



This Place

Barn-raising

by John Millen

There was something different about Bert Pickles that isn't described in the records. When he was born to Annie and David Pickles in October 1894 his father didn't register the birth of his first-born son as he had for their first child, a daughter. But maybe it was just that winter came on suddenly and he never got around to it in the busy days of spring? However Bert's treatment later when the family farm was divided among the children also hints at his difference. Still he appears to have lived out his life on their farm land on the Swale and the adjacent property that is now the east half of Denman Conservancy's Settlement Lands.

David Pickles' brother Abraham had settled on the adjacent land that is now the Lake Farm. His barn is pictured in *My Ain Folk* still in use in 1975. It is reported that when the present owners of the Lake Farm bought that land in the late 1960's there were also remains of an odd shaped barn on the adjacent property as well as the evidence of a cabin and an orchard there. The community raising event for that barn, Bert's barn, in 1936 is reported in *My Ain Folk*.

The photo of Harvey Piercy's barn raising in 1909 shows 21 men, representing most of the farming families on the island, with the partly framed barn behind. That barn is still standing on the Piercy Farm.

Now, I ask the reader to allow me scope for a little creative non fiction. What might one experience when asked to help at one of those major events of the farming community?

The Piercy clan benefited from having a long established tradition of farming. By barn-raising day in 1909 the materials and tools needed had

long been assembled. The joints of the framing timbers had been pre-cut and fitted. You were invited to help on the day because you were known to be reliable and experienced in this kind of work. You didn't need to bring any tools except perhaps your favourite hammer. Borrowing of an extra-long ladder or block and tackle would have been prearranged.

The work proceeded steadily in an atmosphere of calm and control. Occasionally a short conference among the leaders was needed to agree on which timber should be raised next. At each stage temporary bracing secured the structure. A copious lunch was served by the women who had toiled out of sight in the nearby farm kitchen.

At the end of the day, with the main structural framework of the barn erected, you went home knowing you had made your contribution but the major accomplishment was that of the Piercys.

Now consider the raising of Bert Pickles' barn in 1936. Likely it was his brother Arthur, who was running the family farm, that initiated building that barn on the adjacent land where Bert lived. When word of the project was circulated in the community the need was mentioned of additional materials required such as siding, shakes, nails etc. In those dirty thirties no-one had a spare dollar to buy such supplies, but every farmer had a stash of hardware. Straightening and reusing nails was normal practice. In the week before the event you might have spent evenings splitting shakes from your pile of cedar blocks. On the day you would have added a selection of your tools to the load of shakes in the back of your truck.

Quoting from *My Ain Folk*: "A large crew of men arrived to frame the building and by supper the floor was laid and a barn dance was held in the evening. The ladies supplied the food and Jackson Arthurs came from Hornby to play the accordion for the dance, which proved to be a long remembered event." (Undoubtedly author Winnifred Isbister, then in her mid thirties was present!)

The Denman community gave Bert Pickles a barn!

My Ain Folk by Winnifred Isbister, 1976 – a reprint is available at Abraxas.