

# the HERALD Outlook

## Exercise in wax



Ottawa

Stewart MacLeod  
Thomson News Service

It was Prime Minister Mulroney himself who said that his government - or perhaps it was his office - didn't handle small things very well. What he was emphasizing, of course, was that the big things were handled extremely well.

That was nearly three years ago. But there is no reason why the prime minister would change his mind in the meantime.

A big thing would be something like a general election. And in November, Mr. Mulroney and his Tory team handled that very well.

A small thing would be arranging a sitting with personnel from Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum. And just a week or so ago, Mr. Mulroney and his advisers didn't handle that very well.

In fact, they looked rather foolish.

It seems that the famous London museum, which has lifesize wax models of the world's prominent personalities, has wanted Mr. Mulroney to sit for measurements ever since he became prime minister in 1984. The prime minister, not noticeably opposed to rubbing shoulders - even of the waxed variety - with other famous people, kept putting it off.

By the time his enthusiasm waxed, his first mandate was drawing to a close, the opinion polls turned against him, and Madame Tussaud's interest had waned. The museum usually doesn't waste much time in moving out defeated politicians - unless they're of the stature of, say, Winston Churchill.

### TIME RIPE

Anyway, when Mr. Mulroney won re-election last November, the museum expressed renewed interest. In fact, we're told, the wax experts practically pleaded with him to pose.

Those close to the prime minister said that, while he was now gung-ho for such an appointment, he harbored severe reservations about how the Canadian media might cover the event. Obviously, he didn't want to appear to be pushing his way into the wax-works.

And it's doubtful whether he would look forward to cartoons about being measured, particularly when it came to that famous chin.

There are several versions of what actually happened but, in any event, an understanding was reached between the museum and the prime minister's office that a sitting would be arranged on March 12, when Mr. Mulroney would be visiting London. This was on his way back from the environmental conference in The Hague.

The prime minister, say informants, was led to believe the posing, or whatever, would be done without fanfare, away from the prying media.

There are stories of internal memos being mislaid; in any case, signals were crossed and the Tussaud museum announced that the Canadian prime minister would be sitting.

Not only that, the museum arranged to give the Canadian media a demonstration of how it produces the wax figures. This would be a first, of sorts.

Mr. Mulroney's scheduled sitting would not only be public knowledge, the occasion would be part of a televised demonstration.

### NOT HAPPY

It's not difficult to understand why the prime minister might have lost much of his enthusiasm for the appointment.

But, this being a relatively small thing, it wasn't handled well. It became a sort of cat-and-mouse game between reporters and officials from Mr. Mulroney's office. Would he sit, or wouldn't he?

For several days, there seemed to be confusion. One official told a reporter that "it depends on some extent on how the media plays it."

By then, the story of Mr. Mulroney's sitting, or non-sitting, was getting front-page treatment.

Yes, the prime minister did go ahead with the sitting, but not, as originally scheduled, in the museum. It was in the privacy of his hotel room, away from prying eyes.

Too late. The sitting had become one of the most publicized in the museum's history. And some reporters were upset because they were deprived of a demonstration.

It was all so unnecessary.

It's a great honor to be asked to sit for Madame Tussaud's. If it's good enough for the Queen, John Kennedy, the Pope and Churchill, it shouldn't be considered an embarrassment for a Canadian prime minister. Virtually everyone depicted in the museum has freely co-operated.

It's not like going to the local bootlegger's after midnight.

But, as Mr. Mulroney said on July 1, 1986, "we do the big things well; it's the small things we do poorly."

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## Everything old is new again



Your Business  
Diane Maley

Thomson News Service

In the world of popular culture, black is back, jazz is in, cats are cool, Elvis lives and anyone who is not hip is a drag. From clothes to music to the way people talk, everything (thirty years) old is new again. It's eerie.

People are clad in black from head to toe. Women pile their hair up, Brigitte Bardot style, with bangs hiding their black-lined eyes. They wear long black sweaters, tight black skirts, black tights and spike-heeled shoes with pointed toes.

Men grease their hair, slick it back, wear black leather jackets and black slacks. I'm talking about professionals - doctors and lawyers in their early 40s. The kids go much further.

