

PROFILES

with

Jennifer Barr



Tommy Nicol has spent the last 50 years fooling around with rocks and stones. He recently (on Labor Day) celebrated his fiftieth anniversary as a stone cutter and last January he was honored by the Acton Curling Club as a golden age member.

Pretty good for a guy just 65 years old who hasn't even retired yet.

Although Tommy was born in Guelph he was transported to Acton in 1919. He lived in the community until 1952 when he moved to Brampton.

Now he's back, living in the new Acton Seniors Apartments, enjoying being home again and reminiscing.

His father, Scotty Nicol, was a large part of the Acton scene. He set up his stone cutting shop in the spot now occupied by the YMCA.

His mother, Marian, was well-known as a singer. She sang as part of the Presbyterian choir and entertained in the Acton theatre in the days of silent films.

After attending Acton Public School studying under Minnie Bennett, Tommy and his brother

John ("Bus" to his friends) started working for their father. Tom was 15 and having trouble with the truant officer, James Henry Reid, who lived next door. He said Tom could quit school providing he went to work for his father. Tom obliged by starting work on Labor Day, the day before school started.

"I got railroaded into it," he grins. At this time, the shop had been moved and the tombstone cutting business was located near the corner of River and Main Street, next to the house now occupied by Halton Hills Veterinary Clinic.

The shop was so tiny, Tom recalls, it was impossible to squeeze more than one cutter in at a time.

Strictly in the monument business, then and now, Tom learned from scratch the way to cut a hunk of granite or marble into some semblance of a monument.

Scotty, an "old hammer and chisel man" according to his son, started Tommy off shaping a hunk of stone. He taught his sons well roughing in letters and leaving successive steps to the boys as they became ready to try more.

"He was a good teacher," Tommy remembers. "Dad was strict but I often wish he was stricter."

The shop was expanding from the little tin shack that housed the town's original water works to a proper stone cutting shop. Then hydro supervisor Charlie Wilson wired up an electric compressor for Scotty, Tom tells, but he forgot to put in a ground. Without grounding, the electricity found the easiest way to run was through the metal clothes line and wet clothes.

"My mom got quite a belt!" he remembers.

Pocket money or salary?

"As an apprentice, Tommy earned a dollar a week and his room and board (remember this



Tommy Nicol

was 1930). His salary was raised a dollar every year until he had finished his five year apprenticeship and was earning the grand total of \$5 weekly.

In 1936 he and his brother bought a 1935 V-8 Ford for \$828 paying \$30 a month. Their salaries hardly covered the payments but Scotty chipped in \$15 a month saying

"It's time I gave you boys a raise."

The Nicol boys, Tom and John were often called the "Nicol twins" being only a year apart. There were four other young Nicols but Tom and his brother were the closest.

They enlisted together for World War II in 1940 with the artillery and saw action in England, Sicily, Italy, Holland and Germany.

"We were the only set of brothers in the whole damn outfit of 720 men to come back together" recalls Tom.

Once home again in 1945, Tom married Ethel, sister of his best pal in Hespeler. The couple have one daughter and two granddaughters who call their grandpa "Papa Tom".

Thirty two years ago, in the late '40s Tom started to work for Brampton Monument Works and has been manager there for the past 16 years. He intends to go on three days a week next year and gradually slow down till he's retired.

Design manager His work doesn't involve much cutting now although Tom likes to get his hands on the chisel. He designs and does layouts, advises customers and acts as a psychologist to grief stricken widows.

He deprecates the quality of workmanship in today's tombstone business (where have you heard that before?), and explains many monuments are sawn instead of chiselled. Tom says his main interest is making sure the quality is kept up at Brampton Monument.

"I'm a stickler for quality—I'll have the work done over—I'm more interested in quality than production."

What kind of stone is used for grave markers? Granite, of course. Marble isn't used too much any more because although it's "lovely to work with" says Tom, it doesn't last as long as granite. Prices of marble are almost as high as granite although it used to be much cheaper (a fact which surprised me).

Granite comes in all colors, pink, red, black and grey. The best pink granite in the world comes from the Laurentian Mountains in Quebec, says Tom.

The biggest change in the monument business? Tom replies rapidly "prices!"

Fifty years ago a tombstone could be bought for a hundred dollars or less—\$165 bought a beautiful stone.

"A widow could have a thousand dollars, have a real nice funeral, choose the stone, and have a hundred—a hundred and a half left over" Tom

comments. Not now. A cheap stone costs \$600 and goes up from there. The most expensive one Tom's done was \$7,000 but he knows of many costing \$30,000 or more.

Once Tom slows down he'll have more time for his activities that range all the way from long distance running as a youngster to the Acton Citizens Band during the '30s and '50s. He spent 20 years playing alto and waiting for Arlof Dills to hand out the cigars at the annual meeting.

He was on the last village council and was first town councillor in the early '50s. He's been a member of the Acton Curling Club for 50 years and is extremely proud of his telegrams and plaques.

"I'm not a great curler but I love it, I wouldn't mind going on a curling rink (dying)" he grins.

One of the strangest stories Tommy tells, and he has a lot of them, concerns the "green ghouls" sited at the Acton Cemetery several years ago.

There were considerable stories floating around at the time about ghosts in Fairview Cemetery and Tommy knows the true story.

One night he was working on a stone and looked up to see a green dragon's head floating around. He kept his cool and discovered two more heads near the grave of a Chinese boy. He startled the "ghosts" who took off their dragon's heads and jumped into a car. He found evidences of some sort of ceremony on the Chinese grave and believes he witnessed a memorial ritual.

"When you're working late in a grave yard, my dad always said, the only ghost you'll meet is yourself" Tom counsels.

