

The Messy Messenger

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The Massie Blacksmith Shop

by Sharon Burnside



George Rice inside his shop.

Massie blacksmith George Rice (1892-1964) learned his trade from his father William (1858 - 1914) who had a blacksmith shop in Toronto.

In 1885, William sold the Toronto shop and decided to work in lumber camps. Conditions in the camps were difficult and equipment was always breaking. Every lumber camp needed a blacksmith to fix tools, wagons and chains, and to shoe horses. So, with a wagon, his tools, a horse and his growing family, William moved from camp to camp. In 1910, seven years after his wife died, William moved his 8 children north and settled in a house on 3rd Ave. East in Owen Sound. When the Massie blacksmith shop (across the road from Massie pond) was offered for sale, William bought the shop and a nearby farm at the 4th Line and Massie Road.

Upon William's death in 1914, his son Will took over the farm and his son George (the fifth child and second son) took over the blacksmith shop.

Horses needed their shoes replaced every three months. George would



Can anyone guess when this photograph was taken?

buy roughed-out horseshoes in a keg from wholesalers and then custom fit them. The horses' hooves were shaved (they grow like fingernails) in preparation for the fitting. The shoes would be held with tongs and heated in the fire of the forge until the metal was soft enough to shape by hammering it on an anvil. If it was winter, toe and heel plates on the shoes were sharpened for traction, the hot shoe would be dipped in a barrel of water to cool it down, then nailed to the horse's hoof. The hoof is dense and does not have nerves, so this does not hurt the horse.

Work horses that pulled logs, ploughs and stone boats* had heavier shoes than road horses that pulled buggies. The work horses were easier to shoe because they were quieter. In the 1930s, wild horses from the Prairies were brought to the area and were popular with local farmers because they were cheaper than tamed horses. Some blacksmiths had cages for the more high-spirited horses, but George did not use a cage.

George made many things from metal: tools, hooks for chains, garden gates, rims for wagon wheels, handles

for stove tops, parts for sleighs, whatever people needed. This was not enough to keep the business going, so in 1925 George decided to diversify.

He drove to Markdale and bought woodworking machines: a jointer, a band saw, a rip saw and a lathe. He took the motor out of his 1917 Ford and would attach a belt from the car motor to the machine he wanted to use. He kept his fingers crossed that the temperamental engine would run. He could now turn handles for axe handles, tools, baseball bats, rolling pins and whiffletrees** for horses. George made stone boats, skis and farm gates of wood and metal. For his grandchildren, he made rockers and doll furniture, spring horses and bobsleds. He could build or repair wagon wheels, turning the hubs, buying roughed-out spokes and custom-fitting the wooden wheels with metal rims that came in two pieces.

Another sideline was sharpening tools, knives and saws of all sorts. After sharpening cross-cut saws, he'd test them with one of his sons helping and offering copious advice on the proper sawing technique! During the Second World War George sharpened

and tempered tools for Kennedy's Foundry in Owen Sound.

The metal George used came from a wholesaler in Guelph and from Christie Brothers Hardware in Owen Sound. A lot of the metal came in 10-foot lengths. George would drive his 1929 Hudson to Owen Sound early in the morning, strap the lengths of metal onto the fenders and be back in Massie in time to open the shop at 9. He bought wood from Harry Gardiner, who had several area bush lots: white ash for farm gates, as well as ironwood, fence elm and pine.

Blacksmithing was competitive. In those days there were shops in Bognor and Holland Centre and two blacksmiths in Chatsworth, so you needed to get along with your neighbours and be active in the community. The work was hard, but you could make a living.

George and Jessie Root, a teacher, married in 1925 and soon had a large family to look after: Gilbert, Brian, Lois, Yvonne, Ted and Jack. Gilbert's first job, at the age of four, was ferrying messages or cold drinks from home, which was at the top of the west hill of the hamlet, to his dad in the shop down the hill toward the main corner and across the road from the pond and the mill.

Each night after dinner, George and Jessie would record the day's business in a ledger, keeping track of their expenses and what their customers owed them. "You made a deal on a handshake," Gilbert recalls. If customers could not pay, George would take the car and go door to door in the evening and try to collect. Sometimes he was paid with apples or potatoes.

Gilbert worked with his father and was paid the same wage that his brother Brian earned working in



George Rice working on wheels at the mill pond

the Massie General Store, about \$3 a week.

