

COUNTY

Church's future in question

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Unless Haldimand Township takes over Wicklow Baptist Church property as an historic site, it may be lost for good, Reverend Agnes Lee predicts.

Reverend Lee appeared at a council meeting earlier this month to make her plea, giving a brief history of the landmark church which burned down in 1986.

At that time, she said, it became clear that the building itself was not as important as the history it represented.

Rueben Crandall established the church in 1824, making it the oldest one in Northumberland County.

"Port Hope came second 25 years later with the Anglican church," she noted.

She recalled the days after the fire, when there was a 60-foot-long hole where the church had been.

"And not one of our Baptist people even came to clean up that mess, and I'll tell you it was something," she related. "But we got it done."

A chapel memorializing the old church was built in 1991, but the Baptist Convention is loath to keep paying the expenses of this chapel and the little meeting hall on the same property.

"It's no expense," Reverend

Lee said. "There's no wiring, no way it can cost money except a coat of paint and to keep the yard up."

Even these costs are becoming onerous for the dwindling congrega-

tion. In a time of uncertain demands, however, council is also loath to take on new expenses, Reeve Bill Finley said.

"I guess, if we can't find a way of saving the chapel, it will either

be abandoned when we are dead and gone or torn down," Reverend Lee speculated.

Councillor Gord Harnden had an idea that would allow the township to take it over: obtain

title to the land, sever the part of the property that contained the meeting hall and use those proceeds for the upkeep of the chapel.

He thought the building might do for a small residence.

Mr. Finley disagreed.

"The house never was well constructed," he said. "It's not a very substantial house. It's not insulated. It needs a lot of work."

Reverend Lee said the chapel still has meaning for a lot of people. The congregation recently received a \$500 gift from the United States — an in memoriam donation in honour of the recently deceased descendant of the first minister.

And people are always stopping to examine the chapel and read up on its background from the historic plaque.

"To me, it's an important spot, and I think it it was done away with, down the years they would be sorry," the reverend said.

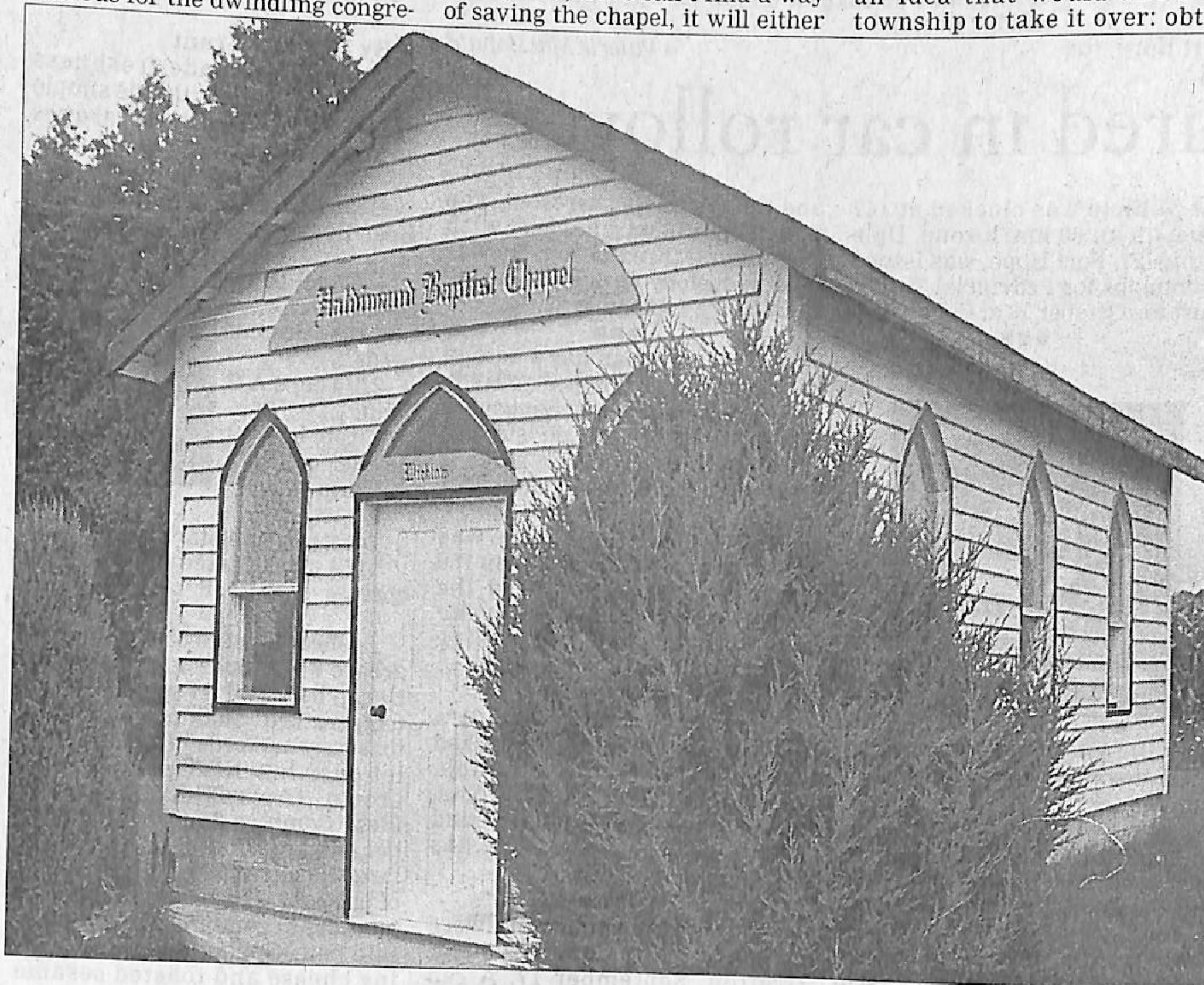
Before council moves on taking over the church, Mr. Finley told her, they will have to see the deed and get specific maintenance figures for the last fiscal year.

Meanwhile, the reeve shared his own Wicklow Baptist Church story with the reverend: he helped in the attempt to fight the 1986 fire.

"I was the last one in that church before she went," he told her.

His fire extinguisher ran out and, by the time the fire department arrived, it was too late.

"If I had had one or two more fire extinguishers, I could have had her," he said.



LANDMARK: The Wicklow Baptist Church was established by Rueben Crandall in 1824, making it the oldest in Northumberland County.

PHOTO BY TED AMSDEN

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