

EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

Some nostalgia...

After an absence of several months, the Tanner is back in circulation. It's in every home now with larger circulation, larger pages and a larger news and advertising package. Like its predecessor, The New Tanner is dedicated to local news. It is also designed so local advertisers can direct their message to their market area and beyond.

So we're here again to comment on local subjects and any which might affect us. That's a wide canvass to explore but it is one which can be both interesting and exciting. Others will fill this place as well as this writer to add new perspectives on news and events.

It's a coincidence, perhaps, but The New Tanner is arriving simultaneously with the official opening of the spanking new Acton Arena and Community Centre. It's a new asset for the community of Acton and all Halton Hills, one which has been awaited for well over a decade.

For those of us who grew up skating and playing hockey in the old ice palace in Prospect Park, it's a time of nostalgia as well as a celebration. There's still a few around who remember the original rink of wood and tin, its dirt floor and natural ice which depended on large part of the vagaries of the weather.

Dressing rooms with pot-bellied stoves stoked by hardwood chunks housed hockey clubs of all ages. Saturday night skaters tied their laces beside the red hot fires before venturing onto sparkling ice created by a hose, barrels of water pulled by "rink rats" who also cleared the snow with huge scrapers designed for those rinks. No Zambonis then.

Before canned music from loudspeakers, Acton Citizens' Band played waltzes and marches from their bandstand perched over the ice for skaters of all ages. Some nights you had to keep moving to keep warm. Novice skaters leaned on the boards for support. Couples gracefully, arm in arm or hand in hand, matched strides to the music. Boys darted in and out of the procession, showing dazzling speed, stopping in a shower of ice chips. A few erstwhile figure skaters, art figures at centre ice, watching out of eye corners to see if admiring glances came their way.

It was Saturday night, bath night, never the loneliest night of the week for the young and young at heart.

If skating wasn't your bage then maybe the hockey games were. There was nothing to match the sheer excitement as the Acton Tanners played home games. Almost the whole town showed up. Drama on the ice, hot chocolate and coffee and hot dogs between periods, the band keeping spirits up with rousing marches such as Colonel Bogey, Washington Post, El Capitan, John Peel and others of their ilk.

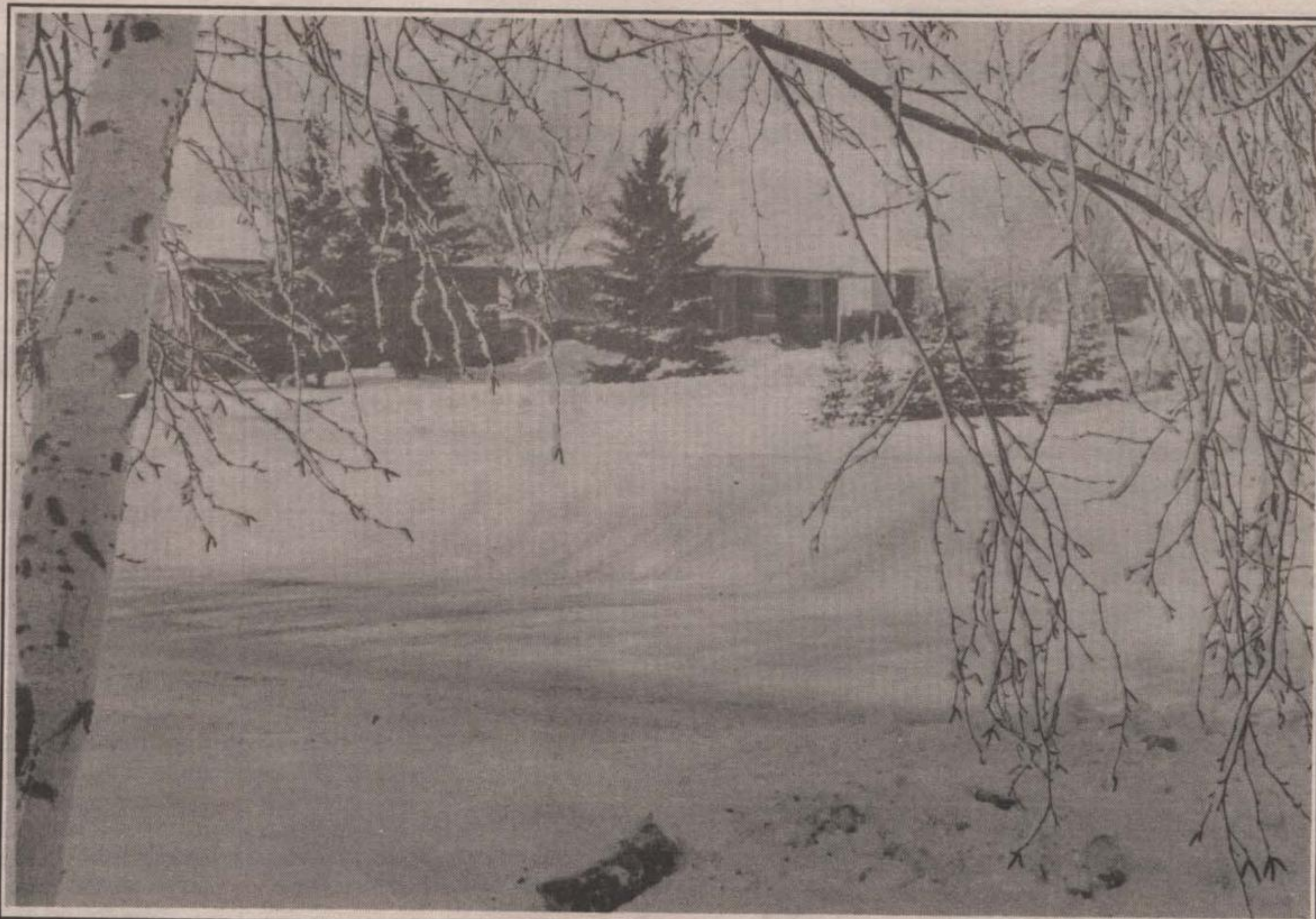
That old arena has been home of champions in hockey, lacrosse, figure skaters and even horse jumping on a dirt floor at fall fair time. It has been home to dances, reunions, curling, stage shows, fall fairs, gun shows, cat shows, ice carnivals, etc., etc., over its 70 year span.

