

Bill Coulter, Halton's new Warden discusses the aims, issues of 1967

In an exclusive interview with Free Press staffers this week, Halton County Warden William J. "Bill" Coulter, Reeve of Nassagaweya, was subjected to a volley of questions concerning county problems and the outlook for the coming year in Halton.

His answers form an informal "state of the county" address.

The photos of the 1967 Warden accompanying this article were taken during the hour-long interview in his office in the County Administration Building, Milton, while he answered the questions.

At 35 years of age, Bill Coulter is Halton's youngest Warden. While his youth gives him a fresh new approach to local government, he is nonetheless occupying Halton's top municipal post with a good background of municipal work.

Born in East Flamborough Township near Freeton, he began his education in England while his family spent three years there. The Coulters returned to Canada in 1939 and they lived in Hamilton, Preston and Toronto before returning to East Flamborough Township to operate a dairy farm. Bill completed his education in Danforth Technical School, Toronto.

Fifteen years ago, the Coulters moved to Campbellville, where William Coulter Sr., Bill and his brother Gordon went into a partnership to operate a grocery and variety store. In order to expand the store's business to the Italian-speaking

community in the Milton-Campbellville district, Bill learned to speak the local Italian dialect.

While in Toronto, Bill became active in Scouting, winning the King's Scout award at the age of 14 and later earning the coveted Gold Cord. At Freeton, he served as an assistant scoutmaster.

He is a member of St. David's Presbyterian Church in Campbellville. For the past five years, he has been active in Campbell Masonic Lodge in the village. He holds a certificate for completing a course in business and sales management, and also graduated from a public speaking course.

In 1964 he was a candidate for the Halton Progressive Conservative party's provincial nomination, a post that was filled by his friend, George A. Kerr of Burlington. He is vice-chairman of the Nassagaweya Ward of the Hal-

ton P.C.s and has been an executive member at the county level.

It was 1961 before he stepped into local municipal politics and joined Nassagaweya Council as a councillor for three years. In 1964 he became



"Keep council a policy-setting body..."

Deputy Reeve and for the past two years he has been the Reeve. He was recently re-elected for a two-year term as Reeve.

He has served on the Halton Region Conservation Authority for the past five years as his township's appointee. Warden Coulter was chairman of the county's personnel committee when it brought out its personnel by-law, which put all the staff under one wing of the county system. He was also active on the property committee while the old Brown Street Court House in Milton was renovated for a magistrate's court; and when the former registry office was converted to the Family Court building.

While Halton Manor was undergoing growing pains, he served a year on the Manor Board of Management. Last year he was named one of Halton's two delegates to the five-man Regional Detention Course which is engaged in building a new jail near Hornby for Halton and Peel Counties. He was named vice-chairman of this committee.

The Warden has also served on the roads committee of county council, which has just brought in a five-year plan for roads development.

He is married to the former Arlene Dixon of Sudbury and they live in Campbellville with their four daughters, Cindy 12,

H. S. HOLDEN
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36 Cork St. East
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Valerie 9, Christine 4 and Heather seven months.

Here are the questions asked during the interview, and Warden Coulter's answers:

Q—What will be your most difficult task as Warden of Halton County during 1967?

A—Probably one of the most difficult things will be to keep the County Council as a policy setting body, rather than becoming involved in administration. There is a fine line here—the council should be held to strictly policy setting. And I think another problem will be keeping the personnel within the county happy. I will be working more closely with them through the personnel officer we are to engage.

Q—Reeve Merry of Oakville has said that being Warden in 1967 will be a full-time job. Do you consider it a full-time job, and how much time can you spend on the work?

A—That depends on what you consider full time — if you mean 35 hours a week, it could be a full-time position. I am used to working a 16 hour day, six days a week. So I will be giving the job as much time as necessary, but I must also consider my duties as Reeve of Nassagaweya, as well as my business and personal matters.

Q—The Plunkett Report was undoubtedly the biggest news item of 1966. Now recommendations from the municipal governments and other concerned groups are in the hands of the Minister of Municipal Affairs. How soon would you expect to hear of some definite progress being made towards regional government or adoption of any or all of Plunkett's ideas?

