

EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

Saving the drill hall

Now the new agricultural /sports facility sits gracefully on the footprints of the old Acton Arena, many are asking what's happening to the historic old poultry barn/drill hall. It sits rather forlornly on the banks of Fairy Lake, it's front doors facing the façade of the new building. Except for fall fair days, the unpretentious 140 year-old barn is used to store Acton Agricultural Society's equipment.

Some may say tear it down and create another vista of Fairy Lake, but the old hall is part of Acton's social and military heritage. Built in 1867 by the federal government in the year of Confederation for Company No. 6 of the Halton Volunteers, a militia unit organized to defend this new nation from Fenian invasions, it's 60x100 feet dimensions were larger than any other such structure in the area, *Acton's Early Days* notes.

Constructed almost entirely of clear pine "it showed some of the finest framing ever done in these parts," the book declares. How then did it regress into its present state? It's a moving tale.

Originally, the drill hall stood at the corner of Bower Avenue and Elgin Street, constructed only a few feet away from a little frame Baptist church which was situated behind what is now the Holland Shop on Mill Street. It cut off the light from the north side of the church but the tolerant Baptists congregation never objected. *Acton's Early Days* related, "even thought it became rather embarrassing in the services there at times, especially when the militia drilled or there was a dance when the 'plow boys' were hoeing it down with their long boots on."

Conditions for the congregation didn't improve much when the original dirt floor was replaced by a wooden one. It created a splendid hall for band concerts, political meetings and entertainment such as Harriet Beeche Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, the popular and fashionable play of the era. The sound of the big military boots on wood must have increased the vibration for the congregation.

That might have had something to do with an initiative by some citizens headed by Alex Secord to have the drill shed moved from its central Bower Ave. location to Prospect Park in Acton where it would have a convenient outside parade ground for the militia. Authorities were convinced and the building was moved to the park on a location now occupied by the new agricultural/soccer facility. When the Acton Arena was built in 1927 the drill hall was moved to its present location.

However there was some speculation then that Mr. Secord's enthusiasm for moving the building to the park may have had another motive. Once the drill shed was moved he bought the Bower Ave property and built the fine brick residence that sits on the site.

The drill shed continued its military role for an Acton company of the militia and served as a base for training recruits for the Peel, Dufferin and Halton Rifles during World War I. Few changes were made to the hall although the exterior gradually succumbed to the weather. Inside, however, the strong pine beams and rafters are as good as the day they were installed in 1867 with adze marks still visible from the virgin timber.

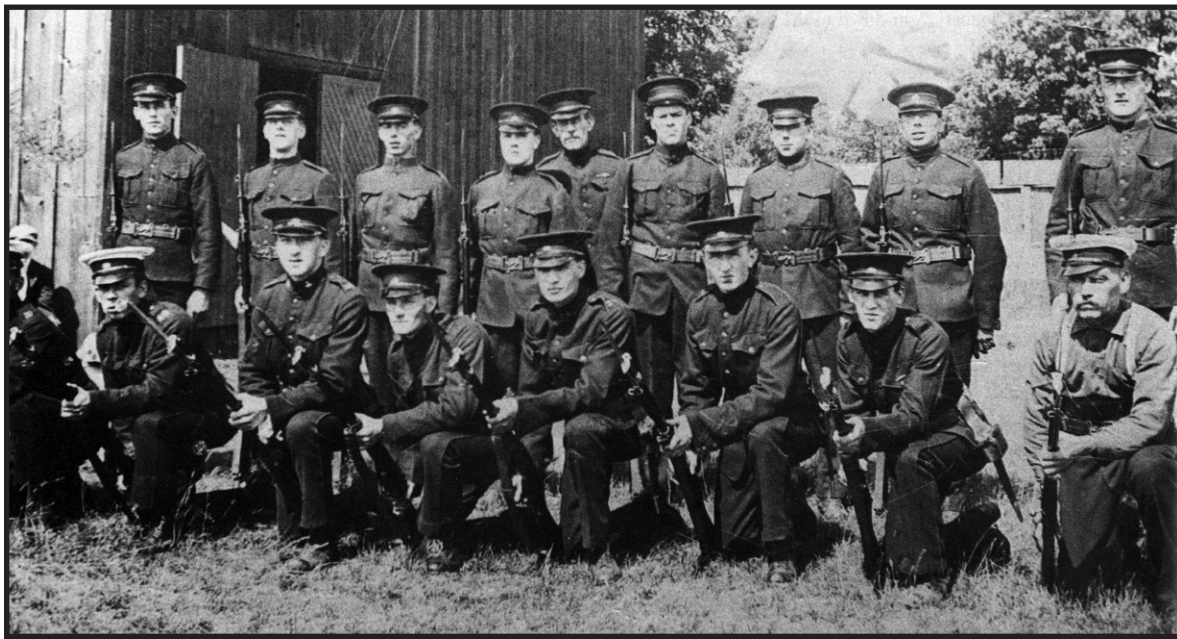
Most members of the Acton Agricultural Society, we are informed, would like to see the old drill shed returned to some semblance of its former glory by creating a new foundation, a cement floor and new siding to blend with the new building. It's a recognition of the social and military heritage it represents, as unpretentious as it is, as well as the fact they have no other place in Prospect Park to store their equipment.

