

EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

Preserving our heritage

The disappointment of Acton Agricultural Society officials over the high construction costs for a new building to replace the old Acton arena as an exhibition centre in Prospect Park is certainly understandable. It is especially so when one considers that the old arena could have been renovated for a cost of \$450,000.

Bids for a new building, that came from only three of the seven construction companies approached, ranged from \$637,000 to \$707,000, far beyond the capability of the Society to finance.

The Society has \$300,000 in its building fund, of which \$200,000 is in donations for a new building. They have a fund raising goal of \$350,000, which even if attained would not nearly match the anticipated cost from the lowest bid for a 5,000 square foot building.

In order to come up with some sort of alternative to the original plan for a stand alone building, the Society is considering moving and renovating the more than century-old poultry barn and linking it up with a downsized new building.

The barn, of course, was originally a drill shed for the militia. It was located at the west corner of Bower Ave. (St.) and Elgin St. It was built about 1869 when every community of any size in Ontario had a drill shed to train militia following threats of a Fenian invasion after the Civil War in the United States.

The Fenians were men of Irish birth or extraction who had served in the Union army during the Civil War. They felt that invading Canada would help the cause of freedom for Ireland as well as paying back the British for their obvious sympathy for the Southern cause in the Civil War.

However, when the threat of Fenian invasion subsided, use of the building for drilling the militia never evoked the same enthusiasm it had during the crisis and use became less frequent, although touring drama companies used it as a theatre for such 19th century dramas as "Uncle Tom's Cabin." It was also a temporary home for six families roused from their homes in a fire at Mill and Main Sts.

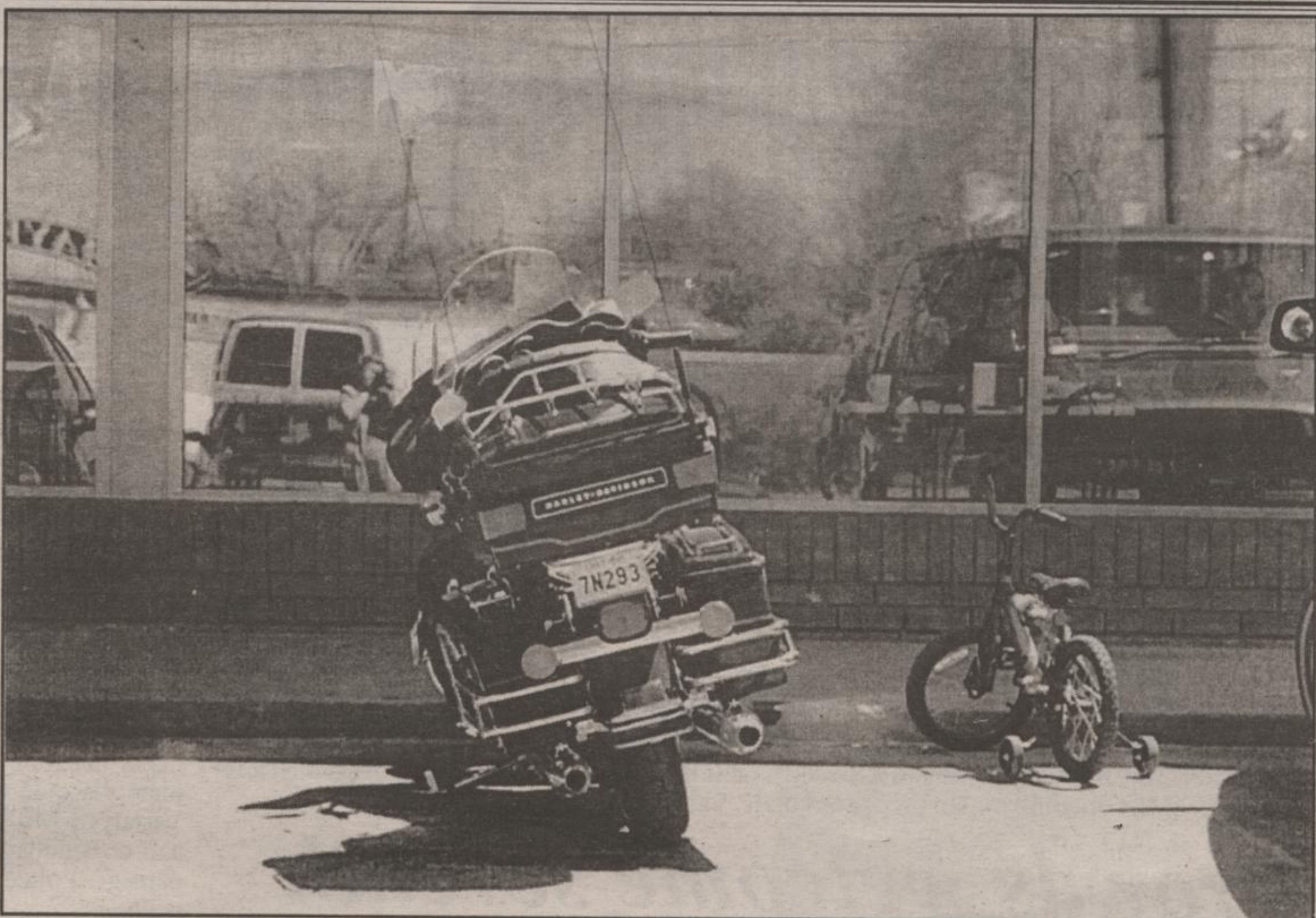
Eventually one local gentleman, Alex Secord, offered to buy the lot and move the drill shed to a better location in Prospect Park. He wanted the lot for his new home, a substantial brick building which still stands on the east corner of Bower and Elgin.

