

# Beardmore: Hub Of Acton For Over A Century



**THE BEARDMORE** Tanneries in Acton were the drawing card which brought residents to the town. This photo was found in a pamphlet dated 1921 when Ac-

ton's population totalled 2,000, most of whom were Beardmore employees and their families. The tanneries employed 500 men and covered 1,000,000 square feet

of working space. There are presently approximately 500 men employed and the operation occupies less floor space because today things are more automated and

The village of Acton had its origin long before it became official on July 1, 1874, with a population of 800, most of whom were Beardmore employees and their families.

The Acton tanning business was founded in 1840 by Abraham Nellis. In 1865, George L. Beardmore brought his tanning operation to Acton after having been successful in Toronto, Hamilton, and Guelph. He took over the Nellis tannery which formed the nucleus of the great organization that has long since been the backbone of Acton. It is now the largest and most diversified tanning operation in the British Empire. At that time it was devoted exclusively to the manufacture of oak sole leather. In the 1880's the Beardmore sons, George, Torrence and W. D. Beardmore bought a small wooden plant and made several additions to it

for the manufacture of harness leather.

When the senior Beardmore died his four sons carried on the business and added yet another operation, belting leather. They kept adding until they covered over one million square feet of floor space, and included chrome sole, upper, case, bag and strap leather. Today Beardmore is much the same only more automated and more compact. By 1921 Beardmore had 500 men regularly employed. The company made every possible provision for the welfare of its employees. One of their schemes was to build sixty homes for their employees and rent them for a nominal fee of \$6 to \$8 a month to help beat the high cost of living. The homes still stand on what is now known as Poplar Crescent and Cameron Ave. Also, at the petition of their men, they opened a store in

Acton, known as the Co-operative, where the employees could buy provisions and products cheaper than elsewhere.

Another feature of the Beardmore business was the splendid club recreation facilities they provided for their employees at a nominal charge. The privileges of membership included tennis courts, quilting grounds and bowling greens and the use of a social club house which covered the area where Canadian Tire and Foodland now stand, and much of the grounds behind it. They had a wicker cart with a pony to give youngsters rides. They also built a large skating rink on the firm's property with a seating capacity for 400 spectators and a boating club on Fairy Lake. These means of entertainment lent attractions to life in the small town of Acton which made it compare very favorably with the city existence.

With the advent of television, after the second world war, tennis and lawn bowling popularity petered out and the firm gave up its recreational facilities.

Beardmore has brought several generations of residents to Acton, including the last two generations who

came with the closing of the Beardmore Tanneries in Bracebridge and Huntville. There are no Beardmore descendants left in Acton. They are scattered throughout Ontario. But the old folks of Acton like to reminisce about the good old days when Beardmore's was the hub of the town.

## OLD ACTON



**BEARDMORE'S BOATING** club on Fairy Lake was just one of the many recreation facilities provided for the employees of the firm. The

boats in the photo belong to Mr. Landsborough whose home and public boat rental was situated across the lake from the club. Mr. Land-

sborough paid a one dollar lifetime membership to Mr. Beardmore for the privilege of putting his boats on Beardmore's lake.



**CHILDHOOD MEMORIES** for Charles Landsborough was attending the Acton Baptist Church, which was built in 1899. The church was founded in 1842 with ten

members. The driving shed where the worshippers parked their horses and buggies is still standing back of the original building. It can't be removed until the

