

# Town Hall Tales

In the beginning

by George Elliott  
On a Monday night in May, 1881, a group of Acton citizens got together to consider the erection of a Town Hall. They had been prodded by an editorial in the Acton Free Press of January 1881 stating a community meeting place was much needed in Acton. True there were private and church halls available but a growing pride in the success of the small community required some civic mark of maturity to tell the world Acton had arrived. It was also generally accepted that in a civilized community laws were first of all established and lawbreakers were firmly dealt with. How could you punish the guilty properly unless you had a Town Hall with a lock-up to assert the Law's majesty? And so the meeting of serious civic minded, early Actonians began.

Everyone wanted a Town Hall but there were vast differences of opinion as to where it should be and what should be in it. The meeting went as all such meetings do then, and now. First Major William Allan proposed a rather grandiose structure to be on the front street. It would have three floors with the first floor given over to stores. The second floor would be a meeting hall and the third a group of smaller society halls. Interestingly he proposed that the council room and lock-up be in the basement. Perhaps this reflected some past unhappy dealings with council.

Immediately, everyone saw, and feared, the cost of such a proposal and hastened to put forth their more conservative, and I'm sure they felt, more reasoned ideas. Fred Secord wanted a Town Hall but he didn't want stores in it as Acton already had enough of these. Mr. D. D. Christie wanted a hall but not an expensive one. James Moore wanted a hall but thought the taxpayers should be asked their opinion and it shouldn't cost more than \$6,000. John Speight said Acton needed a Town Hall and he would do his part to support its construction provided council built and paid for it in a year and it had a bell. James Matthews, the local postmaster, thought the hall should be built at moderate cost. John Cameron, a highly respected local builder whose homes still grace some Acton streets, favored the project providing a proper design was selected and agreed upon and then carried out without any short cuts or curtailment to spoil the appearance. As a builder, he obviously recognized what can happen when eager amateurs get to work without counting the cost until it gets out of sight and requires drastic surgery.

The upshot of all the discussion was a motion that council be authorized to secure plans, and specifications for a Town Hall not to cost more than \$4,000 complete, including site. Immediately an amendment was proposed not to build a Town Hall but it was defeated and the motion to build passed easily. Council met the next even-

ing and passed a resolution calling for submission of plans for a brick hall of two storeys, 40 ft. by 70 ft., of suitable height with tower and bell. The facilities had to include a council room, lock-up, engine room, and a public hall with good acoustics. Cost was not to exceed \$4,000 to \$5,000 and a deadline of two weeks was set for submission of a design. As encouragement a prize of \$15 was to be offered for the best design. As encouragement a prize of \$15 was to be offered for the best design. A ratepayers meeting the following week endorsed Council's action.

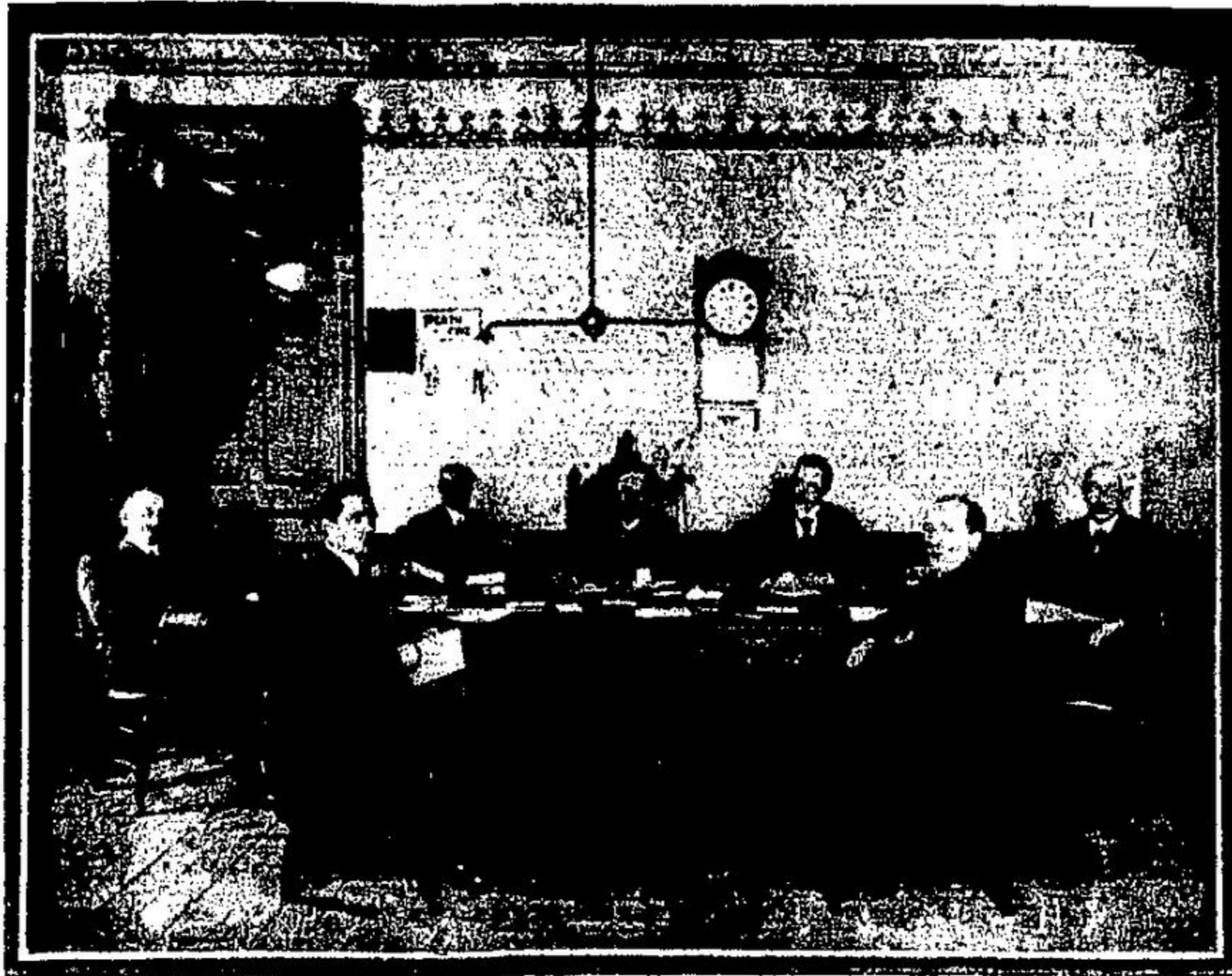
After several extensions of the deadline plans were submitted by John Cameron, Eli Snyder, and a firm of Toronto architects. All plans were good and estimated to cost \$4500 to \$5000. Mayor Allan then moved that the allowed cost be raised to \$6000. Here was a man who obviously liked things done with style. Immediately Postmaster Matthews moved an amendment that the amount be limited to \$5,000. Mayor Allan won this one however and the meeting almost unanimously approved his motion to increase the sum allowed for construction. A committee was set up to circulate a petition to the ratepayers which was largely favored by them. The Free Press complimented council and the ratepayers for their sensible decision in securing a Town Hall to be paid for at a rate of \$2 per thousand of assessment over a 20 year

