

GRAPE VINE

In honour of the biggest social event of the year, we thought we would devote this week's Grapevine to the Acton Fair.

Freedom for fowl

Two teens in a boat came to the rescue of a duck that became entangled in some fishing line on Saturday at Fairy Lake. The duck could barely swim when the teens rowed out to it. Using St. John Ambulance scissors the teens managed to cut most of the line away and the duck flew off without looking back.

Thugs spoil fair for boy

The St. John crew was busy over the weekend treating everything from stings to broken bones and a near-drowning case of hypothermia.

An 8-year-old Acton boy nearly drowned after thugs threw his money pouch into Fairy Lake and made him go in after it. The boy managed to retrieve his money once but then the older youths threw it in again. The boy was pulled from the lake and treated for hypothermia by the St. John Ambulance crew.

Actonites give generously

Ecstatic FoodShare officials report local Scouts helped collect \$309 in donations from Fall Fair parade watchers on Saturday. FoodShare officials also report that 541 pounds of food has been donated since the Tanner ran a story that the food bank shelves were bare.

Grass skirts and south seas

Acton seniors did a brisk business

at the Fair, selling over 350 tickets for their draw to raise money for a new seniors centre. Councillor Gerald Rennie donned a grass skirt and danced the hula with the best of them to help sell the tickets. First prize is a trip to Hawaii. Tickets will be on sale until the draw, New Year's Eve at Acton's town hall.

Ag. Ed. a big hit

More than 1,600 students from Halton and Mississauga got a glimpse of farm life during the fifth Education Day on Friday. Nursery school to Grade 8 students from schools in Acton, Georgetown, Burlington, Oakville and Mississauga helped shear sheep, wove straw hats and watched a blacksmith shoe a horse. The Fair offered free admission to any students who wanted to take part.

Fair Facts

The Acton Fall Fair as we now know it came into being in 1913 when local citizens decided the town needed its own annual event. From 1846, until that time, the fair rotated every two years between Acton and Georgetown. In 1908 the entrance fee was 25 cents for adults and 10 cents for children. In 1914 a government grant of \$300 was received and the new hall opened with 200 exhibits. In 1921 Fair organizers collected \$91 in rain insurance and in 1923 they ran a \$1.20 deficit and decided to raise the admission fee to 35 cents.

In 1953 the grandstand was rebuilt and in 1963, for the 50th anniversary, the Miss Acton contest began. In 1974 the Fair was extended to three days and organizers are already looking to next year and the year 2013 when the Acton Fall Fair will celebrate its 100th anniversary.



Cathy Gerrow (left), chairperson of the Acton Cancer Society shows off one of the outfits that will be modelled at the society's fashion show to be held on Tuesday, Sept. 29. Cheryl Donoghue of Elizabeth's Fashions is providing both the clothes and the models. (Frances Niblock photo)

Acton's original thespians were actors with a mission

It's a night back in the thirties. The venue is old St. Alban's Parish Hall. On stage before an audience of parents and other interested adults is a dance group performing a Dutch clog. Our costumes are improvised Dutch and we are sporting paper bags tied around the ankles as clogs. The music reaches crescendo and we kick vigorously. One over-zealous prancer sends her paper bags flying into the front row of the audience. Instead of continuing her routine she collapses, laughing tearfully in the centre of the stage while her unnerved colleagues stare daggers. A quick-witted colleague draws the creaky curtains and the dance is aborted amid roars of laughter from the audience.

The scene was typical of A.Y.P.A. programmes, the production of which filled our evening hours, so that we were too busy to get into mischief, had we been so inclined. The initials stood for Anglican Young People's Association, a thriving organization in the depression years of no TV, no Y.M.C.A. The other local churches sponsored similar groups, differing from the Anglicans only in the last name of the title. They were Societies, as Y.B.S.—Young Baptist Society.

Methodist and Presbyterian young people surpassed the Anglicans musically, but we excelled in the dramatic field (or thought we did) which amounted to the same thing. Nothing compares with the happy self-confidence and conceit of youth.

At its peak, our A.Y.P.A. was so large that we divided into groups to present alternative productions, an arrangement that caused keen competition and bitter feuding. Religious warfare, while stopping short of carnage, can be savage. The Anglican groups plotted, argued and performed as if their lives were on the line.

