

CVCA celebrates 25th anniversary

Grass roots movement maintained in spirit

Some people might not think so, but the fact that Hurricane Hazel and the first-ever meeting of the Credit Valley Conservation Authority (CVCA) took place in the same year was purely coincidental.

Both those events took place 25 years ago this year. The CVCA celebrated its anniversary last week, but Hurricane Hazel didn't hit the area until the fall.

The move to form the authority actually began about five years ago before the inaugural meeting, and the road to its formation was not a smooth one. It took three votes among the member municipalities before the required two-thirds majority agreement was reached and the authority was formed.

The Credit Valley Conservation Authority has author-

ity over much of Georgetown, Acton and the surrounding hamlets, most of which were built along the Credit River and its various tributaries. To the conservation-committed people, the authority is one of the few bastions against the encroachment of the concrete jungle, while to others, the CVCA is just one more level of government bureaucracy with the government-granted right to tell people in the watershed what they can and can't do with their property.

Either way, the CVCA has played a major part in Halton Hills throughout its 25-year history. This week, the Herald took a look at the formation of the Credit Valley Conservation Authority and the first 25 years of its operation.

By LORI TAYLOR
Herald staff writer

The formation of the Credit Valley Conservation Authority (CVCA) 25 years ago was the result of a grass roots movement that almost didn't make it.

"I think it's important for people to realize that conservation authorities aren't coming down from on high," CVCA information officer Joan Rollings says. "The impetus must come from the grass roots level. The municipalities must agree and apply to the province for a charter."

It took five years of different meetings with municipal representatives before a vote finally gave the required two-thirds majority of agreement among the 16 municipalities in the Credit River watershed; the margin was a slim one.

The process started in 1949, Mrs. Rollings said, but the motivation was there earlier when the conservation movement "took off" at the end of World War II. In 1949, the Lions Club along the Credit River Valley held a meeting, with representatives from clubs in Georgetown, Brampton, Port Credit and the other towns, to discuss conservation in the area.

LIONS CLUB

"Some of the people who belonged to the Lions Club were interested in conservation, and they used the club as a focal point for gathering the interest together," Mrs. Rollings said. After the first meeting, the moving force for the formation of the authority rested with a few members, among them Alec MacLaren of Georgetown, who eventually became a charter member of the authority.

"I think what prompted the formation of the authority was the fact that the hills in Caledon and other headwater lands were being well, I don't like the word, but essentially they were being looted," Mrs. Rollings said. "People were cutting down trees to farm marginal land, and doing other things that were bad water management. As a result, there were massive floods in the spring, dry river in the summer, and a pollution problem."

The first meeting of municipal representatives to discuss

the proposed forming of the CVCA was held in Georgetown, but the necessary vote was not obtained. Between 1949 and 1954, there were a series of meetings held before the meeting April 29, 1954, at the Junior Farmers' Building in Brampton when the two-thirds major-



JOAN ROLLINGS

ity voted in favor of the recommendation to form the CVCA. An order-in-council May 13 established the authority, and its inaugural meeting was held June 13, 1954.

The original executive was headed by Douglas Reddington from Caledon, as chairman, with Tom Glassford as vice-chairman and Elmer Wright of Port Credit as secretary.

The levy in 1954 was two cents a person, which left the authority with an operating budget of \$911.88. At the end of the first year, the authority had spent only \$476.45 of its budget, leaving them with almost half unspent.

Mrs. Rollings pointed out that the authority had no full-time staff at that point. Secretary-treasurer Elmer Wright worked from his home, and the authority's only capital expense that year was to buy a filing cabinet for him, she said.

The original committees which made up the authority were a little different from the present ones. Originally there was a flood control committee, which also looked after pollution; a farm planning and land use committee, public relations, and reforestation. At the second meeting of the authority, the representatives from

Georgetown and Toronto Township requested the formation of a parks and recreation committee.

The present advisory boards are information and education, parks and recreation, historical records, water management and reforestation, land use and wildlife.

The authority has 21 members now, with the member municipalities having representation based on the number of its residents living in the watershed. The chairman and two other members are appointed by the province, and former chairman R.K. McMillan has been awarded an honorary lifetime membership.

The first full-time staff member at the authority was hired in 1958, at 65 cents an hour, to manage the Terra Cotta Conservation Area. The authority had field resources officers, one at a time, but they were employed by the Ministry which had responsibility for the authority at the time.

FULL CIRCLE

"I think the goals of the authority have come full circle," Mrs. Rollings said. "The purpose of the authority is to use a common sense approach to the conservation of renewable resources. For a while, we maybe got off the beaten track a little when we got into the recreation business, although we are still active in the renewable resources area."