Blacksmithing was a very physical job and George was suited for it. He weighed 235 pounds and was very strong. A blacksmith had to be able to wield the heavy tools needed to bend and shape the metal. It was hot and

dirty work. The forge was an open fire, fuelled with wood and oxygen from hand-cranked bellows. George's hands were black when he finished his day's work and no amount of hard scrubbing in the kitchen basin, using water warmed in the reservoir of the wood stove, could get them completely clean.

George died at 72. The shop in Massie is gone now, but the tools George made are still used in the George Rice Blacksmith Shop in Moreston Village at Grey Roots Museum and Archives in Owen Sound. His family continues to use and cherish the handmade gifts he made.

*Stone boat – a flat-bottomed sled for moving heavy objects. Originally pulled by horses or oxen to clear fields of stones.

**Whiffletree – the pivoted swinging bar to which the traces of a harness are fastened and by which a vehicle or implement was drawn (Merriam-Webster Online)

This account is based on an interview with George's son Gilbert Rice of Owen Sound. It was written by his granddaughter Sharon Burnside of Oliphant, Ontario, for "a wee chap book for the family" and donated to the Grey Roots Museum archives. It has been modified from the original with permission.



The Rice family blacksmith shop in winter

Blanche Martin 1922-2019



Always happy to greet friends and neighbours, Blanche Martin was the quintessential people person. Friendly, hard-working, kind and generous, she was universally loved. Ed Neelands described Blanche beautifully when he said, "There's not a mean bone in that woman's body!"

Blanche grew up on a farm just north of Holstein, the oldest of three daughters born to Earl Reid and Jean McMillan. A defining time in her life was the loss of her mother when Blanche was just 14. She had to take on the maternal role in the family, hardship for a young girl, but one that she embraced with her typical good grace. No doubt this influenced her choice of profession: she became a registered nursing assistant and began working at the Mount Forest Hospital. There she befriended Marion Martin who eventually became her sister-in-law, introducing her to Harold whom she married in 1953.

Blanche fit easily into community life in Massie, joining the Women's Institute and the United Church Women, contributing to fall fairs, quilting with neighbours and leading a 4-H home economics class. She served on the community centre and church boards. Blanche was a member of the Holland Township Historical Society and assisted with the production of two volumes of local history. She was a "decent" piano player and would play hymns for her own enjoyment on Sunday afternoons. Blanche loved gardening and her large garden became the site of treasure hunts for her three grandsons and their friends! The siding on her house was painted blue, her favourite colour!

Neighbours would drop in for fresh brown eggs... or peaches! The Klages from Desboro used to deliver a hamper of peaches for Blanche to can each fall. When she found out that others in the community were keen on peaches too, she began to take orders and the Martin farm soon became the delivery depot for 20 to 30 hampers!

Ed Neelands fondly recalls Blanche's cooking: "I was often the lucky recipient of Blanche's wonderful gumdrop cake. At community events, I would always look for a piece of her delicious sour cream and raisin pie!"

Having lost her beloved husband in 1996, Blanche continued living in Massie and contributing to the community. Finally in her early 90s, she decided that life on her own was getting to be a bit too hard and moved into Central Place in Owen Sound. In her final year, at 96 years of age, when she required more assistance, Blanche was moved to Lee Manor. She passed away quietly in September 2019.

Our deepest condolences to her son Glen and his wife Laura, her grandsons Brent, Andrew (Melissa) and Matthew and tiny baby granddaughter Olivia.



Live at Massie Hall 2020

Spirit Awakens

Victoria Yeh Trio

Saturday May 30, 8 pm

Electrifying violinist Victoria Yeh returns to Massie Hall to perform new melodies and reinvented favourites in a musical journey to inspire the soul. Victoria will light up the stage with celebrated musicians David Hines on guitar and Gino Mirizio on drums/percussion. If you've never seen Victoria perform – and especially if you have – you won't want to miss this concert!



Jenie Thai

Saturday June 6, 8 pm

With infectious energy, Jenie Thai sings and plays barrelhouse piano “steeped in the blues.” Described as gritty, composed and sweet, Jenie writes “tough and tender ballads direct from her heart to yours.” Among her many accolades and successes, she was accepted into Paul McCartney’s music school in Liverpool!