A—I think there will be a hearing sometime in the autumn months — definitely not before September. I don't feel the report will be adopted in its entirety but some larger boundary areas are sure to be set out. We cannot necessarily provide all the services demanded, and municipal debt must be watched very closely. The services we are trying to provide in the community are so great we need a broader tax base to draw from, and greater government subsidies for these services.

Q—A provincial election is forecast for this year. Would a complete upheaval of the Robarts government affect the Plunkett recommendations?

A—No, I don't think so. It is more an administration matter than a government matter.

Q—Next to the Plunkett report, the nurses at Halton's Health Unit received the most headlines in 1966. Where exactly does the Nurses-County Council stalemate stand right now?

A—It is not a "stalemate" at the present time. The nurses have been asked to gain certification under the Ontario Labor Relations Board before negotiations continue. I don't know if they are going for cer-

tification or not. The nurses want to be recognized as a professional group and stand free of any legislation affecting negotiations. They should be certified to protect the county's rights.

Q—How soon should the problems with the nurses be resolved?

A—We hope we can come to an amicable agreement in the very near future. We have got to give a little on both sides, to solve the situation.

Q—As vice-chairman of the Halton-Peel Regional Detention Centre Committee, you have been closely connected with the progress on the proposed Maplehurst Regional Detention Centre. Now that the site has been chosen in the Hornby area, how long will it take to gain ownership of the land? At the earliest, when should construction begin?



The nurses: "We have got to give a little on both sides."

A—We should have title to the land within four to eight weeks. Construction depends on the normal tests being carried out for water and sewerage facilities. We are now getting O.W.R.C. approval to go ahead. We want to make sure wells in that area will be protected. Construction should begin some time in 1968. We



"I'm used to a 16 hour day, six days a week..."

have to interview architects yet and it depends on how long it takes for designing. We hope to keep it simple, and it will take some time to iron out the details as this is the first of its kind in Ontario. The detention centre will serve both minimum security (first offenders and petty cases), and maximum security (hard-

ened criminals) prisoners. Any one held for up to 90 days will be held there.

Q—What is the total estimated cost and what is Halton's share?

A—Construction of the two buildings (maximum and minimum security centres) plus services would come to roughly \$1,700,000. This figure does not include the purchase of the land. That figure is subsidized 50 per cent by the Province and it will cost both Halton and Peel close to \$500,000. That is still less expensive than Halton replacing its own jail.

Q—Will local police forces still be responsible for transporting prisoners to and from the jail?

A—That is one of the points I am going to drive home, if possible. I would like to see the prisoner transportation to the jail from the police station and from the jail to court cases, done by the jail staff and jail vehicles. This would leave the police free for their regular duties. It could really affect a small police force if they had to do their own transportation.

Q—What will be done with the present Halton Jail in Milton, when the Maplehurst Centre opens?

A—That's a good question. It hasn't been decided yet. But it would be a shame to see it torn down, it's a beautiful old building. It could be retained as an overnight lockup for local prisoners. I know Milton and Acton police use it for a lockup now. It is presently being used for a pretty heavy magistrate's court schedule and the magistrates would like to keep it for that use.

Q—It was estimated the new "Martin House" home for the aged adjacent to Halton Centennial Manor in Milton will not be ready for occupancy until February. If it is ready by that time, do you have any idea when the official opening will take place?

A—It won't be ready until late in February. The official opening will probably be held in May or June — all the grounds will have to be landscaped and prepared first.

Q—What is the total cost of the new home for the aged?

A—The building itself is \$1,143,517. On top of that, the kitchen at \$60,000 and the furnishings at \$75,000 bring the total cost to around \$1,278,517.

Q—The Museum Board as an appointee of the Halton Region Conservation Authority. This is the year for the official opening of the museum. Do you have any idea when work will begin on the county's centennial project at the museum, the \$31,857 antique vehicle storage building? Has there been any estimated completion date?

A—They were hoping to get it started almost immediately. I don't believe they will have it nearly completed until around the end of 1967. There is still some talk of moving the Museum building to the other end of the Kelso property, but it's still up in the air.

