

The Torrey Family

Farming in Kawartha Lakes since 1851!



The Torrey Family receiving their Spotlight on Agriculture 'Pioneer Farm Family 150 Years' Award.

In the Photograph: Mark and Michelle Torrey, their three children, Helen and Reid Torrey.

With Scottish roots, dating from their 1834 immigration into Canada, the Torrey family have lived and farmed on the same property since before 1851, well before their Crown Land Deed was signed in 1864.

George Torrey was born in the Isle of Islay, Scotland around 1803 and immigrated to Canada with his first wife Janet McArthur's family and their two children, John and Nancy 'Ann' in 1834. The Torreys first settled in the area around Port Perry known as the 'Front.' It is unknown whether Janet died in Scotland, on the way to Canada or shortly after their arrival.

In 1842, George married his second wife, Mary Kerr (or Carr) and their family grew, welcoming four children. In the mid 1840s the family moved into Woodville, Eldon Township (of Victoria County), for a short time. With the passing down of family stories, Reid Torrey, the great-grandchild of George and fourth owner of the Torrey farm, recalls that the “reason why the Torrey family left Woodville was because the oak trees proved too much for the family to clear.”

The family moved north to Concession 5 and found property full of pine trees that were easier to remove. It was here that George built a log shanty on the west side of Sandringham Road. Sandringham Road like we see today did not exist, however there is fair evidence that a pioneer trail cut across the county towards Beaverton.

The 1851 Agricultural Census for Victoria County, Eldon, reads that the ‘occupier’ George Torrey has 100 acres at Concession 5, Lot 15:

- 30 acres are under cultivation (under crops and pasture) and
- 70 acres are under wood.

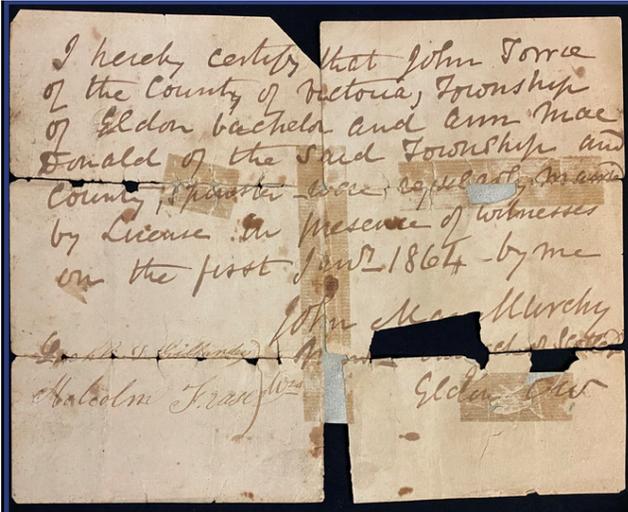
When George died in 1853, the farm passed to his eldest son, John. John continued to work the land, just as his father had and at the age of 33, purchased the 100-acre farm for \$200.00. The land deed still carries the original wax seal solidifying that on July 10, 1864, the land that the family had been farming for over 12 years prior was officially Torrey family land.

In that same year, with the help of his neighbours, John built a log cabin just west of where the current brick house sits today.



The Torrie Farm, Con. 5, Lot 15
James A. Patterson, County of
Victoria Map, 1877

Also in 1864, John married Ann, daughter of Donald MacDonald and Catherine Gillander who had immigrated from Scotland in 1855. The couple was married at their home by Reverend John McMurchy.



The Marriage Certificate of John Torrey and Ann MacDonald, January 1, 1864
Private collection.

John and Ann welcomed 8 children, 2 boys and 6 girls. Reid's father, John Alexander, was the youngest. The family continued to live in the log cabin. By 1898 the "100 acres were cleared and a barn was built at the cost of \$100.00 and a horse."

It was around this time that an 'e' was added to the Torrey name, forever making the spelling 'Torrey.'