However, when we hosted other church societies, we Anglicans closed ranks to uphold the honour of our organization. How we used to envy the Methodists their exceptional musical talents headlined by the Mason orchestra. We did have

two choir soloists, ladies who loathed each other and competed for the limelight at Easter and Christmas. Woe to the Rector who featured one singer more frequently than the other.

Other soloists graduated to the A.Y.P.A., making it known that their talents were available. The drawback was that their repertoires were too limited. One artist favoured two songs: The Old Rugged Cross and Danny Boy. Her adversary concentrated on The Old Rugged Cross, which she warbled with fervour and conviction, adding variations that the composer surely never intended. It was a measure of our self-control (being teenagers with a low giggling point) that we usually managed to sit through a rendition of The Old Rugged Cross without disgracing ourselves.

One night, before a combined church society audience our soloist, fortunately on the last programme, outdid herself. She mangled the Cross as it had never been shattered before, until there were only splinters left to cling to.

Our gaggle of hellions, seated in a row near the door oozed out, one by one, to seek sanctuary in the kitchen. There beside the old wood stove, we capitulated to the kind of weak, tearful mirth that is the gift (or curse) of youth. We were propped against the woodbox making utter fools of ourselves, when the door opened. In walked our rector, very pink of countenance and with tears in his eyes. Without a word of query or explanation, he collapsed with the sobbing group among the woodbox. That night, the closing National Anthem verged on the hysterical.

Sometimes, in our search for dramatic material, our group overreached itself. As for example, when we chose a moody, short play starring a mournful, fated mother waiting in the kitchen for her sailor

son. The sound effects were gripping; thunder and wind from the back stage. The mother (me) dressed in her dowdy weeds, was all set to go on stage but her errant son was missing. Just in the nick, the wanderer crawled through a side window, distributing generous fumes of alcohol.

Apprehensive, but hoping for the best, his poor mother took her place in the kitchen chair. Fortunately, son had little to say as he knelt at my feet. Somehow we finished our emotional act but not a second too soon. Backstage, my son, a picture of suffering, staggered to the side window and brought up his boots. That was one unnerving night.

Thanks to our A.Y.P.A. training, we young thespians turned our talents to three-act plays that we presented in the Old Town Hall. We finally went on the road with our productions, travelling to church destinations in Rockwood and Milton. We thought we were wonderful but our successes, such as they were, were owed to the late Bertha Buchanan who, as Miss Nephew, had taught us in Lower High School. I often thought she deserved many medals for her patience and forbearance.

The proceeds from our plays went into the church coffers, it being depression years when St. Alban's was struggling to make ends meet. If we thought about it, we were glad to lend a helping hand.

What really counted was the fun and excitement of our entertainment activities. Thanks to the A.Y.P.A., few of us developed complexes during our teen and early 20 years. We were too busy.

Nowadays, when I hear tender-hearted citizens lamenting that there is nothing for kids to do in Acton, I find it easy to restrain wrenching sobs of pity. Different times, different conditions — but we made our own fun. Lucky us!

PETUNIA PATCH

With Esther Taylor



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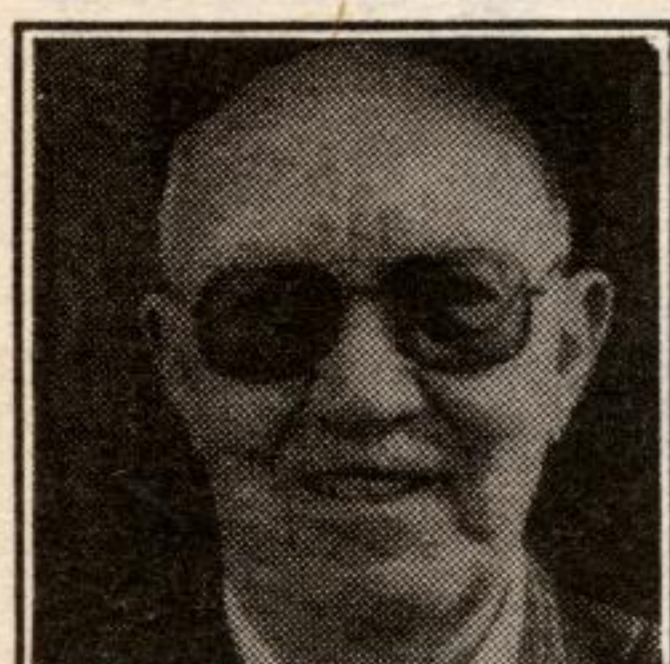


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