



IN THE TRENCHES

September 2012

"Drainage Doesn't Cost - IT PAYS!"

www.drainage.org

EXECUTIVE

PRESIDENT

Greg Walker
(705) 340-5500
gregwalker24@hotmail.com

PAST PRESIDENT

Gerald Neeb
(519) 656-2618
rothdrainage@sympatico.ca

VICE PRESIDENT

Joe Frankis
(519) 420-0014
jfrankis@armtec.com

DIRECTORS

Brad VanGorp
(519) 765-4445

Matt Williams
(519) 291-3581
williams@xplornet.com

Mike Vance
(519) 469-9306
VanceMike@gmail.com

Secretary Treasurer

John R. Johnston
231 Dimson Ave.
Guelph, ON N1G 3C7
(519) 836-1386
Fax: (519) 836-4059
johnston@gto.net

Convention Coordinator

Franklin Kains
519-742-4591
Kains@golden.net

Environmental Advocate

Don Lobb
(905) 838-2221
dwlobb@xplornet.com

From the President's Desk

Fellow Members:

September is upon us again. However, as I write this it is a beautiful and sunny 28 degrees and it feels like it could be an afternoon in July. Despite the gorgeous weather, the tell-tale signs of autumn are here - the leaves are turning, the days are shorter and the kids are back to school. My oldest started junior kindergarten this year, where did that four years go?

As my daughter learns her ABCs, I have been exploring the history of drainage. Drainage came to North America in 1838 when John Johnson emigrated from Scotland. Mr. Johnson laid 72 miles of clay pipe on his 320 acre farm. His wheat yield jumped from 12 bushels to 60 bushels per acre.

Work is already underway for the 2013 convention. Once again our committee is putting together a fabulous program that promises to be educational, thought-provoking and entertaining. This year's ladies program will require early registration as we need a definite headcount for the services to be provided. Early registration details will be forthcoming in the December newsletter. We look forward to another successful convention.

Our next LICO executive meeting is on the October 23. If there are any questions or concerns from members, please contact any executive member, so it can be discussed and addressed.

In closing, I would like to wish everyone a safe and successful fall season.

Greg Walker



"Autumn is the eternal corrective. It is ripeness and color and a time of maturity; but it is also breadth, and depth, and distance. What man can stand with autumn on a hilltop and fail to see the span of his world and the meaning of the rolling hills that reach to the far horizon?"

Hal Borland

A Local Business Changes Hands - (Excerpts from Ontario Farmer, September 4/12)

The fortunes of agriculture and Wolfe Heavy Equipment are linked.

President Ed Veeke recently acquired the business from Melbourne's Wolfe family.

Veeke moved the company to Strathroy into the same industrial building housing the business to be built, Parmerit Inc.

Parmerit specializes in custom equipment, machining, fabrication and automation and has long had a focus on the automotive sector.

Wolfe, with its drainage plows and open trench wheel machines, is primarily focused on agriculture.

"85 to 90 per cent of our business (at Wolfe) is agricultural drainage plows..." Veeke said.

We've been continually hiring and we're looking to double production on the Wolfe side."

Wolfe counts on exports to the US for the majority of its business but Ontario is an important market.

Agriculture will remain a focus but there are plans to diversify into other markets and expand the equipment lineup.

Veeke, trained as a tool and die maker, was raised on a farm in Arkona.

Land Improvement Contractors
of Ontario and the Drainage
Superintendents Associations of Ontario

Annual Conference — January 22 — 24, 2012

“Tile Drainage and Water Quality”

Best Western Lamplighter Inn, London, ON

Room reservations: call 1-888-232-6747 and ask
for the special LICO/DSAO Convention rate

Tuesday Workshop Topics

Red Cross First Aid Course



If you have articles, events or notes of interest you wish to add to this newsletter, please send your submissions (not more than **225** words) to the following:

Sharon Bond
15 Milson Crescent
Guelph, ON N1C 1H1

Phone: (519) 837-0169
E-mail ssbond@rogers.com

Lines from Lambton - Dean Hodgeson

The summer of 2012 has been great for most of the farmers (and contractors) in Lambton County. The humid heat, coupled with some timely showers, provided good growing conditions in most of Lambton County all summer. Although there are a few dry areas in the northern townships, most crops were doing quite well even before the "Million Dollar" rains arrived in early August.

