

The most frequently visited building in Acton is the olde Hide House built in 1899. Originally built as a warehouse for the Beardmore tannery, the Eastern Avenue building continued to serve that purpose for several decades. Finished hides awaiting transport as well as raw materials for the tannery were stored in the building. Difficulties in transporting the materials over the boggy ground between the tannery and warehouse eventually led to a rail spur line being built into the tannery grounds.

Mason Knit operated out of the building during WWII, manufacturing long johns and socks. The building would return to its roots during the 1960s. In 1961 Frank Heller started his own company, Frank Heller & Co, and specialized in split leathers. Heller & Co. continued to produce its leather products from the factory until it announced in July, 1980 that it would be moving across town. At the same time, ambitious plans were announced for a leather factory outlet. Renovations were quickly completed to the interior of the building to convert it from a factory into a retail store. By January of 1985, the olde Hide House had topped the one-million mark in visitors.

A slice of Georgetown's history is tied up with the almost forgotten tragedy that brought 109 Armenian orphans to what is now Cedarvale Community Centre, more than 50 years ago. The boys landed in this country, unable to speak a word of English, on Canada's birthday, July 1, 1923. They had witnessed terrors where the Christian Armenians were persecuted by the Turks, and made to flee the country. In the summer of 1923, the first 50 boys arrived at Cedarvale Farm, through the efforts of the Armenian Relief Fund of Canada. During all the years, local people became involved with the farm, now known as the Armenian Boys Farm. Many women helped darn socks and mend torn pants, while merchants frequently donated goods, or offered them at a discount.

The home was transferred to the United Church and it was run as a home for girls until the late 1960s. As a Centennial project, the Town of Georgetown bought the buildings and land for a community centre.

From the day Canada declared war on Germany in 1939, Canadian families waited nervously. Thousands of Canadian soldiers fought in the war's biggest battles at Dieppe in 1942 and at Normandy in 1944. Back home, fami-

lies wondered whether they would see their loved ones again. The waiting finally ended on Monday, May 7, 1945.

In both Acton and Georgetown, the news was greeted by overjoyed residents. Businesses closed and people left work to join in the celebration and impromptu parades marched down the main streets of both towns.

The Acton Free Press described the scene: "Acton's celebration of the surrender of Germany seemed spontaneous with the receipt of the word. The tannery whistle shrieked and there was no mistaking the message it was conveying. It was the real thing. Germany had surrendered."

A similar scene was played out in Georgetown.

Looking Back at Halton Hills' significant moments

It started as one of those weather forecasts we all pay little attention to, as the residents of Halton Hills tuned into their radios October of 1954. The reports on CBC Radio Friday, October 15 reported a hurricane, called Hazel, had ravaged the town of Myrtle Beach in South Carolina and was working its way toward east Toronto. Hurricane Hazel destroyed the Norval grist mill in 1954 as severe flooding occurred in the village and finished off the mill.

Black Friday—February 20, 1959. A.V. Roe's contract for the Avro Arrow had been cancelled by the Canadian government. Effective immediately, 14,000 employees were out of work. Many of those employees lived locally, between 500 and 600 in Georgetown and 244 in Acton. Oldtimers say whole neighbourhoods were abandoned to banks as families left to find jobs elsewhere. *The Acton Free Press* described the aftermath of the Arrow cancellation. "Local industries have been swamped with enquiries this week from Avro workers seeking jobs as a result of the general close down last Friday

at Malton".

It had been a fixture in the town, a part of the pre-First World War economy, and a job to return to after the war. It had represented a stable labourer's job during the Depression, and a waiting place of employment for those soldiers who survived the Second World War. It had bought several homes in 1950s Georgetown, it had sent numerous kids to college and university, and had even boasted a number of two and three generation workers within its walls. But on March 31, 1991, Abitibi Provincial Paper Mill closed its doors for good. Employing nearly 200 in the 1970s, the mill was one of two local coating mills, the other being Domtar, which closed in 1976. The mill had an early start in Georgetown's history, being built in shortly after the turn of the century in 1905 by Georgetown entrepreneur John Barber. He sold it to the Provincial Paper Company in 1911. The mill's main purpose was to coat paper with a color, then cut, trimmed or re-rolled to go to the next step, where it would be transformed into writing paper, stamps, or school scribbles. Countless Halton Hills residents worked at the mill at one time or another.

A shockwave struck Acton on Thursday, June 12, 1986 when it was announced the Beardmore tannery was to close putting hundreds of people out of work. Of the 329 employees on hand when the closure announcement was made, 224 of them either took early retirement or found jobs elsewhere. When the tannery closed, about 105 employees were uncertain of where they would be the next week or the next year.

