

## *The Path to Love is Tread Barefoot, John Anderson and Margaret McLellan*

This is the story of a love in the early days of the Westmeath area. It is one that involves a lonely young farmer, a girl from near Beachburg, and a great deal of walking!

The year was 1866. The place, the farm of John O. Anderson on the Bromley Line. It had been four years since John O. (the O is for O'Brien) and his brother William made their way from their home in Allumette Island, Quebec to adjoining farms between Westmeath and Lapasse. For the boys the last few years were probably spent clearing land, building two houses, and just getting their feet back under them.



Anyone alone in a new land would of course be eager for some company other than his brother and work horses, and John O. was no different. He'd set his sights on a certain Miss Margaret McLellan from out on the Sandbar Road (now Beachburg Road). It is suggested that the Andersons and the McLellans had lived near each other a generation or two before. Otherwise, John O. may not have even known she existed! Margaret was the second youngest child of Mr. and Mrs. John and Anne McLellan, and John O. was quite determined to marry her.

Now, in those days, courting a girl any further away than next door could become a daring feat. The McLellan farm was nearly 17 miles away from John O.'s homestead.



Through a well-known family legend, we know that John O. walked all that distance at least once—in his bare feet! This was to save what were likely his only shoes. They would have been ruined and unfit to be seen by the time he reached the McLellan's! It is said that he carried his shoes to the end of the Sandbar Road, then put them on just before he met his sweetheart and her family...

...Obviously, that meeting was a success. A marriage was quickly arranged between John O. and Margaret. In fact, some of the couple's descendants say that the two met only four times before their wedding. Perhaps that was lucky for John's poor feet!



John O. and Margaret were married in 1867, and spent the rest of their days in their Bromley Line home (later named Mapleridge Farm) where they raised nine children. Their youngest son, Peter, went on to inherit the farm which his own son, John William, later took over. The late John William's wife, Dawn Anderson, still lives in the house John O. built almost one hundred and fifty years ago.

It's strange to think what would have happened if John had shown up at his fair lady's home in his stocking feet with mud covered footwear in hand. What if he'd just been too lazy to walk all that way at all? But that's the beautiful thing about history. We can "what if?" all we like, but there is always one thing that did happen and usually, you have to admit, it turned out for the best!

*By Mary White*

