

Free Press Editorial Page

In defense of Acton band

It is always dangerous for councillors to do their talking before they do their investigating and Acton citizens, begrudgingly led into a municipal marriage with their Georgetown neighbors, see far too much of this from councillors whose wards do not encompass any of the former Acton area.

No one maintains that Acton was ever perfect, but it is becoming more and more irritating to hear Georgetown neighbors criticizing established traditions, which were acceptable in the former Acton.

The band grant situation is the most current.

Acton has a band it is proud of. Not only is it the envy of many other municipalities, it includes a junior program and many classes for adults or youngsters. It is more than a band.

Everyone has known for years that the band receives a municipal grant. It was the taxpayers who approved it and set its value. Politicians who have tried to tamper with it have found out just how strong the feeling is for the Acton Band.

The band built the Acton Music Centre providing it with a home, but also providing a popular social centre for the community.

Now the municipal marriage reveals that Georgetown treated its pipe band to a grant of \$500 in a plebiscite but this was upped by Georgetown Council to \$1500. In the meantime Acton stuck with its half mill levy. This year then the Acton Citizens' Band expected, we presume, its \$4,750 legislative entitlement.

With all this, Georgetown area councillor Harry Levy remarks that it looks like the Acton band has been relying on council for support and not raising money itself. We suspect the good neighboring councillor has not taken too much time to investigate before making such an observation. Fortunately Acton Councillor Garnet McKenzie tried to correct such an impression.

Unfortunately, though, Councillor Levy apparently continued to

try to compare the Acton band with the Georgetown band, which we suggest is like comparing apples and oranges. The instrumentation in a brass band is significantly different from that in a pipe band, the number of members is vastly different and the kind of teaching organization is different.

Georgetown area councillors should also know about the kind of concerts and local appearances the Acton band makes without being paid, based on the fact the band does receive a municipal grant.

The Acton attitude to its band is perhaps different at the municipal level to that in Georgetown but it is one unique aspect of this town that has been allowed to flourish. It has won honors and it has represented the town admirably in area functions and concerts. In fact we understand it has been engaged for Santa Claus parades in Milton and Georgetown this year.

Marrying two towns and a township is undoubtedly difficult for councillors. It is equally difficult for residents to comprehend. It is doubly difficult when councillors are inclined to run rough shod over past traditions without careful investigation. Acton people have seen so much of this, their patience is shortening and their initial efforts at understanding are being tested.

We suggest those councillors who serve the Georgetown area should be willing to listen to explanations from Acton area councillors when discussions involve that municipality just as we would expect the reverse should be true.

But if Acton traditions are simply to be sloughed off and made to parallel those of Georgetown, residents can hardly be expected to be satisfied with a municipal structure that would allow this to happen, or councillors who would perpetrate it.

It is indeed dangerous and unfair for councillors not to do their investigating and apply their understanding, before they do their talking.



Foul weather doesn't ruffle the temperament of these fowl



Sugar and Spice

by bill smiley

There is nothing drearier, for anybody who is not one, than an "Old Swent" unless it is a collection of Old Swents, exchanging cheerful lies and trying to drink Canada dry, about this time every year.

Although I'm not much for the old soldier bit, I find myself, each year, doing a lot of remembering when Remembrance Day rolls around.

Just the other day, I came across a photo that brought back a lot of memories. There we were, the two of us. Tony Frombola, grinning as though he owned the world, and looking over his shoulder, with a crop of dark hair, a huge sweeping, handle-bar moustache, and a devilish glint in his eye, yours truly.

I think it was taken in Brussels, shortly after we "escaped" from prison camp. We didn't actually escape. We just got sick and tired of hanging around, and left.

The blasted war had been over for about seven days, and there we were, stuck behind barbed wire. The only difference between that and the situation a month before was the guards up in the sentry boxes were Russians, instead of Germans.

At our camp, our incarceration didn't end with the Yanks or the British rolling into the camp in jeeps, and throwing cigarettes and chocolate bars to the joyful prisoners, who wept and kissed their liberators.

We were "liberated" by the Russians. They didn't have any cigarettes to throw

around, they didn't know what a chocolate bar was, and they didn't particularly want to be kissed. They threw a guard around the camp and told us to stay put. Our senior officers told us the same. They didn't want us wandering around the countryside being shot by some drunken Rooshian.

Bored silly, Tony and I decided we'd had enough of that dump. So, about four o'clock one morning, we nipped the wires with a pair of borrowed wire-clippers, crawled several hundred feet through grass (very wet), and headed for home.

It sounds incredibly daring and foolhardy, and it did make the heart thump a bit, but it wasn't either of those. It was just stupid.

However, we made it to the Canadian lines in three days, hitching and hiking, and a very enjoyable time we had of it. In fact, we caught a plane to Brussels, another to England, and were there about four days before the other chickens got out of the coop.

Frombola was an irrepressible character. He was a Yank, from Oakland, California, who had joined the RCAF. Most of his compatriots switched to the U.S. air force when the latter got into the war, but Tony didn't bother. He didn't bother about much of anything, except enjoying life.

