

# Town Hall Tales

## Town Hall piano

by George Elliott  
Almost as soon as the Town Hall was completed in 1881 it became popular as a community meeting place, after all, it was far and away the largest hall in Acton. Concerts and entertainments became common in the community because of the hall; a concert there being almost assured of a full and appreciative house. It soon became apparent to some people in Acton that something was missing in their new hall. That was a piano. How could local talent perform and dances be held without a piano? These were the days before recorded music and in a hall you just had to have a piano.

A Crokinole club was organized, this being a very popular, and innocent, game in those days, for the sole purpose of raising money to buy a piano for the hall. The club put on crokinole socials and garden parties, and all those other social events which drew crowds at the turn of the century. Apparently the ladies of the club did much of the work and by accumulating nickels, dimes and quarters enough money was eventually in hand to buy the desired piano.

In November of 1898, a delegation from the Crokinole club attended a council meeting and requested that Councillor Murray, who was also secretary of the club, be given permission to read a short address. In the words of the address the club donated to the hall, "... the handsome piano" they had purchased, which they believed would be "... a credit to the place it

now occupies." They also admonished council to "... take the precaution to have the piano carefully protected and cared for." The address concluded with thanks to council for assistance given the club through free use of the town hall and park for fund raising. The names of the Business Committee of the club were all signed to the address.

Council graciously accepted the piano and Reeve Pearson in a short reply complimented the Committee and thanked the club on behalf of the citizens. He made special reference to the work the ladies of the club had done, "... in the enterprise they had so successfully consummated."

The town was proud of this new piano, probably the finest in Acton, and before that council meeting ended a resolution was passed establishing the rate per night for the use of the piano at two dollars for local organizations and three dollars for outside organizations. And this was in days when piano lessons were probably about 25 cents a lesson.

Well then, what was this new piano in Acton like? It was purchased from C. W. Kelly's Music Store in Guelph, a business which operated there until just a few years ago. It was an especially fine instrument made in the Bell Piano and Organ factory in Guelph and was described as a concert upright; that is it was designed so its sound would fill a concert hall rather than a parlor. Bell pianos were very good

and today used ones are valuable and much in demand. This one probably cost several hundred dollars and back in 1898 that was real money.

Over the years the piano was played perhaps several times a week and for dances it probably received a real thumping. Certainly it did in later years as I remember it. When the hall ceased to be used the piano stayed there, its once light case now grubby, dark, and stained. Cigarette burns marred its oak veneer and it was immobilized with its wheels long gone. When the Acton Citizens' Band in its wanderings back in the fifties ended up in the Town Hall the piano was still there. I remembered it and was amazed that after so many years of neglect it was still in good tune and the action was as quick and clean as it had ever been. Its unusually full, rich, sound had also not been impaired by time.

When the Band left the town hall for the Music Centre they asked to take the piano with them but council had donated it to the senior citizens new meeting place in the YMCA. This was Charlie Mason's suggestion as he knew the piano well. In the 'Y' the senior citizens tuned it up and used it quite a bit. When they left the 'Y' for St. Alban's hall the piano was left behind once more forgotten in a corner. But the band remembered.

In 1972 the band looked for a project to mark the centennial year of its formation and wondered about the piano. A group went to the YMCA to look for it, not without some fear at what might be found. And there it was, even blacker than it had been, most of the ivories were gone from the keys, and one leg was damaged by sitting in water at some time. But the action was untouched and the sound was still there. Council, the YMCA, and the senior citizens all relinquished their claims to the instrument and the band received permission to restore the piano and keep it in the band hall. Six band members got it onto a truck with great difficulty, because it was a massive instrument, and took it to the band hall. There it was stripped and refinished in the golden oak it had been originally. The keys were recovered, but with plastic rather than ivory which today is prohibitively expensive. The original felts on the hammer heads were badly worn so these were replaced. It was tuned and adjusted and once more sounded and looked as it once had.

Its first use in its new location was for a piano recital by Julie Smith, a music student at University of Western Ontario. At the music centre it is now protected and cared for as the Crokinole club members wanted it to be many years ago. It has some of the blemishes inevitable with age but it looks and sounds much as it did to those proud citizens of Acton in the town hall in 1898.

## LDC denies rural man severance bid

Regional Land Division Committee (LDC) turned down a bid to sever off a home building lot of an R.R. 4 Georgetown man.

application from Robert Starrett Leslie, R.R. 4, because the lot has had three previous severances. The property fronts on Side Road 22. Just because a lot cannot be

used for farming does not mean it should have a house built on it, Coats said. Our aim should be to encourage development in the urban area.

Both the local and regional planners recommended denial of the application. The application called for the severing off just more than a half acre from the 7.573 acre holding.

The regional health unit had no objections, but because the lot was to be less than 10 acres, the unit wanted a proven well drilled before final consent was granted. A man by the name of Campbell who said he owned

the adjoining lot told the LDC he was against granting the severance because of the water situation. He said he has had to truck in water two or three times a year during the summer.