"The thinking has come full circle from the time the answer to all the problems was to build a dam," Mrs. Rollings continued. "The thinking has changed from the engineering way of handling a situation by building a dam and controlling water, to the environmental way of planting trees to slow down run-off, to repair where you have to, and to plan beforehand so you don't have to make repairs."

"Much of the engineering solutions the authority has undertaken has been done to repair damage done in the past," Mrs. Rollings said. In the past most of the towns were built on around the mills, and the authority now has the problem that the towns are all in the floodplain, she added.

One of the authority's projects over the years has been the mapping of floodplain lands, the gullies and valleys. They have also done stream

surveys, urban watercourse studies, and studies of environmentally sensitive areas and hazard lands. The studies are expensive, Mrs. Rollings said, but they provide the authority with the information to decide where water can be channeled from developments while doing the least amount of damage.

"Even if it costs a little more, it's worth it, so the authority won't be spending money 20 years down the road to correct poor planning," she said.

"In the Sixties, Ontario had a whole series of droughts, and the authority originally started out with a land management concept for the Credit," Mrs. Rollings said. "They did a lot of work, because it was a predominantly rural area. The idea was to manage land to the improvement of the river, rather than to its detriment."

FIRST PROJECT

One of the first major projects of the CVCA, the proposed construction of a series of dams along the Credit, was intended to ensure a steady water supply to Georgetown and other towns along the river, as well as controlling flooding. In 1962, the CVCA started out with a plan for six dams, one in Orangeville, one north of the Cataract, one at Silver Creek, one below Georgetown and two more further south.

Mr. McMillan and Mr. Parker visited each of the member municipalities to "sell them" on the project, Mrs. Rollings said. They had to promise the authority would hold the line on the levies, she said, and construct the dams without asking for extra funds. The project was to be funded jointly by the federal and provincial governments at 75 per cent of the costs, and the municipalities through the CVCA at 25 per cent.

The project was approved by the municipalities and the authority, and was sent to the provincial government for their approval. Provincial approval wasn't forthcoming, however.

"They said because of all the reservoirs being created by these dams, we should plan for the recreational use which would accrue around them, and we hadn't done that," Mrs. Rollings said. The plan



The Credit River winds its way through 16 different municipalities in Halton, Peel, Wellington and Dufferin. The scenic river banks attract tourists from all over to relax in the

sun on a sunny, summer afternoon in the shade of the trees, within the sound of the river.

was sent back to the authority to be re-worked, to include plans to buy land around the reservoirs for recreational use.

After getting provincial approval, the proposal was sent to Ottawa for the federal government's approval. And there it sat for two years, with CVCA members making flying trips to Ottawa to talk to local MPs, to try and get the project approved.

In 1965, the authority finally received word on the project: the federal government had decided not to participate because there was too much recreation involved in it.

The whole thing was dropped at that point, Mrs. Rollings said, although the authority did go ahead with a low-level dam at Orangeville. The dam opened in 1970, but not without some strange side steps along the way.

DIAMOND DREAM

Stranger still was the story told by a well-dressed gentleman who came into the authority offices before the dam was built and told staff members of a dream he had had during

World War II, in which he saw diamonds, ready for the finding and taking, in an area which would be flooded by the reservoir. He asked the authority not to close the floodgates and flood the area until he could conduct a search.

The man left the office and never came back. A member of the authority staff checked with an expert to determine if the soil and the geology in the area would be conducive to the formation of diamonds, and was told it was very unlikely. So the floodgates were closed.

"I sometimes wonder if there are diamonds lying somewhere undiscovered under all that water," Mrs. Rollings said.

The CVCA owns about 4,200 acres along the Credit River, not including Terra Cotta Conservation Area, "but out of 418 square miles that's not much," Mrs. Rollings said. In Caledon, there are 800 acres in forest conservation areas, while Silver Creek Conservation Area will cover 1,000 acres. Terra Cotta covers 550 acres.

The authority is working on acquiring the headlands of the river and its tributaries as they come on the market, "because when you lose your headlands, you lose your river," Mrs. Rollings said.

Other up-coming projects in

the area include the second phase of the Metcalfe Ravine project, erosion control and tree planting along Regan Crescent, and the construction of the spillway in the paper mill dam and dredging of the river in Glen Williams.

One of the biggest projects undertaken in the Acton area was the dredging of Fairy Lake. About 40,000 cubic yards of fill was dredged out of the lake which had formed behind the mill dam.

"It was an experiment to find out if it was economically feasible to dredge behind mill dams, and I guess it wasn't because we never did it again," Mrs. Rollings said.