period. The design submitted by Mr. Snyder won the \$15 prize but he was not awarded the commission. The building committee decided to engage the Toronto architectural firm of James, Mallory, and Mallory to advise on the suitability of the designs. Mr. Mallory considered these and submitted a revised design he felt would be more applicable to the needs of Acton. It is his design we see in the Town Hall as it stands today.

A lot for the proposed new Town Hall had to be secured. A descendant of one of the founding families of Acton, Josiah Adams, had built a small cottage for his wife and two boys on the lot at the corner of Willow and Bower. This property was purchased and the cottage was moved to the lot to the south of the site of the new hall. Later this cottage was to be enlarged and a second storey added, it now being the home of "Did" Price.

The lot having been secured, a contractor was engaged by name of McCulla from Brampton. Construction got underway in the spring of 1882 and the building was completed in May of 1883. On completion the Acton Free Press spoke for all Actonians when it editorialized that Acton had "...the finest Town Hall possessed by any village of Acton's size in the Dominion."

(Next week, 'In the Beginning' Part 2. The story of what went on at the Town Hall in its first few months of existence.)



ACTON COUNCIL members posed for their photograph in 1911. The date is determined by the Perth fire insurance company calendar on the wall. This picture shows the attractive decor-

ation of the council chamber in the old town hall. The fancy tin work has been covered with paneling. Can anyone name the councillors?

## Building permits reflect increase in commercial

During the first six months of 1978, building permits issued for commercial purposes throughout Halton Region were valued at \$6,438,840. According to William Marshall, Director of Business Development, this represents a 13.7 per cent increase over the comparable period in 1977 and reflects a growing trend of job creation in the service sector.

The total volume of building permits including both commercial and industrial sectors totaled \$13,113,302 during the first six months. The total is down nearly 12 per cent from 1977, reports Marshall, due to lower investment in industrial buildings. The decline in new industrial building starts is fairly uniform across the Region with the exception of Burlington where industrial building permits issued in 1978 are holding at 1977 levels. The Director of Business Development indicates that part of the first six month decline may be attributable to a catch-up period in which previously built buildings were leased or sold. There is growing interest in Halton as a location for both industry and offices, says Marshall. However, the total amount of available investment dollars is limited and the Region must maintain a competitive posture towards investment if it is to achieve further assessment and job goals.

## Town to honor achievement

Twice a year, at the first council meeting in January and June, two residents who have achieved provincial, national or international awards in cultural or recreational fields will be honored. Prior to the meeting a medalion of merit will be presented. The selections will be made by Recreation Director Glen Gray and a committee of council.



FREE PRESS publisher and editor H.P. Moore, left, accepts Acton coat-of-arms from Sir Harry Brittain. The gift from Acton, England, now hangs in the library. The picture was taken in Mr. Moore's office in the old building.

Old photographs found during reconstruction of the old Free Press building

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## Storm sewer water allowed in Fairy Lake

Credit Valley Conservation Authority is going to allow storm sewer water from the Lakeview subdivision to pour into Fairy Lake. Friday, CVCA executive committee approved an application from R. V. Anderson Associates, Willowdale, to install a storm sewer outlet from the subdivision to empty into Fairy Lake.

The storm sewer outlet into Fairy Lake will be built by the firm when storm sewers are installed. CVCA chairman Grant Clarkson joked the authority should charge "royalties" to the town for dumping water into Fairy Lake since the authority spent a "lot of money" a few years ago dredging the lake.

The Amazing '78 rabbit

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