Q—County Council expenses for conventions, trips and entertaining were heavily criticized last year, but the Minister, after checking out the charges, gave Halton County a "clean bill of health". Do you believe it is possible to cut back on these expenses?

A—Yes, it is possible. We have already indicated we are going to pay close attention to these expenses, and there is an overall feeling we should watch our expenditures. The personnel and finance committees have been asked to bring in some recommendations.

Q—Generally, would you say delegates to the conventions and educational trips bring back enough information to make the expense worthwhile? Do they pass this information around to other councillors and staff members?



The staff: "Exceptionally good people... top flight personnel."

A—I know they don't give too many reports to the council itself, but I have seen many county councillors make good use of the information they have brought back, and pass it on to their committees. Generally, those who attend conventions are pretty good about it. It really helps when there are changes in staff to have the information on hand. But there should be some consideration given to the various bodies who hold conventions—there is some overlapping of service. The seminar for councillors at last year's Ontario Good Roads convention was one of the best I have ever seen — it was really good for anyone new to council work.

Q—Let's look at the staff situation in Halton. The county lost its Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Archie Ball, late last year. How soon will a replacement be engaged?

A—As soon as possible after we receive a report from our management consultants. We are advertising for a replacement now.

Q—You are also advertising for a personnel director to ease the work load on the

A—It will indicate to the municipalities concerned the county is taking more appropriate measures to accelerate their road construction program. It gives our engineers more time to consider costs of the projects and the land required. Through this program, the county can be spared the cost of lengthy expropriation proceedings, and large construction programs can be accomplished within three years.

Q—You are believed to be the youngest warden in the history of Halton. Do you think this will be a disadvantage or an advantage in your dealings with other people in government who have more experience?

A—I don't see where it could be any disadvantage. It could be more to my advantage — knowing I have to deal with these people, I will have to do a little more research and study on the work I am doing.

Q—Last year, certain county councillors complained of "unfair treatment" by the press, especially during the dispute with the nurses. Have you found this any problem?

A—No, I think we have had the best possible co-operation from the press, as far as the county is concerned. I hope the county's good relationship with the press can continue for the next term, at least.

Q—Does the ordinary "Joe Citizen" have a say in county government?

A—I have found with all my municipal work that I should be in contact with as many people as I can. This is where you get the grass roots opinion on county and local government matters. It is a problem trying to decide an issue alone, and public opinion is very helpful.

Q—Tell us about Halton's future.

A—I believe this county has one of the brightest futures of any part of Ontario, because of its strategic location between two large metropolitan areas. It will require some good solid thinking, and some good solid planning, but we can make Halton an excellent model community if we all give a concerted effort towards that end. That's a pretty broad statement, but I like to think of it like that.

Q—Are there still problems with salaries of jail employees?

A—Yes, we still have problems, but we have found our salary ranges are in keeping with other areas. Our starting rate is low, but the six months' increment puts the staff at the starting level of other jails in this area, and there is an annual increment equal to that in other jails.

Q—Is Halton considered a "young" county?

A—Certainly when you look at the population figures. It has been figured that 43.9 per cent of the county's population is under the age of 21. And Halton is growing faster than the provincial average of four per cent per year — last year it was a six per cent increase here.

Q—Make Halton an excellent model community...

Q—Could you outline any major changes contemplated in the county roads system for 1967?

A—One of the things we have to accomplish is to get an overall by-law to sign the county roads with stop signs, intersection warnings, and so on. All the roads have to be designated and passed under a large by-law, and it means an awful lot of work. Also, in the very near future, we will be dealing with illumination of the county road intersections where they are populated to the extent they need illumination.

Q—How will the five-year county roads plan assist the county?

A—It will indicate to the municipalities concerned the county is taking more appropriate measures to accelerate their road construction program. It gives our engineers more time to consider costs of the projects and the land required. Through this program, the county can be spared the cost of lengthy expropriation proceedings, and large construction programs can be accomplished within three years.

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The Plunkett Report: "Some large boundary areas are sure to be set out."

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