

# EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

## Assessment increases

Home owners in Halton shouldn't have been surprised to read in last week's New Tanner that Halton's average residential assessment has increased by 16.7 per cent, compared to a provincial average increase of 13.2 per cent.

After all, most homeowners received assessment notices in November, which reflected the new assessment based on an updated appraisal of properties for the two-year period from 2001 to 2003. However, there's no question that there are homeowners in Halton Hills who are seething over the method used to determine the increases.

"Drive-by assessment," one told The New Tanner, and ridiculously unfair was the inference.

The conclusion was drawn when it was revealed that university students were employed by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) to drive down streets to determine the value of homes.

No one, of course, is reassured by the statement from the Region's director of financial policy and internal audit that an increase in assessment does not necessarily translate into an increase in their taxes. If the Town's tax rate spirals by seven or eight per cent then we will all be in the same boat. Those with much higher assessments than the average will pay much higher taxes. Few properties, if any, will be assessed lower than now.

The new assessment figures are almost a carbon copy of last year's (2001) when the average Halton Hills assessment rose by 12 per cent. However, 69 property owners saw their assessment jump between 50 and 75 per cent and 613 properties saw an increase of between 20 and 50 per cent.

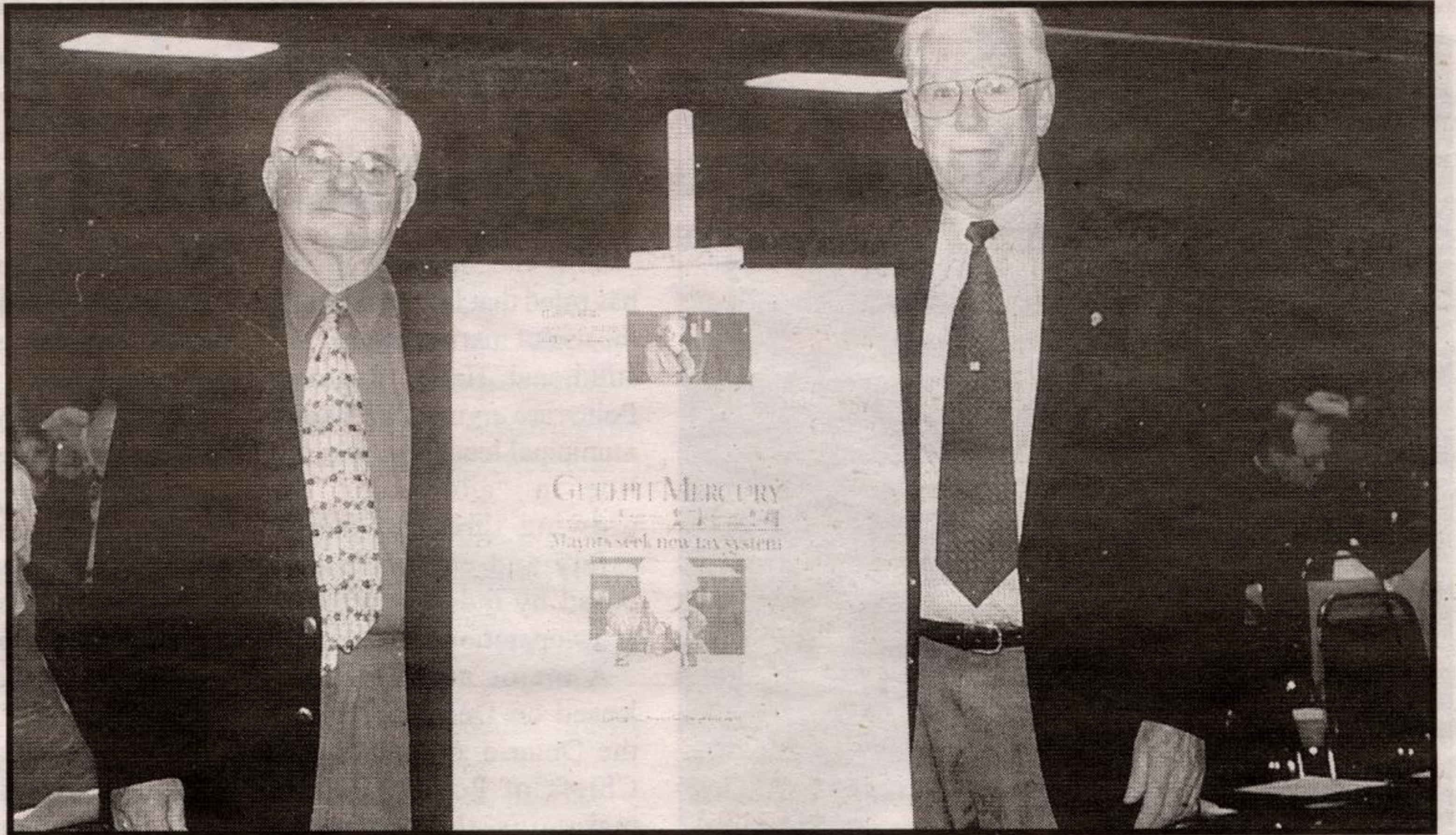
Of course, some appealed – and won. Surprise! This year's assessment notice showed they lost all they gained in the appeal.

