

Everyday Heroes

BY REID KENNEDY
NORTH HALTON COMPASS

As a gatekeeper, grass-cutter, gravedigger, Harold Dennis has contributed behind the scenes in the Campbellville area for over 40 years.

Harold and his younger brother Elmer were farm-raised on Ten Sideroad Nassagaweya which his parents had purchased in 1919. Charles and Annie (McPhail) Dennis passed away when Harold was barely in his teens and the two brothers were unable to keep the property.

On his own as a very young man, Harold began to work as a hired hand for area farmers in Nassagaweya. In 1947 Harold married Mae Stokes from the Chrisite area. The newlyweds moved to

the Hornby area where Harold continued to work as a farm labourer. Harold came from a Presbyterian background, but he joined the St. John's Anglican Church on Guelph Line after marrying Mae. The Stokes' are one of the earliest recorded families worshipping at St. John's. As a new member of this extensive clan, Harold also joined the Campbellville Orange Lodge. Many of the Stokes' had been active members in the lodge which first formed in 1865. Harold was secretary when the Orange Lodge closed in the early 1970's.

1957 was a landmark year for the Dennis'. Harold began working for the Milton Co-op where he remained until his retirement 32 years later. The

family - which now included son Bill and daughter Mary moved to the Currie house at 105 Main Street in Campbellville. They remained there until moving with their youngest daughter Kathy to a home on 4th Line and 3rd Line Nassagaweya. The new home was dear to Mae's heart as it was located on a lot severed from the Stokes home farm.

This was also the year that Harold first began managing St. John's cemetery after Big Jim Ferrier decided to retire from the job. Big Jim dug the graves at St. John's by hand and cut the cemetery's grass. He lived in a log cabin built in early 1800's on Guelph Line.

Anyone remembering Big Jim will agree he left little Harold some big shoes to fill. But Harold says gravedigging in the area had become automated after Charlie Mitchell of Campbellville purchased a backhoe for his excavating company. In addition to groundskeeping, Harold also sold and recorded the family plots.

When Harold experienced health problems a few years ago, the St. John's congregation bought Harold a riding mower. But he ultimately had to retire after a serious heart operation and other members of the congregation took over his duties. Since 1997, residents of Maplehurst prison have

maintained the grounds. Harold says the job was getting increasingly difficult because of his health and new regulations. However, with assistance from his grandsons, he still manages some cremation burials.

Unfortunately, the original plot map of the St. John's cemetery was lost years ago. Now, even after his "official" retirement, Harold remains on call to determine where to dig a grave in the cemetery's old section. He's been working with others from the church on developing a new plot map.

Harold also maintained the Old Campbellville Burying Grounds for many years. A cemetery committee made up of local residents has done a remarkable job - with Harold's help - maintaining the historical grounds.

Although Harold travels three times a week to Oakville for kidney dialysis, the treatment hasn't slowed him down much. Last year, Harold actively supervised the painting of the iron fence surrounding the Old Burying Grounds by son Bill and grandsons Raymond and Jason.

Now 74 years of age, Harold remembers far enough back when either the family or friends of the deceased were responsible for digging the grave and the pallbearers filled it in to complete the burial. He himself dug his parent's

graves in St. David's Presbyterian Church Cemetery.

An avid baseball fan, Harold and Jim McLaren were gatekeepers for many years on Sunday afternoons at the old Campbellville Ball Diamond. Together, they saw many of the village's great intermediate and junior hardball teams that played in an era when baseball was king on a Sunday afternoon in Campbellville. Harold still remembers the fun Jim and he had trying to get the player's wives to pay.

Today, Harold and Mae live in an apartment in Milton but remain in contact with many of their old friends and family that still reside in Campbellville. Last fall, the Dennis's celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary that many friends and relatives from the Campbellville area attended. Harold and Mae also served as Honourary Mayors of Campbellville in 1990.

Harold remains an avid walker and keen observer. A source close to the Compass informs us that he has kept a close eye on the recent renovation at the J. Scott Early Funeral Home in Milton, and he seems satisfied with that project's progress to date.

Which only goes to prove, special people that naturally look after things find it hard to stop, even when they're "retired".



HAROLD & MAE DENNIS - NOVEMBER 29, 1947



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Milton Council Notes by Cindy Lunau

It is the best of times. It is the worst of times. But it certainly makes for interesting times as Milton struggles with its ordinary affairs while dealing with what downloading means to this community.

Taxes:

The mill rate is gone. Instead, your taxes are based on a percentage of the Current Value Assessment of your property established by the Province. You should file an appeal before July 30 if you feel it is unfair. The phone number to call is 1-800-387-5909. Community Assessment Information Sessions are scheduled March 24 to 26, 1:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the Memorial Arena on Thompson Road in Milton.

Interim tax bills are out. What will be your final tax bill? Many factors are up in the air: tax policies from the Region, the new assessment base, Operating Budgets yet to be set by the Region and Town, the impact of the Who Does What downloading by the Province. Council has determined that there be a 0% tax increase, and is meeting this week with the Province looking for the revised numbers. The drama continues.

Capital budget

\$664,000 of a 3.9 million Capital Budget will be spent in Nassagaweya this year. In the Capital Budget approved March, Council directed the following work 'above the funding line'. Improvements to 25 Sideroad between Second Line Nassagaweya and the Nassagaweya Puslinch Townline; 20 Sideroad east of Fifth Line Nassagaweya, the bridge on Second Line Nassagaweya at Eden Mills border, a project shared with Puslinch Township. These projects are part of the long term road project to improve the rural road system, and it is particularly significant that these items survived in view of the many budget pressures. A final item is the resurfacing of the Nassagaweya tennis courts (a project shared with the Club.)

Council Size:

The size of Council is under review with a motion to downsize the Council of 10 (plus Mayor) to a Council of 6 in the next election. Will this streamline or hamper representation? Will it save money or lead to full-time politicians? Your thoughts are important and you are encouraged to attend the Open Council meeting on April 6.

Come share your views. It should be an interesting meeting.

Stonegate:

The Stonegate subdivision on Fifth Line Nassagaweya has been approved by the OMB in a greatly modified form. Challenged by the Nassagaweya Residents Association, the developers agreed on a greatly modified plan. The abridged plan allows for five new homes (opposed to 15) with building only in prescribed areas away from the road and wetlands, no street lighting, gravel driveways, and a public trail through the property. The time and effort by this devoted citizen group was incredible, and they deserve our heartfelt thanks for their struggle to preserve our rural community.

Herb Farm

A Temporary Use By-Law application by Cornelia Breisser operating a herb packaging company from her home on 20 Sideroad and Second Line Nassagaweya has been denied. Staff will work with them in an effort to find an industrial location more appropriate for the operation.

Agendas

The public is always welcome at any meeting. If you have a concern, it is best to speak first to the Committee. All agendas are posted the Friday previous at the following locations: Clover Farms in Haltonville, Campbellville Depot and the Post Office in Campbellville, Brookville Variety Store, outside of Town Hall, and the Milton Public Library.

Your questions, comments, concerns are important. Please call us.

Lieven Gevaert: (519) 856-4529, Barry Lee: (519) 824-0679 or (519) 853-5790, Cindy Lunau (519) 853-3772.