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# ABOUT POTATOES



SOUVENIR OF  
ALLISTON POTATO FESTIVAL  
ALLISTON  
(The Potato Capital of Ontario)

# History of the Potato

J. K. McRUER, Agricultural Representative, South Simcoe County

The earliest recorded history of the potato comes to us from the Spanish who discovered it in Peru and Chile in the early 1500's. The "papas" were used by the aborigines in place of bread and were also dried in the sun to preserve them. They were usually cooked, but often made into flour. There was evidence of long continued practice of cultivation, however crude. The potato was and still is wild in the mountainous regions of Chile and Peru.

The potato was probably carried to Spain by explorers of the sixteenth century and for over a century after its introduction was grown more as a curiosity than as a food. The Irish first recognized its great value for food and it was cultivated as a field crop in Ireland before 1663. For the Irish it quickly became a staple article of food in the greater part of the country. In 1845 and 1846 when the potato crop failed because of late blight, it was referred to as the Potato Famine with a great many deaths and many emigrating to other countries.

The date and method of introduction of the potato to North America is not known but it was probably introduced by early Spanish explorers. Over the years through selection and breeding there has been considerable standardization of the crop which now includes smooth to heavily russeted skins, red, blue, white colours, oblong and oval shape, deep and shallow eyes, etc. Continuing selection and use of its many varied characteristics makes it possible to use the right variety for each specific use.

## POTATO NICKNAMES

"Taters" presumably is a derivation of the gaelic word "pratie" which itself probably was derived via "prata" from "patata".

The term "Spud" probably is derived from the three tined fork commonly used to dig the potato crop years ago in England and Scotland.

"Murphy" a slang term in early use in Ireland is an example of the use of personal names to designate the potato, a practice which probably commemorated a particularly successful or outstanding grower.

## POTATOES IN SOUTH SIMCOE

It is sometimes interesting to look at statistics as shown below taken at 10 year intervals.

Year	County Potato Acreage	Yield	Yield Per Acre
1924	12,514	2,069,816	165.4
1934	13,482	1,604,358	119.0
1944	8,641	673,998	130.0
1954	4,900	937,200	191.3
1964	10,300	4,032,700	392.0
1974	16,000(est.)	?	?

What do these figures say? Is it not that in the early years practically every farmer in the county grew some potatoes, certainly for their own use and the surplus would be marketed. As time moved forward it became accepted that certain areas were better for potato production than others and the acreage started to concentrate largely on the Essa and Tecumseth flat lands. Growers in these areas increased their acreages while other growers dropped out of production to the point that in the late 1940's there were only about 150 commercial growers, the largest of whom would have about 25 acres of potatoes.

At this time new technology was creating many changes in the management of the crop and there continued to be a drop in the number of commercial growers but those who stayed with the potatoes have become very specialized with large equipment, entirely new cultural practices, new varieties and much less labour per acre. Today most growers are handling well in excess of 100 acres of potatoes.

What are some of these changes? The varieties have changed through varieties like Irish Cobbler, Chipewa, Dooleys, Warba, Green Mountain, Ontario, Katahdin to approximately the following acreage of varieties in 1974:

Kennebec	8500 acres	Sebago	400 acres
Superior	2400 acres	Ontario	200 acres
Netted Gem	1800 acres	Cherokee	200 acres
Norchip	1400 acres	Irish cobbler	200 acres

Another 300 acres composed of—Chieftain, Green Mountain, Keswick, Norland and Raritan.

In earlier years all seed was cut by hand. Herb Dunn would cut 40 bags in one day and everyone wanted him to cut for them but today by machine a grower cuts over 2000 bags per day. Some of the earlier planting was hand dropped in the furrow followed by machines like the Iron Age Single Row Planter pulled by horses. Today, large four row planters fed mechanically by truck loads of treated, cut seed and fertilizer make quick work of the planting operation.

In early years sprays of 'paris green' and lime sulphur were the main insect and blight control programs. This switched to the use of dusters for better coverage but in the early 50's dusters were replaced by high pressure sprayers using more specific materials which have been carefully checked for safety standards and control.

Fall harvest shows many changes, earlier crops being plowed out and hand picked. The big innovation came when digger units were initiated to fill bags in the field, but today a bulk truck drives along beside a multi-row harvester in the field and with little or no hand labour a truck is loaded to head for the storage or grading plant.

Storages too have undergone considerable change, particularly in the past 15 years as enterprises have grown in size. Most early storages were bins in conventional barns or root cellars. Today, large insulated buildings with temperature control and air circulation are common. These are mostly bulk storages which have mechanical means of loading and unloading.