Last February 200-plus Acton and area property owners met at the Acton Legion and subsequently formed an organization, to change Ontario's "flawed and unfair" tax assessment system. A core group has been meeting over the last nine months to fight MPAC's methods and we'll be hearing plenty from them in the New Year.

MPAC is a provincial agency, which provides Ontario-wide assessment information to local governments which set property taxes. Its methods have encountered stiff opposition from homeowners across the province.

The outcry comes from homeowners because the Province requires that assessment-related property tax increases for non-residential properties be capped at five per cent, which means costs are shifted on to residential and other properties. However, as the Region has indicated, the Province has also given municipalities "discretionary tools" to adjust the impact of taxation on certain properties or property classes.

Halton Regional Council will review MPAC's recommendations in the spring of 2004 so final tax rates can be included in tax bills in the second half of 2004. Obviously they have a real challenge on their hands. Meanwhile, we'll be hearing from those who feel Ontario's tax system is "flawed and unfair."



**LIGHTNING RODS:** Lou Bonnette and Mac Sprowl were organizers of a meeting in Acton Legion last February to protest huge property tax increases as a result of a new tax assessment. Over 200 Acton and area property owners attended the meeting, which resulted in formation of a group to fight the "flawed and unfair" MPAC tax assessment system.

## Balmy Yule has precedents

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If you're thinking the weather we had over Christmas and the holidays was unusual you're right. But it has had several precedents in my lifetime. No snow, the sun shining brightly, the temperature well over the freezing point, people working on their lawns and gardens, golfers on some courses. It was like Spring just as we ushered in the winter solstice on Dec. 22.

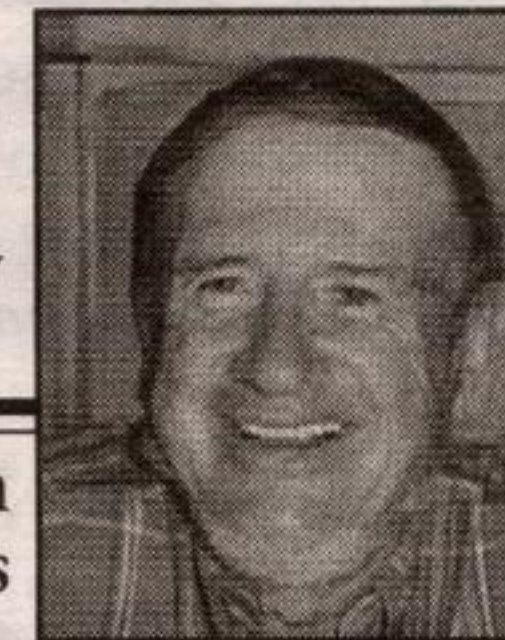
Ordinarily we'd have lots of snow, the air would be brisk and well below freezing and children would be anxious to try out things like skis, sleighs, toboggans and snow boards on the slopes in town and country. This year it's skate boarding, road hockey, strolling, bike riding and basking in the sunlight which bathed the area for several days.

We were jerked to our senses and reality on Monday when clouds rolled in and rain started to fall, although temperatures stayed above freezing – fortunately. As this is written, the weather prophets are forecasting colder weather for New Year's Day and possibly some more unseasonably warm weather later on.

As noted earlier, however,

### Coles' Slaw

with Hartley Coles



there are precedents. Remember Dec. 29, 1982? The temperature slid up to over 17 degrees Celsius. My neighbour, Jack Carpenter, took advantage of the balmy weather to cut his front lawn which he had neglected in the fall.

Next year, if we really want a white Christmas, we are going to have to get a lot more people dreamin'. Still on the subject of Christmas, it seems only a few people now observe the twelve days of Christmas which started, of course, on Christmas Day and ended on Epiphany (Jan. 6) also known as Twelfth Night. Epiphany celebrates the visit of the Wise Men to Christ at Bethlehem, in most Christian churches. Churches of the eastern rites and the Orthodox who follow the Julian calendar observe both Christmas and Epiphany several days later.

Maggie Petrushevsky of The New Tanner staff says she has always wondered about the Twelve Days of Christmas, especially the carol of the same name. What in the world do leaping lords, French hens, swimming swans, and the partridge who won't come out of the pear tree have to do with Christmas?

Someone sent her an e-mail which purports to explain how these figures got into a Christmas carol. From 1558 until 1829, Catholics in England were not permitted to practice their faith openly so they devised a code to pass their faith on to the children. One was the Twelve Days of Christmas, which has two levels of meaning, the second meaning known only to those of the faith. Each element in the carol has a code word for a religious reality which the children could remember.

The partridge in a pear tree was Jesus Christ.

Two turtledoves were the Old and New Testaments.

Three French hens stood for

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373 Queen Street East, Unit 1  
Acton, Ontario L7J 2N2  
email: thenewtanner@on.aibn.com  
(519) 853-0051 Fax: 853-0052

**Publisher** Ted Tyler  
**Editorial** Hartley Coles

**Editorial Contributors**  
Frances Niblock Mike O'Leary Ellen Piehl  
Maggie Petrushevsky Angela Tyler Janis Fread

**Advertising and Circulation**  
Marie Shadbolt Bruce Cargill

**Composing**  
Danjelle McIsaac Kasia Walasek Laura Maitland

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