Mind you, the way the kids talk is music to the ears of aging baby boomers. People are cool or hip or a drag, language familiar to the over-the-hill set. Boomers and their kids sit side by side in jazz clubs, sipping Black Label beer.

That nostalgia sells is not news. But the sheer strength of its appeal is something we should wonder at. If a new magazine is any measure, North Americans are walking backward into the future, their gaze fixed on the past.

### PAST BECKONS

Memories, billed as the magazine of then and now, is made of the news of bygone days: Why Jackie Married Ari; how Harry Truman defeated Thomas Dewey for the American presidency; how Orson Welles threw the country into a panic with his radio play, The War of the Worlds; the making of Gone With the Wind; and the Alger Hiss spy case.

For reporters and editors, drumming up yesterday's news is an easy business. But will it sell? Seems so, if early responses are any sign. In the magazine's second edition (it is published quarterly), editor Carey Winfrey seems genuinely surprised at receiving more than 500 letters from enthusiastic readers.

At first I was skeptical; living in the past is not a good thing. An hour later, I had changed my mind, at least provisionally. Years of thirty-second television news clips have made our memories far too short.

It is useful to remember that only 50 years ago, people really believed that the Martians had landed and were poised to take over the world.

Who the magazine is designed for is revealed by its advertisements. "Pluck, pluck, pluck, pluck, pluck. Isn't it time to change the way you deal with gray?" the ad for hair dye reads. "Gray hair or Loving Care."

### ADS AT ODDS

While aging baby boomers are the target, the ads are at odds with the still hip people sitting around jazz clubs, wearing berets, black leather jackets and graying goatees. Who wants to be reminded that it's time to start dying one's hair?

It gets worse. A few pages later is an ad for herbal tea; followed by a limited edition plate to celebrate 50 years of the Wizard of Oz; an electric toothbrush designed to swish away plaque; porcelain dolls of Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler; and Correctol laxative.

Memories calls itself the magazine of then and now. The editorial pages are devoted to then; the ads to now.

On second thought, let's leave the past, and present, behind and read something more uplifting.

## Backyard dilemma



Staff Comment

Brian MacLeod

Your municipal representatives are going to be put to the test in the next few days.

Sometime on Tuesday night, they'll have to make what will amount to a \$500,000 decision.

Homeowners on Metcalfe Court, Eden Place and Dawson and Irwin Crescents are slowly watching their backyards crumble away into a ravine behind their houses. They've been told that the original builders placed fill to extend their yards in the mid-1960s and early 1970s but they didn't compact it properly.

The homeowners have been told their backyards will disappear completely without stabilization.

Now, it's going to cost \$1 million to stabilize the banks of 34 homes. The first 16 homes on Metcalfe Court are scheduled to have the work done this year. The province has approved its 55-per-cent share of the Metcalfe Court repairs. That section alone will cost \$300,000.

On Tuesday, the town will decide if it will kick in the remaining 45 per cent, work out a cost-sharing formula with homeowners, or tell the homeowners to pay for it themselves.

Whatever the decision on Metcalfe Court is, it will have to apply to the homeowners on the other streets as well.

The average price of the bank stabilization on Metcalfe Court is between \$17,000 and \$19,000 with a high of \$36,000 - not exactly amounts that are tucked away for a rainy day.

If the town decides not to endorse the project, there is no guarantee the money will be approved by the province again next year.

Homeowners say the town has known about the situation for 17 years.

For councillors the easy decision would be to say no, the town can't afford it. One would expect those homeowners would have a long memory come election time, but it's probably easier to explain to 34 homeowners why they won't get the money, than it is to explain to the entire town why some projects have to be cancelled or why the budget is skyrocketing, because of a bank stabilization project.

As it stands now, the homeowners will have to pay for the repairs out of their own pockets. Some residents want the town to foot the bill, saying the town has a moral obligation to protect them from unscrupulous builders. Others are willing to work out a cost-sharing formula.

It would be easy, perhaps, to say "buyer beware" in this case. But what's a prospective homeowner to do? Go out and jump on their backyard to see if it crumbles?

The case for the moral obligation is there. The case for the legal obligation may not be.

That's where the dilemma comes in.

In the past, with such potentially expensive projects, councillors have stuck to the legal obligation.

Regardless, it will be interesting to hear the justification of their decision on Tuesday.

