

Inducted: 2003



Andrew Dixon of McGillivray Township, is recognized for his life-long dedication to education, innovation, and conservancy in agriculture. Throughout his 32-year career as a high school science and agriculture teacher, his innovative teaching methods influenced many rural students to continue in school and thereby increased the level of education in the farming community. Following his retirement from teaching, he worked with the Stewart Seed Company of Ailsa Craig as a corn plant breeder developing new hybrids for this area using winter nurseries in Jamaica, New Zealand, and Argentina. Beginning in the early 1950's, Andrew worked for and with the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority to promote their mandate and was an acknowledged proponent of hardwood production as a viable cash crop in Southern Ontario.

ANDREW DIXON

1907-2002

Andrew was born on a farm in McGillivray Township. He attended the local school one concession west of his home. Following completion of high school in Lucan, he attended the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph, graduating in 1929 with his degree majoring in apiculture. His first job, as a bee inspector, was short lived and it was then that he decided to enter the Ontario College of Education to become a high school teacher.

In 1933 Andy began teaching agriculture and science at the high school in Hagersville. Here, for the next 15 years and in Exeter the following 16 years he would challenge and enrich the minds of many young men and women with his innovative teaching methods. He implemented and managed a profit sharing mini farm whereby the students built a barn, raised chickens, a litter of pigs and worked a one and a half-acre area of experimental plots. His class was the first group to study poultry in windowless, high population and caged environments.

Throughout his life, Andy always had an attachment to land and conservancy. In 1936 he bought, what was, a poor piece of property in McGillivray Township and planted 300 apple trees and 5 acres of mixed hardwoods. Today that farm is a viable three-crop operation including asparagus, strawberries and dwarf orchard trees.

In 1951, while the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority was still in its infancy, he was elected to be the public relations representative. In a strong appeal to the public to influence government representatives,

he gave 28 presentations to ultimately persuade the province to purchase a four-mile strip of Lake Huron beach. The Pinery, one of our most unique and beautiful parks might never have been but for Dixon's dedication to the cause. He also was instrumental in instigating the building of the Morrison Dam, which enabled the canning factory in Exeter to stay operational and the residents to benefit. Andrew received two citations for his service with the Authority from 1951 to 1959.

In 1965, Andy retired from 31 years of teaching to begin a new career, as a corn breeder for Stewart Seeds of Ailsa Craig, which would last for the next 11 years. For the first four years, his summer crop was on his home farm. However during the winter months, his work led him to Jamaica, Argentina and New Zealand, which offered sites that were compatible to southern Ontario in terms of day length and heat units. His perseverance and ambition resulted in excellent results in hybrid crossings.

Following his work with Stewart Seeds Andrew developed a new passion – growing trees as a viable cash crop. He believed that, in the long term, the average annual return from growing trees could be greater than from growing conventional crops. To do this he felt three things were needed:

- 1- accelerate growth and hence log size through wide spacing at time of planting
- 2- grow veneer quality logs through pruning
- 3- keep expenses to a minimum

Although many government officials met his ideas with skepticism, through perseverance, his vision and philosophies led to establishing the concept of Agro-Forestry in Canada. Impressed with Andy's vision and direction, the first Agro-Forestry plot for the University of Guelph was established. Television appearances, presentations, magazine articles and his book on how to grow trees were all part of Andy's extension efforts to help educate and encourage landowners to grow trees his way.

During the period when Andy was teaching at Hagersville a new teacher arrived just out of school. Her name was Edith Tuero, the daughter of the owner of the Tuero Cigar Manufacturing Company of Toronto. Education has a way of placing people with varied background at the same place and so it happened with these two. They were married and had two children Jim, who continues to farm and Betty who lives in London.

In 1996 Andy was awarded the O.A.C. Outstanding Service Award in recognition of his leadership in stimulating and supporting research teaching and extension programs in agriculture.

Andrew Dixon is a man to be remembered; for the influence and impact his innovative teaching methods had on many rural high school students; for working to improve the genetics of Ontario corn; for promoting the uses and needs of conservation authorities and for weaving all these aspects of education, promotion, improvement and extension into his passion of forestry.

This is why we come together, here, today, to celebrate and honour Andrew Dixon as one of our 2003 inductees to the Middlesex County Agricultural Hall of Fame.