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KEEN, MARY
A REPORT ON THE DRAKE'S DAIRY

A report on the Drake's Dairy Farm, Rossland, B.C.

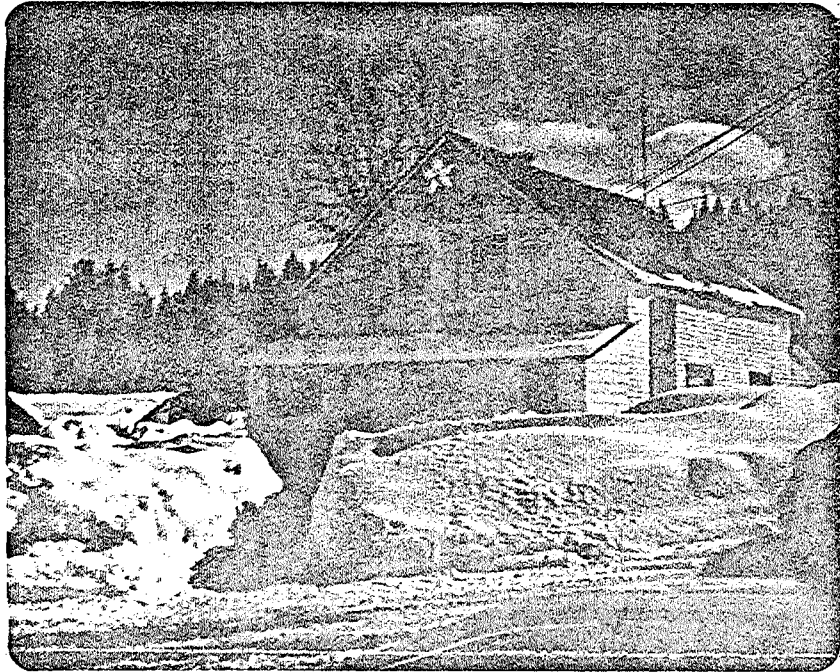
April 1975.

Mary Keen

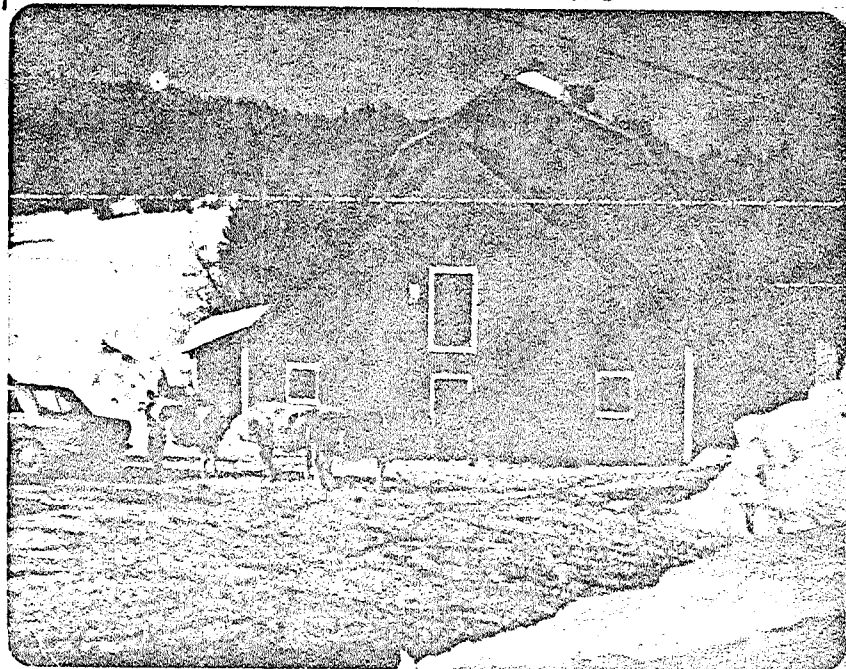
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the

The Farmhouse



The barn with part of the dairy herd,
Ayrshires and one Holstein



Introduction

I chose to do this term report on the Drake family and their dairy for several reasons. One of the principal being that I had met Mrs Drake the previous summer and knew her to be an articulate woman who was very proud of her family and their business. Also I am interested in the 'natural' way of farming and the way this dairy is run is just about as basic as one can be and still have a successful business. However the main reason for this report is that the Drake family is fighting back against all the red tape and petty officialdom of Governments who say 'but you can't do that, no one else wants to'. This family as a cohesive unit want to, are doing and hopefully will continue to do things their way. In spite of what 'they say'.

