

The Acton Free Press

Founded in 1875

Don McDonald, Publisher

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Acton needs its "heart"

There have been appeals in these columns over the last two years to save Acton's old town hall from demolition. Now the time has come for residents to bite the bullet and decide the fate of the century-old red brick building.

Not everyone has the enthusiasm and the generosity of the pensioner who donated all of her \$300 pension cheque to saving the building but dollars are needed if it is to stay at the corner of Bower and Willow Streets.

The town hall has come to signify one of the last remnants of this community's autonomous period before it was joined with Esquimes and Georgetown into the blissful wedlock of Halton Hills.

It represents more than a building. It represents the old Acton which ran its own affairs and did very well, thank you.

Truthfully, there isn't much to say architecturally for the town hall. It creates no excitement for aesthetic taste. It does not dominate the landscape. Perhaps for the superficial it is merely an old building which needs much repair.

Inside it is typical of many 19th century buildings with fancy moldings around windows. Downstairs the old jail cells are still there. The council chambers are still there, stripped of the municipal furniture, none of which was inspiring. Upstairs, where so much of Acton's early entertainment and social events took place, they removed the stage which was the focal point of the auditorium.

So why save it? Why not tear it down and get rid of the old relic? There are many reasons for

saving the building which is a symbol of this town's early beginnings but perhaps the most tangible is to give the community a heart. Remember the children's favorite, The Wizard of Oz, where the Tin Man looks for heart. The wizard responds by presenting him with a bauble in the shape of a heart. Acton needs one, too, a symbol that this is still a community with a large one.

Then, too, there are many memories in that old building. They can't tear them away but they can take away the representation of what this community once revolved around. Historically, much of the history of Acton was decided in that old town hall.

Newcomers who came here to get away from the glitter, noise and confusion of the city can also appreciate that this symbol of the old Acton is also a history lesson from another age, a look at what this community and this part of Ontario stood for and could afford as they built up the country.

We'll find other uses for the town hall. Perhaps it can regain some of its former standing as a social centre. Perhaps part of it could house a museum which portrays the history of the community. There are other uses, but too many to mention here.

If Halton Hills councillors finally decide to tear the town hall down it will do no good to blame them. They are giving the people of Acton the chance to save it.

If not enough of them are interested there's no doubt the building will come down. If we really care about the town hall and all it represents we'll donate to the fund to preserve it.

The ball is in our court.



"HE DOESN'T WANT TRICK OR TREAT, ETHEL, HE WANTS OUR FIRST BORN MALE."

It's 50 years since the crash of '29

This scribbler was still in diapers when the crash of '29 plunged the world into one of the worst depressions in memory. Growing up through those years was not the tragedy for me that others seem to have experienced. There were hard times and the people of this town and district had to tighten their belts but life went on pretty much as usual.

The shortage of money also brought prices down and for a kid two to 12 years of age a penny was a lot of money. For instance, in the Acton of the '30s one could go into "Pa" Jones' grocery store on Mill Street, (where the Chicken and Pizza Spot is now) and get a full bag of chocolate-coated peanuts for one cent. And "Pa" Jones liked to wait on you himself to make sure your bag was full. Sometimes, if you had a talent such as singing or tap dancing, you had to perform for him and the store's patrons before he'd let you out the door.

It also cost only 10 cents to enter into the precincts of the Gregory Theatre, which was situated where the empty store formerly occupied by A-B Foodmarket is now. Elva Masales would be at the wicket dispensing tickets while Lloyd Masales did everything else in the theatre including the ushering. "Did" Price was the projectionist, I think.

The Saturday afternoon matinee always featured a serial such as Flash Gordon and the Mud Men or Tarzan or Our Gang, so it was a happy afternoon for a youngster with 15 cents to spend.

Ten cents went to Elva, one cent went for chocolate-coated peanuts and the rest for various other confections at Wiles Bus Depot which had the fastest candy counter in town as well as a soda fountain.

As kids we wore gum boots in the winter, oxfords in the spring and fall and unless your family was really well heeled you went barefoot in the summer.

Only the farm kids wore overalls but most boys wore breeches and wind-breakers in the winter and again if they were fortunate had a pair of hi-cuts on their feet, leather boots which today probably sell for a fortune.

Because Acton was a leather town, many of the kids also had leather wind-breakers, leather patches on their knees and sometimes on their elbows.

Perhaps someone from an affluent country, if there were any then, would have thought we were underprivileged. But we never knew it. Our lives were full.

Coles' Slaw

They handed out milk in the lower classes at Acton's only school, if we paid for it, and so we wouldn't get sick. Then just to make sure of our health, mothers stuffed us with Scott's Emulsion or other foul tasting concoctions, including cod liver oil, to alleviate the lack of winter sunshine.

