Cultural Moment for September 9, 2024 Celebrating Saturday Nights on Main Street in Mount Forest

Seventy years ago, Saturday nights in Mount Forest were a reward after a long week of hard work, rural chores, restraint and anticipation. Most people shopped only once a week and that was on Saturdays when husbands had the time to bring their wives into town when many women did not drive. For some, if it was all they could afford, they would just sit in their truck and watch the faces go by.

People from town parked in the afternoon in order to have a parking spot for the evening. This was a practice that annoyed farm folk, as they would rush through their chores to arrive early for the only break in their week. Town historian Fred McLuhan wrote, "Saturday night could be had for not much more than a dollar. This would pay your way to the show, ice cream sundae, a hot dog or hamburger and a couple of drafts."

Main Street, Mount Forest in the 1950s.

An early evening parade would kick off every Saturday summer evening with the bands playing at Wellington and Main streets. After that, with everything open from the taverns to the library to the Roxy, the night was yours.

If you were young and had a car, you had to make time to cruise the main drag. To the north, you turned at the Fina and then south to Reynold's White Rose, but you could change it up by turning a little sooner. Even if you were driving your parents' car, you rolled down the window, cranked up the tunes and took your best girl for the ride. The important thing was to be seen and to see who else was in town that evening.

Mount Forest could boast as many as 18 hotels in 1880, but with the arrival of the automobile and better roads, travel became easier. By 1950, there were three popular hotels that survived the march of progress: The Kent, the Belmont and the Mount Royal.

On any given Saturday night, the taverns of these three hotels were boisterous, busy and boozy. Each one had a character of its own and it was reflected in their patrons. Of course, there were many townspeople who would not frequent the taverns ever or consider themselves "hotel people." But for those who were so inclined, the basic Kent, the working-class Belmont or the dressier Mount Royal all saw fights and friends, heard belly laughs and whispered secrets, and witnessed tall tales and quiet tears.

And then there were dances. For Mount Forest, it was the Oddfellows Hall. These were dances where romances were started or hearts were broken, but if you were lucky enough to scrape together the 50¢, they were a social must. Once George Plume took your money at the door, the music hit you as you entered the Hall. Even if you were a shy young man who just stood and watched the girls dance, you could be entertained by jivers like Jim McLuhan who never missed a beat.

Ted Linder's garage and hot dog stand was a popular place to park your car, where it could be clearly admired and meet up with friends on any Saturday night. For all the locals, it was simply known as Ted's. If you could save 25¢ from the grocery money on Saturday night and set it on the counter in exchange for one of Ted's footlong hot dogs, you felt like a King. They were thought to be one of the best dogs in the country, and to taste them was to love them. Everyone seemed to have a weakness for a footlong topped with Ted's home-made, much guarded secret mustard and relish. Ted's Place was more than just a hot dog stand. It was a meeting place for friends and neighbours.

Relive all the memories of Saturday nights gone by with the Mount Forest Museum and Archives' current exhibit, "It's Saturday Night in Mount Forest!" The Museum and Archives is open every Wednesday from 1:00-5:00 PM and for private tours. For more information call 519-323-4755 or email archive@mfheritage.ca.

Submitted by the Wellington North Cultural Roundtable