

A FAMILY, A FARM, A TRADITION

By Laura Davison

History is both a teacher and a reminder. Understanding the past brings discernment for the present and wisdom for the future. The Davison family has an incredible story that unfolds the character and foundation on which Davison Orchards now stands. From the beginning, survival has meant change and the land has seen change: from horse to tractor, ditches to drip irrigation, boxes to bins, fruit grower to merchandiser and finally, from a production farm to an agritourism experience. With change and development come aches and pains, but in the end it has brought much to be grateful for: a family to be proud of, a farm that brings joy to many, and a tradition that will continue for years to come.

Starting a family and a career in England in the mid 1920s was not only challenging for Tom Davison and his new bride May, it seemed to be impossible. The Davison family farmed in Tunbridge Wells, England since 1856. George Davison, Tom's father, had supported his family of seven sons and two daughters by growing



Figure 1: The Davison Farm Tunbridge Wells, England early 1900s

hops and mixed farming on the family property. After the passing of their father on

February 16, 1920, the Davison family was forced to re-evaluate. England was in a state of flux after the First World War; the economy was unstable and farming was tough¹. George's estate could not be divided to sufficiently support nine families. Many men and women were moving to the British colonies throughout the world, looking for new opportunities and a brighter future². Several of the Davison siblings moved to Africa, but because the cost was high, Tom and his brother Edwin were forced to consider elsewhere. Canada was looking to colonize the West and the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) was sponsoring families from England to immigrate into the western provinces. In 1927 Tom and May took what little they had, left their home in England, and made the journey out west.

¹ Stevenson, John., Cook, Chris., *Britain in the Depression*, (New York: Longman Publishing, 1994), 8.

² *Ibid.*, 65.



Figure 2: Tom and May Davison arrive in Canada 1927

Tom and May took the CPR as far as Calgary, Alberta. There they met a policeman who suggested that, because of Tom's background in horticultural, they should continue westward to the fertile Okanagan Valley. Tom and May considered the man's advice and traveled as far as Westbank, British Columbia. The young couple stayed in Westbank for only a year where Tom worked on local orchards. It was while Tom worked in Westbank, that he began to develop an invaluable relationship with the British Columbia Fruit Shippers, an area packing house. The BC Fruit Shippers provided opportunity for financing to purchase the orchard in Vernon, which later became

Davison Orchards. In 1929, Tom's brother Edwin, also known as Ted, and his wife Phyllis decided they too

would take the journey, courtesy of the CPR, to western Canada. Together Tom and Ted leased and worked on orchards in the Vernon area for several years. Opportunity came for the Davisons in 1933. The Belgium Syndicate *Land and Agriculture Company of Canada* had land available for sale in the Bella Vista area of South Vernon. On November 16, 1933 with financial help from the BC Fruit Shippers, Tom and May realized their dream of owning their own orchard in the Okanagan. The orchard was bought for six thousand dollars from The *Land and Agriculture Company of Canada* (see appendix 1).

Tom farmed mostly Macintosh apples with some other popular varieties of the day such as Wagner, Dutches, Wealthies and Delicious. Although the beginning years were hard, through his relationship with the BC Fruit Shippers, Tom was able to sell his produce to the packing house and generate enough income to survive the years of the Great Depression. Just eight years after his arrival in British Columbia, Tom's brother Ted passed away in 1937, leaving his wife Phyllis with two small children. Bob Davison, Ted and Phyllis' eldest son, began working on the orchard slopes with his Uncle Tom in 1948 at the young age of seventeen.