> Flora, Mary, Catherine, Isabella and John A. , Absent: George, Jessie and Margaret, c. early 1890s

After 40 years in the original cabin, the current brick house was built in 1904. The house was constructed using bricks from the Milton Press kilns for a cost of \$843.00, "the bricks were transported by train to Balsam Station then by horse and wagon to the farm. Located on Lot 15, Concession 5," says Reid.



Ann, John Alexander, Isabella, John Sr., mid 1880s



Sadly, John Sr. and Ann's oldest son, George Albert, passed in 1896, therefore, the farm was passed to Reid's father, John Alexander, upon John Torrey Sr.'s death in 1915.

Reid recalls his father recounting how tough his first few years on the farm were. Not only did his father and farm go through both World Wars, but he, like many families struggled through the Depression.

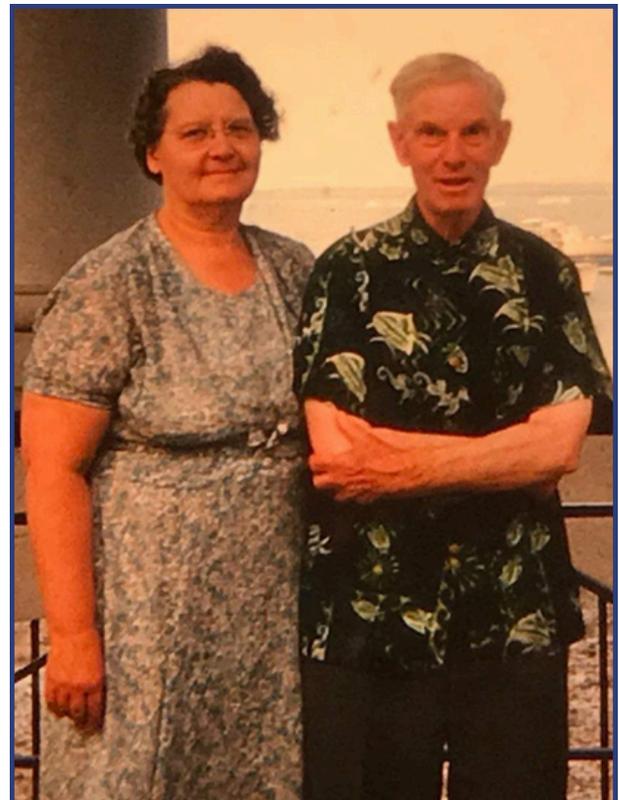
Circumstances eventually required John A. to work off the farm and find work where he could.

During World War I, John A. rented out the farm and temporarily relocated to Toronto with his sister Isabella. While Isabella taught, John A. built Jeeps for Willy's- Overland. When John A. first met with Willy's they asked, "where did you work before?" John A. replied, "I farmed." They explained to John that they knew what work on the farm was like and hired him on the spot.

By the spring of 1925, John A. was back on the farm, and in the Fall of 1927, he married Mary Margaret Reid of Reaboro.

Mary Margaret was the daughter of farmer William Reid and Emily McCredie. When Mary was 20, she attended Peterborough Normal School to become a teacher and in 1921 assumed the teaching position at S.S. No. 7 Reaboro School, a mile south-west from her family farm. After one year, Mary was offered the teaching position at S.S. No. 3 Sandringham School and boarded with the McEachern family, the farm of which neighboured the Torrey's.

Between 1927 and 1941, John and Mary welcomed 5 children, John 'Reid' was the middle of those 5.



Mary and John Torrey, c. 1959

While this was a joyous time for the Torrey family, the farm suffered setbacks in the Depression. In the late 1930s, the Torrey's lost their entire herd to tuberculosis. Reid recalls that "twelve cows were sent to Toronto; some were used as meat, and some were used as fertilizer. I'm not sure if father was ever paid or not... but a big pot of boiling water was used to sanitize the barns and everything was whitewashed."

At the wake of World War II, John Alexander went to work at the arsenal in Lindsay, like many people did at that time to make ends meet. Reid remembers, "we kept the farm and hired Archie D. McEachern to work the land for us."

