

Archives lead path to Halton's treasured past

Walter Lewis presides over the town's history

By ALAN MACKIE
the Herald

Can one man fill a room full of old public documents, historical maps, historical photographs, old phone books and newspapers by himself when it takes so many people to retrieve and preserve just one artifact - a 132-year-old piece entitled "Tremaine's Map - County of Halton?"

One man is trying but he's getting a lot of help.

Looking through the library for research materials you may reach a door with a label on it which reads "Archives." It's a small looking door beside a monstrous map that hangs on the dimly lit wall. Beside the map is a plaque that rhymes off the people who made the map possible, including Marion Young, Mary S. Cooper, John Mowat, Marshall Neilson, the Dominion Seed House, the Glen Williams Town Hall Board, the Esquering Historical Society, the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce in honor of Walter Biehn, and Keith Felton Bookbinding.

The map was originally printed in four pieces but due to the acid in the glue that held the map together the paper weakened and left the map in over 60 pieces, said Walter Lewis, a research librarian who is in charge of the archival collections of the Esquering Historical Society and The Halton Hills Public Library.

'The fact that someone donated something is historically important'

—Walter Lewis

It cost around \$1,500 to put the map together and frame it, Mr. Lewis noted. "There are very few of these in public hands," he said. He only knows of two in public hands. One is down in Oakville and the other is at the Georgetown library.

The map was printed in 1858 in four pieces because there was not a large enough printer to print it on one piece of paper, Mr. Lewis noted.

The map is just one of the few documents in the archives that is not sealed in the small archives room. Mr. Lewis explained the

frame seals the picture from any harmful environmental dangers and the glass has a special filter aspect to it, to help battle against light fading the map's lines.

The actual archives room is fairly small and appears to be completely filled with all sorts of various artifacts. There is an account book from a general store in Stewarttown that dates in the 1830s.

The oldest newspaper in the collection is the June 12 edition of the 1861 Canadian Champion based in Georgetown. The Champion moved to Milton a few years later, Mr. Lewis said.

In the 1820s farmer George Kennedy and Sarah Bedford were married and the archives received a certificate of marriage of the couple. The certificate came from the prairies with the help of Mayor Russ Miller, Mr. Lewis noted.

The small archives room was not always filled with such knowledge and information.

The library was renovated in the fall of 1981 and Mr. Lewis started in the spring of 1982 as a reference librarian. Part of his job was to work with the Esquering Historical Society to create the archives.

"The room was empty when I started," Mr. Lewis noted. He quickly added that he did not fill the room but organized it.

He said the people who donate pieces to the archives come from all walks of life. Some people do not want to play favorites in leaving items to their children, so they decide to leave them to the community, he said. Other people who are leaving the area feel they want to leave certain items with the archives instead of taking them away from the community. Mr. Lewis also said some people have been able to obtain tax receipts for their donations. But this happens quite rarely.

He does realize how tough the decision to donate an item to the archives is. This is one of the reasons the archives tries to keep a separate piece of documentation so people know who donated a specific item.

The other reason is "the fact that someone donated something is historically important" - separate



Walter Lewis searches out one of the older documents contained in the archival collections of the Esquering Historical Society and Halton Hills Public Library in the small archives room in the Georgetown Public Library. (Herald photo)

from how historically important the donation is, Mr. Lewis said. For example, the first major donation to the archives was made by Walter Biehn who was a member of the Esquering Historical Society and a publisher for the Herald. He donated numerous copies of the paper and any other information he could give to the archives.

But whether the donation is a small piece or a major collection does not matter since Mr. Lewis tries to treat every donation the same way. This includes a letter of thanks, Mr. Lewis noted.

Mr. Lewis has two degrees in history from Queen's University and a masters degree of library science from the University of Toronto. He has spent eight years working at the Halton Hills Library and with the archives.

The archives door is kept closed with the lights turned off to help protect the documents within the room, Mr. Lewis said.

He also noted the acidity of paper can also destroy it. People who tend to keep a newspaper for some time will notice it turning yellowish in color, he said. This is due to the acid the pulp industry adds to the papers. Mr. Lewis said the industry only started to add the acids after 1880. The paper that came out before 1880 will last "as close to forever as we can environmentally keep it." Paper produced after 1880 needs to be kept apart from other pieces to prevent the acids "migrating" from one piece to another. This can be done using acid free folders and boxes,

store," he said.

Mr. Lewis does not see this as a bad problem. "I would rather have that problem (of having too many items) than if no one cared enough... or had anything to give."

He already knows of a couple of possible solutions to this "good problem." One solution is to put everything on microfilm and keep the original copies in a different place.

Another solution is, assuming the library moves, the archives could use the existing building or gain a larger place at the new library site, he said.

He added there is "nothing that says to me that this (inflow of documents) is drying up."

Mark Rowe, president of the Esquering Historical Society, said people have been approaching the society with items they believed they could not keep in a state of good repair. One of the society's objectives is to "collect and preserve local history," which is the main reason for creating the archives, Mr. Rowe said.

He also would like to see all the archives readily accessible to the public. This is the reason Mr. Lewis keeps strict records of all the items in the archives.

As people come to know about the archives they will start to have more confidence in the fact they can look at the items they have donated, Mr. Rowe said.