Higher Funktion

Sunday June 14, 2:30 pm

This season’s Massie Hall outdoor concert will feature Higher Funktion, a 7-piece funk and soul band that moves audiences with soulful vocals, sweet backbeats and funky horn lines! This eclectic but awesome group of local musicians will warm up your mid-June Sunday afternoon.



Live at Massie Hall 2020

Matthew Barber

Saturday June 20, 8 pm

Two-time Juno Award-nominated singer-songwriter Matthew Barber is currently working on his 10th album – another one worth celebrating! Armed with an M.A. in Philosophy from McMaster University, Matthew provides a thoughtful perspective on the world. His performances, which have spanned the globe, combine literate rock, folk-pop and Americana.



Drew Jurecka Jazz Trio

Saturday July 4, 8 pm

Surely a crowd-pleasing combo: Drew Jurecka, Don Buchanan and Jack McFadden! Drew, a superb, classically trained violinist/vocalist, has played on, written or arranged over 150 albums, including Juno-winning and Grammy-nominated ones! Don has been the organist at St. Mary's Church in Owen Sound for 25 years; plays clarinet, tenor sax and piano; and composes and arranges big band and jazz music. Jack is a Juno award-winning double bass player whose many accomplishments include being principal bass for the National Ballet for 6 years.



Raven Meets Lion

Saturday September 26, 8:00

"Raven Meets Lion are musical realm walkers creating modernized folk with sounds, intentions and flavours drawn from Old Gael, Norse and Druidic traditions. Warrior Women in front, Musical Mages in back." Wow! Aren't you compelled to find out what Trevor & Tara Mackenzie, Tyler Wagler and Summer Martin mean by this cryptic statement?



Live at Massie Hall 2020

Morgan Barrie

with special guest Tyler Beckett
Saturday October 3, 8 pm

Singer-songwriter Morgan Barrie and fiddler Tyler Beckett return to Massie Hall for an encore performance! Morgan's music reflects his love of the natural world and the human experience. His "warm guitar riffs" and "thoughtful lyrics" make him an audience favourite. Tyler has been performing with his sister, father and grandfather since he was a tyke and it shows in his polished style and engaging on-stage manner!



Madison Galloway

Saturday October 17, 8 pm

Madison rounds out this year's Live at Massie Hall concert series, charming the audience with her catchy tunes and soulful voice. Playing guitar, harmonica and ukulele, this 19-year-old seamlessly blends folk, rock and blues. Don't miss this concert – your chance to hear an exciting newcomer in a cozy, rural setting before she explodes onto the music scene!



Blue Rodeo

Saturday December 5, 8 pm

In the thirty years since forming, Blue Rodeo has sold over 4 million albums, won countless Juno awards, been inducted into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame, received a star on Canada's Walk of Fame, been named to the Order of Canada and been honoured with the Governor General's Performing Arts Award.





Photograph by Ralph Bergman

Massie 2020 Events

- Saturday, April 25 **Massie Community Cleanup.** 9 am – 1 pm. Come one, come all – we'll have a ball! Bring garden tools and cleaning equipment. Lunch provided.
- Saturday, May 9 **Geranium Tea from 1 – 4 pm.** Pick up your flowers and stop for tea, desserts and conversations with old friends. Order geraniums from Pat at 794-2397 or Marg at 794-2085.
- Friday, May 15 **Shoreline Chorus concert at Massie United Church, 7:30 pm.** Tickets at the door: \$15.
- Sunday, Sept 27 **Massie United Church Anniversary Service – 11:15 a.m. –** 125th building anniversary and 164th worship anniversary
- Wednesday, Oct 14 **Ham and scalloped potato dinner at Massie Church –** Takeout at 5:30 p.m. Sit-down meal starts at 6 p.m. To order tickets, call 794-2216.
- Saturday, Nov 7 **Snowflake Tea and Bazaar at Massie United Church –** 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. – Bake table, preserves, crafts, Christmas décor. Lunch: Adults \$6, children \$3.

FOR THE COMPLETE LIST OF LIVE AT MASSIE HALL CONCERTS SEE PAGES 5-7

The Massie Messenger is a community newsletter. Send us your stories, photographs or artwork that has anything to do with Massie! Email Renee at editor@massiemessenger.ca or call 519-794-0865.