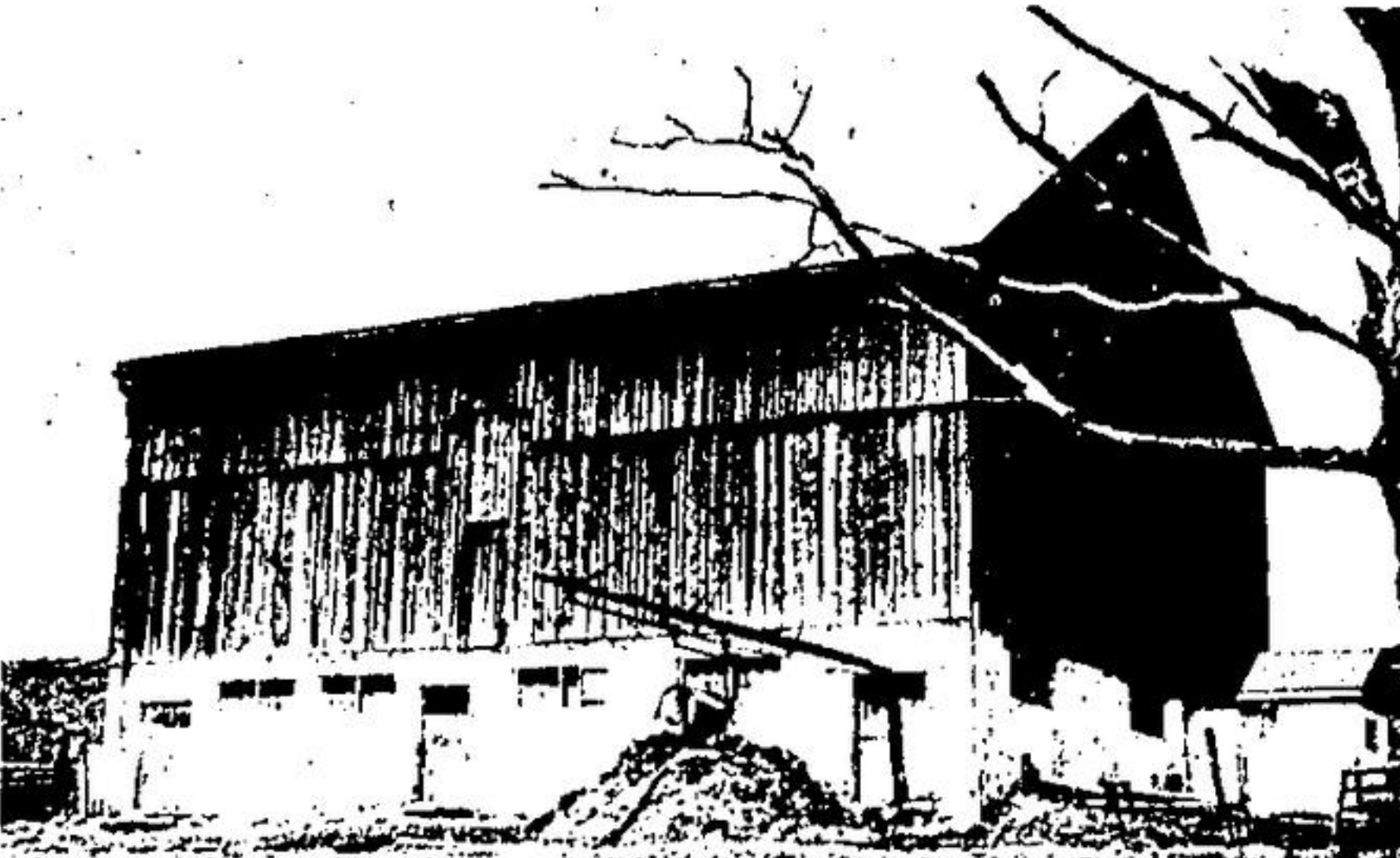
church decides to add an extension, according to a bylaw Mr. Landsborough has been organist for 35 years.



