

PROFILES

By Jennifer Barr



She's called "The Chief" by those who used to work with her, and chief she was of the Acton Public Library for 60 years.

Isabel Watson retired as head librarian three years ago but to her staff she'll always be the chief. A strict disciplinarian, Mrs. Watson ran the library with authority keeping the naughty school boys in line, but she always had a smile and wry comment for someone with a sense of humor.

Now Mrs. Watson lives in her apartment with Teachers Pet, the 11 year old poodle who accompanied her daily to the library, and regrets retiring from her life's work.

Library in town hall

Isabel Watson became fulltime librarian in 1926 after assisting during school years in the library founded in 1898 and always run by the town.

At that time, the library was a tiny cubby-hole in the town hall across from the jail cells. Cleaning and firefighting were looked after by the general custodian who also happened to be the policeman.

If ten people at once tried to use the old library, Mrs. Watson says everything "was in a mess". No one could move. Books were stored on great high shelves necessitating a high ladder to reach them. Patrons would ask Mrs. Watson for a specific book and up she'd climb. The room was just too small to allow people to choose their own books.

Patrons bought library cards for five cents and Mrs. Watson remembers spending the very first nickel she ever acquired as a child on a precious library card.

The first night she spent as librarian an English lady with a broad accent came in and said she liked "trial" books. Mrs. Watson looked out several mysteries and courtroom-type novels, puzzling over the choice. It was only later she found out the lady was fond of westerns and was asking for "trial" type books.

Spoon stirring move

In 1934, the cramped quarters of the town hall were exchanged for more spacious rooms in the YMCA building. Professional movers were hired but Isabel says they were simply awful. "They couldn't have done a finer job if they'd stirred it with a spoon," she laughs.

But it was no laughing matter then, and it took weeks to straighten out shelves and get books back into the order of the Dewey Decimal system started in 1913.

By then there were three on staff in the library, open three days a week. On Wednesday afternoon school classes came to select books and Mrs. Watson ran them like "an assembly line".

Later, she and an assistant took boxes of books by taxi to the schools.

"We sent out a tremendous amount of books." One of the best moments in her career occurred when Mrs. Watson turned the sod for the new library in 1967. As she wielded the spade she remembers it was softly raining that August day and she thought, "This is the most beautiful place in Acton".

New library attractive

That new library situated on the corner of River Street and Main North still is one of the most attractive places in town, with a foot bridge over the duck-infested creek, pelumia-bordered flower beds, the memorial plaque park area and plenty of trees for squirrels to play.

The second library move to the new building was quite different from the first one. The staff packed

books in shelf-order in long boxes and transported them labelled ready for their new shelves.

Mrs. Watson gives her son Tom considerable credit, saying he was a "tower of strength".

Mr. and Mrs. Tom Watson used to run the Watson restaurant on Mill Street over which Isabel Watson lived for many years.

Improvements made

Many changes have taken place in the library since Mrs. Watson first took over. Emphasis on education and research material has greatly increased. Resource books, encyclopedias, and information literature are now a large part of the library—a far cry from the one dusty set of encyclopedias that sat in the window shelf of the old library at the "Y".

Junior activities have multiplied rapidly encouraging the young to read early. Mrs. Watson is delighted with this feeling that a love of reading creates a desire to go on to better things.

One library inspector, Angus Mowat (father of Farley Mowat, the author) used to visit Mrs. Watson and once predicted the central card system that is now being innovated.

Mrs. Watson is an avid reader and says she must have read thousands of volumes from historical books, biographies, to some favorites by Farley Mowat and Mary Stewart.

She's seen the reading tastes of children change from Thornton Burgess and Mother West Wind to the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew and now to the Star Wars space-type odysseys.

An institution in herself, Isabel Watson has a lifetime of stories about the Acton Public Library. Why don't you ask her to tell you some of them?



Isabel Watson



Children came from all around to attend a Songs and Games for Children hour at the Acton Public Library on Saturday. Lois Lillienstien provided the music and entertainment for the many, many children in attendance.

Approve severance

Despite a recommendation from the planning department to appeal the decision claiming Cousins is not a bonafide farmer, nor is the area cluster development.

Councillor Russ Miller said the land could never be put back in agriculture. Councillor Pat Patterson commented "The only thing that land could raise is taxes." He said the land beside him is all rock and gravel.

Cousens said the Official Plan discourages strip development along

highways and residential access on major roads. He contended the Fifth Line is not a major road. He said agricultural use would be impossible since it was taken out of farming use when the land he now owns was separated in 1960.

The committee decided there should be no appeal, so the separation stands, unless council does not accept the recommendation.

'Daffodil Tea' planned May 5

Mrs. Harry Murray opened the meeting of Knox Ladies Aid on Tuesday with a poem "A Voice". A timely roll call was responded to by a spring cleaning hint.

The names of Mrs. H. Besley and Mrs. C. Allen were added to the purchasing committee to procure supplies for the

five banquets being planned in May. The ladies are invited to the Explorer's Daffodil Tea on May 5. The devotional part of the program was taken by Mrs. J. Berry reading the Scripture and Mrs. Besley giving the prayer. Readings were also given by the committee ladies.

A "know your pie" contest was won by Mrs. G.S. Matthews and Mrs. J.C. Dennis.

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Quarries honored

Both the Acton and Halton quarries of Indusmin Limited received awards recently for having gone through the year 1977 without a lost time injury.

Bill Brennan of the Industrial Accident Prevention Association made the presentations to Len Draper, the production superintendent of the Acton quarry and Jack Champoux of the Halton quarry.

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Town goes after industrial park

Mayor Pete Pomeroy and council are determined a proposed industrial park at Highway 25 and Five Sideroad will become a reality and intend to go to Queen's Park to talk to the Minister of Housing.

The mayor said everything had been approved and the amendment passed by Halton Hills for the industrial land and a private recreation club on the 283 acre parcel of land.

He explained the land can be serviced and the owner, Joe Shaw, of Northshaw Developments, has commitments for industry to locate there. "We want the jobs here."

The land abuts a recently approved large industrial area in Milton, the hydro corridor, the CN main line and Highway 25.

The plan calls for light industry and warehousing, while a corner is reserved for a private sports club with indoor and outdoor swimming pools, squash and tennis courts.

Extensive buffering by landscaping to screen the area from adjoining properties is planned on a strip 100 feet by 1000 feet, with all hazard land left in its present state.

The letter from the Ministry of Housing questioned the necessity

for the industrial land in light of the nearby large industrial acreage in Milton, and suggested it was premature until the new official plan sets the amount and location of all industrial land in the town.

Paper drive ends after two years

There will no longer be newspaper pick-ups at the Halton Hills Furniture and Appliance store, as there are no longer any places willing to purchase paper.

The program had been on for two years, according to Jake Kuiken, with the proceeds going towards Christian education at the Georgetown District Christian School.

The group got \$15 a ton for newspapers, usually raising about \$100 a drive for the school. An individual trucker charged only \$40 to take the papers to Milton, where they were bought.

The last load will be taken out of Acton May 12.

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