The winter of 1949-50 was the coldest winter recorded in Okanagan history.³ January brought in the new year with record lows in Vernon of 31 degrees Fahrenheit below zero, killing many of the fruit trees in the local orchards⁴. The Davison's, however, were fortunate because the orchard was young, and managed to escape much of the damage caused by the winter. That year proved to be even more difficult for the Davison family. Tom Davison passed away from cancer in June of 1950, leaving his widow and young nephew to continue farming the orchard. Bob, then eighteen years of age, worked on the orchard with Yud Campbell, who was the foreman of the orchard after Tom passed away. In 1953, at the age of 21, Bob married Dora McKenzie. He then committed to the orchard, built a cabin on the property for him and his new wife, and took the reigns of the orchard. The agricultural market began to pick up in the late 1950s and big production of apples continued throughout the sixties. Bob and Dora had four children, Joyce, Linda, Tom and Sharon and two foster children, Nathan and Erica. The children all grew up living and working on the farm. All the apples grown on the orchard were sold to the BC Fruit Shippers.

The eighty's brought more change to Davison history. Bob and Dora's son, Tom, returned after being at OLDS College in Alberta with fresh ideas and new inspiration. Tom leased and farmed some orchards with his wife, Tamra while he worked for the Vernon Fruit Union as an agricultural consultant. Tamra worked as an interior decorator for Winman's Home Furnishing in Vernon. After a few years Tom, realizing that his heart was in farming, began investigating the option of working on the family property with his father. Because there was little profit in produce, Bob was very cautious about Tom and Tamra joining the farm. As it was, the orchard was just sustaining Bob's family and he was concerned



Figure 3: Davison Orchards 1949

³ British Columbia. *The Report of the Royal Commission on the Tree-fruit industry of British Columbia, October 1958*. (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1958), 129.

⁴ Ibid.

that the task of providing for two families with the one orchard would be too much. The selling prices to the packing house were too little; if Tom and Tamra were going to join the farm, something would have to be done differently.

Tom's wife, Tamra, brought a new dynamic to both the family and the orchard. Tamra had an eye for displays and a natural talent for sales. It seemed that between her talent in marketing and sales, coupled with Tom's expertise in farming, the idea of selling direct seemed to be an opportunity worth taking. Tom and Tamra had seen several successful orchards who sold directly to the consumer and decided to give it a try. Direct marketing enabled the farmer to gain more return for the same apple that he would sell to the packing house at a much lower price.

Finally, in the spring of 1985, Tom and Tamra joined the orchard as partners with Bob and Dora; all the profits and costs would be split evenly between the two families. That first year brought many changes to the orchard. At the time, the orchard was mainly Macintosh apples. The Davisons had done well with this crop in the past, but in order to attract customers out of town and to the orchard, they would have to diversify and allow more choices. The Davisons became known as the "apple people". The business grew on good reputation, friendly service and excellent fruit. The first spring was spent replanting the orchard with new varieties. In addition to apples, Tom and Bob planted a few tomatoes. Because funds were short, those first tomatoes



Figure 4: Owen Parchumchuck at harvest time 1948

were planted in the orchard, between the rows of apples. A new building was built and the market was created.

Because Bob, Dora, Tom and Tamra worked together running the market and working the fields, a sign was posted "Honk for Service". Everything was done in the one building: the packing, the sorting, and the selling.

The first year's total sales were \$8000,

and the family was thrilled. All profits were put back into the business in order to grow

and diversify. Cucumbers, watermelon and pumpkins were planted the following year. In 1989 Davison Orchards made the front page of Vernon's "Morning Star" newspaper with Tamra's first