**THE OLD** Station Hotel as rebuilt by Sam Lasby in 1913. Previously it was an old stone building, with a cement

porch and balcony like the ones you see in western movies. Old Sam removed the balcony after his four-

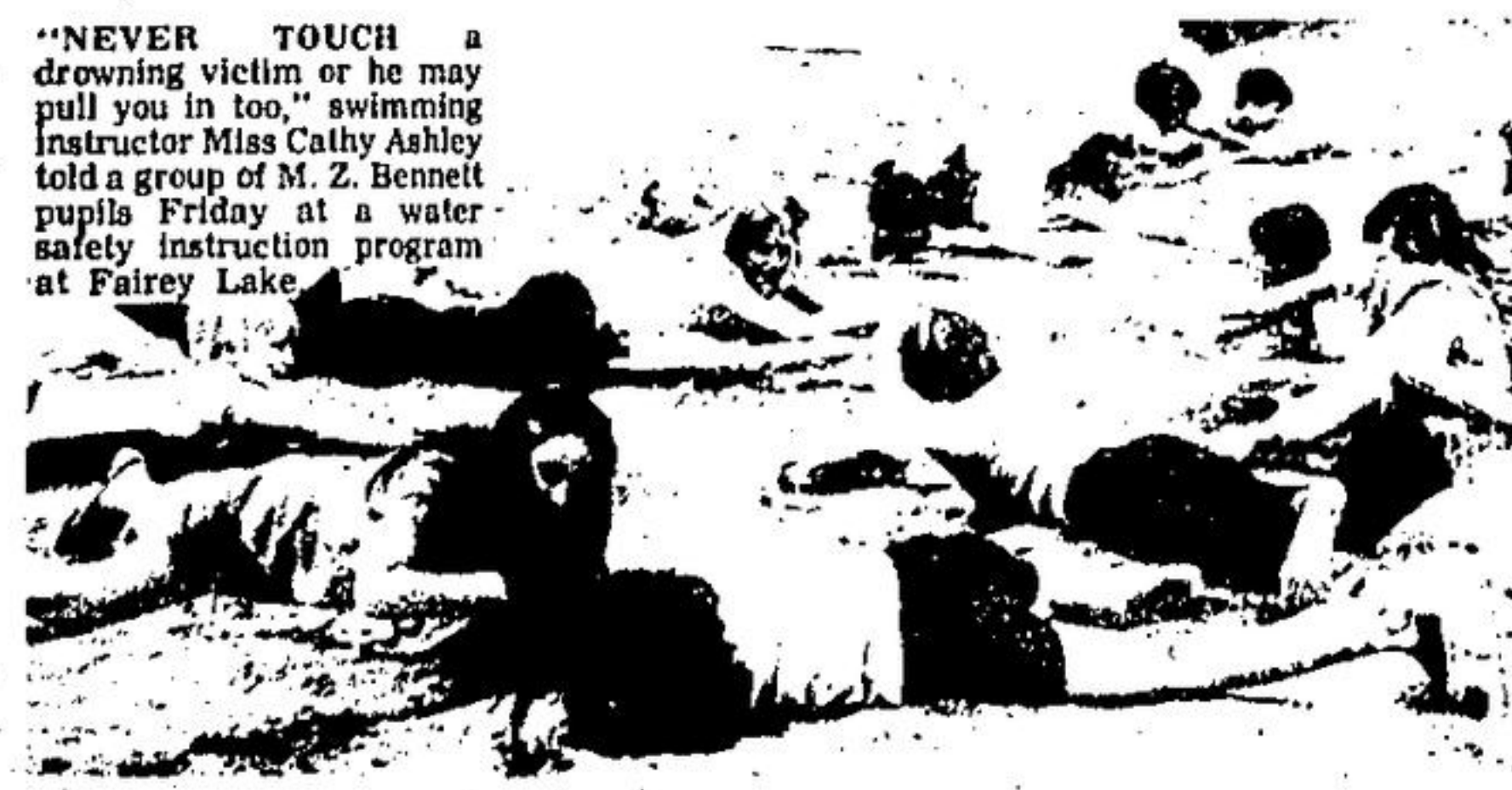
year-old daughter, now Mrs. Mary Osborne fell over the railing and broke her leg.



