

# EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

## Great parade, Bill!!

Congratulations to Bill Spielvogel and all his elves from the firefighters' association who produced Saturday's Santa Claus parade. It was one of the best Santa parades in years.

Big, fluffy flakes of snow cascaded down on the procession as it wound down from Acton's east end, down Mill Street and north on main. A bone-chilling wind mingled with the snow to provide just the right atmosphere for the bands, imaginative floats and other entries.

Santa brought up the parade's rear proceeded by a four horse span of splendid horses, followed the Guelph Royalaires, a dazzling band that provided a royal entrance for the jolly old elf.

Thousands lined the streets to see the parade and surely will join with us in ending our appreciation to Mr. Spielvogel and the firefighters' association for again providing the elements that make small town living worthwhile.



## Losing experience

We don't know whether there was any symbolism in the fact Major Marilyn Serjeantson rode shotgun in the old Acton fire truck in Saturday's Santa Claus parade but she was greeted warmly by the Acton and district populace as it bounced merrily down Mill Street. Mayor Marilyn may have lost the election to Kathy Gastle but she was a popular figure here. Only a handful of votes separated her from the winner. During three terms in office she was a constant visitor in Acton and in our opinion did her best to weld Halton Hills into a community rather than three disparate communities. Unfortunately, elections may decide winners but they also preclude the losers from contributing years of experience into deliberations at council tables. In her many years on council, first as a councillor and then succeeding Russ Miller as mayor, Serjeantson was always approachable and willing to discuss the issues. True, we didn't always agree with her decisions but there was never any doubt that she was doing what she thought best.

Halton Hills Council is going to be the poorer without her and retiring Acton Councillor Norm Elliott. It'll be up to the revamped council to create new strengths to bond this Town together and fill the vacuum created by the ballot box and retirement.

We wish Mayor-elect Gastle and the new council the very best in forging Halton Hills into a community of communities, a difficult task for anyone. There are many challenges waiting for the new council, not the least of which will be the cost of the proposed leisure centre in south Georgetown. It may be a real clanger in view of the \$1.8 million runover on the twinning of the Alcott arena.



The MS Amsterdam, left, and a European freighter share twin locks on the Panama Canal. The ships are pulled and guided by electric locomotives called "mules" which run on tracks parallel to the canal.

## Panama Canal world wonder

Told you last week about taking a trip on MS Amsterdam, Holland America's brand new ship on its "maiden" voyage which among other things traversed the Panama Canal from the Atlantic to the Pacific. I've been through the canal before but found it such a marvel of engineering that when the opportunity arose to retrace our earlier voyage, with wife Irma and Frances and Jean Marcoux, signed up for the 10-day cruise.

Ceremonies at Fort Lauderdale in Florida christened the Amsterdam with the traditional bottle of champagne (which didn't break until a later try). With the "bugs" ironed out, the tooting of whistles, ringing of bells and tugs blowing streams of water, the ship edged out into the Caribbean for a visit to a small island in the Bahamas for a day before visiting St. Thomas.

St. Thomas is one of the Virgin Islands owned by the United States. It's supposedly a shoppers' paradise. When six cruise ships dock in its harbour at the same time it's a place I'd rather not be. Prices, of course, are in U.S. dollars and even in this tax-free haven Canadians are the poor cousins unless they're millionaires. Our dollar was trading at \$1.55 for one U.S. buck.

A quick visit to St. John precluded a day at sea before docking at the capital of the little Dutch island of Aruba and its capital, Oranjestad. Situated only a few miles off the coast of Venezuela, South America, I would choose it any day over St. Thomas although about half the island is desert. It has a casino, up-to-date downtown and unlike the narrow streets and cobblestones of St. Thomas's capital is a clean, modern city.

Its beaches on the fertile side are beautiful.

That night we set our sights on the Panama Canal, a distance of 619 nautical miles. That took a day at sea and a night before lining up at Cristobal for the 45 mile trip through the fabled canal.

Touted as a spot for a canal as long ago as the 16<sup>th</sup> Century to join the two oceans, work never started on the dream until the late 1800s. Then the French tried to conquer the swamps and dense rain forest which covers the Isthmus of Canal. Defeated by disease and money problems they passed the torch to the United States.

