

# Preserving Acton's heritage for town's future generations

Hall set for December opening

By SANDY CAMPBELL  
Herald Staff

Give them the past and they will preserve it for the future. That is the goal of Heritage Acton who are finishing their first project, the Acton Town Hall, on the corner of Willow and Bower.

In December the Acton Social Services and Information Centre will move to first floor offices, said Ted Tyler, chairman of Heritage Acton. He did not know when the second floor would be finished, but only hoped that its new tenants would be compatible with the social service agency.

"It should be used for various town functions. It was built for the people of Acton and it should be used by the people of Acton," he said.

The old town hall has a history of serving the community. It was once a fire department, a boys band hall, a library and most recently a police station.

During the Depression, nomads seeking work used to find a bed at the old police station. The dairy man who delivered at night would give left-over milk to travellers or prisoners.

Consequently, when the hall was renovated, there was a supply of milk bottles found beneath the floor. They were fed through a hole in the floor, Mr. Tyler said. "We have the history of Acton in milk bottles," he said.

The renovators also found a decorative eagle and Acton Crest; both will be on display in the hall permanently. The crest was donated by the mayor of the original Acton, in England.

Preserving the building as it once was, is Heritage Acton's mandate. That mandate also includes fund-raising.

The Ontario Heritage Foundation is one of three major contributors. In order to get money from them, all renovated buildings must be functional and in their original state, Mr. Tyler said. They only donate money to rebuilding things as they were. They will pay for old moulding, but they will not pay for phone lines, Mr. Tyler said.

The town hall was bought from the town for \$1. Since then the Ontario Heritage Foundation has donated about \$40,000, the federal government about \$130,000 and Heritage Acton about \$70,000.

"They (the town) have the option to buy it back," Mr. Tyler said. Heritage Acton will be leasing it. "We preserve and restore. We're not in this to make money but to preserve Acton," he said.

Preserving and restoring the town hall has been difficult as well as costly. One reason is because there were so many different occupants and changes to the building. It was difficult to decide how it looked originally, Mr. Tyler said. He said the project started in the spring of 1983. "It seems like forever, like I inherited the thing," he joked.

"The biggest problem has always been finding money," he said. Heritage Acton was formed to ease this problem; now, it is a recognized tax deductible charity. Once there were two groups, one to save the building from the wrecking ball and the other to



After months and months of construction, with some time delays in between, the Acton Town Hall is nearing completion and the Acton

restore it. When the groups merged, Heritage Acton was born.

Renovating is a journey into the unexpected. "We were running into unknowns all of the time. We had to almost gut the building. We weren't aware the architect was going to do it. We had to tear the front section of the building out. We had to reinforce it with steel and update bathrooms. We renovated things we found out later didn't have to be renovated. There were problems every day, but eventually things all fit into place," he said.

Social Services and Information Centre is preparing for their move. A final date for a ribbon cutting hasn't been decided, but it isn't too far away.

Many of the old features were retained and those that couldn't be, had substitutes found for them. Most of the original doors were found except the front doors. Dave Dills offered the doors of the old Acton Free Press building. They were the right dimensions but didn't go on with ease. "It's kind of hard though, taking stuff from one old building with its bends and twists and trying to fit the bends and twists in another old building," he said.

The old cell doors were used also. One is used in a small kitchen and the other as a demonstration of how criminals were once held. "Some people came in to see if their initials were still on the doors," he said. Impossible, the steel doors were sandblasted and now look like new.

Heritage Acton's first project is almost complete, but they have no plans to begin another until it is. No doubt they will begin another. "You can't tear everything down. Can you imagine what Europe would be like if they did," Mr. Tyler said.

## Juried art

The Brampton Arts Council will be holding a juried art and craft exhibition Dec. 5 - Jan. 5 at the Brampton Public Library and Art Gallery.

The official opening will be Dec. 5 starting at 7 p.m. with Christmas music provided by the Peel Choral Society.

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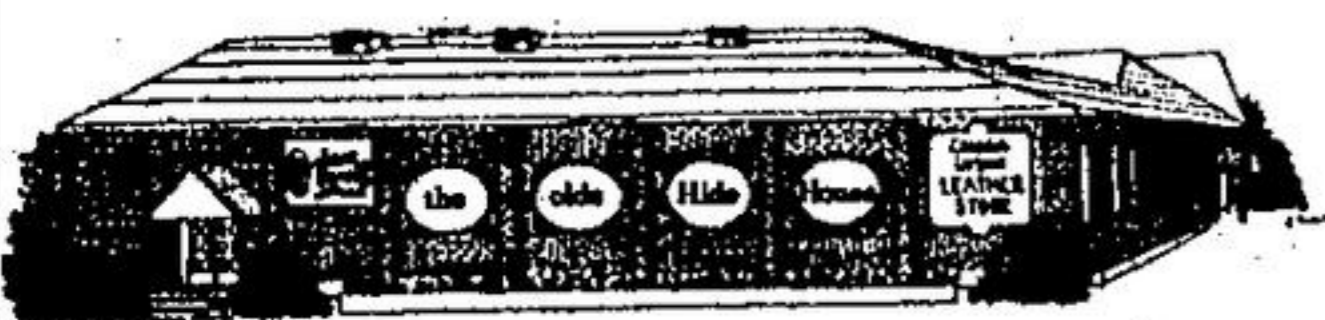


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