**THE NEXT TIME** you pass this old barn on Hwy. 7 at sixth line, think of Evan and Sally Price, who built it in

1840. Five of their descendants who are still living in Acton, said they feel a twinge of emotion every time they

drive by the old place. "Even though we never lived there, we feel that the place is very much a part of us."



**"NEVER TOUCH** a drowning victim or he may pull you in too," swimming instructor Miss Cathy Ashley told a group of M. Z. Bennett pupils Friday at a water safety instruction program at Fairy Lake.

## Young People Ready To Offer Their Services

Over the past few years it has become increasingly popular with young people in Georgetown to find some way of helping their community during the summer. Some people join service clubs, some join the recreation department's programs, or other organizations designed for community-minded citizens, and still others create their own organization.

The latter, of course, is made possible by the government grants known as Opportunities for Youth (OFY). The projects are planned by young people of secondary or post-secondary school age early in the year, and are sent to OFY to be approved, then, throughout the summer the youths run and control their own organization with only requested or necessary help from the project supervisor.

This year there are two OFY projects in Georgetown which plan to help the community. One is a play school for all preschoolers aged three to five and the other is a French language day camp for children.

The play school is called CAP '74 (Creative Activities for Preschoolers). In this program, children will be involved in activities ranging from crafts and games to creative play and songs during the months of July and August.

The six members of CAP '74, Brenda Fisher, Mike Deere, Nancy McKee, Cathy Henderson, Kevin Fisher and Peggy Levera, received a grant for over \$6,000 to cover the expenses involved and have been able to procure Knox Presbyterian Church to use as a base for the activities.

The second project, Divertissement pour Enfants, is a day camp planned for any child who can understand French. The project will run through the summer under the supervision of eight regular and four part time workers. Pauline Chaisson, Pauline Casey and Nancy Hayes are the project representatives for Divertissement pour Enfants. They will be conducting activities in art, sewing, drawing and cooking in the mornings, and a program of sports will be run in the afternoons.

Many of the people involved in both projects were involved in similar projects last year. Last year's projects were both successful and the experience gained from them by the organizers will undoubtedly prove extremely useful in running and planning this year's activities.

## Halton Hills Want Talks On Housing

Halton Hills council after expressing a strong disapproval with the Ministry of Housing's proposals to encourage house construction in the area, decided to meet with town planner Mario Venditti. During a committee of the whole meeting Monday, the council agreed to arrange a special meeting with Mr. Venditti to discuss the program and start a future development plan for the town.

However, many of the councillors felt that stricter measures were needed, and councillor Harry Levy proposed that the council prepare a brief expressing their displeasure of the ministry's plans.

"I think that the ministry is waiting for a reaction from us, and we should give them one," he said. "We should prepare a brief on our proposals."

Councillor Ern Hyde agreed to the idea and added that the council's reaction should be in the negative. "We should give them the biggest fatestest no ever," he added.

"When I brought out the Toronto region (TCR) plan there was no reaction from the area, because we were prepared to go along with the plan as a slow growth designation," he said. "Now, they're going for a complete reversal."

Councillor Hyde pointed out that if council did not react it would be like accepting the ministry's plans. "If we don't make a statement, they're assured that we're willing to go along with the plans," he said.

