

100hearst



CH. **BLAIS** RD.

FAMILLES PIONNIÈRES | PIONEER FAMILIES



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## Blais Road

*The Blais: A Local Pioneer Family*



Photo taken in 1923, on Lot 5, in Concession 8 (Blais Road) (from left to right) Édouard, Arthur, Joseph and Phillippe Blais.

## **A Century of Blais**

Upon their arrival in 1923, Édouard Blais and his three sons— Arthur, Joseph and Philippe—settled on lot 5 in Concession 8 and 9 (last house on the right from the current Hwy 583 South). At that time, no one doubted that this newly cleared road would one day bear their name: Blais Road.

Two years later, in 1925, the rest of the family left Saint-Benoît-Labre, Quebec, to find the land settlers in Northern Ontario.

Nine children (Origène, Marie, Suaire, Édouard, Camille, Euloge, Louis, François, Délia) and their mother, Amanda (born Blais) joined the men who had arrived earlier.

In 1929, Origen settled near the creek and built the barn that still stands there.

Arthur, the eldest, married Irène Marie Rose Camiré on July 22, 1930. In 1931, the young couple began the construction of a farm located at the crossroads of Roy and Blais Roads, which was completed in 1932. This was the beginning of the Blais farm venture.

## Work and Daily Life

In the winter, the first generation of Blais men left their farms to work at logging sites. They were lumberjacks, like many others in the region. For farmers, the cold season was indeed calmer than the planting



and harvesting season. The work in the camps provided them with a significant additional income. During this time, the women and boys who were too young “to work in the bush” looked after the household.

The second generation of Blais, that of Arthur’s or Origène’s children, for example, knew a different kind of life. The modernization of breeding and production was introduced. In 1957, Arthur’s son, Armand, settled with his wife Léonie Roy in his father’s house. The couple gave birth to five children—Yvon, Robert, Francine, Guy and Lucille.

In 1965, Armand became the owner of the farm which he purchased from his father. Three other children were added to the family over the following years: Marielle, Pierre and Louis. Enough to carry the torch.

In 2021, at the time of this writing, Armand and Léonie Blais are still living in the family business's house, even though the business was passed on to their sons Robert and Louis in 1992.

## **A Dairy Farm**

The farm produced milk from 1930 to 2016. From 1930 to 1950, it was shipped to Cochrane. Then, until 2016, the Blais supplied nearly 40 dairies in the region, including, for a time, Hearst. A lot of Ontario butter therefore had a little flavour of Hearst thanks to the Blais.

Since 2016, cattle farming has replaced dairy production.

## **The Musicians**

In the photo, Armand (left) and one of his brothers in front of the Blais farm house. Photo: Courtesy of the Blais family.

Even if some of the Blais' sons' and daughters' houses have disappeared with time, it is



important to know that the road has seen four generations of Blais since 1923 and that some are still there. You can certainly hear them.

Indeed, the Blais are known in Hearst and in the region as a family of musicians. This is not new, as old photographs show Armand on guitar, Arthur on accordion or harmonica and Philippe on the violin. These guys left their heirs with a passion for songs, a sense of rhythm and spirited evenings. Even today, few people in the region do not know at least one Blais who sings, whistles or plays music. Involved in community activities, the Blais know how to liven up an evening, bring the family together and get the crowd dancing. They may recount old tales, sing a folk melody, or hum a good country tune. It's hard to resist!

Other "concessions" have been renamed over the years to pay tribute to the memory of the families who settled there, cleared the land and cultivated it. Namingly, roads such as Dillon, Maheux, Camiré, Roy, Haman...

*- Danielle Blais-Lauzon et Marie LeBel*

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