Acton resident Rick Bonnette, now Halton Hills mayor, referred to the closure as "Black Thursday" and said the loss of the tannery "transformed the town."

"It changed the face (of Acton) from being one major factory town to a more bedroom community," said Bonnette.

Beardmore, founded in 1844, was at one time the largest tannery in the British Empire. In 1865 George Beardmore purchased the tannery property; the first tannery on the site had been built in 1842. He repaired the buildings and equipped them with the most modern tanning equipment of the time. Beardmore was known as a community-conscious business that made provisions for the welfare of its employees. However, in 1900 workers went on strike for two weeks because wages had been reduced from \$1.25 to \$1.10 per day due to poor economic conditions.



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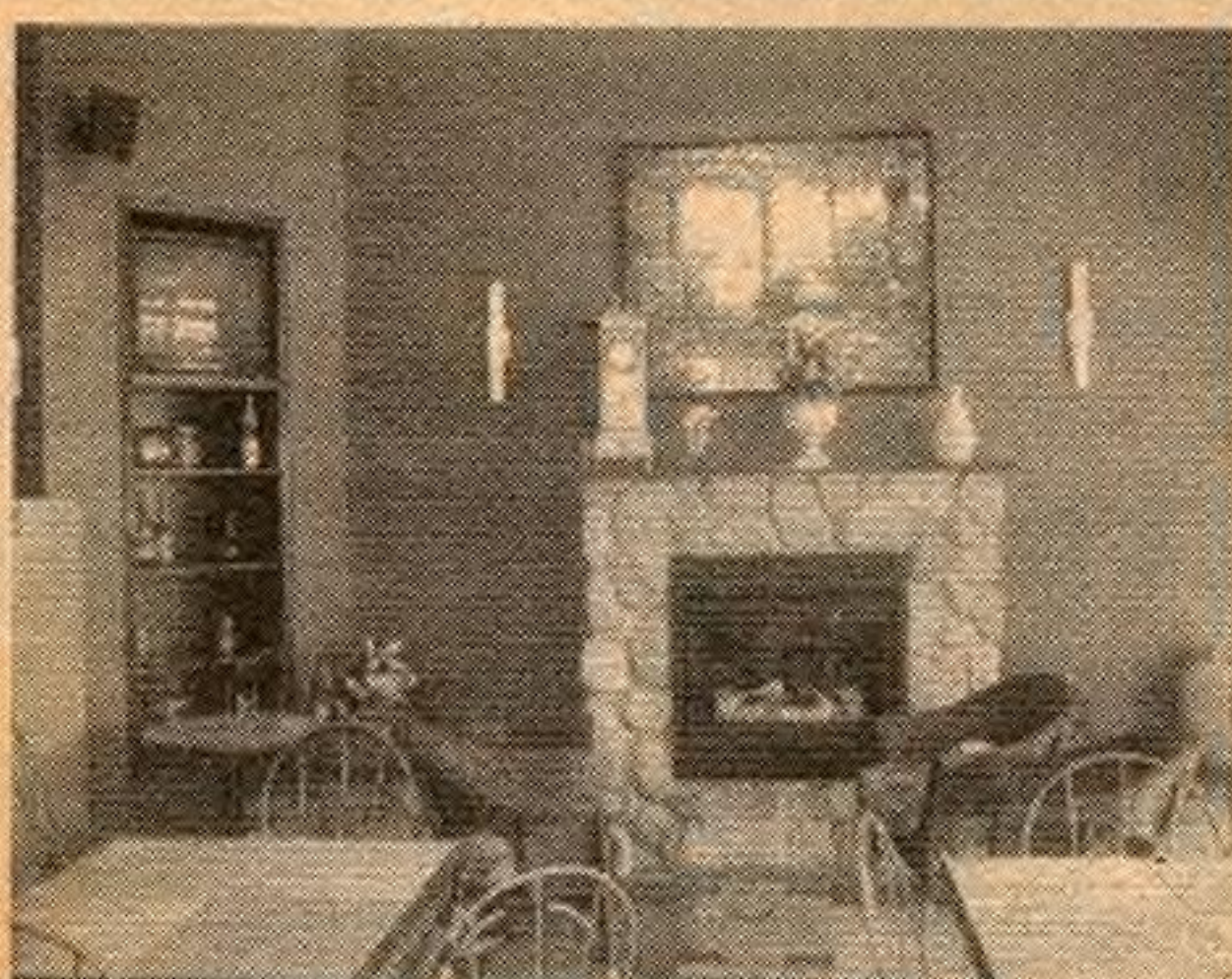
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