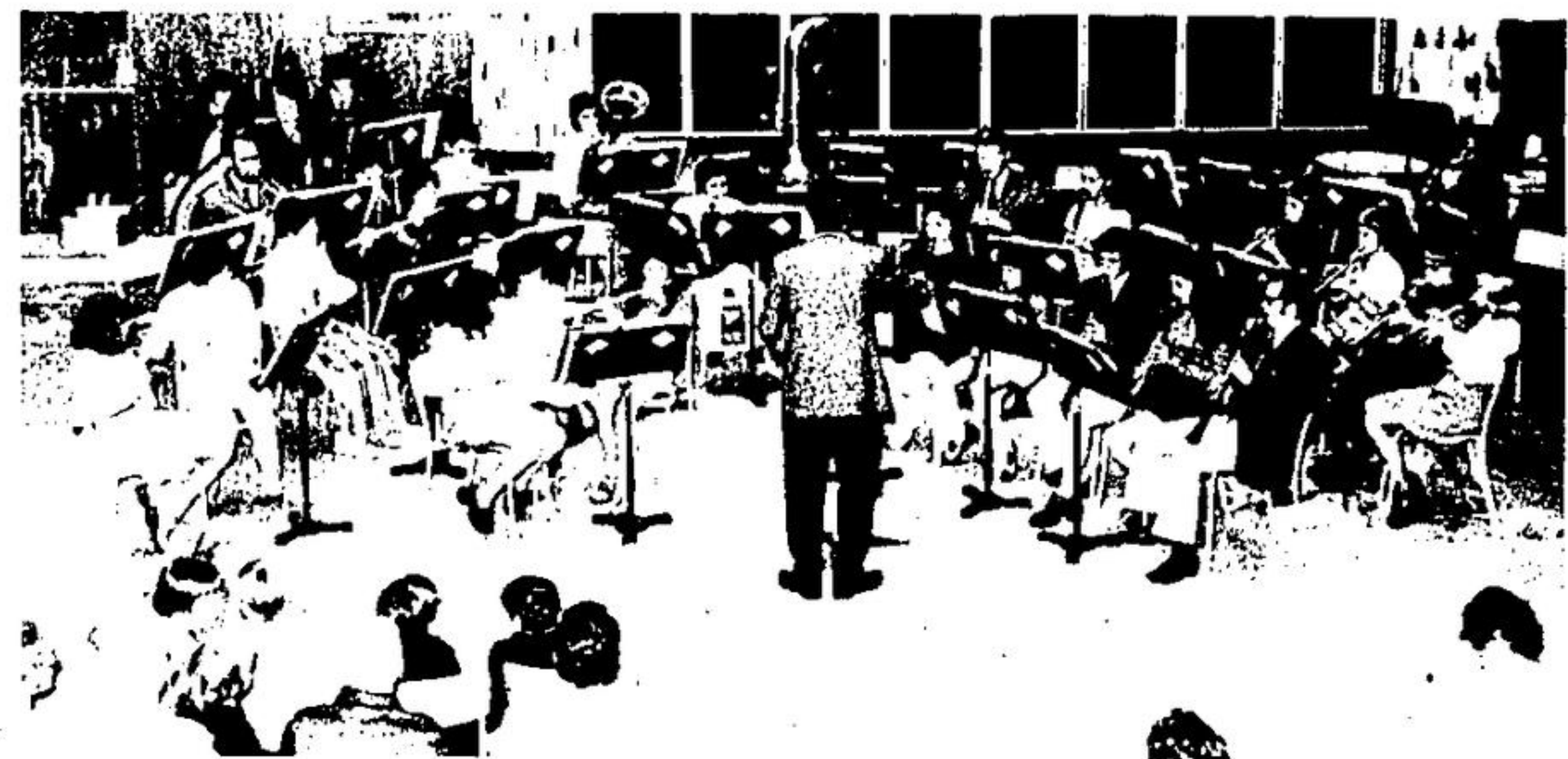
"The government is quite happy to sucker anyone they can," he said. "They got the GO train here and now they're in a bind with the housing situation." Other councillors expressed objections to the provincial governments dealing in the area. Councillor Les Doby blamed the province for slowing the developments of the area.

"Provincial regulations held up the developments for the past few years and now that the price of land has escalated they come out with a housing project," he argued. "All of a sudden things seem to have changed."

He added one note of relief for the other councillors that the

town could only grow as quickly as its sewage treatment plant is able to expand. "We're still faced with the same problem of whether capabilities of the municipality can handle the growth, where are we going to put the affluent from the people," he questioned.

