

Acton's history comes alive in Rowe book

By FRANCES NIBLOCK
The New Tanner

A 127-year-old story about a toad encapsulated in a tree – first read by local historian Mark Rowe as a boy in public school – turned up again when Rowe was researching his latest book, *Acton: The History of Leathertown*.

From dusty archives, generously donated photos, interviews and the seminal work on Acton history, *Acton's Early Days*, Rowe has painted a picture of an industrial town on the Grand Trunk railway that became a centre for leather glove making and then leather tanning – and made it into Ripley's Believe It Or Not in the 1960's.

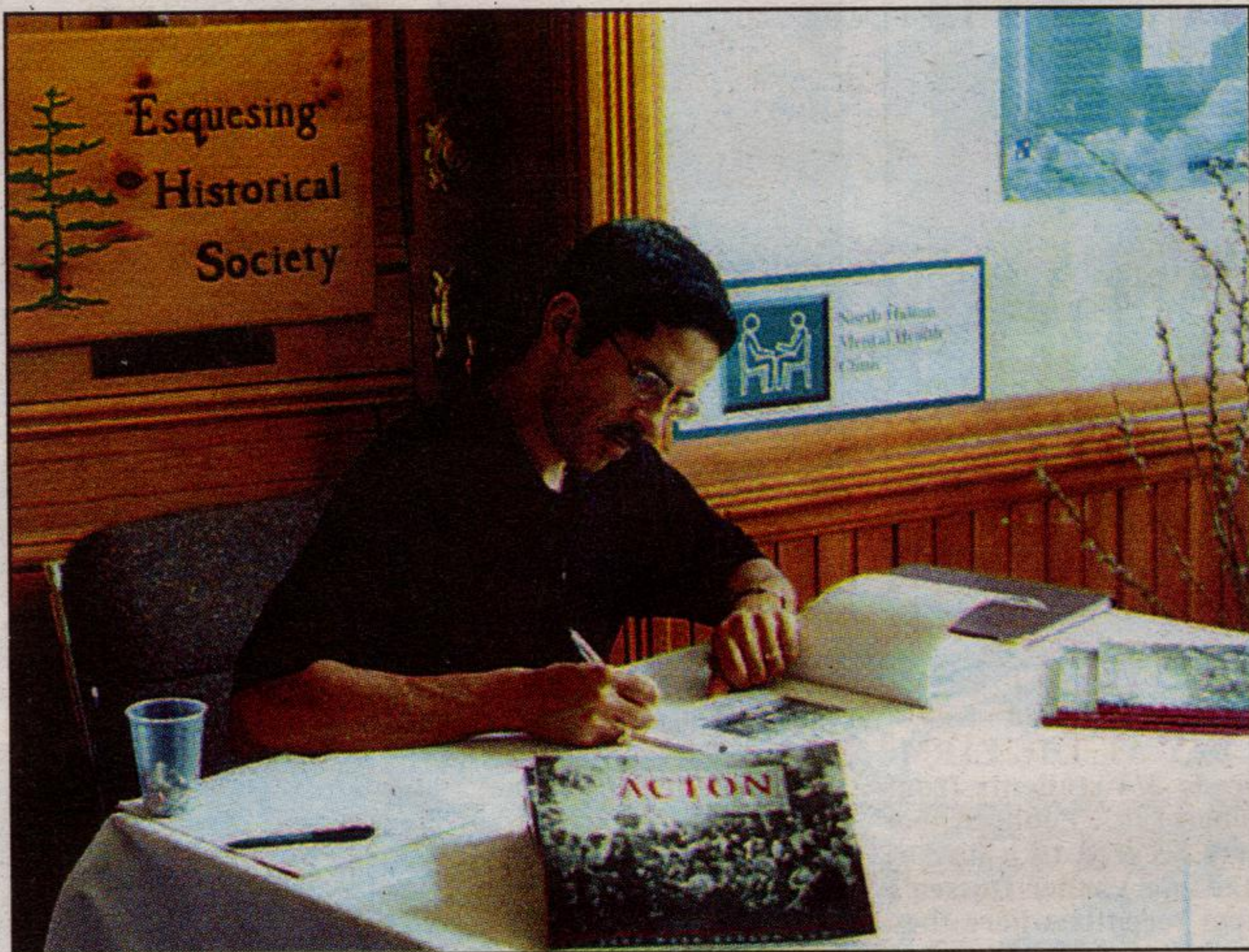
"I verified the story with a newspaper article, that at Brown's sawmill on Main Street, sort of across from Elizabeth Drive, they had this huge tree that they were sawing down," Rowe recounted on Friday.

