

# Fire guts Dominion Hotel, one man dies



Firefighters fought flames which completely wiped out the century-old Dominion hotel early Sunday morning. A passer-by spotted dense smoke pouring from the building and turned in the alarm about 2:30 Sunday morning. Firefighters were hampered in

their work by the smoke. Flames were confined to the inside of the building and didn't break out through the structure until about 4 a.m. and the pictures by Acton photographer Jim Jennings catch the action as firefighters pour water on the building.

Far right, part of the wall comes down sending firefighter Herb Dodds running for shelter. Another unidentified firefighter rushes in to help. Bricks crushed the roof of a car parked alongside the hotel. Owner Cosimo Mercuri says he will rebuild the

structure, which is composed of buildings constructed since well back in the 1800s. Photos by Jim Jennings

Fire and police officials are continuing to investigate the cause of Sunday's fire which killed one man and gutted the century-old Dominion Hotel on Main St. N.

Officials from the Fire Marshall's office were at the scene soon after and they were checking the site yesterday and Monday. Police and fire officials also conducted interviews with Acton firefighter crew members Monday night in the firehall.

Dead is 58-year-old Howard Gibbons a hotel resident. His body was removed from the scene at about noon Sunday.

Another resident, Joe Mathison, was released from Georgetown and District Memorial Hospital after he was treated for smoke inhalation. He was released Monday. Friends brought him out of the burning building from the third floor.

Firefighters used a ladder to rescue another man from a second storey window at the front of the burning hotel.

Most of the residents escaped the flames without injury.

A passerby turned in the alarm at about 2:30 in the morning after he spotted smoke coming from the three-storey building. Halton Regional Police arrived at 2:39 a.m. and they described the hotel as being "completely engulfed with smoke". A crowd had already formed across the street from the hotel.

One passerby driving through said: "There was all this blaze and hordes of people standing around. We stopped for a while." One estimate stated there were about 200 people watching the fire. Crowds continued to flock to the scene all day Sunday to watch firefighters dousing the flames and a shovel pushing debris away.

The firefighters suffered burns to their hands.

Acton Firefighters were on the scene for about 13 hours. Two trucks from Georgetown were also called into action. Georgetown firefighters helped for about five hours. They found it difficult to find the fire because of the building's construction and dense smoke.

In order to aim water better, firefighters used a hydro truck cherry picker.

R.R. 4 resident Cosimo Mercuri bought the Dominion Hotel about two and a half years ago.

While firefighters battled the hotel fire, another call for their services came from a nursing home on Mill St. W. Firechief Mick Holmes said he dispatched a pumper to the scene. "I think they were alarmed by the smoke drifting over," said the fire chief.

Some bystanders helped firefighters. A shuttle was set up to take empty air tanks to the firehall where they were refilled. "I thank the people who helped the department," said Fire Chief Holmes.

Other people appeared on the scene with coffee for the firefighters.

Firefighters returned to the hotel Sunday night to pour more water on the rubble.

## The Acton Free Press

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### Police nick ring thieves

Two men who allegedly stole more than \$3,000 worth of rings from local jewellers were arrested by Kitchener police on the weekend.

According to Halton Regional Police the pair would enter a shop, indicating interest in some gems. After being shown some items they would leave. Only after they left the shops were the thefts noticed.

Two Safari diamond rings and a man's diamond ring were reported stolen from Kerns Jewellery Ltd., Georgetown Market Place. Total value of the take was placed by police at \$2,600.

Later the same afternoon the men paid a visit to Barber's Jewellery, 77 Main St., where they managed to pocket a \$450 diamond ring.

### Cars in collision

Two passengers in an Oakville car suffered slight injury during a Friday night two car collision on Main St. N.

Robert Fitzgerald and Avis Hawksley, both of Oakville, were hurt in the crash, according to Halton Regional Police.

The driver was William Hilson, also of Oakville. Police estimate damage to the Hilson car to be \$700.

Damage to the other auto, driven by Warran Hawthorne, 77 Elizabeth Dr., is about \$2,500, according to police.



Halton Hills playground wound up their '79 season with a parade and Penny Carnival at the Acton Community Centre last week. People from the Sports Centres, Music, Art and Drama Centres (MAD) along with Day Camp participants were all

involved in the festivities. Acton's Day Camp had a float in the parade with the nature theme. Instructor Larry Kurtz (front right) plays the chief with warriors, front row l. to r. Carol Colyn, Wanita Phillips, back row Chris Colyn and Michelle Rooth.

### Firefighters spend 13 hours fighting hotel fire Sunday

Volunteer firemen spent a gruelling 13 hours at the scene of the Dominion Hotel fire Sunday morning.