We like the restoration idea and perhaps a bronze plaque should be on the building pointing out its historical significance to Acton. It may be fit now only for chickens and storage but over the last 140 years phantoms of the past, marching feet, and long-ago entertainment's permeate its clear pine structure. It is worth seeing.

However, there is a fiscal problem about restoring the drill hall. There's a substantial (\$1.3 million) mortgage on the new building and the Agricultural Society has few funds to do the restoration work. Some may even like to see it demolished.

Hopefully there may be government or heritage funds available to help with restoration since it represents a time when Confederation was new, the threat of a Fenian invasion was real. As it has been said; *Those who neglect the lessons of the past do so at their peril.*

In it's present form it is an eyesore but a lot could be done to spruce it up if funds are available.



STANDING ON GUARD: member of the Lorne rifles, predecessors of the Lorne Scots, drill beside the Drill Hall in Prospect Park about 1916 during World War I. Wilfrid Coles is the Sergeant in the back row, fourth from the right.

IPODs, earbuds all distractions

Do you remember when the cassette Walkman came out? It was really expensive, yet you could bring your music with you in a small portable way. With head phones you didn't have to worry about disturbing anybody with your choice of music.

I was pretty ecstatic when I got my first portable CD player. I thought it was the ultimate. Then as technology always changes, the Dude introduced me to the world of MP3s. It was a little much for me. After about a month and a few dozen phone calls to friends who have mastered MP3 technology I was finally able to download some songs. I don't use my MP3 very much...maybe a few times a week, yet it is nice to have one and to use one when I want.

My dad doesn't understand why I use my MP3. "Why can't you just listen to the sounds of the world?" he has asked me several times. Sometimes though, I don't want to listen to the world, I just want to escape to my music. I've even bought a set of CDs to learn Spanish and have downloaded them onto it. It isn't working though as I am still on the lesson where I'm trying to count to 10.

Lately, however, I'm getting frustrated with them and other portable



By
Angela Tyler

listening devices such as the IPOD. There are a couple of summer students at work who I am sure have had their IPOD headphones, or earbuds as the kids know them as, surgically implanted into their ears.

If you talk to them, unless they face you, they can't hear until you start yelling their name. When they realize they were being talked to, they do this special IPOD head tilt ear bud removal technique. It's hard to describe unless you see it. I figure there is a section in the IPOD manual of how to do it.

I've tried hard to ignore the earbuds. I try to remember they are young and at least they are working, not just staying at home in the summer doing nothing. In a way, I'm turning into a motherly figure I'm sure they don't want or need.

The other day, the one boy was filling a bucket of water. I was about 20 feet away and I could hear the music his headphones were filtering into his ear drums. "For gawd's sake...turn that thing down," I grumped at him. Big sur-

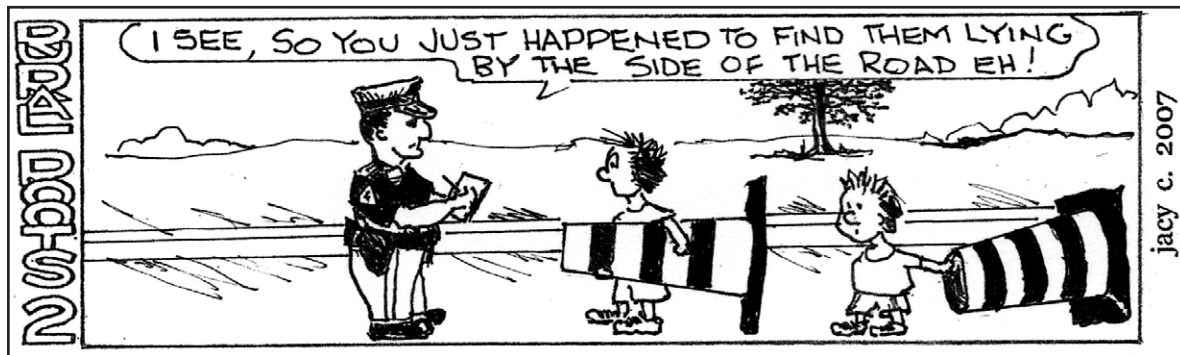
prise though...as he wasn't looking at me he didn't hear me. Then he saw me and did the head tilt thing popping out the ear buds. He politely asked me to repeat myself.

"Don't you realize you are killing your hearing?" I asked. He's young. Things like a woman telling him that he was going to go deaf listening to music that loud wasn't important. With that I told him to yank his pants up because I was sick of seeing his underwear. When will the trend of boys letting their pants fall below their waist end? I was turning into my parents.

A few days later I was reading one of the Toronto newspapers and there was a story about how a young man got zapped with lightning while he was listening to his IPOD as he mowed the grass. I figured this would surely get their attention. Maybe, just maybe, I could actually talk to them without having to see the head tilt thing again.

After reading the article, they were surprised. I thought I was winning the battle. Then the one said to me, "I'll give this to my brother. He's usually the one that cuts the grass." With that they put their ear buds back in their ear and continued their work.

It's time to admit defeat.



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