Since the old building was built of some of the finest pine lumber produced in this district, it was moved with little damage. It may have been moved again in the park but has stood for at least a century in its present location. It was used during World War 1 as a recruiting centre for the Halton, Peel and Dufferin Regiment, which later became the Lorne Scots Regiment. However, after WWI its use again diminished and the Acton Fall Fair Board took it over to store equipment and display poultry classes during the Fall Fair.

At one time the old building had a floor, but it has long since gone, and the beat of marching feet has gone with it. The building really has nothing to distinguish it from a barn except for its long association with Acton's history, which perhaps will qualify it for heritage conservation grants. Members of the Agricultural Society hope so. Blending it with a new building would preserve the old structure and remind us of our heritage as well as making it possible to have a decent exhibition in Prospect Park.

The rub is, of course, that all of this could have been avoided by the simple expedient of fixing up the old arena. It stood for over 70 years on a site which tests now show to be "structurally inadequate."

Since the wrecking balls have long since removed the option of fixing the arena, members of the Acton Agricultural Society are to be commended for their resolution to build a replacement for the arena as a meeting place for this community and district.



Maybe not a Harley...but one day...



Need broader vision for farm land in Halton Hills

Following is a letter to Premier Mike Harris filed with *The New Tanner* for publication:

Dear Sir:

Re: Rural Economic Vitality in the Town of Halton Hills with the GTA Smart Growth

I act for Valentina Farms Inc. and S.G.D. Farms Inc. which own acreage totalling approximately 642 acres, south of Georgetown in the Town of Halton Hills. I have also participated in group meetings with property owners in the same area from whom I expect that you will also be receiving deputations, representations, and submissions.

I hope that my letter will offer you a broader vision than the recent focused and limited attempts to deal with concerns through regional down-zonings, Golf Course amendments, and efforts to expand the Greater Toronto Services Board powers at the expense of local municipalities.

The voting structure of the GTSB (Greater Toronto Services Board) is such that it has permitted "motherhood" farming perceptions to overrule practical rural economic realities and needs. Naïve political infatuations with the "Mama and Papa Family Farm" have been and are continuing to take away from the efforts that should be directed towards developing a flexible and viable rural activity which had both vitality and is complimentary and not totally subordinate to the priorities of the urban areas.

The nature of farming in the GTA has gone through enormous changes during the last 20 years. Both family farming and farming practices have changes so dramatically that clinging to out-moded traditional and romantic views of the family farm is more negative than beneficial.

The Rural Economic Vitality in the GTA Smart Growth cannot be preserved by allowing "motherhood" statements to dominate the decision

making and eliminate useful and thorough debate of all of the issues.

The Rural Economic Vitality in Halton Hills and other areas in the GTA must be looked at in the context of the open space rural flavour with aggregate uses, mixed industry, and community development. Vitality just does not simply sit with the preservation of farmland. More diversity has to be afforded in any formula in order to help the economic vitality across the GTA.

In offering Rural Economic Vitality one cannot assume that the solution should be to restrict an area to permanent agriculture. A greater variety of uses which have a closer relationship to the urban areas must be included in the rural flavour of any formula. The option and the encouragement should be there to promote a type of farming that has a close relationship to the urban area so as to promote the economic vitality of

Continued on Page 5



THE NEW Tanner

59 Willow Street North
Acton, Ontario
L7J 1Z8

(519) 853-0051 Fax: 853-0052

Publisher

Ted Tyler

Editorial

Hartley Coles

Frances Niblock Mike O'Leary Ellen Piehl
Maggie Petrushevsky Angela Tyler

Advertising and Circulation

Marie Shadbolt Elaine Petkoff

Composing

Karen Coleman Erika Ford

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

ADVERTISING POLICY

Every effort will be made to see advertising copy, neatly presented, is correctly printed. The publisher assumes no financial responsibility for typographical errors or omissions in advertising, but will gladly reprint without charge that part of an advertisement in which an error may occur provided a claim is made within five days of publication.