

## EDITORIAL

With Hartley Coles



### Author ignored Acton

Mazo de la Roche's refusal to acknowledge the years she spent in Acton from 1905 to 1908 has several readers wondering what her real motives were, following last week's column. Was the fact her father was a publican here, her desire to remain a mysterious figure to her millions of readers, the *raison d'être*? Or was it her desire to avenge real and perceived slights from Acton gossip, as new biographer Daniel L. Bratton postulates?

Mr. Bratton's fascinating book, *Thirty-Two Short Views of Mazo de la Roche*, suggests she wrote her personal experiences into her novels, idealized but with truth behind them. In *Delight*, a novel acknowledged to be about Acton, the heroine, Delight Mainprize, is chastised, even humiliated by local women for following her instincts and thereby violating the social conventions of the age.

It's an interesting thesis which second-hand information from people who knew the Roches during their time here have passed on to this scribbler. Were Actonites less inclined to accept people who marched to a different drummer than perhaps the people of Bronte, whom de la Roche rhapsodized in her autobiography? Was Acton so different than in any small turn-of-the-century Ontario town?

Likely quite different than the port town of Bronte and its environs. Acton was, after all, an industrial village of about 1,000 to 1,200 people who mainly made their living making leather and its products such as gloves and harnesses. Add some mostly hard working, perhaps best described as small "c" conservative people, who worked and played long and hard, and the scope widens.

Hard liquor and all the social consequences that went with it was tolerated to some extent. "Decent" people did not patronize the four hotels and other bar rooms. They joined the Sons of Temperance, a society formed in Acton in 1852, which quickly became popular. They built a hall on Main Street about where the entrance to Lakeview subdivision is now, which was later moved to Church Street.

Total abstinence, says *Acton's Early Days*, was not generally in favor but the Sons of Temperance gained a lot of adherents by organizing much social activity. Their hall also quickly became a community centre for a variety of activities. It also became a fortress against the "liquor interests."

A person of Mazo de la Roche's temperament must have found the bonds of Puritanism in Acton confining, despite the moral imperatives which drove it. It wouldn't require much effort to defy the social conventions of the time, a literal thumbing of the nose at those who looked down their noses at the moral turpitude. Not much different today. Her place, as she saw it, would be more comfortable associating with those who congregated at the Beardmore home, where the social elite of Toronto came as visitors.

Like most small communities of the time, Acton also had its "elite," who lived in large homes on expansive grounds where the professionals and merchant princes of the time, congregated. Sometimes the homes were opened for the local populace depending on the liberal views of the owner. Typical were the Beardmores and their family home, Beverly House, at the corner of Church and Maria Streets. Well respected and owners of the largest tannery in the British Empire, the Beardmores and their home was the social centre of Acton. Visitors included such luminaries as the Governor General and the social elite of Toronto, visiting country "cousins." The family kept a large motorized launch on Fairy Lake for excursions around the big pond, as it was called.

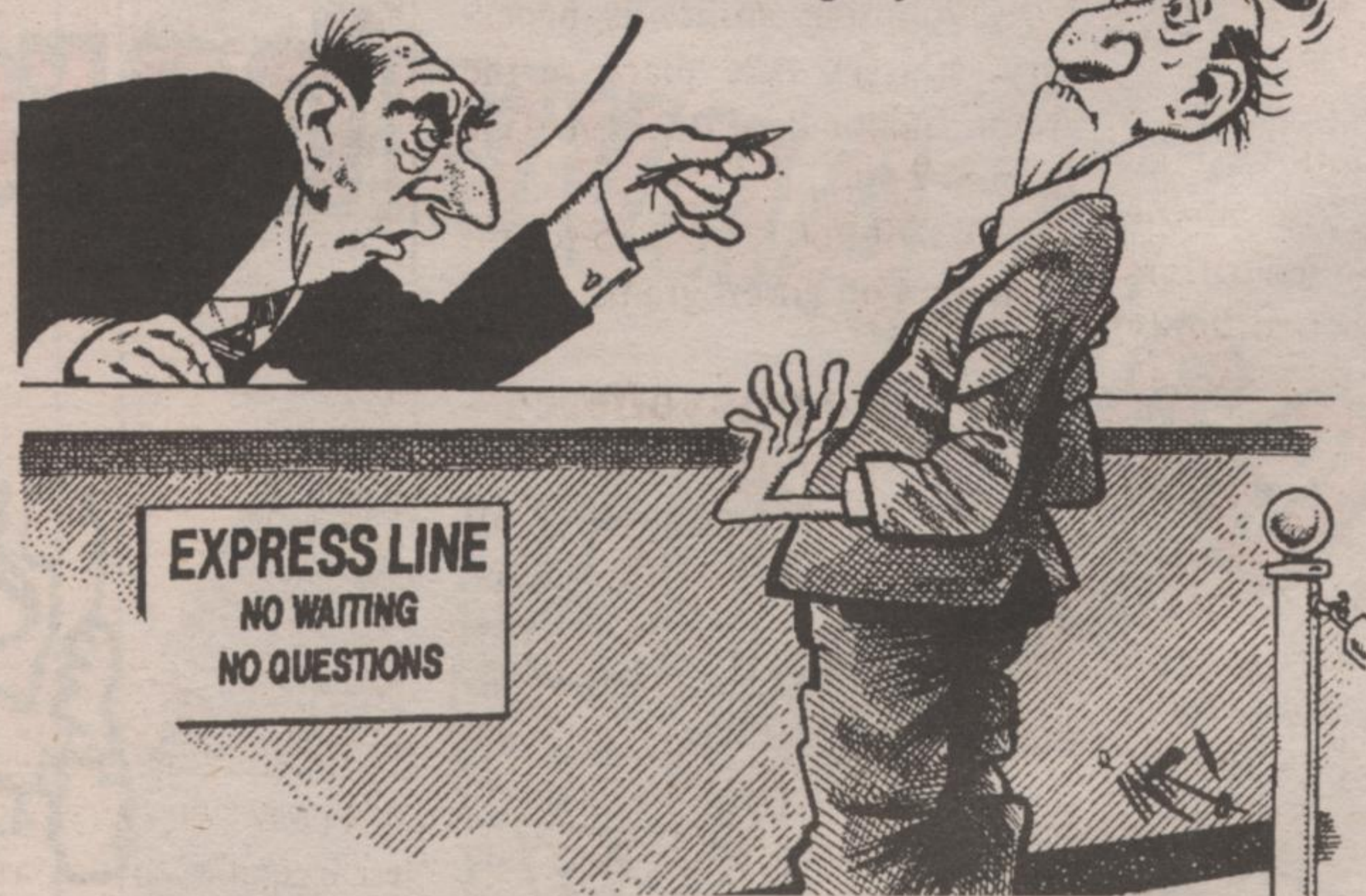
Mazo de la Roche's early pretensions to grandeur were inoculated with imaginative aristocratic French lineage. This was her world, not the rough and bawdy bar room, over which her father presided. It's ironic, too, that although born in Newmarket, she always insisted her birthplace was Toronto. There, too, is another Fairy Lake, beside which is a plaque noting the real place of birth. I wonder if she would be pleased?

