was nine years old and her sister Agnes eleven. Her grandmother Little came to take care of the children then and remained for eleven years, until Agnes and Jessie were old enough to take over. There were hired girls and hired men in those days while the Hastings children were going to schools. When Agnes passed entrance she stayed at home and no

longer needed the hired girls. Jessie worked outside while Agnes looked after the housework.

Alexander Hastings at one time had a threshing and separator unit which was run by horsepower. It was used at neighbours as well as on the Hastings farm. Horsepowers were in frequent use in those days and were used with from one to eight horses. Such horsepowers furnished power for threshing machines, sawing machines for cutting logs into firewood, machines for boring holes in fence posts, and for turning lathes and other woodworking machinery. As steampower came into use there was less and less use made of the horsepower unit, but it continued to be employed at home for a variety of jobs. Jessie and the other children used to drive the horses for the horsepower during the later years when it was only used at home. This was a regular Saturday job when the children were home from school. Nowadays threshing is, of course, done differently and not so many people are required. In those days there were from twelve to fourteen men on hand for threshing -- a busy day for the women.

Jessie recalls many incidents and experiences from her younger days on the farm. Her grandmother, Christiann Hastings, used to make straw hats. The children would go to the swamp to get grass which Grandma Hastings would braid and sew into shape for hats. These would be worn around the farm by the children.

Once a year soap was made on the farm. This project was of several weeks duration. First, lye from wood ashes was leached in a barrel. A layer of straw was put in the bottom of the barrel and a handful of lime. Then the barrel was filled with wood ashes. Every day for two or three weeks soft water was poured into the barrel and through the ashes and lye came out through a hole in the bottom to be caught in a kettle. When enough lye had been accumulated to make a batch of soap it was put into a large iron kettle containing soft water which was held over a fire by a big pole. All kinds of grease, fats, bones, pork rinds, etc. were added and the whole mixture was simmered and stirred for a day or two until it reached the jelly stage. It was then poured out to harden and later cut into blocks. This kind of soap was used more for heavy washing. Hand soap was usually purchased.

Still in the family are candle moulds which were used to make candles. Sheep were raised in those days and were one of the main sources of meat. The fat was used to make the candles. It was not until later that lamps were used, and still later before electricity came into use. Now that we take electric lights for granted it is difficult to imagine how the women managed to sew by candle light.

Butchering was always a big event - a day when all the family helped, together with two or three extra men. The men scalded and scraped the hides and the women cut up the fat for lard. The animals were mostly hogs and sheep. The next day or two was occupied in getting the meat ready for curing, and frying down the sausage before packing away in lard for summer use. Sausage was one of the main products.

Jessie's father, Alexander Hastings, died in the fall of 1914. The following spring, on the 24th March 1915. Jessie married Frank Hall. Frank was from

England. They were married by Archie Blair and Mr. Johnston, at Glen Lee farm, Jessie's home.

After their marriage Jessie and Frank went to live at Kingsville, Ontario where they acquired ten acres of land just outside the town. They grew garden vegetables which were sold in the town along with some milk. The house in which they lived - their first home - had at one time been a winery. It was here that their first child, Glen, was born, on the 1st February 1916.

After the first year they moved to an adjoining farm and went into the dairy business., Soon after they purchased a pasteurizer and began pasteurizing milk.

Russell and Douglas were both born on the farm - Russ on the 15th January 1920 and Doug on the 17th December 1921.

In the fall of 1915 Jessie's brother, Stuart, had married and took over the farm at Chesterfield. Her other brother, John, went to Kingsville to help Frank and Jessie in the dairy.

In 1922, after a few years on the farm, Jessie and Frank moved into the town of Kingsville - just after Douglas was born. Until this time they had carried on the dairy business on a fairly small scale. After moving into town they purchased a dairy and continued the dairy business on a much larger scale, on the farm as well until it was sold.