The problem facing the authority at the moment is the amount of development going on in Orangeville, Brampton Georgetown and especially Mississauga, Mrs. Rollings said.

"It's created a massive runoff after rain storms, down the storm sewers that outlet into small streams," Mrs. Rollings said. "These small meandering streams have been there for years not bothering anybody, but this run-off causes all kinds of problems with erosion and pollution."

"People have to have some place to live, but there has to be a common sense ap-

proach," she said. "There has to be a happy medium between saying no development at all and going all out."

It was the fill regulations which were introduced in 1973 that finally gave the authority the chance to have its say about what goes on in the floodplain. The fill regulations say no one can "fill, construct or alter a watercourse without a permit from this authority."

"The fill regulations give us the right to make sure it's done properly the first time around," Mrs. Rollings said. The decisions on whether or not a permit will be issued are made by the executive committee of the authority, with technical advice from the staff.

"It's still a matter of judgement for the executive, based on advice from the engineering staff and planning staff, and also from people in the Ministry if necessary," Mrs. Rollings said.

Many people have questioned the need for the authority over the years, Mrs. Rollings said.

"But after that big storm in Pennsylvania two or three years ago, when they had all that flooding, and it wasn't even a big storm, people were saying, 'You know, it can happen here,'" she said.

Honorary lifetime member swears he could write a book

Roy McMillan, honorary lifetime member of the Credit Valley Conservation Authority (CVCA), says he could write a book about his days with the authority.

Mr. McMillan was chairman of the CVCA for 13 years, until 1974. He was then appointed honorary lifetime member. He was on Toronto Township Council when the vote was held which authorized the formation of the CVCA, in 1954, and was a voting delegate at that meeting. He didn't become a member of the authority until 1958, however.

Mr. McMillan was chairman of the parks and recreation committee for three years before being elected to the position of chairman by the authority for three years. For the next ten years, he was appointed by the province.

Mr. McMillan takes great pride in his attendance at authority meetings. He only missed a meeting if he was out of town on authority business. "My attendance record would be close to 100 per cent,"



ROY McMILLAN

he said. "I used to come from my cottage north of Jrihla to attend a meeting. And being chairman of the authority, I was an ex officio member of all the advisory boards, too."

CVCA FOUNDATION
Mr. McMillan is also a direc-

tor of the CVCA foundation, which looks after donations received by the authority, either financial, or in the way of equipment or antiques. The authority has amassed a sizeable collection of antique items for use in conservation areas.

Mr. McMillan said he is disappointed with the way the authority is handling Silver Creek Conservation Area, because it had been intended to have the antiques, which include "valuable farm equipment that couldn't be found anywhere else," on display there, but those plans appear to have fallen by the wayside.

In the meantime, he said, people have stopped making contributions of their antiques.

MASSIVE RUN-OFF

"People are willing to give gifts but there are no plans for that kind of thing at Silver Creek now," Mr. McMillan said.

Mr. McMillan said he is not strongly in favor of the plans for the Silver Creek Conservation Area, which call for en-

france by the public in some of its more environmentally sensitive areas to be limited to groups of people with a guide.

"I don't think the Niagara Escarpment or the province can own thousands of acres of land and close it off from the public, and say you can take a few children through for a walk," he said in reference to the proposed education centre at Silver Creek.

Mr. McMillan said the reason the authority has been proceeding so slowly on the Silver Creek Conservation Area is because it has so much of its budget invested in other projects at the moment.

SOME PEOPLE

"I'm not sold on the idea of building out into Lake Ontario," he added. "I've always felt the valley lands along the Credit River would be more beneficial to people, at a much lower cost, than to build a park out into Lake Ontario."

When Mr. McMillan be-

came chairman, the authority already owned the land necessary to construct the Orangeville dam. After the federal government withdrew from its commitment to share in the cost, Mr. McMillan went to the province to ask them to take over 75 per cent of the project.

MAIN CONCERN

He said he simply pointed out that there was a provincial election coming up, and in view of that fact, the province might want to take another look at the possibility of their funding their own and the federal government's share of the Orangeville dam project. The province agreed, and the dam was built.

"In the time I was chairman, I got the very best of co-operation from every member who sat on the authority," Mr. McMillan said. "I certainly hope the work of the conservation authority will continue, and the people will stand behind it and try to preserve what is left for the future generations."



In the spring, the Credit River has a more violent nature, as was the case this year, when flooding pushed large blocks of ice across the

floodplain. Halton Hills mayor Pete Pomaroy, himself a resident in the floodplain at Norval, surveys the damage.