First we had the mild winter and early spring which saw all the crops in the ground and farmers actually standing around waiting before seeding. Not even old-timers could recall a spring like 2012. Although there were some dry periods and some late frost there was no serious damage to most crops except the orchards in the Arkona - Forest areas where the fruit trees suffered from a killing frost. The winter wheat looked a bit pale at times during the dry spring but most yields were above average when combined in early July. Most areas in Lambton received light but timely rains even during the dry months of June and July. Pastures though, were looking sad and the hay crop was light before being rescued by the heavy rains of early August.

Generally all Lambton farmers are smiling as they look at their crops and the commodity prices that are going through the roof. Unless we have some damaging hail storms or an early killing frost, 2012 looks to be the most prosperous year in the history of Lambton County.

Lambton County tile drain contractors are as happy as the farmers. Most contractors started working in the early spring and though continuing nearly every day in ideal conditions have not been able to keep up with the demand. Some contractors have worked every month of 2012 but get so many new calls they are hard pressed to fit everyone in to their schedule. It has certainly been a wonderful year to be a farmer or drain contractor here in Lambton.

There was other good news locally when a group of five Alberta oil companies visited our area hoping to set up contacts with local suppliers. One of the local suppliers involved in the discussions was Ron McFarlane of Ideal Tile. Ron lives in Forest and has been involved in the Lambton farm drainage industry most of his life. Ron said in a television interview "that his company can supply any pipe needed". The oil companies are also looking for fabricating, electrical and logistics companies to supply their future needs. There are also several companies preparing to manufacture fuels and electricity using local agriculture crops which all bodes well for Lambton County farmers as well as young people looking for jobs. On August 16th the London Free Press featured a story on the expansion of Ron McFarlane's Ideal Pipe Company opening a new plant in Thorndale, the Ideal Polymers Solutions. These companies were formed by a long time LICO member, Gerry Clark, who passed away in 2010 but his wife Bev and her sons are carrying on and even expanding Gerry's work.

However, it has not been all good news from Lambton. On July 20, 2012, Donald McGee of Sombra, only fifty-three years of age, was suddenly struck down by a deadly disease which took him quickly. Don McGee was one of our most progressive contractors and had worked in the tile drainage industry most of his life, starting with his father Jack McGee in the 1970's. Don leaves his wife Glenda and two children still at home. Don McGee enjoyed his life and lived it to the fullest every day but has left us much too soon.

Meanwhile everyone is hoping for a good fall harvest and tiling weather right up to Christmas. After the "Million Dollar" rains of August everyone is smiling in Lambton County. Especially Steve Vokes who celebrates three score and ten on September 1st with a huge pork roast at the Vokes Family Farm.



Vokes Farms of Enniskillen Township - Dean Hodgeson

The Vokes Brothers Limited operate a conglomerate of businesses, all rolled into one, from their headquarters at lot 1, con.14 of Enniskillen Township.

The Vokes Brothers have been involved in the farm drainage business for over 46 years but they have expanded into excavating and trucking, as well as farming over 2500 acres. The business is owned by brothers Steve and Peter Vokes who employ several other family members along with some part-time staff. All of this help is required to operate and maintain the huge inventory of farm equipment, excavators and trucks stored in shops and sheds on the home farm. Another brother, David, is also involved in the farming operation with each owning their own land but farming together with cooperatively owned machinery.

It all started in 1967 when Steve Vokes brought home a rusty old Buckeye # One to help his father tile drain their farm. The boys' father, John Vokes, was not always happy when his boys brought home some of this excavating machinery but he backed them up and it has all turned into a booming agricultural success. Steve never had much success with the Buckeye # One but gained a lot of experience on patience and repairing. Steve's first paying job was for a neighbour where Steve set out the grades and operated the machine, while the farmer spread the tile, hooked in the tile, made the connections and backfilled the drains. As Steve says "It was a good experience but hardly a money maker".

A few years later Steve and his brothers, Robert and Peter, bought a Buckeye "302" from Ken Jaques and started into the farm drainage business. However, they found they spent as much time on maintenance and repairs as they did actually digging. Steve had been working at Imperial Oil in Sarnia and Peter at Dow Chemical. In 1975 they decided to go full time into the farm drainage business. With the help of Geoff Carter, who flew the boys from the Sarnia Airport up to Pigeon, Michigan, they purchased a 1975 Speicher Ditcher from Kraft Machinery.

