

# EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

## Shopping patterns

Although most residents seem pleased with the construction of a new plaza in Acton's east end, some west end residents, without vehicles, are concerned that groceries and prescription drugs may not be as accessible as they are now. They point out that IGA is moving and news last week revealed that Pharma Plus has bought the two Acton drug stores. It could mean their loss as well as a new large facility in the new plaza.

Shoppers, especially seniors in the west end, are used to the convenience of a supermarket and drug store within walking distance. If they are closed then it would entail getting a ride to the other end of town, although IGA does have a bus service for seniors on Wednesdays.

The loss of these two stores in the downtown could be a blow to the remaining merchants in the plaza, Acton's busiest, unless suitable new business moves in. However it is not know at this time who will occupy the present IGA or whether Acton Pharmacy will be closed, so the future of the plaza of the plaza is uncertain. It is the penalty we pay for growth.

It could well mean shopping patterns will change from historic Main St., where commerce in Acton got its start, to the east end where the prohibitive because of its distance from the Acton sewage plant.

Several years ago the then Acton Chamber of Commerce heard from an architect and town planner, Lloyd Sankey, that an ideal plan would enshrine anchor stores at either end of Mill St. from the CN tracks to its intersection with Main St. The "downtown" would encompass all of Mill St. with lighter and medium traffic business in between. However, several factors have ruled that vision out including (1) a marked increase in street traffic and (2) the growth of the olde Hide House and (3) the lack of suitable open space for new business.

When Acton was first laid out in the early 1800's the widest thoroughfare was named Main St. because it was thought most commerce would locate along it's course from Church St. to the area where the School Creek flows across. And that's the way it was for a number of years- until 1856, a scant 145 years ago.

In 1856 the Grand Trunk Railway opened a station here on its way to Sarnia and a complete new outlook emerged. Mill St. which as its name implies was the conduit to the Acton flour mills, an industry still flourishing, suddenly became more important. It linked the village, clustered around Main St., with the railway station and all the traffic in entails.

It was called the "age of steam" and rightfully so. Wood-burning locomotives chugged their way up the steep grade to Acton, where water and wood was abundant, to serve the engines. It created trade the like of which was never seen before. Acton prospered, especially in the leather and glove industries which were attracted to the village by the availability of the bark used to make liqueur for tanning.

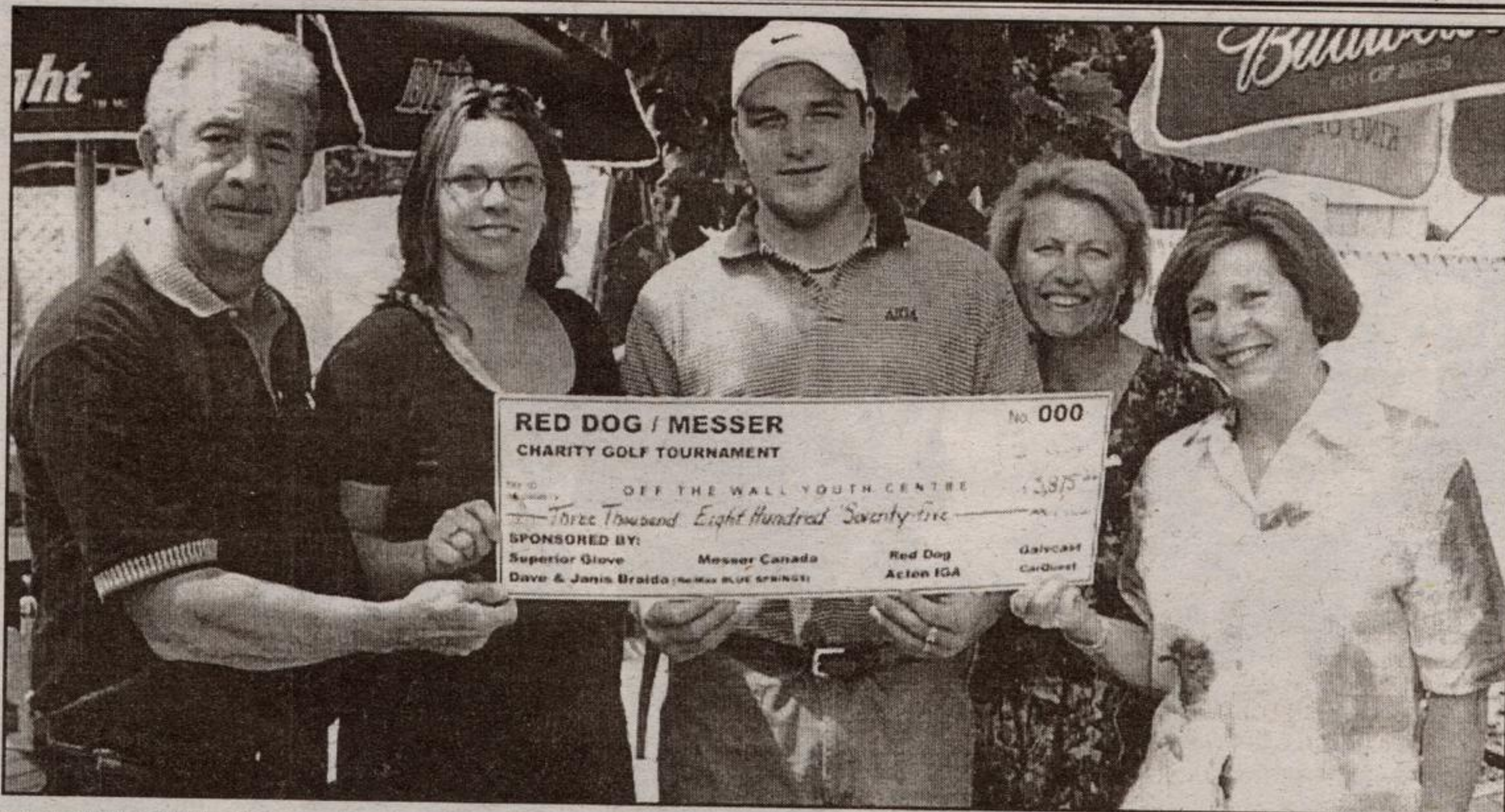
"Downtown" became Mill St., with Main St. at the base. Most commercial activity began to creep toward the railway station. Hotels at either end of the downtown housed frequent sales people and travelers. By the early 1900's Acton was a prosperous industrial village with a number of important industries dominated by leather.