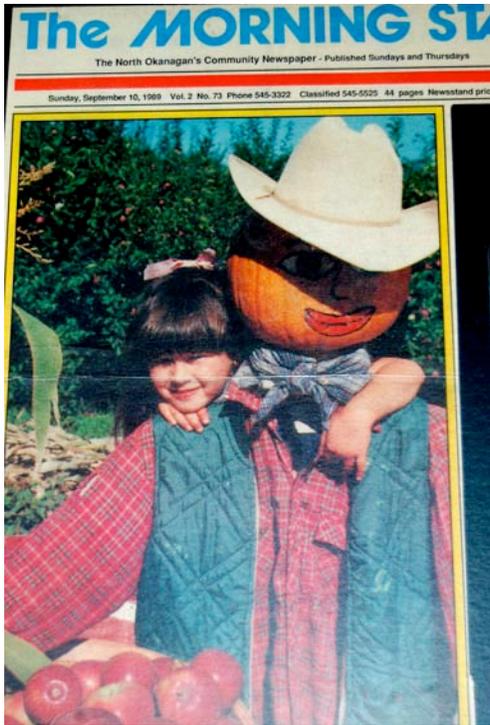


Figure 5: Tamra Davison's first Pumpkin Man Display 1989

pumpkin man display from which the Davison Orchards logo was derived. It became clear that, in order to continue expanding as a business, it was imperative that the name became known to the public. Tom and Tamra put in extra hours attending the IPE in Armstrong and the local farmers' market in order to accomplish that goal.

As each year went on new ideas were put into play. Davison's own apple juice was introduced in 1994. The Davison's focused on offering the "value added" product: a product which took their own apples, and offered a specialized product. In 1996 the Apple Crate Bakery was built and the now famous Deep Dish Apple Pie was introduced. Tamra also began doing special events such as

the Pumpkin Festival. These special events gave the customers an opportunity to come and enjoy the orchard,

see first hand where their fruit came from, and make unique memories as a family and as friends.

This upcoming year, Davison Orchards will celebrate seventy-five years of farming on their land. There have been good times and bad times, with plenty of hard work and memories made. Today, Davison Orchards is not just a place to come for apples, pies, or anything else -it is an experience. It is a place where much fun is had and where memories are made. It is an opportunity to see a real-working orchard, to buy local, fresh produce, and to experience a family-oriented business. Three generations work together to make Davison Orchards a place for all to enjoy.

History teaches a family where they come from and who they are. It is a reminder of the hardships endured and the accomplishments made by generations before. To know the history of Davison Orchards is to know the family and to understand the foundation upon which it is built. History brings understanding, giving a new perspective and increased appreciation for what is now. Appreciation for the past ensures the family, the farm, and the tradition will be passed down for many generations to come.

Appendix 1: Original bill of sale for Davison Orchards 1937

T H I S I N D E N T U R E

Made in duplicate this 18th day of January in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and thirty-seven.

BETWEEN:

THOMAS CECIL DAVISON, of the City of Vernon,
in the Province of British Columbia,
farmer,

hereinafter called the "Assignor"

OF THE FIRST PART.

A N D:

BRITISH COLUMBIA FRUIT SHIPPERS LIMITED, a
body corporate under the Companies
Act, of the Province of British Col-
umbia, having its registered office
in the City of Vernon in said Province,

hereinafter called the "Assignee"

OF THE SECOND PART.

WHEREAS, by the articles of agreement dated the 16th day of November, A.D. 1933, and made between ARTHUR DEJARDIN of the City of Winnipeg in the Province of Manitoba, of the first part and the said Assignor of the second part, the said Arthur Dejardin did agree to sell and convey in fee unto the said Assignor who thereby agreed to purchase from the said Arthur Dejardin the lands therein and hereinafter particularly described, for the sum of Six thousand (\$6000.00) Dollars subject to the conditions and covenants in said articles contained:

AND WHEREAS, the said Assignor has agreed to grant and assign the said Articles of Agreement and all interest therein, and in the said lands unto the said Assignee;

Bibliography

British Columbia. *Report of the Royal Commission on the Tree-fruit Industry of British Columbia, October 1958*. Victoria: Queen's Publishing, 1958.

Robert Davison, personal interview by Laura Davison, November 12, 2007.

Stevenson, John, Cook, Chris. *Britain in the Great Depression: Society and Politics 1929-39*, New York: Longman Publishing, 1994.

Tamra Davison, personal interview by Laura Davison, November 15, 2007.

Tom Davison, personal interview by Laura Davison, November 23, 2007.