

FEATURE

Colborne orator and trophy reunited

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Nicholas won the trophy in 1934 in his second attempt. The previous year, in grade 11, he had taken second, losing to Donald Massey of the Massey family, noted for their contributions to Canadian public life.

It was his graduating year at Colborne High School and the principal F. W. C. (Frederick William Charles) McCutcheon took Nicholas as his project.

The pair spent many long hours preparing his speech on Mussolini. Nicholas remembers that, at that time, Mussolini was known as the man who had made the Italian trains run on time. Prior to World War Two the Italian leader wasn't considered as evil. Fascism was recognized as an efficient way to get things done.

It didn't come easily

Nicholas credits his teacher as a genius. It was clear that the work was hard, preparing for the competition. Mr. McCutcheon had a speech impediment and Nicholas now thinks he may have been pushing his student to attain something that he couldn't.

Regardless, they spent several months preparing, with Mr. McCutcheon threatening him along the way. The teacher boarded in the village of Colborne and would take Nicholas to his boarding house to "grill and teach".

The competitions were held in Victoria Hall in Cobourg. It was an important venue - politicians spoke there. And there was no P.A. system. Nick had to speak to the people in the back row and make himself heard.

The Clareys had three or four boys and farmed in Wicklow.

Tom Goulding later became the caretaker at Colborne High School while Nicholas was there.

Nicholas remembers that Ted Turpin used to involve his friends in daredevil schemes.

There was an orchard behind the Aziz house on Church St. Ted would get the kids to slip into the orchard to pick plums. The owner, Mr. Quinn, had a handyman who would come out with a shotgun. Fortunately for the plum pilferers, he never shot it.

That wasn't the only questionable activity the boys engaged in.

Apparently there were ways to sneak into the Opéra House balcony to see the silent movies.

A friend found

In the late 1970's Nicholas was walking down Yonge St. in Toronto when he spied an old friend. The hair was a different colour; it was platinum blonde. It had once been bright red. Jack Wilson spotted him too. They hadn't seen each other in 40 years.

Jack now owned a 'wonderful gourmet shop' in Toronto. He had once been the unwitting victim of his friends.

Jack's dad owned the hotel where the Queen's Hotel now stands. It cost 15-20 cents to play a game of pool, with the loser always paying. Nicholas and his friends never paid. They would play with Jack who was not good at sports and always lost.

Nicholas had lunch at the Queen's the day he was in town and could pick out the spot where the table had actually stood.

When he was a child, Nick's



The Aziz Family, circa 1934 in Colborne: Nicholas, the oldest, and his eight brothers and sisters pose with their mother for a family portrait probably taken by their dad.

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CRAMAHE MUSEUM

mother Rose remonstrated with her eldest to be more like Jack, who played the piano.

The landscape

The predominant building on the south side of King St. in Nicholas' time was Honey's Garage where Bill Honey did the repairs.

Across the way, Griffis Drug Store would hold Rexall sales and Nicholas would buy his school books at half price. Also on the north side was one of the precursors of the Chronicle. Mr. G. R.

Keys ran the Colborne Express.

poured out a stream of Colborne personalities.

Ben Coyle was Colborne's magnate in Nick's days here. He owned the building that housed the Aziz dry goods shop. Mr. Coyle would buy up the fall fruit crop in the spring, then hire migrants at \$2 a day to pick it when it ripened. He used the Aziz office to pay off the workers each Saturday.

Sid Turpin was a fisherman working out of Lakeport. He'd go out and catch as much as he could. The next day he'd lay the fish out on a bed of ice and call around town. Nicholas' mom Rose liked his whitefish.

Life since then

And what has Nicholas done since those heady years as the top orator in the area?

Following the bankruptcy in 1935, the family headed out on a 'Settlers Train' to Saskatchewan where an uncle farmed 480 acres. It was the farm Nick's father Albert had homesteaded when he had immigrated to Canada in 1900.

Unhappy with the lack of electricity, running water and services, Nicholas moved back to Ontario a year later. In 1938 the family followed.