



1951
Hans
Backs
standing
by his
1942

Oldsmobile Hydromatic, forerunner of the automatic.

In the background is Jack Reimer's school bus from Square Butte.



Terry Backs in front of his garage 2021. Millarville Motors was rebuilt on the same location in 1995.

By Eveline (Backs) Prestie

Millarville Motors was started by Hans Backs in 1945. Hans and two of his friends, Harold and Hjalmer, came to Canada from Germany in 1926. They wanted to be cowboys. They came west and settled in the Olds area. Hans worked for the Reed Ranch which was then owned by Pat Burns and is now a college. From there they moved to James River Bridge, northwest of Olds and bought some land. Hans and Hjalmer went into a partnership. Hans met the love of his life, Merle Ritten and they were married in 1936. Ev was born in 1938 and Bob in 1939. Later in 1939, they burned out so they decided one partner should keep the land and the other take their three-ton truck and all the bills, as with the truck they could make immediate money. So, they decided to flip a coin. Hans got the truck. The family moved many times during the next couple of years, going wherever the work was. In 1942, Hans heard about the booming Turner Valley oil patch so we moved again, this time to the hamlet of Majorville, which was about 4 miles west and north of Millarville. Hans and Merle had four

children – Eveline, Bob, Phyllis, and Gwen, who all went to Sheep Creek School. Hans worked as a “roughneck” for the next couple of years. He then felt that the area could use a service station so he went to Home Oil, Major Oil, and Drilling Contractors to see if they would support him in opening a service station and bulk station, with a truck to haul fuel to the well sites. They all agreed it was a good idea, so that was the beginning of Millarville Motors which opened in 1945.

The area didn’t get Calgary Power until 1950. Before then, Millarville Motors was operated by a 32-volt light plant with storage batteries, probably what would now be called a generator. The following year in June, there was a major snow storm which knocked down a lot of the power lines. The neighborhood ladies, who had been lucky enough to buy electric stoves were now running to Merle’s to heat their supper pots on the wood and coal kitchen stove.

At that time, you couldn’t buy small portions of land so everyone paid \$7/month to Ted and Joy Rawlinson, who owned the land where the hamlet of Millarville and Millarville Ridge now exist. The site of Millarville Motors was about halfway between the store and the existing school. The school was still called Sheep Creek School and was located about 2½ miles northwest of Millarville, so we walked to school until Hans took a half ton pickup that he had and put a canvas top (like a covered wagon) and padded benches on the front and sides of the box. He used this for a school bus and whoever wasn’t busy at the garage drove us to school in the mornings and in bad weather picked us up as well.

In 1946, Hans called a friend, Frank Malcolm, who was a mechanic, and they enlarged the garage by two bays. They were very successful and then bought a service station in Black Diamond east of the hotel. That partnership broke up and Hans kept Millarville Motors.

Approximately 1949/50, Ginger Douglas, brother of Jappie who owned Millarville Store at the time, started another service station where Millarville Motors now exists. There wasn’t enough business for the two service stations so Hans bought him out, as he was able to purchase the land as

well as the garage. Along with the service station, Hans had the Massey Fergusen Dealership and the Ford Dealership.

Early in 1967, Hans retired and went to the Racetrack and trained his own thoroughbreds, doing the whole circuit, starting in Calgary, then Edmonton, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Regina, and back to Calgary. He had a very successful and wonderful year.

Hans' son Bob, and wife, Joyce then took over the management of Millarville Motors. They had three children Bev, Terry and Brenda who all went to Millarville School. Bob dropped the Massey and Ford Dealerships as snowmobiles were all the craze, and started an Arctic Cat Dealership. Bob had a small building on the south side of the service station called the Cat Shack. Millarville Motors is still in the family with Bob's wife Joyce, and son Terry now owning it. Three generations!!