#### MARKETING

As the commercial acreage of potatoes increased the marketing problem increased as well. The grower marketed where and how he could with limited knowledge of markets. In early years Tom Cas-

sin, George Drennan, Herb Dunn and Nicol Wilson showed considerable leadership in trying to get a marketing system established. In the early 30's with brand names of Big Chief and Tee Pee, they established contracts with Eatons, Loblaws, etc., and tried to organize a regular supply. With no real control of supplies to honor contracts, they were forced to give up having lost money but gaining experience. Tom Cassin brought Katahdin seed into the area. The Alliston area didn't grow much seed but under the direction of Harold Whiteside, a number of growers in the north of the county developed seed programs.

The main system of marketing the crop in the area became one of selling to trucker dealers. Once established with a reliable trucker a grower could feel safe but the offer of 5 cents more from another trucker raised doubts and in some cases bad cheques or non payment and left the marketing in general turmoil. With Salada Shirriff Horsey establishing their plant in Alliston in the late 1950's a new process of marketing was introduced, i.e., contracting at a price at the time of planting in the spring. A number of growers have since that time marketed a part of their crop in this manner.

In the early 60's the Alliston Potato Co-Operative was formed as a means of packing and selling some of the Table Stock potatoes of the areas.

At the same time some independent packers were established and the Co-Operative had a short life.

Today with Salada Foods and other processing companies taking a large volume of potatoes from the area for processing and with large packers like Cappuccitti Bros., W. Davidson, etc., there is a good and competitive local market for growers' potatoes.

#### **SOUTH SIMCOE 500 BUSHEL CLUB**

On a Potato Tour to Virginia in the early 1930's, Tom Cassin, Thompson Banting, Carl Whiteside and Herb Dunn saw some attempts to grow 500 bushels of potatoes per acres. During the second world war when Food For Britain was a theme, growers of the Alliston area set 500 bushels per acre as an objective and recognized their producers with the higher yields. Over the years other ideas were incorporated into the competition with more and more emphasis put on quality. Each year the overall winner was particularly emphasized and are listed as follows:

J. Herb Dunn	1943	Ross Whiteside	1958
Jas. Sleightholm	1944	Alvin Murphy	1959
Thompson Banting	1945	Ron Beattie	1960
Hugh MacKenzie	1946	Ross Brett	1961
Homer McMann	1947	Frank Elphick	1962
Eric Gallagher	1948	Ross Whiteside	1963
Victor Gallagher	1949	Eldred Lundy	1964
Edward Banting	1950	Wm. Dorsey	1965
Warren MacKenzie	1951	J. K. Crank	1966
Ken Whiteside	1952	John Brouwer	1967
Clarence Leach	1953	Bob Dorsey	1968
Homer McMann	1954	Eldred Lundy	1969
Jack Willson	1955	Ray Cole	1970
Jim McCague	1956	Charles Marshall	1971
Bill Roth	1957	Ross Whiteside	1972

Ray Cole 1973

## ALLISTON 500 BUSHEL CLUB

F. A. Lashley, 1943

You have heard of the Alliston district;  
Of it's people, climate and soil,  
And the way they grow good potatoes  
By sweat and honest toil.

The growers there are aggressive,  
Of this you will agree.  
They answered the call for increased food  
To ship across the sea.

They simply said we must not fail  
Those sons who left our shore,  
To win the fight for freedom,  
And the peace for evermore.

So they organized a meeting  
To decide what should be done,  
To step up food production,  
And make IT beat the Hun.

Some one of the group had a brain wave;  
"Let's have a contest", said he.  
"To see who can grow the most bushels;  
Let potatoes help make the world free."

So they set the goal at 500,  
A lot of spuds for an acre to yield;  
And quick as a flash each grower began,  
To select the best site in his field.

What can I do to be first?  
Was the question each member did ask.  
Shall it be better seed or good culture;  
Or will dusting accomplish the task?

Perhaps I should adjust that old planter,  
To allow for more plants to the row;  
Or should I try some new fangled method,  
That none of my neighbours would know.

It soon became quite apparent,  
That a most friendly battle was on;  
And the grower who wins this contest,  
Will need to be up before dawn.

To prove that our growers weren't fooling;  
And that none gave up in despair;  
At least three produced the 500,  
And with a few bushels to spare.

So we say to these growers "Carry On,"  
You have performed a remarkable feat;  
By your ever untiring efforts,  
Our nation will continue to eat.

At this potato festival 1974 we hope that you will enjoy the fellowship that has existed in this area for years between grower, commercial people and the community.

### RECIPE FOR POTATO PANCAKES

Served at Festival Breakfast

2/3 cup Salada Instant Potato Flakes  
2/3 cup all purpose flour  
2 tsp. sugar  
2 tsp. baking powder  
1 tsp. salt  
1 egg  
1 tbsp. salad oil  
1/2 cup skim milk powder  
1 1/8 cup water

#### METHOD

Mix dry ingredients altogether. Put beaten egg, salad oil and water together. Put a well in middle of dry ingredients — add liquid. Stir gently only until just mixed. Batter will be lumpy.

Let stand 1/2 to 1 hour before cooking on hot griddle.

Makes 8 pancakes.

# Shipping Then.....



# .....Now