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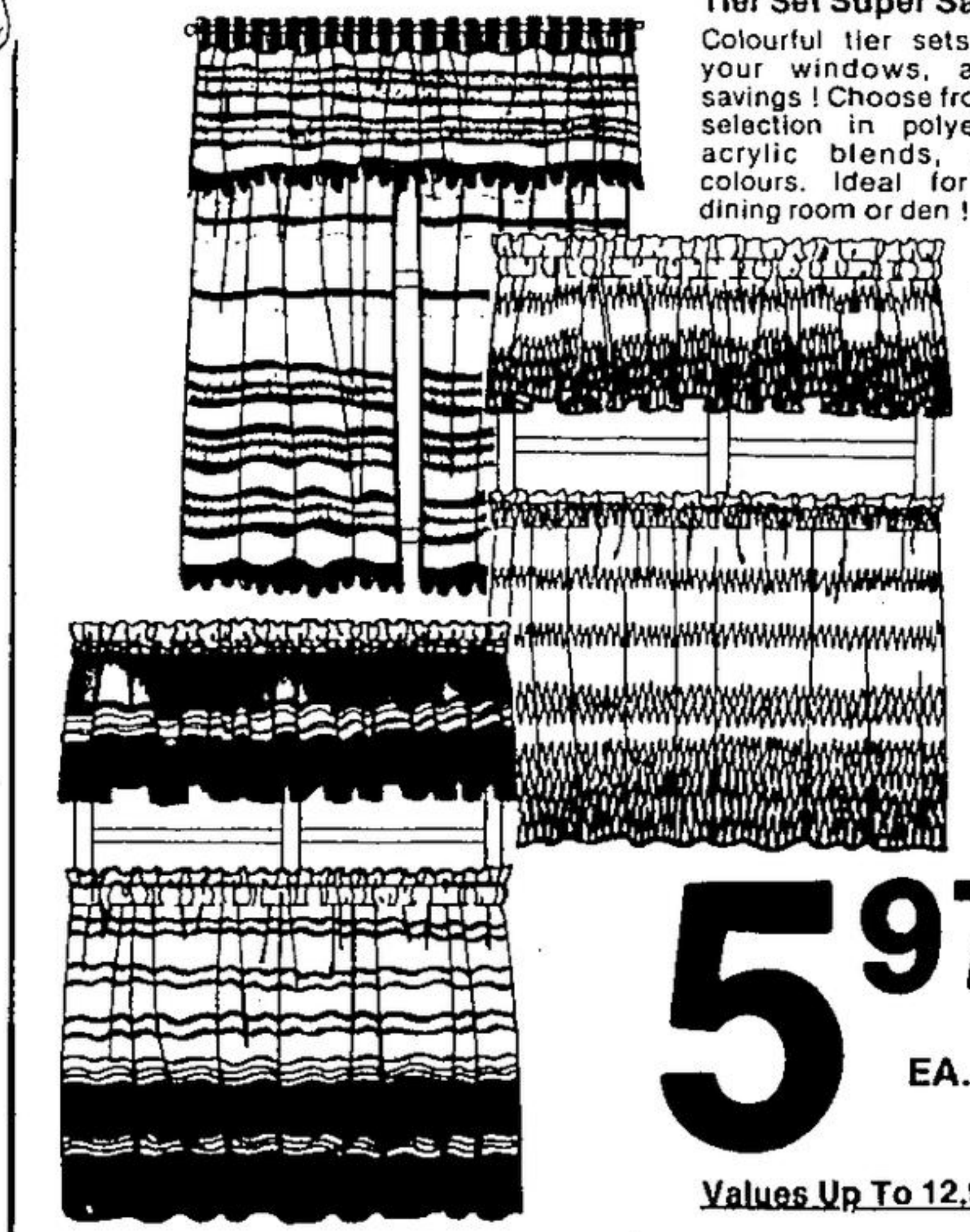
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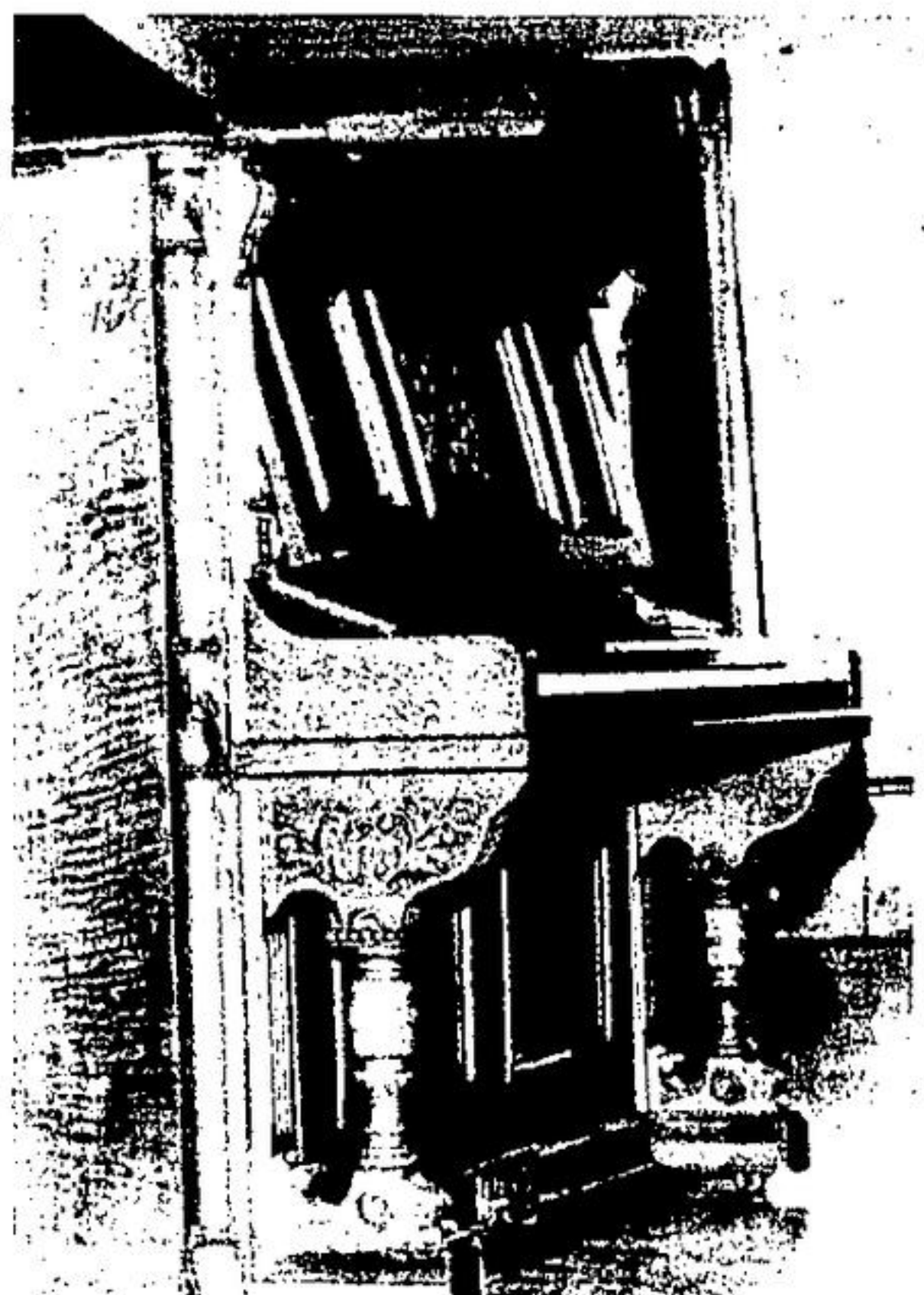