Tommy's plans for the future include a wish to become a consultant for people choosing a memorial stone. There doesn't seem to be anyone I know who could fill the bill better.

Nielsen ponders choices including OMB appeal

The lack of understanding by some south Halton councillors plus the tactics of the municipalities staff added up to defeat for a proposed 13-lot subdivision near Acton High School.

Cedar Road Developments President Paul Nielsen, however, is not through yet.

Nielsen said after last week's denial by the region that he is likely to appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board.

"It's a completely ridiculous situation," said Nielsen.

Halton Hills, the local municipality, has given the project an amendment under the town's official plan. Many north Halton councillors, including Ed Wood and Halton Hills Mayor Peter Pomeroy, gave a good defence of the project, said Nielsen.

The region, said Nielsen, takes the position that its hands are tied because of the case against Jerry Sprackman's plaza on the eastern fringe of Acton. That project failed to receive a

planning amendment to Halton Hills official plan.

With the exception of Oakville councillor Terry Mannell, most of the southern politicians failed to grasp the meaning of the housing project, Nielsen said after the vote.

Earlier the region's planning committee turned down Nielsen's project, however, it gave a green light to an 18-lot nearby subdivision owned by Peter Civerio.

What defeated the project, in Nielsen's opinion is that the southern councillors

were unsure of the degree of services for Cedar Road. "We have," said the developer, "a 3,000 population excess at the (sewage treatment) plant."

Nielsen charges that it is "grossly unfair" to compare his infilling subdivision to the proposed Sprackman plaza. That project, he said, has no services in place, it does not have an official plan amendment from Halton Hills. He does.

Nielsen said he has a \$100,000 investment: half for studies on the proposal; half on carry charges and such.

"This is the story of development in Halton Hills right now," charged Nielsen. "I would call this total obstructionism on the part of Halton Region's staff."

Nielsen also noted that the region's staff spoke six times concerning Cedar Road Developments, while, he, the owner, got only to give some opening remarks.



Nancy Little, right, of the Theta Phi chapter of Beta Sigma Phi Sorority donates two toy boxes and 24 convenience packages to Peggy Balkind, chairman of the board of Halton Women's Place. The presentation took place Thursday at the Community Services Centre. Contents of the convenience packages was donated by Gary Barton of Glenora IDA.

More dump money

Regional Council has approved spending \$78,000 as an extra for the construction of the leachate collection system at the Georgetown landfill site.

There are reports the dump, closed and covered over, is now

leaking a "black ooze" into the Credit River. Although the \$78,000 was approved, Councillor Bill Johnson said he wants staff to find out if there is any financial responsibility on the part of the contractor which did the work on closing off the dump.

That report is expected today at a regular meeting of the Public Works

Council agrees to pay for Sally Anne lunch

Halton Hills Council agreed to pay \$360 toward the cost of a luncheon for Salvation Army Commissioner Norman Marshall of London, England, at Monday night's meeting. Each councillor, how-

ever, will repay the cost of their own dinner to the town.

The luncheon is being held to mark the sod turning for a Salvation Army Citadel in Acton. Commissioner Marshall, whose grandfather

was born in this area will be proclaimed an honorary citizen of Town.

Lorne Pritchett, Salvation Army Lieutenant, explained to council the total cost would be \$510, since 85 people at six dollars a plate are expected at the civic luncheon.

Councillor Walter Biehn, who had opposed the sponsoring of the luncheon, explained he was opposed to voting money to any group to entertain members of council, and is not opposed if councillors pay for themselves and spouses.

Correction

It was incorrectly reported in last week's paper that an Acton man was accidentally shot by his own gun at the Maple Rock shooting range. Halton Regional Police report the incident happened near Maple Rock but not on the range's property. This paper apologizes for the error.

Landfill hearing

Halton is in effect suing Halton, following the decision last Tuesday in a Toronto Division Court to allow the Town of Milton an injunction which may hold up an Environmental Assessment Board hearing slated for Oct. 15.

That meeting, to be held in Halton Centennial Manor, is to delve into a Halton regional application to turn 246 acres (95 hectares) of land at Tremaine and Britannia Rds. into the next regional landfill site. However the Town of Milton has, in its injunction, asked the hearing proceed under the rules of the Environmental Assessment Act (EAA), while the Region

has prepared all its evidence, including an engineering study, under the regulations of the Environmental Protection Act (EPA).

The EPA deals only with the impact at and immediately around the proposed dump site. The EAA deals with the total impact, including social and economic, on the entire Region of Halton.

After a day-long session before Mr. Justice James Southey, last Tuesday the decision made at 5:30 p.m. was to defer the question of which act the hearing will proceed under directly to Environment Minister or Harry Parrott for the final decision.

You are cordially invited to attend a 'SPECIAL PREVIEW' of the 1981 Mazdas featuring the all new '81 GLC.



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History photo winners

Two townspeople correctly answered all the questions in The Acton Free Press History Contest.

The winners are Brenda Denny, 90 Mill St. E. and B. Musselle of 151 Cobblehill Rd. They will receive copies of Halton Sketches, the book by Halton Hills historian John McDonald and Acton Free Press T-shirts.

The contest, which was run during the fall fair,

Shelter

Halton Women's Place will officially open Thursday Oct. 16.

There will be an open house from 4 p.m. until 7:30 p.m.

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draw a number of entries. The Acton Free Press thanks everyone who took time to test his knowledge of local history. The contest consisted of photos which had to be identified. The winners correctly identified or answered questions concerning all seven photos. The answers, in order are: 1883, for when the town hall was built, Shoemaker Funeral Home, the post office, Trinity United church, Beardmore Tannery, the Mill and Main St. intersection and the parade along Bower Avenue.

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Post Time

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Evening Afternoon
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