By 3:30 in the afternoon, when most major cleanup was accomplished, firefighters crawled home to sleep—most for 12 hours straight.

Some were too tired to wash away the grime and smoke smell causing their wives to grumble and sleep on couches, the Free Press was told. Many firefighters didn't see bed at all on Saturday night going nearly two days without sleep.

Firemen were paged at 2:30 in the morning, all turning up within minutes of each other. Most of the fire danger was over by 8:00 a.m. and the awesome job of cleanup began.

All through the long morning, firefighters were fed and given coffee by Jeanette Fernandes and Mrs. Synott, who supplied sandwiches. The men were able to cover for each other going in shifts to the firehall for a good breakfast of bacon and eggs.

Another call during the night, pulled one truck off the hotel fire to answer an alarm at a nearby nursing home.

Fortunately, it wasn't serious and firemen were told by nursing supervisors they could handle it themselves.

One volunteer fireman, a fulltime firefighter for Mississauga came right off duty to help at the Dominion.

Because the fire belched out large quantities of smoke, obscuring the smoldering flames deep inside, relays of airpicks for the firemen kept coming from the fire hall.

Police were at the scene all night and day directing traffic, assisting, and controlling the hundreds of spectators.

According to one firefighter, observers were more of a help than a hindrance, keeping well back except to assist with moving hoses and running errands.

By Tuesday, most of the firefighters felt back to normal, catching up on their sleep and having their clothes washed, although one firefighter apparently has a good suit that needs to go to the cleaners.

Herb Dodds, volunteer fireman, for Acton for the past 22 years, commented, "I've always wanted to be a fireman but I never figured out why!"

### Industrial subdivision approved

An 18 lot industrial subdivision proposed by Alteo Construction at Highway 25 and Highway 7 Acton was approved by Halton Hills planning board, this week, subject to conditions.

The land covered 70 acres with the lots running off

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Hotel owner views fire

Dominion Hotel owner Cosimo Mercuri (left) watches as firefighters battle the blaze which totally destroyed his establishment in the early hours of Sunday morning. Halton Regional Police Constable George talks with Mercuri while hotel waiter Mike McCristall looks on.

## \$35,000 parks plan urges more and better recreation

Halton Hills master park plan prepared at a cost of \$35,000 will not be totally revealed to the public, but will be discussed at public meetings, with the section on possible land acquisition deleted.

This week, Robert Lockhart of the consulting firm of Balmer, Crapo and Associates, outlined highlights of the 400 page report to planning board.

The plan sets out a course of action on parks, recreation and open space in general for the next 15 years, and in particular, for the next five.

Lockhart emphasized all facilities and open space were considered including private facilities, CVCA, schools, Y, and church programs, and said the recreation department provides less than a quarter of the programs in town.

Within the next five years the report calls for two outdoor natural ice rinks, more

beaches and outdoor swimming areas along the water courses, three additional major ball diamonds for softball, an additional intermediate ball diamond, the upgrading of existing diamonds, a major playing field, five new intermediate playing fields, and three new lighted tennis court locations with two courts each in scattered locations.

Lockhart said there are 32 other recommendations for upgrading playgrounds in areas where most of the children live. He said after talking to more than 600 people, representing many more, he found a great demand for a trail system through town, as well as picnic areas and outdoor passive recreation.

Lockhart said, according to their surveys, Halton Hills has younger than average population with many more people than usual staying home on weekends during the summer, suggesting a greater need for recreational opportunities.

He assured planning board many of the sites are already publicly owned, and now are unused, so there are only a few land acquisitions recommended. Two pieces of property, now owned by the town should be sold and the money used to better recreational use.

Lockhart termed the present level of landscaping in parks as below average, and suggested it be improved. He said the present park land deficiencies have to be filled. Open space land should be used to buffer incongruous land uses, and to preserve the separate identity of the hamlets, which he said seemed to be desired by the residents. He pointed out there are "very large holes, such as soccer" in the town's facilities.

Councillor Harry Levy contended the report is idealistic, and pointed out council has to be realistic. Citing one statement in the report, Levy said it would be impossible to have

playgrounds within eyesight of mothers.

Lockhart said the playgrounds meant front lawns, boulevards, or in apartment buildings an inner court area where mothers could look down and see what the children are doing. He emphasized everything had been scaled back to be financially possible and responsible. "It can be implemented at less cost than the municipality has spent in the last four years," commented Lockhart. He claimed the report is based on the reality of the capital and operating budget, and said it is a great community with great potential. "I believe everything in this report could be implemented."

A special committee of council will be formed to review the 400 page report, made up of a councillor from each ward, then after their review is brought to council public meetings will be held to acquaint residents with the proposals.