Before the days of electricity and refrigeration local families could contribute to what was called a 'Beef Ring.' The Beef Ring supplied fresh beef once a week to each member or member family. Every year at an annual meeting, officers were elected and a 'chart' of approximately 20 members (individuals or families) would be drawn up, each to contribute a steer on their predetermined week. Thus, each family was able to serve fresh beef several times a week, through most of the year, especially when other fresh meats were scarce on the farm, "in the winter salt pork and bacon were alternatives."

Once the steer was butchered, Reid remembers that a cut would be delivered the next morning. Dave Hopkins of Lot 16, Concession 3, Eldon, was the butcher for the community Beef Ring that Reid's family belonged to.

"In the earlier days when a pig was slaughtered the pork would be fried, put into a crock and leftover melted fat would be poured over the meat to help preserve it... mom sometimes would use some of the leftover fat to fry donuts." When asked if she made them for special occasions, Reid replied with a smile and short laugh, "it was always a special occasion when she made them."

Reid and his four sisters, Jean, Alda, Ruth and Donna spent much of their childhood helping around the farm: milking cows, looking after the hens and pigs, cutting wood. Everyone had a part, "we were all raised but it wasn't the wealthy things or the money things that we gained, it was the honesty and integrity as our parents taught us." Reid also attended Sunday School at Sandringham School and service at the South Eldon Church with teachers Ella Hargrave and Mrs. Jim Deacon.

Reid and his siblings attended Sandringham School until Grade 8 and Reid remembers all of the teachers that taught him:

- Mr. Orval Mark
- Ms. Eleanor Thurston
- (married a McLaughlin)
- Ms. Mary Wylie (m. Bill Ross)
- Ms. Mary McEachern
- (m. Joe Jewel)
- Mrs. Isabel Truman
- (nee McEachern, Reid's mother Mary taught her in school, and with whom Reid passed the Grade 8 entrance exam with) and
- Ms. Mary McInnus

After graduating from Sandringham, Reid went to LCVI in Lindsay.

I was invited back to speak with Reid, however, this time there was a change of venue.

Instead of sitting at his kitchen table going through his family papers, we went for a drive. Reid drove me through Eldon Station, sharing everything he knew about the area—the families, the buildings still standing and no longer. We then traveled down Sandringham Road to the Torrey family farm where we met Reid and Helen's son, Mark. Mark and his family now live in the 1904 brick farmhouse and farms the Torrey farm.



Alda, Reid and Jean Torrey, c. 1920s



Sandringham School S.S. #3, c. 1937- 1938
Top Row, L to R: Ruby Morrison, Unknown, Eldon Deacon, Bill Campbell, Irene Keith; Middle Row, L to R: Alda Torrey, Doris Hargrave, Flora, Jean Torrey, Ila; Front Row, L to R: Donald Morrison, Jack McLachlan, Leonard Keith, Reid Torrey and Ernie Hargrave.

Sitting in the newly renovated kitchen, Reid reminisces about his first few years as a farmer, “mom didn’t want me to farm initially, she knew how hard it was. But I did, I wanted to farm.” Reid began supporting his father on the farm in 1951 and took over operations in 1963 when his father passed. At this time, Reid’s sisters were all employed in Toronto.

Helen, Reid’s wife of 60 years this September, joined us at the house.

When asked about how they met, Helen smiled at Reid for him to answer, a story well memorized. Reid begins, “I was up in Udney at Jack Little’s wedding, she [Helen] was serving. I approached Bob Robertson to see if he knew of this girl and he did, [she was] his first cousin.” Helen, with a smile, comments “and a stroke of good luck.” Reid continues, “the same way I took you here today, is the same way I took Helen 59 years ago to meet Mom Torrey.” Helen adds, “I remember walking in [to the farmhouse] for the first time, Grandma (Reid’s mother) was here,” Helen points to a corner of the kitchen where the stove used to be.

Helen is the daughter of Sam Speiran and Julia (nee Kett of Sadowa) and was also raised on a multi-generational farm in Udney. Helen was trained as a dental assistant and medical typist.