The introduction of the automobile gradually eliminated horses from commerce and an important part of the leather industry-harness making - was virtually eliminated. However, other industry took its place until after World War 2 when another era opened up. The importance of railways was negated by trucks and cars, which became available to the average family. Shopping patterns changed as far away places with malls were easily accessible. Small town "downtown" were a casualty unless they were isolated enough to protect services.

A pattern, which saw plazas erected on the edge of town emerged. In Acton's case it was simply postponed although a thriving business section has gradually emerged within the town's limits on the east end.

The changes mean Acton is evolving and residents have to adjust to the reality of living in a larger community.

At the same time we can well understand the concern elderly people and those without vehicles, feel over the possible loss of easy access to food and prescription drugs. Their worst fears may never happen but changes certainly will.



**GENEROUS GOLFERS:** The Red Dog and Messer Canada held a golf tournament at Acton Meadows on July 7 in support of the Off The Wall Youth Centre. Donating a cheque for almost \$4000 was Jim Lowrie of Messer Canada, Laurie and David Parker from the Red Dog, Ellie Tuitman and Joan Barham accepting the cheque for the youth centre. - Angela Tyler photo

## Cemeteries tell tragic stories

Most of us have heard the story about the unusual gravestone in some corner of Canada which bears the unusual inscription, "I told you I was sick," but there are stones in old graveyards that tell other unusual stories.

Between Wellesley and Crosshill, two villages in Waterloo Region, is Ruskes Cemetery, resting place for many of the Mennonite pioneers who settled that nearby part of Ontario. In that cemetery is an unusual gravestone with a word puzzle inscribed on it.

The stone marks the graves of the two wives of Silas Bean, Henrietta and Suzanna. The puzzle can only be solved by reading up, starting in the middle lower half. The word puzzle has made the stone almost a mecca for the curious and for people like me who find cemeteries of all description full of interest and strange tales.

There are two in Halton Hills which, among others, have attracted my interest and mark the resting place respectively of a child and a young man, both of whom died in tragic circumstances. The one grave is situated in the cemetery beside historic Limehouse Presbyterian Church. The other, weather-beaten and hardly legible, is in St. Joseph's Cemetery on the First line, newly renamed the Dublin Line. Neither bears a striking inscription but both rekindle tales of pioneer days in this part of Halton and one of frontier "justice" meted out without benefit of the law.

The grave in the Limehouse churchyard the first, is said to be

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that of a three year old girl, the daughter of James Frazer and his wife, Jane Stirrat, residents of Lot 22, Con. 11, Esquesing Township. The story goes back to April of 1826 when Elizabeth Standish wed George Leslie, a highly eligible bachelor of the township who already had carved a home for himself on the east half of Lot 20, Con. 6, Chinguacousy. Among the guests, according to Numbering the Survivors, a history of the Standish family, were James Frazer and wife Jane Stirrat.

Half the people in the township were reputed to be at the wedding celebrated "with much music and dancing." The Frazers, in order to be free to enjoy themselves, had left their three year old daughter, Agnes, in the care of a neighborhood girl. However, when the festivities were over the Frazers returned to find the child was missing.

The search for the toddler went on all night. The old legend associated with the story say the searchers finally found the youngster where a she-bear had gathered her in and tried to warm and suckle her. The exposure to early spring weather had been too much and the child and was dead from exposure.

The Standish history by J. Rich-

ard Houston, says that according to some versions the original inscription read "Died as a result of neglect." Residents of the very young baby-sitter had charitably had the words erased from the stone. The story has been handed down and embroidered as the years passed. It was told so often, Houston mused, that the surname of the child varied with the telling of the highly coloured and sentimental versions which appeared in several local newspapers. In some it was Agnes Starrett. In others Agnes Snyder.

Tragedies were common among the early settlers. One year later in the summer of 1827 this part of Halton along with many of the struggling new communities of Upper Canada were hit by sickness (fever and ague) that took many young lives. The cause was believed to emanate from the huge quantities of rotting vegetation, the result of the headlong clearing of the land for settlement.

A stone in the Limehouse churchyard marks the "Frazer" tragedy of 1826. Others mark the tragedies of 1827 in cemeteries across Esquesing. But the one in St. Joseph's Cemetery which marks the resting place of Martin Dromgole was an entirely different slant. It's a love story/murder of 1865 which both shocked and titillated early residents of Acton and area.

Acton's Early Days records the story succinctly and with no emotion but it must have caused a sensation and raised political and religious passions 25 years ago. It con-

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