

New camera to highlight proposed Heritage Centre

By **ROB KELLY**
Special to the Independent/Free Press

The proposed new regional museum in rural Milton certainly won't be the largest in the land, but it will have one thing that will be the biggest of its kind on the continent.

It will be a camera obscura. At Halton Region's administration and finance committee meeting recently, architect Nelson Wong and exhibits coordinator Scott Thornley described the device, a kind of periscope-type projection unit.

At the top of a 60-foot tower would be a rotating mirror assembly reflecting the images of the surrounding landscape down onto a 10-foot lens.

Visitors to the proposed Halton Heritage Centre would enter a darkened room and see the outside images, slowly changing as the mirror rotates, in the lens.

The 10-foot lens would make Halton's the largest camera obscura in North America. There is a similar device in San Francisco, Thornley said, but its lens is only four feet wide.

Thornley was certain of the exhibit's drawing power. "People will travel from everywhere to see a camera obscura," he told the committee. "There are none around."

While money is in short supply, enthusiasm for the museum is not, at least among its designers and curators.

Halton's heritage director, Paul

Attack, led the three-man contingent offering an update on plans for the \$6,675,000 facility. The proposed museum is to be located next door to the new regional landfill on Highway 25 south of urban Milton.

The museum is currently planned as a 24,500 square foot structure that will house exhibitions of the more than 35,000 artifacts in Halton's possession. As well, Halton expects to get a "quite significant" number of new artifacts, Attack said.

Currently the regional museum is operated out of an older barn-like structure within the Kelso Conservation Area. It is regarded as a compromise solution at best, given the lack of proper environmental controls to preserve the col-

lection and limited fire prevention equipment.

While a plan to build a new museum has been in place since 1988, the funding has not, and it still isn't certain when the Halton Heritage Centre will become a reality.

Oakville councillor Keith Bird voiced a sentiment many other politicians have expressed in the past. "This is very nice, it's on everybody's wish list. But to sell a \$7 million museum site - if the economy does not turn around, this thing is going to be extended out beyond the term of this council (1994)."

Given the current state of the economy and pressures to flatten tax increases, "this project will be

extremely difficult for us to implement," warned regional finance director Joe Rinaldo. "We will look at it. We will try it."

Wong said that at an estimated cost of \$140 per square foot, the structure "is in the mid range of Canadian museums. I believe to go lower than that would be unrealistic. Museums are expensive buildings."

Halton's planning director, Rash Mohammed, said the project has already been scaled back due to financial pressures. The archive storage area has been reduced due to lack of funds, he noted.

Thornley said the museum will emphasize the environment and its relationship to Halton's people throughout time.

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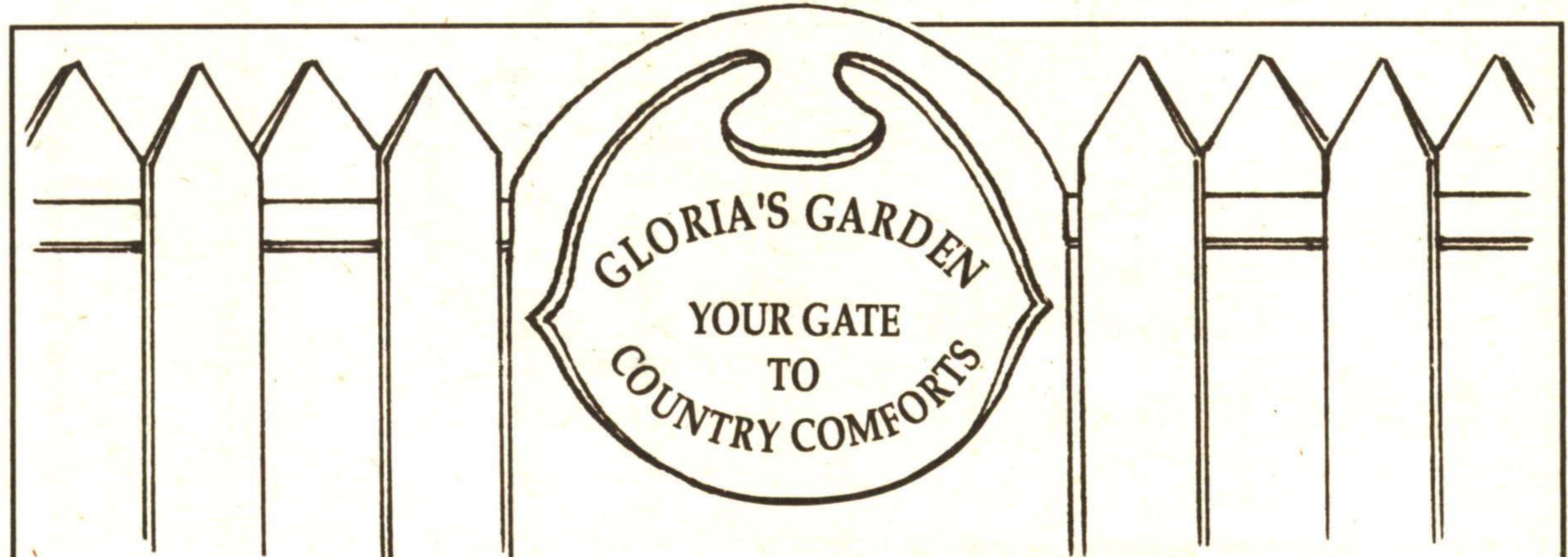
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