The boys quit their day jobs and went tiling full time during the 1970's when tile drainage was booming in southern Ontario and especially in Lambton County. Over the next few years the Vokes Bros. installed millions of feet of tile with their Speicher wheel machine, about half clay and half plastic. In 1977 they bought a rubber tired drainage-plow from Allen Griffin and increased their production tremendously. About this time they also joined with several other contractors and set up their own plastic tile manufacturing company, Agri-Drain, at Tilbury, Ontario. This was a very successful operation for several years but low farm prices, high interest rates and the sudden death of their brother Robert, in an electrical accident on the farm, slowed the enterprise down for the next few years.

Progress was slow in the 1980's but Steve and his wife Rozelle continue to farm and raise their family. Steve bought the home farm at lot 1, con. 14 from his father and ran a cow-calf herd of 70 Limousine cows. Peter bought his own farm just down the road and the Vokes boys began to expand their farming operation. In 2012 the Vokes Bros. are farming 2500 acres of cash crops, including 680 acres of sugar beets. When the sugar beet contracts became available to Lambton County farmers, the Vokes brothers each purchased 200 acres of quota at a cost of \$300/acre. It was quite a gamble at the time but despite making some tremendous investments in machinery, the sugar beet industry has worked out very well for everyone involved. Peter Vokes went to Germany in 2005 and brought back a \$540,000 beet harvester. This gigantic machine has proven to be worth more than the purchase price. The sugar beet producers all work together to save everyone from buying all the machinery and the cooperative has worked very well. The Lambton producers work with their Kent and Michigan partners and this sugar beet cooperative has been a tremendous success for the Vokes brothers' farms and everyone else involved.

(Continued Page 5)

Vokes Farms of Enniskillen Township - (Cont'd. from page 4)

As the farm business improved, the Vokes brothers also expanded their drainage business. Though farm tiling was slow at times in the late 1980's and early 1990's, the Vokes brothers installed water lines and in 1992 they bought their first large excavator, a Cat EL240. This led to several lucrative jobs for Union Gas. Since then they have purchased more and larger excavators and have been involved in construction work in Sarnia. As their farming acres expanded, the Vokes brothers bought their own trucks and now have two tractor-trailers available during harvest. They have one grain buggy, seven gravity wagons and two trucks to haul their grain and so are able to harvest up to 150 acres of grain per day. They also have their own drying and storage facilities on the farm so it is only the weather that can slow progress on the Vokes brothers' farms.

These days Steve and his son Charles do the trucking and maintenance on the farm. This is a full time job and during the winter other employees work in the shop overhauling the vast collection of equipment. Everything is ready to go when seeding and harvesting times arrive.

In the meantime Peter Vokes is in charge of the farm drainage end of the business. Peter has two steady men with him on the job, nephew Joe Vokes is the backhoe operator and Ron Hardy has been part of the Vokes tiling crew for over thirty years. However, if Peter requires additional help, Steve and the rest of the crew are always on hand.

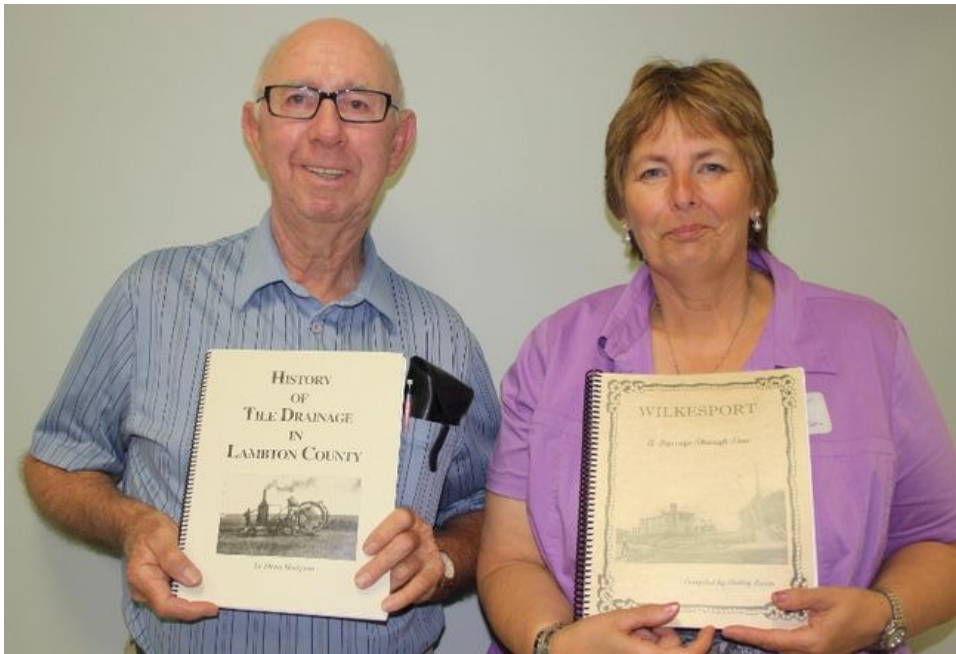
The boys' father, John Vokes, would be proud of the operation the boys have built from that rusty old Buckeye # One that Steve brought home away back in 1967.