Transportation was usually by shanks mare, a reliable and slow method of getting around, so in the winter months this was solved by hopping onto Casey Jones' sleigh as it was drawn up Church St. by a team of horses. The sleigh left the railway station transporting coal to the Mackenzie Lumber Co. for delivery to houses around town. In the summer months Casey Jones' team of white Percherons hauled a wagon, another favorite ride for moppets.



There must have been poor families in Acton who didn't get enough of the right things to eat but they were few and far-between. Some of them were on "relief" but somehow they always survived. I can remember playing hockey on the filter beds with boys who couldn't afford the dime for a hockey stick, so they fashioned their own from tree roots.

Necessity was indeed the mother of invention then. There wasn't much extra money around for such things as tailor made cigarettes or the occasional glass of ale at the hotels so the men made their own home brew and rolled their own cigarettes from tins of tobacco which sometimes smelled like a burning garbage dump.

In the fall, many picked elderberries from which they made their own wine from recipes handed down from generation to generation. Dandelion wine was another popular libation hauled out on festive occasions such as Christmas when, if you were lucky, there was also a chicken in the pot.

It has been 50 years since the crash of '29 ushered that era into Acton and district and I doubt if anyone would want to see those days repeated. But there were consolations in the small towns. Few could boast of a building high enough for anyone to jump out of and kill themselves as they were alleged to do in such capitals as New York so most of the people of Acton survived.

Stories have been handed down of some families who lost all their money but they always seemed to have more money than anybody else after the crash anyway, so few people noticed.

The collection plate at churches suffered, too, because most could not afford to turn too much that way. But the churches were full. It seems to me that was more important than the money.

So while everyone else is looking back in horror at the Great Depression which followed the crash of '29 we Depression Kids wonder sometimes if it was really as bad as it is sometimes painted.

Motorists behind Mr. Davis

Motorists will generally agree with the president of the Canadian Automobile Association that the proposed leap of 30 cents a gallon in the federal excise tax on gasoline is unreasonable.

R.J. Genereux, the president, expressed dismay at the "extra financial burden which will be placed on motorists, who consume only 23 per cent of the petroleum products to subsidize all other petroleum users.

He also claims the 37 cents per gallon tax will not encourage conservation. Spending patterns in Europe and Japan—where gasoline costs up to \$4 a gallon—show no change in energy consumption. Faced with higher energy costs consumers continue to purchase gasoline and stop purchasing other consumer goods.

That is precisely what Premier Bill Davis is telling Premier Peter Lougheed in their war of words over increased oil prices. Mr. Davis doesn't think the price of Canadian crude needs to match

the world price, controlled by the mid-Eastern cartel. He has millions of Canadians behind him, especially in view of the immense profits both the oil companies and the Province of Alberta have chalked up with present prices.

Albertans, still paying 80 cents a gallon at the pumps for fuel, may support their premier but surely the welfare of the entire country must come before that of one province. Canadians, faced with inflation in almost every facet of everyday living would be dealt another blow by sudden price hikes of such magnitude.

Most Canadians realize the country must be more conservation-minded but there are better methods than price to control oil supply and demand, including rationing. Even now the Arabs are preparing for another price hike. If Canada must follow suit the price of gasoline will continue to climb at their whim.

Mr. Davis deserves our support in his bid to keep prices reasonable.

Fourth Estate

Reactionary comments on radio...to Tut

by Eric Elstone
 I like logical argument, I'm not keen on violence, but there are some other things I like even less. Therefore I do not like the disruptions which occurred during Saturday's pro-police rally at Toronto. Moreover, what I infer from reports of the incident by a Toronto radio station I dislike most of all. It was reported the trouble makers shared two characteristics: they are members of the far left Marxist-Leninist political party and most of those arrested have non-Toronto addresses. Perhaps these people had nothing to say worthy of an ear. The value of their contribution, however, did not seem to concern the station. Broadcaster Bill Walker especially sounded miffed. I reconstruct the tone of his comments as—what nerve

these outsiders have; coming to Toronto, criticizing, causing trouble. It is insufficient in logic to discredit someone by where he lives; the best way is to counter what he says. One may live outside Metro's borders, criticize Metro and still be correct. Just as one may live outside Metro's borders, praise Metro, and still be correct and according to Sunday's Star there is at least one such person: Dan St. Andrew, one of the co-ordinators of the pro-police rally. Mr. St. Andrew is an auto worker from all places, Oshawa.

I wonder if HRH Queen Elizabeth would loan her phrase book of very polite put-downs. I need a very pointy one to whistle in one ear and out the other of Charles Benson. And who is Charles Benson? Someone

testing Confederation's mettle while demonstrating west Canadian humor. Mr. Benson is a radio station manager in Edson Alberta, west of Edmonton. Mr. Benson earns a royal zinger for spawning a spoof by "passing the hat" round westerners to establish an "Ontario Heritage Fund" and help this province buy Alberta oil. Station listeners sent Mr. Benson \$60 in nickels, dimes and cents. One typical donation was a package of tissue for Premier Bill Davis to dry his tears and two cents. Other donations, according to the Globe, included a can opener so we can open the barrels of oil we buy and a broken wristwatch "so that Ontario could keep up with Alberta." Now that's Alberta rude.