### Same time last year ...

Acton Subway owners Gus and Maria Galimanas are awarded for having the cleanest store in southwestern Ontario for the third straight year ... Halton Flour Milling's expansion plans are approved by Town Council ... Fire inside an Acton High School washroom causes \$2,000 damage.

## WELFARE

YOU are in the wrong line...  
this one is only for convicted  
criminals awaiting deportation!



## Your LETTERS

### Hit-and-run driver called 'inhumane'

To the Editor,

My husband just called me at home to tell me he was in a car accident.

He was driving north on Hwy. 25 just near the Tim Horton's by the 401 when some very uncaring and inhumane person did a U-turn on the road, hitting my husband's van in the process. This caused his vehicle to spin and turn upside-down, where he was squished in.

Did this *thing* (I don't think he deserves to be called a person), stop to see if my husband was hurt? No!

As I write this letter, the jerk is

### Stop bashing U.S.

To the Editor,

I wonder if any other Canadian is as tired as I am of hearing the United States bashed? People love to go on about our "superior" medical care, political system, economy and culture. Do they really think these things through, or is criticism of the States just sour grapes?

When have we heard of an American dying because he couldn't get medical care? How often do we hear of an American coming to Canada for treatment? Americans know exactly how much their health care costs, per person, per year.

Here in Canada, where we claim the best health care system in the world, people often wait months for tests or surgery. Hospital care is almost passé. Health care workers and patients alike are disgruntled over the inadequacies of the system. The average Canadian has no idea of the costs; we only know that they are tremendous and that the system is broke. The ideology behind our system seems to be the dog-in-the-manger, socialist notion that if one person cannot afford the best, no one should have it. In the States, those who can afford the best get it, and those who cannot afford it get, at least, some kind of care.

American politics appears to provide fairer representation and more

probably eating his supper in a warm house, while my husband, lucky to be alive, is freezing outside waiting for the police.

The Christmas spirit people feel should be around all year, not just in December. Do people really have such little regard to another life that they could do something like this?

My husband is the best husband. He is a sweet and caring father and grandfather. There would have been a lot of sad people had this been fatal, although I am still saddened by this guy's total disregard for another life.

I'm sure if this letter is published the jerk who did this knows who he is and although I know he will never come forward, I believe that what goes around, comes around. That will be punishment enough.

Please, everyone, drive safely and carefully, and always look out for your fellow man.

Sandra Scherbinsky  
Cook Street

accountability than does our system. Each state has some autonomy in the enactment of its laws, which would make sense in a country as diverse as Canada. With America's two-party system, no party can claim a majority with less than 40 per cent of the vote, as frequently happens here. It is hard to imagine any country's politicians could be more dishonest or incompetent than ours, having viewed recent events!

Unemployment remains lower in the U.S. Americans doing so-called menial work go about with smiles on their faces, happy to have a job even while they wait to improve their lot. Many Canadians seem to believe they are above menial labour. They whine constantly for more pay, easier conditions, better benefits and job security.

Then there is culture. Are we really so superior in the way we live? Are we any more tolerant of race and religion? Are our athletes any more talented? How does our arts and entertainment compare? The last few Canadian films we watched at our house were about as exciting as a visit to the funeral parlour!

The U.S. has its problems, but they must be doing something right, given their high level of patriotism and morale. We are fortunate to have such good neighbours.

Eileen Hutcheson  
Knox Street

## THE ACTON Tanner

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