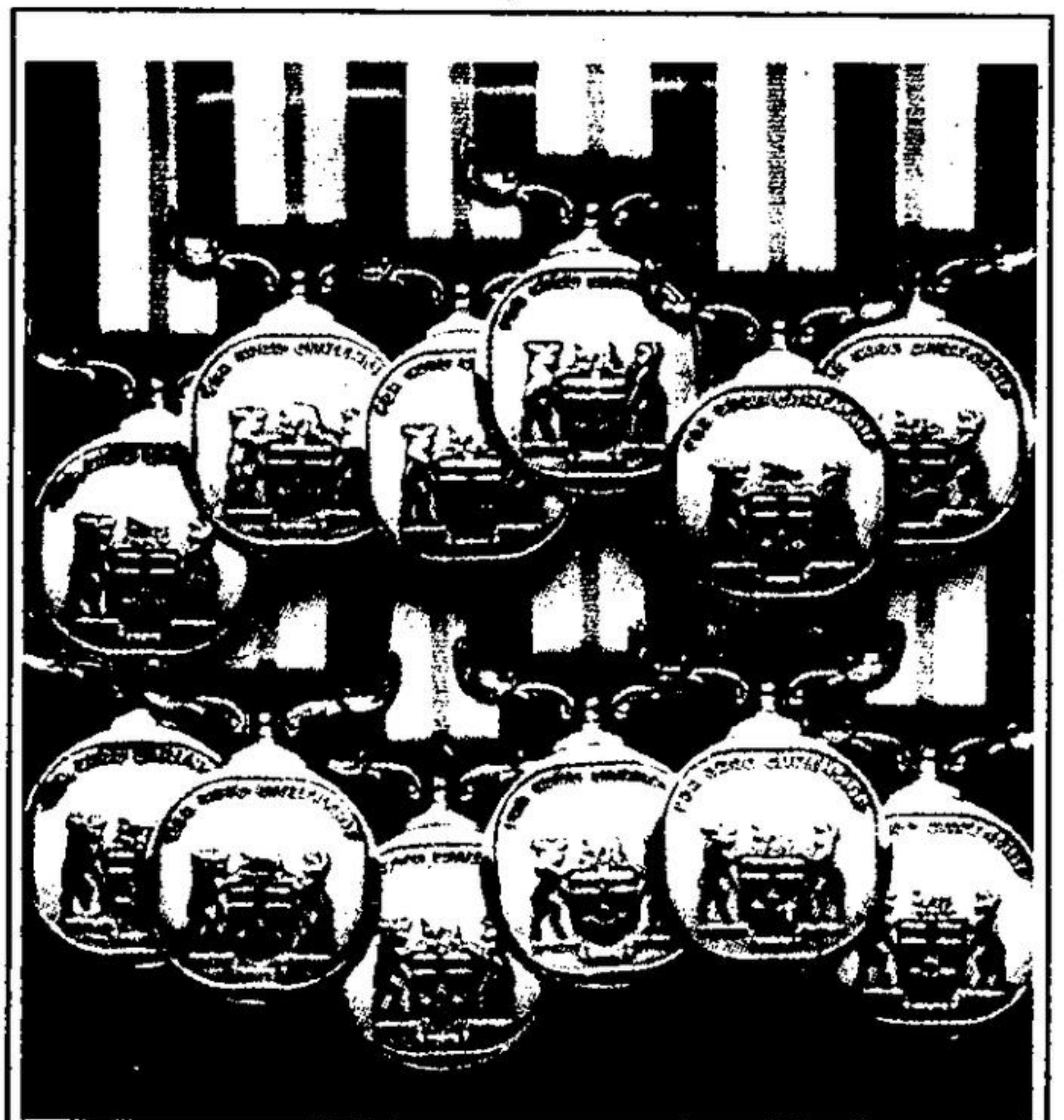
Mr. Rowe noted it is not inconceivable that the archives may move into its own building in the future.

Mr. Lewis said.

A good environment will also control temperature and humidity, he said. He added there are a number of features in the library that allow items to last longer than in most Georgetown homes.

The future for the archives looks very tight, Mr. Lewis said. The library itself will be getting cramped and within the next three to five years it will lose a large amount of public studying space, he predicted.

"I can only see it (the archive collections) growing," he said. "We are at one level a victim of the success we have had over the past few years," he said. "We have collected almost as much as we can



Do you know someone who deserves a medal?

If you know someone who has made Ontario a better place to live...through their selflessness, humanity and kindness...tell us.

An Advisory Council of Ontario citizens, whose honorary chairman is the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, The Honourable Lincoln M. Alexander, selects the recipients from nominations made by you each year.

We need your nominations by March 15, 1990. Nomination forms are available now by writing: The Ontario Honours and Awards Secretariat, Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs, 6th Floor, Mowat Block, 900 Bay Street, Toronto M7A 1C1 or from your M.P.P.'s constituency office.



The Ontario Medal for Good Citizenship

1 Sale! Reprint Special.

Order 1 reprint or enlargement at our REGULAR LOW PRICES and receive the 2nd print of the same negative for ONLY ONE CENT.

	First Print	Second Print
3 1/2 X 5.....	69¢	1¢
4 X 6.....	79¢	1¢
5 X 7.....	\$1.49	1¢
8 X 10.....	\$5.99	1¢
11 X 14.....	\$9.99	1¢
16 X 20.....	\$14.99	1¢

Offer expires March 3, 1990

Free Film!*

Free replacement roll of Sooter's Supreme Quality high resolution color film with every roll of color negative film processed at Sooter's.

* ISO 100, 15 or 24 EXPOSURES

Sooter's

211 GUELPH ST.
(NORTHVIEW CENTRE)
GEORGETOWN
873-4777

Offer Expires March 3, 1990

"Good service,
good coverage,
good price-
That's
State Farm
insurance."

ROBERT
TAIT
INSURANCE
AGENCY
LTD.



174 Guelph St., Georgetown
873-1833

Like a good neighbor,
State Farm is there.



State Farm Insurance Companies
Canadian Head Office: Scarborough, Ontario