"When they sawed a slice off about 50 or 60 feet in the air, they came on a cavity in the wood. Out of that cavity as soon as the saw blade passed, a live toad hopped out. The cavity was completely sealed and there was no way for the toad to get in or out and it ended up in Ripley's," Rowe said, adding he'd forgotten the story and laughed when he found it again during his research.

Rowe, a Georgetown teacher, Glen Williams resident, historian and member of the Esquesing Historical Society, said the idea for the book came from demands for local Acton history at the library.

After completing a general history of Georgetown and Glen Williams, Rowe turned to Acton, where there was no central source for information after 1936.

"This history starts with the surveying in 1818 and goes right to 2000. Along with using *Acton's Early Days*, I searched through newspaper microfilm to either verify a place or place an event in context and put dates to events," Rowe said adding he gathered stories through interviews with lo-



HISTORY REVEALED: Local historian Mark Rowe attended a book signing for his new work, *Acton: A History of Leathertown*, on Sunday at the old Town Hall. Proceeds from the book will benefit the Esquesing Historical Society. – Frances Niblock photo

cal people.

Rowe seems most pleased with the fact he was able to clarify details about the settlement of Acton, including a new piece of evidence no one had until now.

"They're called the Township Papers and they're documents and correspondence from the Ontario Archives regarding pieces of land, before a Crown patent was

granted," Rowe said, adding after a patent was granted, the information appears at the local registry office.

"Now, those documents are microfilmed and you can look up property by lot and concession number, and that gave enough information to figure out, or know better, when and why the Adams settled here," Rowe said.

The 96-page softcover

book has 85 black and white photos and Rowe said he tried to make the photo captions tell a history all their own.

"The story itself, I've broken it up into easy chapters (*Good Times and Bad Times* and *Riding Gloves to Driving Gloves* are two) so anyone who is looking for particular detail can find information quickly with the index," Rowe said, adding he hopes the book will be of interest to tourists as well as school kids and local residents.

While two years of research was difficult at times, Rowe said it was more difficult to decide what had to be left out of the book.

"That's the problem with a general history. You have to leave out a lot of interesting details, but I did go into a lot of detail about the leather industry that has two specialized chapters. But, there's so many social

and cultural items in the life of a community that you just have to gloss over (or) leave out entirely."

The 96-page softcover book, published by Boston Mills Press, was delayed by over a month because of a bankruptcy protection application by Stoddard Books, which owns Boston Mills.

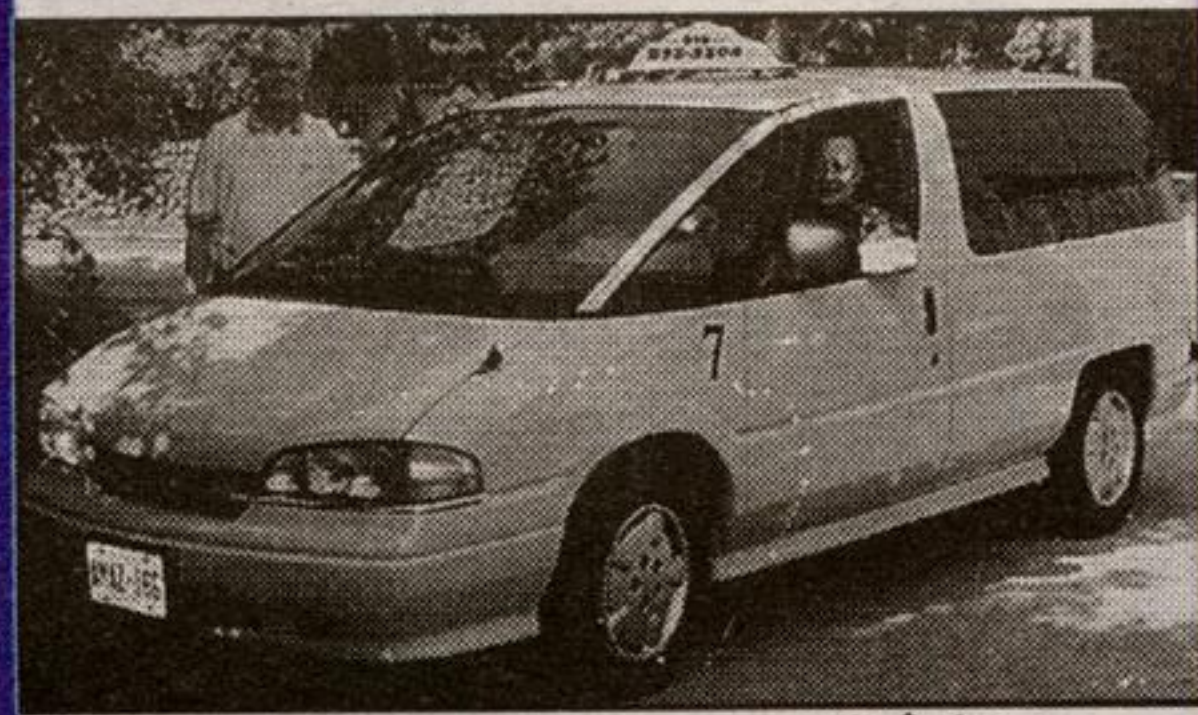
Rowe said the best part of writing a book was "getting to read the history and to relive incidents and recognize names and places and figure out why the way they are in Acton," Rowe said.