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Drake's Dairy

This dairy farm is one of the few remaining dairies in Canada to produce for sale to the general public 'raw Milk' i.e. unpasteurized, non-homogenized milk. It is situated in the mountainous West Kootenays approximately 6 miles from Rossland.

The road winds upward after leaving Rossland, a good paved road, but even on a sunny day at the end of March still partially snow covered. The road literally ends in the Drake's farm yard, there are 3 houses all owned and occupied by the family, a large red barn, various out buildings and a small white building, the dairy.

I talked to Mrs Drake, an extremely pleasant and voluble woman, initially in the dairy and later in her large kitchen. All the time during our conversation, at least one of her 4 sons was in the kitchen, snacking on cookies and several of her grandchildren came in on their way home from school. Her

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husband, Jack, insisted on repairing his old tractor hose in the middle of the kitchen floor while we were talking, much to her disgust. Mrs. Drake was born in Scotland in 1910, emigrated to Canada with her family in 1914, initially to Saskatchewan and then later to Rossland.

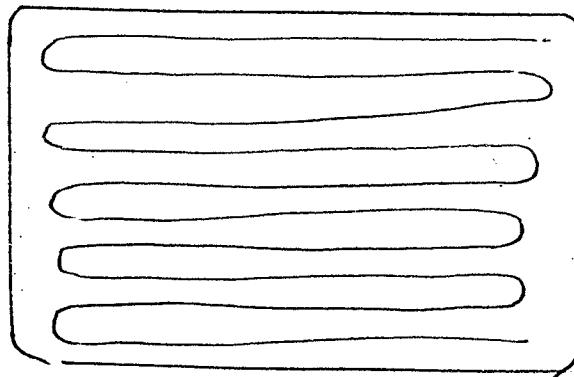
The Drake family have owned the farm comprising of over 550 acres since 1914. The present owners took over from Jack's father in 1936 and are in process themselves of handing over the farm to their sons, Jám , the eldest and Tom, the youngest. They are giving the sons the farm but will keep living in the old farm house. Mrs Drake says that no one young can afford to buy any farmland nowadays so they are giving the land and stock to their sons. Jim and Tom are using some of their savings to install a new 'milking parlour' and feed barn which will drastically cut down on the amount of manual labour involved every day. The Drake's have 8 children and

19 grandchildren, only 2 of their children have left the area, one son is a miner in Williams Lake and a daughter is a teacher in Victoria. They also have a man of 42 living with them whom they adopted at the age of 8 when his mother died. He is rather 'slow' according to Mrs Drake but he has a labourer's job.

The farm supports about 40 head of dairy cows, 30 of which are milking cows. The rest are too young to be milked and are to be replacement stock. The herd is a mixture of Holsteins and Ayrshires. Holsteins give large volumes of milk but it has a low butter fat ratio. Ayrshires yield a low quantity of milk but it has a much richer butter fat ratio. Therefore the two types of milk are mixed together for the best quantity and quality. The Drakes cultivate about 45 acres for hay which yields 45 tons of hay for winter feeding. They buy 150 extra tons of hay per year from Creston farmers. The rest of their land is used for grazing with a portion left for

timber property. At such a high elevation mixed farming is not possible.

The cows are milked twice a day by machine, before electricity came to the farm in the 50s, the cows were all milked by hand. The milk is then transported to the dairy in hand buckets. It is then poured over a 'wall type Cooler' which is a large continuous water pipe rather like a series of tight 'S' bends.



This cools the milk sufficiently to allow it to be bottled in quart size glass bottles. The tops are sealed on, the bottles crated and placed in a huge walk in refrigerator.

