

EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

A tragedy unveiled

People here were shocked last Friday when a prominent article in *The Toronto Star* about a Peel Court case involved an Acton couple accused of abusing a child over a lengthy period of time in 1995. The sordid tale resulted in a 21 month prison sentence to the child's father and three years probation to the mother for failing to provide the necessities of life to his oldest child.

People were not only shocked that it could happen right in our midst but that it could go unnoticed until a nurse in Georgetown hospital recognized there was something seriously wrong with the child. The offence was compounded by the fact that childcare workers had visited the family 48 times and had not decided something was wrong. Why was nothing done? Outraged citizens here enquired.

According to *The Star*, although the child is now 5-years-old she has never been toilet trained, has a vocabulary fewer than five words and during a year-long period in her third year never gained a pound.

"This offence occurred day by excruciating day for one full year or more," Mr. Justice Ken Langdon of the Ontario Court, general division, is quoted as saying as he sentenced the father to jail. Langdon made it clear the sentence was the maximum he could give under the law but was frustrated the penalty would not have been harsher.

The child's standard of care, mainly milk and little affection, has resulted in four operations, two of them life-threatening, at Sick Children's Hospital where part of her bowel and spleen were removed. The judge was baffled that Halton Children's Aid Society workers had found nothing seriously wrong when only a casual observation by the Georgetown hospital nurse could see the child was malnourished, could hardly walk, was pale and lethargic, and had matted hair.

Obviously the case raised a lot of questions for all of us. Was no one outside the family aware something was seriously wrong with the child, that she was starving, not only for food by affection? Especially childcare workers who visited the family so many times.

Clearly, the findings of the court require an extensive look at the involvement of child-care workers at Halton Children's Aid in this case, as Judge Langdon says, and if there are others of similar vein.

We can't let this happen again.

Keep pets leashed

What do you do when old Bowser runs off without his leash and deposits some poop in someone else's yard or along a sidewalk or road? You pick it up, of course, using a pooper scooper or any other instrument that does the job.

Why? Not only because someone is liable to step in it, or because it creates an unsightly mess, but because dog poop is also a breeding ground for disease.

Once a pet is outside the boundaries of its own property it should be on a leash or so obedient it walks to heel with no inclination to roam. If it's on a leash and it poops, it's the owner's obligation to clean it up.

If you're walking the dog in a town park the bylaw says it must be on a leash. It is not only for its protection but to make sure it doesn't bother another pet or person.

We've been fortunate here. There have been no serious dog bites inflicted by breeds known for vicious attacks on children. However, if precautions aren't taken it could happen here.

Please curb your pet's inclination to roam. Most people do but there are always the few who don't seem to realize they are responsible for their pet's behaviour away from home.

A legacy of love

Most people want to leave their children wealth: I would like to leave mine a legacy of love. To know they have been surrounded by love since infancy and that no matter what they did or what they are my love for them will never change. Discipline them, of course, but let them know that no matter how much you may disapprove of what they have done, your love is still there underneath. Children are very sensitive and we should try not to say cruel things to them or criticize them in the presence of others. It is not easy to do but we should all make the effort. Love is contagious and if they see love in their homes they will automatically begin to show love to their playmates in childhood and their associates as the years go on. Give your children love and when they are grown and away from you, they will always be with you in their hearts. A legacy of love is the greatest thing you can leave your children and they, in turn, we hope, will leave the same to theirs.

Granny

Granny is Marion Jean Patterson who published a series called *Meditations from an Old Rocking Chair*. She is the mother of Betty Farr of Leathertown Lumber.



CRYING OVER SPILLED BEER? A.T. Brown, Acton's versatile druggist and photographer, took this photo of barrels of beer being smashed during the strong temperance movement in the early part of this century. It has long been rumoured the men who watched this performance in front of the town hall on Willow Street were perturbed by the waste. Others, no doubt, heartily approved as 110 gallons of beer went down the drain, beer which had been seized in a raid on the Dominion Hotel in 1911. See story below.

Policing in the past

Illicit liquor sales brought big profits but big fines, too

By SGT. BOB ANDREWS
Halton Region Police

The years between 1884 and the mid 1920's had very little in the nature of serious crime occurring in Acton. The only thing that seemed on the rise was the population. One of the reasons behind this apparent condition of peace and tranquillity going on in the village was possibly due to the "Scott Act" that came into force in May of 1882. During this period, the village was dry. Illegal intoxicants were banned from the community except for medicinal purposes. Any infractions of the law were strictly enforced, resulting in substantial fines. Many people were outspoken about the merits of the Scott Act, except for maybe the innkeepers. Consequently, temperance halls sprang up in every community and Acton was no exception.

Not everyone was a supporter of temperance however. Clandestine manufacturing of the evil spirits was forced underground. No matter how hard the community tried to suppress liquors it became evident that all attempts were futile and the illicit substance could be had at a price.

There were those in the village that did not hold to the same convictions as that of the Province and felt a disobedience of the law was their only recourse. One such character was A. J. Lehman, the owner of the Dominion Hotel. Mr. Lehman was once a resident of Guelph and moved to the village in order to seek his fortune in the tavern business. Along with his two sons Austin and Norman they ran an establishment that displayed blatant disrespect for the law and the citizens of the village who chose to cherish it.

Lehman certainly was no novice to the innkeeping industry and his ability to make a buck at any cost became a priority. He certainly would

not let the law stand in his way when it came to accumulating personal finance and he utilized his creativity to achieve his goal. In order to escape any legal responsibility, however, Lehman would lessee his bar out to individuals, usually employees. Should the law intervene in any way, the poor sap holding the lessee would take the fall for the offence.

In May 1911, a raid was conducted on the Dominion Hotel by Provincial Inspector Ayeard and three provincial constables. The raid was a result of two months of surveillance conducted on the Hotel. Six charges were laid against William Lawson who just happened to be the lessee of the bar at the time. He was charged with one count of keeping intoxicating liquors and five counts of selling intoxicating liquors. Convictions were registered on all counts by the two Justices of the Peace, H. P. Moore of Acton and H. W. Kennedy of Georgetown who heard the case. Lawson was fined a total of \$520 plus court costs or 18

months in jail at hard labour. Unfortunately Lawson was not present during his trial. Apparently after conferring with his counsel the night before, Lawson got a bad case of cold feet and fled the village on the morning train. His destination was believed to be Cheyenne, Wyoming, however, should he wish to return to Canada at any time, an arrest warrant would be waiting for him.

Present during the trial was Lehman, not as a spectator or witness but also an accused by selling intoxicating liquor on two occasions to these same provincial constables. It appeared that greed got the better of him and he could not rely on poor old Mr. Lawson when there was money to be made. The courts treated this case as a first offence but fined him the maximum penalty of \$200.

This was not the only Lehman and Lawson on trial that day. Austin and Norman, Lehman's two sons were also charged with selling intoxicating liquor. Both boys were also observed by provincial constables dabbling in the family tradition resulting in \$100 fines per youth.

The total fines handed out that day totaled \$1,120 plus court cost. This was a considerable amount since the purchase of a house in those days could be had for under \$1,000. As a result of the convictions, the two magistrates ordered the Provincial Inspector to roll out the evidence seized and have it destroyed. During the raid on his premises 110 gallons of beer were seized. The only premise large and secure enough to hold the evidence was in the two jail cells in the Town Hall. The afternoon after the trial the kegs were rolled onto the street, each was broken with an axe and the beer allowed to flow down the gutter.

This is the first of a series of articles written for a book outlining the history of policing in Halton.



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