And I wonder how many of you out there in readerland are living in luxury? If you're not sure if you qualify for the easy life, Statistics Canada has churned out a definition. Non-essentials included households with automatic washing machines, clothes dryers, record players and television sets. And of course the second car (the agency does not distinguish between automatic and manual shift autos). Stats Can has discovered we are having an easier time of owning such luxuries than we experienced in the early '70s. There's still some loose change out there. However, recent boosts in interest rates and prices probably has palmed much of it.

Few exhibitions of archaeological trea-

sure coming to North America have created the public interest, and indeed the public excitement, that has been caused by the loan exhibition of these marvels from the Tutankhamun Treasure. Lines from a King Tut advertisement for tomorrow's opening at the Art Gallery of Ontario? Not quite. Charles F. Comfort, director of the National Gallery of Canada wrote those words 15 years ago when the 3,000-year-old boy king toured Canada for the first time. He stayed in Toronto at the Royal Ontario Museum. And as far as manufactured excitement goes, there's much more this time. Promoters push pyramid power so much now they surely subscribe to the belief everything's better the next time round. Like Jaws-2, Rocky II and Air-port—what ever the figure is.

Back Issues

10 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press of Wednesday, October 23, 1969
 Acton council confirmed their decision to develop the industrial park in the north end of town. A Chamber of Commerce delegation made a plea to council to make up their mind.
 North Halton urban board, after about 20 years of successful existence, is now disbanded. While Acton representatives favored its continuance, Milton and Georgetown councils withdrew their support. The board operated as a sounding board for discussion of mutual problems.
 Mr. and Mrs. Bill Denny marked their golden wedding anniversary.
 Excavation began for the new addition at the back of the Bank of Nova Scotia.
 Students and teachers from the three Acton schools raised over \$1,000 for UNICEF in the Y's Men sponsored walk-a-thon Saturday. Among the early finishers were Kevin Broostad, Gary Barbus, Dick Van Fleet, Cathy Lawson, Jan Allen and Mary Watson.
 Esquimes residents petitioned council against a race track rumored for the area.

20 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press of Thursday, November 5, 1959
 Mr. and Mrs. C.K. Browne have moved into their newly-renovated store in Main St., after being in cramped quarters for 23 years. His first store was where the IGA store and bowling alley are located.
 Jack Newton returned as fire chief with other officers Mick Holmes, Bern Van Fleet, Bill Williams, Will McEachern, Philip McCristall and John Krapek.
 Halloween costumes worn by children collecting for UNICEF were judged at the Y. Winners are John McGeachie, Linda Cooper, Christopher Coyle, Sally Wilson.
 A large local cast was applauded in the two-night stand of "Casper", sponsored by the Legion Ladies' Auxiliary. Taking lead parts were Doreen Couper, Phil Caddick and Helen Benton.
 Lou Wagner is opening a new bakery in the shop formerly operated as Ovetette Bakery.
 Kathy Marsen won the Eramosa public speaking contest.
 Land was broken for the new \$94,933 school at Speyside.

50 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press of Thursday, October 31, 1929
 Good old Acton! This old-time temperance town stood by her old-time principles and voted dry by a good majority. Mr. Hillmer lost in Halton to Thomas Blake-lock, the prohibition candidate. Halton was the first county in the Dominion to have this beneficence put into effect in 1879, fifty years ago.
 Acton Citizens Band will again stage the Halloween parade and Ghost Walk.
 Women's four buckle overshoes at Harrison's Sale, for \$1.
 Two splendid temperance meetings were held by the WCTU. In the afternoon a meeting for the ladies was held in the school room of the United Church and in the evening a gathering of young people was addressed at Knox Church. There were splendid inspirational messages.
 The congregation of Knox Church was greatly edified Sunday morning and evening by anniversary messages given by Rev. Patterson of Knox Church, Galt. Monday evening a bounteous turkey supper was served to between 300 and 400.
 Some fine loads of turnips are being shipped from Acton these days.

100 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press of Thursday, October 30, 1879
 Now that the long winter nights are approaching, the question arises, how shall our young people spend their evenings? Last winter skating monopolized their interest but this sport does not furnish intellectual enjoyment. We think that a Debating Club or Literary Society might take very well.
 From every station along the GTR there comes a call for cars to ship wheat.
 Thanksgiving sermon will be preached by Rev. Hobbs on Thursday, 6th November, Thanksgiving Day.
 Thursday was cold enough for a snow storm of old-fashioned proportions.
 Get your parlor stoves up as the nights are becoming too chilly for the couple outside.
 Halloween tomorrow. The village constable will be on the lookout for depredators.
 John Street, between Mill and Bower, has been blockaded for the past week by a building in the course of removal. We think it is time the obstruction was removed.