Passing

Weger, Darren Wayne — It is with deep sadness the family wishes to announce the passing of their beloved husband, father, brother, son, friend Darren Wayne Weger, of Tillsonburg, at VON – Sakura House, Woodstock, on Sunday, September 09, 2012 with his loving family by his side. Darren was 39 years of age. Fun-loving husband and father to Elaine and their boys Owen (3 years) and Oliver (18 months). Beloved Son to **Lorraine and Dave Stevens (Dave Stevens Drainage)** of Springford, Wayne and Sandra Weger of Port Bruce, Diane Wallington and the late Jim Wallington (2012) of Tillsonburg. Exceptional brother to Melanie W e g e r a n d h e r h u s b a n d C o l i n L i n d s a y , Stephanie Middleton and her husband Jeff. Brother-in-law to Heather Wallington. Step-brother to Cari Caverly, Mike Caverly and his partner Lynette Facey. Wonderful Uncle to all of his Nieces and Nephews. Cherished by his loving family of Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles, Cousins and Friends, both near and far. Darren was the dedicated owner of Stevens Irrigation in Tillsonburg. The Memorial Service for Darren was held at O s t r a n d e r ' s F u n e r a l H o m e C h a p e l o n Saturday, September 15, 2012 at 10:00 a.m. Inurnment in the Springford Cemetery. At the request of the family, please provide written, personal stories, and memories of Darren, that can be gathered and used in creating a "Book of Memories" for Owen and Oliver. Memorial donations to "In Trust for Owen and Oliver Weger" would be appreciated. Personal condolences can be made at www.ostrandersonline.com

Collecting Crop Chronicles: Volunteers To Put Together Township Farm Stories – Heather Young, June 28, 2012



Dean Hodgson, project volunteer, and Shelley Lucier, curator of the Sombra Museum, will be working with St. Clair Township residents to put together a book of stories about people's memories of family farms in the township's history. The pair is pictured here with books that they have written about Lambton's tile drainage history and the history of Wilkesport, respectively. Heather Linda Young/ Sarnia This Week/ QMI Agency

ST. CLAIR TOWNSHIP - Dean Hodgson is at it again.

For two years, the Sarnia man helped compile stories of Lambton County farmers into two volumes.

Now, he's leading a similar project exclusively for residents of the former Sombra Township.

"We have all noticed that the farmsteads are disappearing from our township roads. Soon, our past will be forgotten," he said.

"We have started a new project of recording family farm stories, hoping to preserve our past for future generations."

Hodgson is asking that anyone interested in their farm histories will jot down memories from their family's past. It can be full stories or point form anecdotes – he will look it over and do his best to help compile it properly.

The volunteer committee putting the book together is hoping for all kinds of stories – when your family purchased the farm, how they raised the whole gang on bread and butter churned right on the farm, or when the last rail fence was removed.

(Continued Page 6)

Collecting Crop Chronicles: Volunteers To Put Together Township Farm Stories – (Cont'd. from page 6)

“Hopefully, some of our pioneer stories will tell us of barn threshings, steam engines, logging, the wood stoves, and when the first automobile appeared on their road,” said Hodgson.

“Every family has a different story.”

Interviews can also be arranged in the Reference Room of the new Sombra Museum Cultural Centre if you need help writing.