The original building built in 1929, replaced the old outdoor rink which was situated between Maria and Frederick Street, visible from the Maria St. bridge over the Beardmore railway spur line. The first Acton entry into the OHA Intermediate hockey came with the new arena in 1929-30, heralding a new era of group champions and culminating in an Ontario Championship in 1938-39.

World War II arrived and a wartime warehousing shortage closed the arena for sports. The Wool Combing Corp. and Canadian Wool, two essential war industries, located in the Beardmore plant at the foot of Frederick St., stored huge bales of wool in the arena until hostilities ceased. Hockey resumed as the number one winter sport in 1945 and a few years later the old ice palace underwent a face-lift with a new front and the installation of artificial ice.

But it's showing its age again. A new arena proposal in the 1980s was debated for years. It was finally approved in 1996 and that gleaming new \$5.6 million building on Highway 7 East is the result.

It's yours. Enjoy it.



CHILL OUT: Frosty mornings and ice storms have created Christmas card scenes in Acton over the last few days. The snow and ice shimmers in the snow like a huge crystal palace.

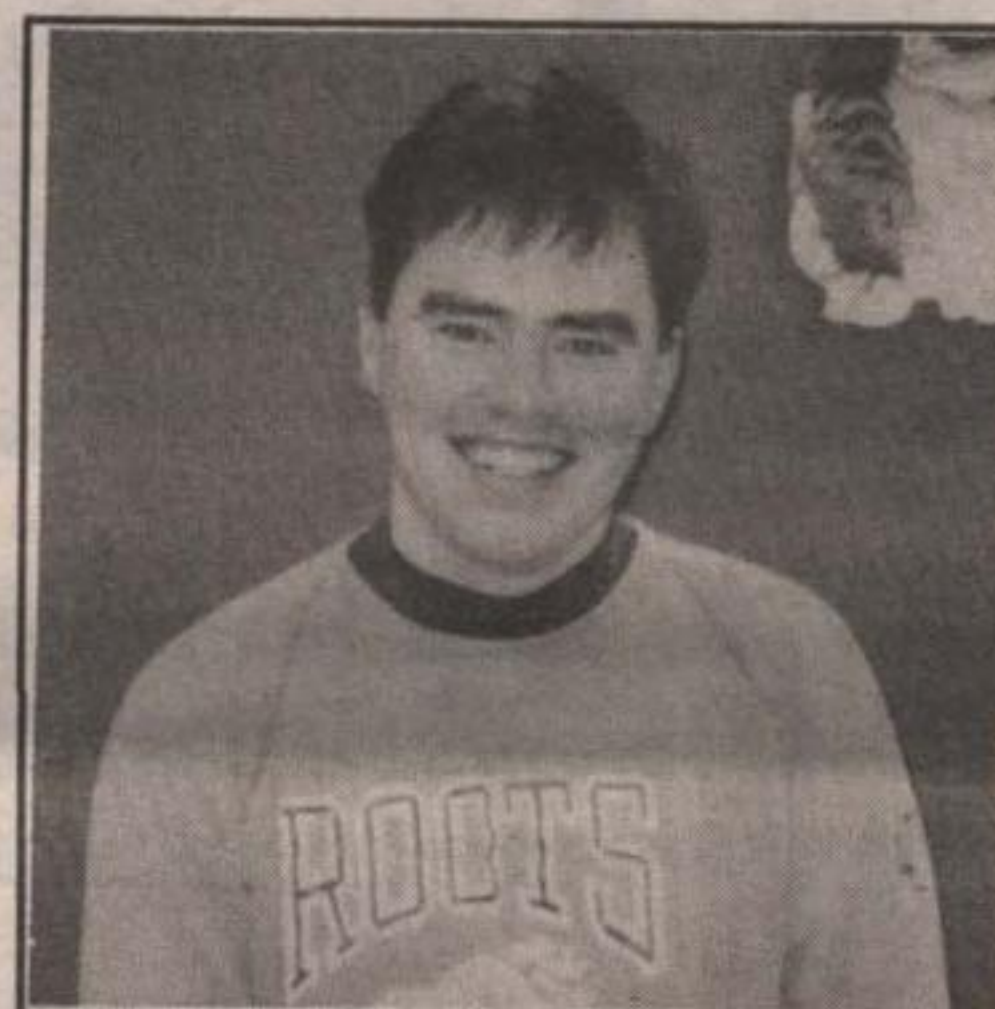
This is a wonderful story

To begin, I'll go back a bit. Let's turn back the calendar to March of last year. To set straight the record; to offer an explanation to those who haven't heard the real story about the demise of The Tanner.

We'd made it through February, often the leanest of months in the newspaper business. In fact, not only did we make it through, but it was our best month ever, in terms of revenue and profit. Things looked good on paper, and the paper, well, that looked pretty good.

Yet, I wasn't getting a lot of sleep those nights. What kept me awake was the knowledge that, no matter your profitability or popularity, negative cash flow can spell the end of any small business. And we were being squeezed - stuck in the grip of a cash flow crunch.

For a few months our receivables had been hovering around \$90,000, but it seemed that the harder we tried to collect, the more frustrated we became. We reminded, we pleaded, we even threatened; I spend more than a few days in a Milton court room, chasing money from a delin-



PAUL NOLAN

quent advertiser. We were losing ground.

March 14, 1997 was Black Friday. We had to pay out some \$15,000, in payroll, printing and RevCan remittances. And the bank was pretty bare. We geared up for one last round of collection calls, but I think we finally gave up when one gentleman, who has since left town, and who had taken out a full-page ad the month before) told us he had no real intention of ever paying his