He had a big, homely mug, but was a terror with the ladies. He was strong and tough and cynical and witty.

This may be hard to believe, but this

incident, which I personally witnessed, showed what he was made of.

It was August, 1944. One evening, after flying, we decided to walk down to the beach in Normandy. There was nothing of interest to do back at the wing, and the padres had cleaned up the tiny whiskey supply in the mess.

At the beach, a Liberty ship was unloading jeeps. There was a line of them, parked on the sand, guarded by two British soldiers. Tony walked up to one of them and said: "How much do you want for a jeep, buddy?" I nearly fell over.

"Five quid," responded the Limey. Tony peeled off five notes. He was always flush, as he was a gambler and a dealer. He drove the jeep away to a place of privacy, rounded up some paint, and painted RCAF roundels and the legend "Canada" on it.

He was the only lawly Flying Officer to have his own jeep during the Normandy campaign, and he made good use of it, such as visiting field hospitals. Not to visit the sick and wounded, but to date nurses.

We came home on the same ship. He picked up five hundred dollars in the twenty-four hour crap game, lost most of it, built it back up to \$2,000. Haven't seen him since we landed, but wherever he is today, I'll bet he's rich.

Not all the memories are so pleasant, of course. Three of us shared a tent in Normandy. We were all shot down within 10 days, and I'm the only one alive.

My parents received three telegrams from the Department of National Defense. Each of them began, "We regret to inform you. . . One son was blown up by a land mine, and lost an eye. The second was missing in action. The third was shot down over the Channel. By some strange working of fate, we're all alive.

But thousands of lads aren't. Remember them.

More open land gone

The open meadow between Fairview cemetery and Highway No. 25 is due to be filled with 17 houses, as permitted by Halton Hills council and the previous Acton council.

It will be sad to see this pleasant plot at last built upon. Open space in town is at a minimum.

Mike Brodigan of Windland Associates, planning consultant for Kingham Hill, explained to council these 17 houses for 40 people are the last to be allowed under the set capacity for the sewage treatment plant.

A Beardmore representative rightly questioned allowing more homes so near the tannery.

This is the piece of land where Decoration Day ceremonies were held for years, and another hope for the land had been for the building of a mortuary for winter interment.

The delightful old pioneer home, last lived in by the late Mrs. Grindell, is also owned by the developer and will be demolished. There had also been hopes a small Acton museum could have been set up here.

Bit by bit our open spaces are built on. More houses will be for sale.

Mini-Comment

There was plenty of praise for the good behaviour of Acton children on Halloween—until a stupid phone call was placed supposedly reporting a bomb in the bank. Just one fool can't wreck a town's reputation.



SIR DONALD MANN



THIS HOUSE IN ACTON now occupied by the Eugene Braida family was bought for Hugh Mann by his son, Sir Donald Mann. Hugh Mann was buried from the home in 1911. The Braida family has since made extensive renovations but the home can still be identified.

Colorful, enterprising

Sir Donald Mann left his mark on railroad system

By John McDonald

One of the most remarkable men Canada ever produced was born on March 23, 1858 just outside Acton, on Lot 23, Concession 4, north of the old Bannockburn School. Donald Mann, the fifth child of Hugh and Helen Mann, abandoned his parents' plans to become a Presbyterian minister and went on to become one of the most colourful and enterprising men of his time.

At the age of twenty-one, Donald left farm life and became foreman of a lumber company in Northern Ontario in short time. In 1879, Donald, like several young Ontario men, went West to Winnipeg, working on the railroad lines and contracting with the Canadian Pacific Railway. By 1886, he had met William MacKenzie and established the famous contracting firm MacKenzie & Mann which, in 1895 purchased the Charter of the Canadian Northern Railway. The firm eventually controlled over 5,000 miles of railway in the West and in Northern Ontario.

Several small contracts were undertaken by the company as well as the Crow's Nest Pass, which they secured in 1897 at the then phenomenal cost of \$27,000 per mile.

The "King and Duke" as they were dubbed, expanded their holdings by accepting financial handouts from all levels of government—municipal, provincial and federal. They gave business to sub-contractors who were fre-

quently of their own creation. They built hotels, created telegraph companies, express companies and grain elevators, acquired coal and iron mines. They created trust companies and, at one time, were in control of the Toronto Suburban Railway which was the electric-radial system which ran from Toronto to Guelph, via Georgetown and Acton.

Mann envisioned a network of these electric railways throughout Southern Ontario which would feed his Canadian Northern System. As outright gifts, the Canadian Northern had, by 1913, received more than seven million acres of government land, in addition to a quarter of a billion dollars in cash and guarantees from public funds. The Laurier administration spent many a session in debate regarding the provision of further funds to MacKenzie and Mann.

Two young lawyers who led the debates were to become Prime Ministers. It was Arthur Meighan who pressed the case for MacKenzie & Mann, while Richard Bennett argued that the duo wanted the country to pay their debts.

