

## EDITORIAL

With Hartley Coles



# Drill shed historic

Discussions between the Acton Agricultural Society and Halton Hills over future plans for the old Prospect Park arena seem to be at odds with a new arena looming in 1997. There is at least an agreement that the Fall Fair should remain in the park but the location of a proposed new exhibition building is going to be a problem for the Town if it is built on the present arena site.

Paul Stover, acting Director of Recreation and Parks, says the Agricultural Society's proposal for a permanent new building would have to conform to a larger master plan of parks if it is to get approval. The master parks plan would make Prospect Park less sports-oriented and would entail moving sports fields to a different location.

Mr. Stover questions the advisability of rebuilding on the old arena site when it is demolished because it would block a splendid view of the lake as well as affecting the future of the old "poultry barn." When the arena was built in the '20s, the barn, which is really the old drill shed, was moved to its present site from the arena location. The view of the lake then was more like looking at Dismal Swamp because bullrushes, bullfrogs, algae and tree stumps were the prominent features.

Now the area has been developed into Rotary Park, shoreline parkland, the homes of Lakeview, a fine senior citizens' residence and a lake that has been dredged, a swamp virtually eliminated. It presents a picturesque panorama that is partly blocked by the arena and the old drill shed. So, Mr. Stover has a point, but not an insurmountable one.

The Agricultural Society wants to retain the features that have made the Acton Fall Fair one of the best in the province. The fact that the arena has always been used for exhibition purposes, and its location, have something to do with the Fair's success. If the present foyer of the arena is retained and a new building erected on the identical site it could include a window wall on the north side to capture the charm of three seasons. However, the old drill shed is another matter.

Believe it or not, that unpretentious old barn-like building is part of our military and social heritage. Almost 130 years old, it has already been moved twice from its original site at the corner of Bower Avenue and Elgin Street. According to *Acton's Early Days*, the drill shed was built about 1867, the year of Confederation, by the government for Company No. 6 of the Halton Volunteers, a militia unit. Constructed almost entirely of pine, nearly all clear, it was 60x100 feet, larger than any other such structure in the area then. "It showed some of the finest framing ever done in these parts," the book maintains.

Zoning laws were not a part of life in those pioneer days so it was built only a few feet away from a little frame Baptist Church which stood midway on Elgin Street between Bower and Mill. Although it cut off most of the light on the north side of the church, the tolerant Baptist congregation never objected. But, scolds *Acton's Early Days*, "it did become rather embarrassing to the services there at times" — especially ... when the militia drilled or there was a dance when the "plow boys were hoeing it down with their long boots on." It is assumed from the book's account that salty language was not part of the irritation.

The conditions for the church worsened when the original dirt floor was replaced by a wooden one. Now there were military band concerts, political meetings, and entertainments such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the drill shed as well as the added noise from big military boots on wood. The place was packed for one performance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on the Queen's Birthday when the dignified doctor of divinity, Rev. T. Albert Moore, played the part of Uncle Tom.

Despite its central location, when Prospect Park was bought an Alex Secord convinced authorities the drill shed would be better located in the park, which would provide a convenient outside parade ground. So it was moved to where the arena sits now. Mr. Secord, meanwhile built a fine brick residence on the lot at the corner of Bower and Elgin formerly occupied by the drill shed, suggesting his enthusiasm for the move might have been motivated by more than foresight. Meanwhile, when the present arena was built, the drill shed was moved to its present site.

Unpretentious as it is, the drill shed has nevertheless harbored a large slice of Acton's history. If it could only talk, think of the stories it could tell. Reclad in siding, it's good now only for chickens and storage. It would probably never fit into anyone's master plan. Phantoms of the past, marching feet, the faint sound of a military band or stentorian tones of a drill sergeant permeate its pine interior along with cobwebs, snow fence and the musty air of age.

If, along with the arena, it succumbs to the wrecker's ball it will take many memories with it. However, I guess if the Montreal Forum with its ghosts of hockey legends can be demolished with impunity there's not much hope for these two obsolete buildings.

Perhaps it would be in order for the Town to erect a plaque on the site, encompassing both buildings, to mark the spot where so much of Acton's social, political and sports history took place.

## Same time last year ...

Property owner Vince Cavallo agrees to clean up the old Canadiana restaurant site on Queen Street ... John and Lori Bruner appeal to Town Council for help in getting a suitable driveway for their business/residential property ... Councillor Rick Bonnette spends \$2,597 in his successful bid for re-election to Ward 1.



## ACROSS THE FENCE

With Joanne Stevenson



# That dog-gone knee!

You might remember my sob story this past winter, when I suffered an injury to my knee. In an unfortunate turn of events, I fell while getting off a chair lift on the slopes at Blue Mountain and spent the better part of the winter recovering from the sprain.

I was diligent in my self-prescribed physio-therapy sessions. Each morning I would bend and stretch the knee until the stiffness would diminish. I worked with ankle weights to build up my strength again.

I'd like to tell you I lost 20 lb. in the process and now have the shape-liest gams in town, but that is not the case. I did, however, manage to get to the point where I could wake up pain-free and was looking forward to water-skiing on our upcoming vacation.

Until last week that is.

Those of you who know my dog will have no trouble picturing this scenario:

I was walking dear old Sam on the trail behind the high school. Sam

loves to run ahead, circle around through the bush, and come speeding out of nowhere from behind. I heard him coming and stepped to the side to let him pass. At the same time, he veered to the right to avoid me.

It was a collision worthy of Wile E. Coyote and the Roadrunner. I was temporarily airborne, then landed with a thud. And a snap. It was the snap that worried me.

I managed to limp home (with Muttley on a very tight leash) and spent the rest of the day with my leg on ice. Recovery has been much quicker than last time — the swelling went down in only a day and already I can climb stairs like a big girl!

My sister tells me I can now look forward to a life of knee problems. Once you've been injured you are more prone to re-injury, she says.

But, after eating three TV converters, two pairs of running shoes, a cowboy boot, several magazines and, yes, even the homework in just over a year, I'm thinking it's the dog problem that's chronic.

When I read of the times that were spent at Fairy Lake and the surrounding country, when I looked at pictures of people, especially those I know — there was even a picture of me when I was in Scouts — I was taken back to those days.

Jessie Coles and Urana McDonald are very familiar names to me. I came to the conclusion that this is a paper about Acton today and about Acton of yesterday. So Mary and I figured it would be nice to subscribe for the year.

Lots of luck with *The Acton Tanner*. We look forward to reading about our old home town.

Mary and Gordon Gibbins  
Lindsay, Ontario

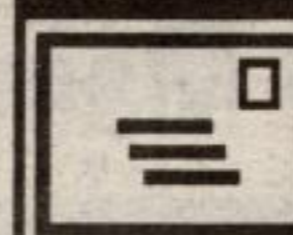
## Your LETTERS

### Acton old and new

To the Editor,

My sister and nieces recently came up from the Acton and Guelph areas and they brought three editions of *The Acton Tanner* with them for me to read. They were dated March 27, May 1 and June 26. What a pleasure to read of bygone days when, to me, Acton was Acton.

If you have comments on what you read and see in *The Acton Tanner*, send them to us:



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