Engineers from the States came up with a brand new plan using the fresh water in the mountainous regions of Panama to create a lake which would feed the canal's ingenious hydraulic system. And it worked, especially after scientists found out mosquitoes were causing malaria and other diseases that decimated the canal workers. Swamps, ponds and puddles where mosquitoes bred were covered with oil and the toll of diseases was halted.

The canal opened in 1913 to much fanfare and has been operating ever since, although enlarged, of course. Tolls for ships using the canal have

### Coles' Slaw



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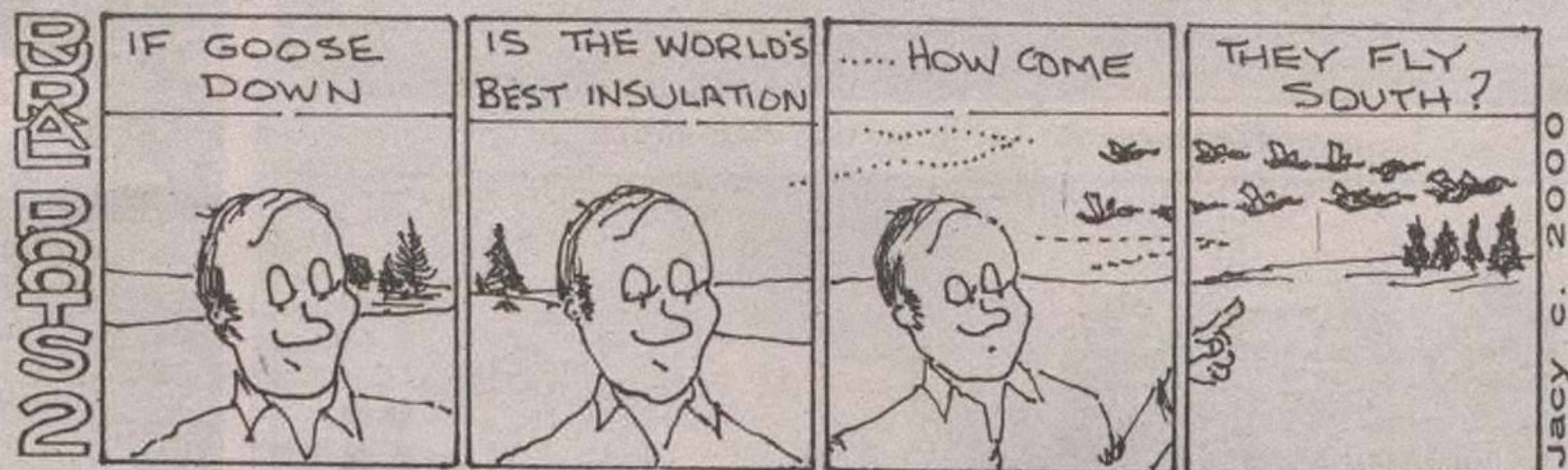
reached as high as \$184,000. Our ship, the MS Amsterdam with 1231 passengers, paid \$155,000 to traverse the canal one way. It took from just after 6 a.m. on a Monday when a pilot embarked to guide the ship through, until almost 4 p.m. to clear the canal.

There are three sets of locks which take you way up and then let you down into the Pacific. Oddly, you are travelling from west to east, a direction caused by a jiggle in the Isthmus of Panama.

The weather when we traversed the canal was hot and humid, almost stifling since Panama is only about 600 miles north of the Equator. Half an hour on deck found most of us retreating into the ship's air-conditioned interior. Then it rained just as we approached the Miraflores locks, the last before passage to the Pacific. It made conditions intolerable for people like me who would rather face below zero weather than high humidity.

The rain created a veil over the City of Panama whose many skyscrapers looked like ghosts guarding the Pacific mouth of the canal; now owned and operated by Panama. The U.S. ceded the canal to the Central American country in 1997.

The transfer wasn't popular in the U.S. which had helped Panama break away from Columbia and operated the canal for over 80 years. But Panamanians asked how the U.S. would like it if Panama controlled the Mississippi River down the middle of their country as well as land on both sides. A treaty was signed and it is now history. And Balboa the first white man to visit the Pacific side of the isthmus can rest in peace knowing Spanish is the language of canal country.



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

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