Most of the milk is sold by the Drake's own milk route in Rossland and its immediate area. The city of Trail has a byelaw forbidding the sale of raw milk within city

limits. I was unable to find out why such a byelaw exists, Mrs Drake murmured something about politics under her breath. The Drake quota of milk is set by the Milk Marketing Board at approximately 432 quarts a day. Any milk sold over this amount is supposed to be reported to the Milk Marketing Board who then levy payment, really a fine, on the Drake's. Mrs. Drake says 'All the Government wants is to make liars out of us'. The milk is sold at 40 cents a quart which brings in about \$ 170 a day. Any left over cream during the slower summer months is also sold for the giveaway price of 35 cents a pint. Mrs Drake makes all her own butter but is not allowed to sell any.

Their expenses are hay and feedstuffs, bottles, sterilizing equipment, bottle caps, farm equipments, gas, etc. The bottles are bought from a firm in Vancouver at a cost of 15 cents each and last with luck for about 6 days. Each bottle is washed, cleaned with a crude type of vibrating brush and rinsed by

hand before sterilization. The caps are put on by a bottling machine purchased last year for a price of \$ 1200. Jack says the day is coming when he will be forced to change over to cartons as bottles are fast becoming scarce and expensive. Cartons now cost about 2 cents each, can only be used once and would necessitate the purchase of very expensive equipment as they have to be heat sealed.

The Drakes appear to have a running battle with the various Government agencies just to keep functioning. The milk has to be rigorously tested every month which involves a dairy inspector making quite a long journey to the farm to test the milk for bacteria count. The bacteria has to be lower than 10,000 mgm per ton of milk in order to meet the health requirements for raw milk. Last summer the dairy was threatened with closure because the count for one month was around 12,000 mgm. Apparently the inspector had taken the sample of milk in his car on

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a hot day for quite a distance to his laboratory. When tested the bacteria count was too high so the Milk Board had attempted to put pressure on the Drakes to close the dairy. There were insinuations that the local Public Health director, Dr. N. Schmitt, was unhappy about the dairy being allowed to sell raw milk. Mrs. Drake was very angry about these remarks especially as at least 4 local doctors are regular customers, some even drive from Trail to buy milk every week. She phoned Dr. Schmitt herself and he was astonished to hear what remarks he was supposedly making. He told her that as far as he was concerned the dairy was well within the law and he had no complaints. The regular customers on the milk route drew up a petition, the local radio station and newspaper interviewed the Drakes and almost magically the threats and Government pressure melted away.

Mrs Drake is very vocal about all the Government regulations concerning agriculture which she says are driving

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farmers away from the land.

While the controversy about their own milk's bacteria count was raging she found out some interesting facts about some other dairy farms around the area. Apparently these other dairy farms had much higher bacteria counts, even up to 30,000 mgm per ton, but had not been penalized because all this milk goes into the common tank to be pasteurized, homogenized and sold to the unsuspecting public. Bacteria count goes up in direct proportion to the general care and cleanliness of the cows.

There are two saddle horses, a flock of chickens and a few beef cattle kept on the farm for the family's use. They are a close knit family unit who take pride in what they do and the service they give to the public. The farmhouse occupied by the senior Drakes is warm and comfortable. The living room is dominated by a large colour television set and masses of family

photographs. There are two fairly modern houses on

the farm occupied by family emembers.

Although the dairy is now sufficiently prosperous to afford enough income for Mrs Drake to take trips to Scotland the family work extremely hard and ofted put in consecutive 18 hour days during the summer. When Jack took over from his father he used to deliver the milk by horse and wagon during the summer and a horse drawn sleigh in the winter. Then shortly after the Second World Wat he graduated to an old car and now drives the milk route in an elderly truck. Mrs Drake told me a funny story about the time electricity finally arrived at the farm. It was in the early 1950s when the power line at last came up to the farm. The children were all extremely excited about the 'electric light' coming and rushed home from school the day the farm was connected. The engineer had told one ~~xx~~ of the younger children that~~s~~ the electricity came up the line into a piece of equipment he called

a bucket. The children tore through the house turn

switches on and off for a day. The next evening they were eating dinner when all the lights suddenly went off because of a power failure, 'Oh, Mum, we've used up all the electricity in our bucket and we'll have to go back to oil lamps.'

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All of my information for this report came from 2

interviews with Mrs Drake interlaced with sly comments from
her husband Jack. She was extremely easy to interview and
made this work a joy and pleasure for me. Both interviews were
conducted in her kitchen during her very busy day.

I used the Foxfire books as a style reference.