All stories will be edited for clarity and returned to the family for correction and approval. Nothing will be printed without the family’s permission.

The Reference Room, which is stocked with census, cemetery and some property records available for research purposes, will also house all the materials used in the project, so anyone researching Sombra’s history in the future will have access to the stories.

Photo submissions along with stories are welcome.

Shelley Lucier, curator of the Sombra Museum, said the project will hopefully encourage families to write down their personal histories.

“Everyone talks about sitting down and doing it. This is a motivator,” she said.

“It’s a record in print for them – it’s something they can be proud of.”

Stories can be submitted by e-mail (sombramuseum@hotmail.com), by mail (Sombra Museum, Box 76, Sombra On, N0P 2H0) or dropped off at the museum during open hours.

For more information, called 519-892-3982. heather.young@sunmedia.ca

The LICO Executive is working with “Country Guide” to get our message out that good drainage is part of good production practices. The first article appeared in the September 17, 2012 issue of Country Guide right after Page 41.

Country Guide is a publication directed at the 20% of producers that produce 80% of the food. These farmers are our best customers, or should be.

Review the article and give feedback to the Directors. Our current commitment is six articles over 12 months. Since this is the first, your input is valuable in directing the content for future articles.

If you would like to see the article online, please go to page 63 of 76 at the following website:

<http://c4238086.r86.cf2.rackcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/CGE120917.pdf>



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January 22 & 23, 2013
LICO Conference
Best Western Lamplighter Inn
591 Wellington Rd.,
London, Ontario N6C 4R3



Passings

McGee, Donald Frank - A resident of Sombra Township passed away suddenly in Sarnia on Friday, July 20, 2012 at the age of 53. Donald is the son of the late John and Vera (Carroll) McGee. Beloved husband of Glenda (Ross) McGee. Loving father of Gillian McGee (Zach Phillips) and Eric McGee. Dear brother of Nancy Forshee, Bill McGee (the late Linda), Norman McGee, Jim (Rosemary) McGee, Marilyn (Bev) Ritchie and Cathy McGee (Greg Bull). Uncle to many and brother-in-law of Betty & John VanSegbrook, Dale & Michelle Ross and Tina & Richard Zimmer. Donald farmed in Sombra Township and owned & operated McGee Brothers Farm Drainage. The Memorial Service was held at the Wilkesport Community Centre on Saturday, July 28 at 11 AM. The interment of Donald's cremated remains in Duthill Cemetery will be held at a later date. Funeral arrangements have been entrusted to the HAYCOCK-CAVANAGH FUNERAL HOME, 409 Nelson Street in Wallaceburg. If desired, remembrances to the Brain and Mind Institute may be left at the funeral home. 519.627.3231. Online tributes may be left at www.CavanaghFuneralHome.ca

Geenevasen, Herman A. — (Founder of Richmond Ditching) Peacefully at Trillium Centre in Kingston on Wednesday, August 29, 2012, three days following his 88th birthday. Reunited with the love of his life Diny Geenevasen (nee Thissen). Dear father of Jeana Ferguson (Bev) of Atlanta; Jack (Laurie) of Selby; Herman (Lori) of Napanee; Jeffrey (Allison) of Newburgh and Jennifer McClashan (Murray) of Napanee. Cherished "Opa" of Shawn & Ryan, Johnathon & Christopher, Katrina, Eric & Bryce, Brandi, Cole, Owen, Ashley & Cory and "Great Opa" to many. Survived by his sister Rie of the Netherlands. Predeceased by his great grandson Gavin Geenevasen and his brothers Jacobus, Frans and Kees. Remembered fondly by the Thissen family. The family received friends at the WARTMAN FUNERAL HOME "Napanee Chapel" on Friday, August 31 from 2-4 & 7-9 p.m., with prayers at 4 p.m. and Saturday, September 1 from 11-12:30 p.m. Funeral Mass to follow at St. Patrick's Catholic Church (179 West St, Napanee) at 1 p.m. Cremation followed by Interment at Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Picton. For those desiring, donations by cheque to the L&A Hospital Foundation will be remembered with appreciation by the family. The family would like to thank the exceptional staff at Trillium Centre for their care and kindness shown to Herman and family.

"There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are messengers of overwhelming grief...and unspeakable love." Washington Irving