

CULTURAL MOMENT FOR MAY 19, 2026 CELEBRATES HOW BIG ISLAND BECAME PIGGY ISLAND (BRIEFLY) – PART 2

In Part 1, we left this story at a point where the pigs were removed from Big Island after being reported to the Ministry of Lands and Forests. And now, for Part 2...

Following their removal from Big Island, the sow and pigs were delivered to a poor family in Monticello with quite a few children.

That might have been the end of it, but soon an investigation followed, aimed at the entire operation at Luther Marsh.

OPP inspectors from the city arrived to take a closer look at what they believed to be a commercial pig operation. They asked plenty of questions, and each was met with a quick, plain-spoken answer.

“How did you buy the pigs?”

They were traded for a load of grain.

“Where did the grain come from?”

It was grown on land in the Conservation Area.

“And how did you grow it?”

With a plow, cultivator, seed drill, and a combine.

“Do you have receipts for this equipment?”

No receipts. The plow was traded for some logs. So was the cultivator. More logs were traded for the seed drill – logging that took place in areas where new trees were being planted.

Eventually, a receipt did turn up for the combine, which was being paid off in installments.



The inspectors struggled with the idea that bartering was simply a way of life in rural areas—and even more so within the Conservation Area. One inspector from Kitchener was convinced the equipment had been stolen and that “this Jack guy” was a crook. The inspector from Toronto, somewhat surprisingly, took a more lenient view.

Somewhere deep in the OPP archives, there may still be a file on Jack Benham. But he never spent a day in jail.

By now, you might be wondering why the Conservation Area was planting grain in the first place. The explanation is simple enough: the grain was planted in workable areas of Luther Marsh to feed ducks and geese, helping keep them out of neighbouring farm fields. For years, Jack spread grain where the birds gathered – an effort that earned him plenty of appreciation from local farmers.

And as for the planned fall boar hunt on Big Island? It never happened.

And that’s how, for a brief and peculiar moment in local history, Big Island came to be known as Piggy Island.

Now you know the rest of the story.

Submitted by Bonny McDougall, Wellington North Cultural Roundtable