The MacKenzie & Mann Company was on the verge of bankruptcy and was eventually taken over by the federal government and incorporated into the Canadian National Railways.

Of Scottish ancestry, Sir Donald Mann received his education in Acton before venturing into the lumber camps of Northern Ontario

and travelling West to make his fortune. Sir Donald was a large, powerful man and began his career with an axe in his hand in the lumber camps and on the construction sites.

When the railroad construction had come to an end in the West, he travelled to points in the United States contracting and eventually spent a year in Chile fighting Spaniards and Indians while constructing a railway for the Chilean government.

It is said that while in China trying to obtain business for the firm, Sir Donald met a Russian Count at a night club. The Count took offence to a remark made by Sir Donald and challenged him to a duel with swords.

Following his companion's advice, Sir Donald accepted the challenge, but insisted that the weapons be the broad-axe, as it was the national weapon of Canada! Needless to say, the duel did not take place.

Sir Donald Mann married Jennie Williams at Winnipeg in March, 1887 and they had one son, Donald Cameron Mann. Sir Donald was knighted by King George in 1911 and was present, by invitation, at the coronation of King George and Queen Mary and was later presented to them.

Although Sir Donald was considered to be a man of a few words, he was certainly a very opinionated individual. He was the author of articles on national questions and contributed to the National Review, Saturday Evening

Halton Sketches

The Free Press Back Issues

20 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press November 3, 1951

It was subdividers' night at council this week. Four local subdivisions in staggered stages of development involved council in a drawn out session that didn't break up until a.m. Tuesday morning when members groped out of the blue haze of the chamber satisfied with the progress of two housing developments, optimistic about a third and worried about the fourth.

Cobble Hill came first, along with members of the public utilities commission who met with council in the newly-painted room to nail down agreement that water and sewer services to the 14-lot area be installed by town employed labor and under local supervision.

An overcast day and scattered showers failed to provide the usual bright setting for the annual Halton County Plowing Match on the farm of George Hornbridge in Trafalgar township on Friday of last week.

Inadequate lighting in the stone school caused members of the Public School board Tuesday evening to call for a lighting expert of the H.E.P.C. to make an appraisal of proper requirements. In the rooms found deficient.

Over 300 lively and excited youngsters converged on the Roxy theatre Saturday afternoon for a Halloween party. The most successful party was directed by the Roxy manager, Henry Devesant, assisted by Jack Holmes dressed as a clown.

Of a total registration of 140, 134 began night classes at Acton High school Tuesday evening. In the school shop, woodworking is under the instruction of the regular shop teacher, Phil Caddick. There are 15 registered, among them three ladies. Harold Muller of Guelph, gave instruction in sketching to 14 in the intermediate and beginners oil painting class, while Frank Hood of Guelph had the same number of pupils in the advanced painting group.

50 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press November 6, 1924

A fire which looked serious for a few minutes occurred at the residence of Mr. Alexander Macdonald, Church Street, a few minutes before noon on Monday. Mrs. Macdonald was preparing dinner, and hurried the coal fire a bit with a stick or so of wood. The pipe became over-heated and in some way fire communicated with the studding between the lathing and the wall, and then ran up to the attic and through the roof in a few places. Mrs. Macdonald was alone, but notified members of the family by phone and then pluckily battled with the flames. In a few minutes quite a number of citizens gathered. The prompt work of a bucket brigade soon extinguished the flames. Chief Macdonald and the firemen were soon on the scene and by well-directed orders avoided unnecessary damage by water. The wind was blowing briskly at the time, and in a few minutes the fire would have been serious, had it not been promptly discovered.

About three o'clock on Saturday afternoon, during the westerly gale which prevailed, a spark from the kitchen chimney of Mr. Duncan McDougall's farm house, on the second line, fell on the roof, and in a minute or two the upper part of the house was in flames. Mr. McDougall was at the house at the time replacing a screen door for a storm door. As soon as the fire was noticed he climbed to the roof with a pail of water, but found at once that he could not cope with the flames.

75 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press November 6, 1899

Councillor Barber, of Georgetown, visited Acton one evening a week or so ago, to investigate the qualities of our electric lighting system. At the last meeting of Georgetown council when the subject of electric lighting was under discussion, he expressed himself as follows: "I recently paid a visit to Acton and made an examination of the system there. My first impression was not favorable, but upon a more minute examination, I found it very satisfactory." He also said he considered that Georgetown was not getting value for the money paid for lighting, and he believed that an effort should at least be made to have the present lighting more satisfactory.

The annual meeting of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society in Knox church this afternoon at three o'clock promises to be an occasion of much interest. In addition to the ladies of Knox church a number from the other congregations in town will accept the kind invitation to be present.

Mr. and Mrs. D. Henderson, M. P. Mr. and Mrs. John Henderson, Dr. and Mrs. McKeague, and Messrs. Charles, Milton, Gordon, and Thomas Henderson were in Georgetown yesterday attending the marriage of Mr. H. B. Henderson and Miss Jessie McLeod.

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