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ACTON CROKINOLE CLUB, many years ago, held a fund raising drive to raise money to buy a piano for the town hall. The piano has been restored and is currently in the care of the Acton's Citizen's Band.

### Obituary

## Susie Mae Denny of pioneer family

Funeral service was held July 5 for Susie Mae Denny of 281 Arthur St. She died in Palmerston Town Manor July 2.

Mrs. Denny was born in Esqueving township on September 30, 1895, the daughter of Almada Griffin and Robert Sprowl, a pioneer family of Scottish Stock. She attended Bannockburn public school.

On September 22, 1915, she married Evert W. Denny, who is now deceased. They lived in Brampton for 30 years, before moving to Esqueving to farm. They were here for 33 years. They raised five children: Ralph and Clarence of Acton; Elmer of Calgary; Edith (Mrs. Lloyd McMurdo) of Mississauga; Leola, (Mrs. Fred Koch) of Kitchener; and Jessie (Mrs. Gordon Aldham) of Brampton. All are left to mourn her loss.

Also surviving Mrs. Denny are her two brothers, Griffin and John Sprowl of Acton and Dora (Mrs. Elmore Johnston) of Ancaster.

The Rev. Chas. Beaton officiated at the funeral held in Shoemaker Funeral Home. Interment was at Churchill Cemetery. Pallbearers were Robert Denny, Douglas McMurdo, Vern Denny,

Denny Aldham, Ray Denny and Gary McMurdo, all grandsons. Flowerbearers were grandsons Peter McMurdo and Fred Koch, Jr., nephew Harold McIntyre and neighbor, Jack Cole.

## Masson trustee in Georgina Twp.

Former Halton Regional Chairman and former Oakville Mayor and Councillor Allan Masson has been appointed interim trustee after the election of all but one of Georgina Township's councillors were declared to be invalid.

Masson will work three days a week at \$150 per day plus expenses, until the November election. Masson, an active member of the Tory party, was appointed to the job by provincial treasurer Darcy McKeough.

Masson lost his seat as Halton chairman to Ric Morrow almost two years ago. The province has accepted responsibility for running the township and Wayne Woods, who was to start as the township's Chief Administrative Officer, will begin work immediately.

The Georgina Township Council was disbanded after Judge Ward Allen ruled the results of the last election in Georgina invalid because the clerk failed to mail notices of polling places.

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