bill.

Admittedly this was just a straw. But it seemed to break our back. By Tuesday afternoon the front door was locked.

I know how much Actonites have missed their Tanner. I've missed it too. So when Ted Tyler told me last fall that he and Hartley Coles wanted to reestablish a community newspaper, I was pleased. Soon after our first meeting, I transferred the publishing rights to Ted and the Tanner officially changed stewardship.

Much of the old team has been reassembled and the Tanner once again will arrive each week on the doorsteps of Acton homes. This is a wonderful story.

To be honest, I don't know what role, if any, I might fill here. I am now working at a magazine in the city, and besides, it's time for someone else to shape this tab with their ideas and idioms. But I'll be looking forward to seeing the Tanner each Thursday, just as you will.

Now there's a role I will surely fill every week. The role of the reader. This should be fun!

If you see a groundhog Monday

Monday, believe it or not, is February 2, commonly known as Groundhog Day.

According to legend, it's the day hibernating groundhogs emerge from underground burrows to forecast the weather for the next six weeks.

If so, the legend goes, the sleepy creature sees its shadow he'll dive back into the hole and we can expect six more weeks of winter. On the other hand, if the groundhog fails to see its shadow then we'll experi-

ence six weeks of beautifully sunny and mild weather, breaking up the winter's ferocious bite. Herr Groundhog will not go back into his long sleep while there's festivities above ground.

In case you think this is the stuff legends, remember there are now professional groundhogs. One - Punxutawney Pete - makes his home in Pennsylvania where the story originates.

His Canadian counterpart - Warton Willie - of course, sleeps up

in the Bruce Peninsula until it's time for his annual appearance for the barrage of kleig lights and clicking cameras. A few imitations have emerged in the last few years, one an Albino, all dressed in white fur, but their prognostications have never gained popular support.

Indeed, some have even challenged the myth as absurd, a relic of our ancestral imagination. For instance, an Acton student at the University of Guelph, was given a grant to study the habits of the groundhog.

THE NEW Tanner

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Distributed to every home
in Acton and area as well as
adjoining communities.

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