Rowe attended a book signing reception at the old Town Hall on Sunday. His book is available at Wetherby's, the olde Book House, the olde Hide House and from the Esquesing Historical Society, which will receive proceeds from sales of the \$24.95 book to continue to expand and improve its archives.

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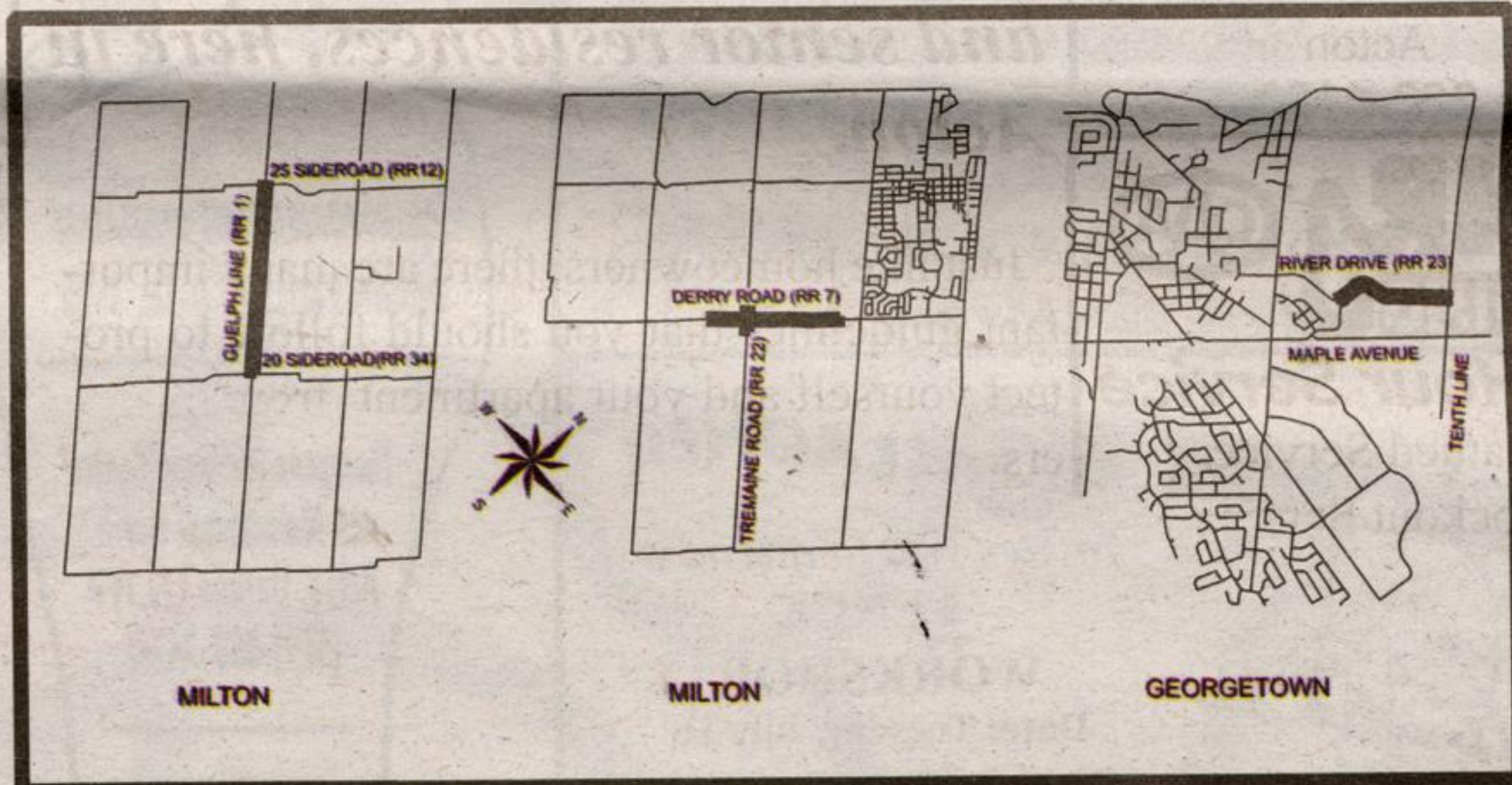
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