Last week two representatives from the ministry of housing Bob Holmes, and Peter Martin met with the general administration committee to discuss the province's needs for the housing.



**THE ACTON** Citizens' Junior Band delighted a packed house Wednesday night when

they made their first public appearance in the band hall. In the morning and afternoon

they staged dress rehearsals at Acton's two public schools

to announce the upcoming OFY summer project.

## Junior Band OFY Summer Program

The present members of the Acton Citizens' Junior Band made their first public appearance together Wednesday night at the Band Hall, directed by bandmaster George Elliott. Most of the members are products of an Opportunities for Youth program that was held last summer in Acton. Again this summer free instrument

lessons are being taught to Acton youngsters from Grade five through high school age to give them something worthwhile to fill their summer days. cornet, clarinet, trombone, french horn and baritone, instructed by Barbara Pratt, Carolyn Merrin, Mary Watson, David Marcoux, Dave Morris

and Janet Allan, senior band members.

The classes will be conducted for one hour a day, from July 2 to August 29. For two weeks, July 29 to August 9, music students will attend a day camp at Rockwood which will include swimming, hiking, games and picnics as well as musical instruction. Transportation is

provided free.

Next semester, the high school is introducing a course in instrumental music, instructed by Dave Sale who has a master's degree in music. So this is a great opportunity for high school students to get a head start. For more information call Miss Barbara Pratt, 853-0516.

## Busy Week For Acton Citizens' Band

It was a busy week for the Acton Citizens' Band. Tuesday night the senior band led the motorcade of election candidates through Acton to the Robert Little School auditorium for a "meet-the-people" evening.

Wednesday morning and afternoon the junior band visited Acton's public schools to announce the OFY summer program and to sign up recruits. Barbara Pratt, senior band member and clarinet instructor, led the band in what was really their first public appearance.

Wednesday evenings the junior and senior bands presented a concert of instrumental music in the band hall. It was a delightful informal evening of marches, waltzes, solos, duets, trios and quartets.

Bandmaster George Elliott introduced each piece with a history of the instrument, the selection and the entertainer.

The idea of the concert was to give the junior band members an opportunity to play together and to hear the senior band in unison. The junior band was formed last summer as a result of the OFY project. Other members resulted from the adult music classes held Tuesday nights at the band hall.

"It is usually two years before the members of the junior band are ready to move up to senior level," explained bandmaster, George Elliott. "and then we start all over again with a fresh new group."

"The Acton Citizens' Band has brought music to the area since 1972," George continued. "And in those 103 years there have been only four bandmasters."

He said that back in 1872 there were bands all along the railway line, in Georgetown, Brampton, Guelph and Acton.

John Hill led the band for many years until the Mason-brothers, Charlie, Amos, and Bert took it over.

The boys and girls band was started by Charlie Mason when all the senior band members were called away to the service during the second world war. There have since been many junior bands in Acton.

George went on to say that "John Hill taught Charlie Mason to play, Charlie Mason taught me, and now I'm probably teaching the next bandmaster." In the interim between the Masons and George Elliott, Alf Perrott led the Acton band for many years until George was old enough to step in. Alf Perrott also conducted for many years in the Scots regimental band in Georgetown.



**MARCHING TO AN ELECTION** Leading a motorcade of the election candidates, the

Acton Citizens' Band marched through Acton to Robert

Little School, where Terry O'Connor, Frank Philbrook

and Archie Brown held a meet-the-people evening.



**WHELAN 'BEEFS' IT UP AT RALLY** Eugene Whelan, Minister of Agriculture ate a home grown beef sandwich before a large crowd at the Erin

fairgrounds last Sunday to emphasize that he will stand firm against American threats of retaliation con-

cerning Canada's decision to halt imports of cattle containing the growth hormone DES. Halton candidate Dr.

Frank Philbrook is at left and Wellington candidate Frank Malone is at right.