Torreydale Farm, c. 1960s



Reid sitting with his mother and sisters

It was not too long after Helen met Mary, that the couple was married at the Udney United Church and were off to Ottawa for their honeymoon, "I had one sow and I sold it to pay for our honeymoon," Reid chuckled. Helen remembers that on their way home they purchased their first chesterfield. When Helen and Reid returned to the farm, Reid did his very best to carry his new bride over the threshold of the farmhouse, "I almost made it," and Mary (Reid's mother) held the door. Reid, Helen, Mark and myself all burst into laughter. The weeks following their honeymoon there was a terrible frost and Mary and Helen spent days picking though potatoes. Helen was no stranger to farm work, she helped everywhere she could on her family's farm.

**Reid building the Original
Potato Storage, c. 1962**



Reid and Helen were blessed with 4 children: Carol, Ian, Dwayne and Mark.

Growing up on the farm everyone had a role, "the farm was a family operation, the kids knew if they were getting off of the bus in the evening and mom (Helen) had hot chocolate on the stove, they were headed to the storage to bag potatoes." Pride, love and hard work was instilled in everyone, "but there was also so much fun," remembers Reid with another smile.

At the height of farm operations, with 40 acres, not only did the family grow, sort and bag 300 tones of potatoes, per year, Reid also sold, and hand delivered potatoes to local general stores in Cannington, Woodville and Oakwood!

It was around this time that Reid started calling the farm Torrey-Dale. "Torrey-Dale is what Dad named it when he started marketing potatoes in the 60's...it just stuck" commented Mark.

It was during this time that “Victor Fleming owned the store in Arygle, every time mom and dad went in, there was a big sign that said ‘If you buy \$5.00 to \$6.00 worth of groceries, you don’t pay.’ He never asked you for money, but would accept a bit of butter or eggs and that amount would be taken off of our bill.” After Reid took over the farm, dad owed Victor Fleming \$12.00, “so I said, lets go get this bill cleaned off. I don’t know how we did it, but we went and gave them the \$12.00. We never had a bill afterwards.”



Torreydale Farm, c. 1965

The farm cared for 25 to 30 cows and calves and hired approximately 8 locals to help. Helen proudly stated that, “there was not one accident on the farm!” Both Helen and Reid attribute no accidents to how well their help was treated, “two hot meals a day, with coffee breaks at 10am and 4pm and paid \$1.00 an hour, that was \$0.20 more than what others could pay. The Township of Eldon paid \$0.80.”

I asked Reid, Helen and Mark if together they could remember the farm hands, and of course, they did:

- Mr. Murray Campbell
- Mr. Ivan MacMillan
- Mr. Donald MacMillan
- Mr. Thomas Carr
- Mr. Sam Speiran (Helen’s father)
- Mr. Ralph McEachern
- Mr. Lorne Taylor
- Mr. Hugh Johnson

Helen recalls how busy the farm was in the 1960s, not only was the farm busy as ever, but the family also spent one full year fixing up the property. In 1967, Torreydale won a silver tray for the most improved farm property in Victoria County!

On the drive to the farmhouse, Reid and I spoke briefly about the pride he has that his family farm hasn't left Torrey hands. Humbly, Reid remarked "that's what you hope will happen, but you never do know." That pride was echoed when speaking with Mark. Mark is a graduate of the Ontario Agricultural College - University of Guelph, and with all of his jobs, every one of his endeavors were to get him back to the farm.

Like his father, Mark wanted to farm.

Mark is not only the Member Services Representative for the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), but the proud owner-operator of Torrey-Dale Farms, as the fifth-generation of Torrey's, with his wife Michelle and children.



Torreydale Farm, c. 2018

Congratulations to the Torrey family on the 190th anniversary of their arrival into Canada, 160th anniversary of the Torrey farm, 120th anniversary of farm house and 60 years together (with many more) to Reid and Helen.

Thank you to the Torrey Family

Torrey, Reid, Helen and Mark. Interview. Conducted by Laura Love, 2023 and 2024