In addition to the dairy Frank ran a photographic studio and carried on a very active business in developing films. He also developed a large decorating business in which all three boys helped. Much of the studio work was done by Jessie.

The Hall family were regular attendees of the Anglican Church in Kingsville. Frank derived a good deal of pleasure getting UP Plays and organizing garden parties. Jessie was active in church work, particularly the Sunday School primary class which she had for twenty two years.

Frank died in 1942, on the 5th July, of cancer. Jessie continued on with the studio work for four years and then rented the studio for a few years. Later she had the studio converted to an apartment which she rented. All three of the boys were in the armed services during this period.

In 1955 the house in Kingsville was sold and Jessie moved back to the Chesterfield district - to Bright.

On the 6th June, 1959 Jessie remarried. She married Fred Bean from Wilmot Township, a few miles from Chesterfield. Fred sold his farm and they lived in Jessie's house in Bright.

Fred died suddenly of a heart attack, on the 6th of December 1963, just over four years after they were married. He was buried at Bethel, a few miles from Chesterfield.

Jessie lived the rest of her days in Bright. She died on the 21st June 1970 as a result of pneumonia which she developed in the hospital after undergoing bone surge for a broken arm. Jessie was buried in Kingsville, beside her first husband, Frank.

James Lindsay Hastings

James Lindsay was born on the Hastings farm, at Chesterfield, Ontario, on the 24th November 1884. He grew up on the farm and later worked for a time at the cheese factory in Bright, a nearby village. Being interested in the dairy business Lindsay went to Guelph and took a course for a few months in cheese and butter making. Afterwards he went to Toronto where he was in charge of a dairy.

Lindsay enlisted in the Army at the start of the First World War, in the Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry. He was killed in action at the battle of Courcellette, on the Somme River, in France, on the 16th September 1916.

John Alexander Hastings

John was born on the Hastings farm at Chesterfield, Ontario, on the 14th September 1886. He attended Blink Bonnie School and was always very active in church and you people's work, being a Sunday school teacher, member of the choir, mixed and male quartettes and an ordained elder of Chesterfield church.

After his brother, Stuart, married and took of the Hastings farm at Chesterfield, John went to Kingsville, Ontario where his sister Jessie and her husband, Frank Hall, operated a dairy. John worked for Frank on the Hall farm and in the dairy.

On the 25th December 19?? John married Lillian Barnett of Kingsville. They were married just eleven months when John died, on the 13th of May 19??, after several weeks of illness.

William Stuart Hastings

Stuart was born at Chesterfield, Ontario, on Glen Lee Farm, the Hastings farm, on the 11th September 1889. As mentioned earlier in this family history, Chesterfield is between Galt and Woodstock in the County of Oxford and is evidenced today by the church and cemetery.

Stuart grew up on the farm with his brothers and sisters, attended Blink Bonnie school, and like other members of the family was and still is very active in church affairs.

On the 27th of October 1915 Stuart Hastings married Ella May Jane Woolcott. May had also been born in Oxford County, at Richwood, 12th April 1894 and prior to her marriage was living on a farm at Drumbo.

In 1914 Stuart took over the Hastings farm. While engaged in farming he was appointed director of the North Blenheim Farmers' Mutual Fire Insurance Company, in the year 1929, and later on, in 1931, was appointed Secretary-Treasurer of the Company.

In 1947 Stuart and May moved to the nearby village of Bright, at which time their youngest son, Gordon, took over the Hastings farm. Gordon's children represent the fifth generation of Hastings living on the home farm.

The later years while Stuart was on the farm saw the gradual change in methods of farming, and particularly in farm equipment. Stables, which at one time were occupied by numerous horses have given way to other uses. Tractors now draw the implements. The days when many hands were available from family, hired or other help have all vanished.

Robert Little Hastings

Robert Little Hastings was born on the Hastings farm at Chesterfield on the 27th November 1891 and died three months later, on the 29th February 1892. His mother had died just two weeks prior, on the 12th February. He was buried at the Chesterfield cemetery.