



Lengthy controversy launches Town Hall

Born in the turbulent pre-Confederation days, Milton's Town Hall in its classic-Georgian architecture, stands today in its renewed state, as a tribute to pioneers who built well.

Erected amid bickering and political knavery, controversy and debate, the sturdy stone building was built at a time when the foundations of our country were being laid. From concept to completion it figured in the activities of three years' councils. It was the subject of heated and lengthy debate of meetings that continued past the midnight hours. The project's defenders' good intentions were challenged and the \$5,000 cost was described in terms of gross extravagance.

Today, 100 years later, with the exterior of the building still largely unchanged except for a brick addition at the rear and the interior completely modernized, the Town Hall is cast in a new form to match the changing times in municipal government.

Within its walls a variety of county and community activities have taken place from gala balls, lectures, soirees and tea meetings to raucous political meetings verging on riots. But gone in the modernization is the large assembly hall that hosted such a variety of events, transformed into a dignified chamber for the deliberations of municipal legislators.

Drift back 100 years to the Milton of 1865. The Milton of mud streets, board sidewalks, verandahed stores and limited social life. The time of the small hamlet of 900 people where annual expenditures in the municipal budget were under \$4,000. The time when the common and grammar school were supplemented by the Mechanic's Institute in providing a broader education.

Come along to the time when the first fire brigade was becoming a pressing necessity; when the establishment of the first telegraph link was an event for amazement and rejoicing; when the stage trip from Milton to Bronte was being edged down to two hours and the problem of impassable roads was a frequent complaint.

The 1850 era was the time of the Fenians, the abortive battle of Ridgeway and the subsequent trouble in the west with Riel.

But in May of 1865 Milton Council accepted "the generous offer of Joseph Martin" to give the site for the new Market House to the town. "The specifications are to be ready for the next meeting of Council, on Monday next, and it is proposed to proceed at once. The building is to be of stone about forty feet by sixty. The cost is estimated at about \$4,000; to be raised chiefly from non-resident land tax and the Clergy Reserve Money".

Thus was the project launched. Under the direction of the mayor and council members McGuffin, Martin, McKindsay and Freeman as a building committee it was agreed tenders on the structure should be called. It was the first obstacle when the tender came in at \$6,640.

Councillor Joseph Martin, however, agreed he could build the new market house and town hall for \$5,000 and men were soon at work, not only preparing the site but changing the geography of the town as well.

The open ditch that ran through the middle of the town was to be converted to a race "much to the health of the town", a news report commented.

The formula for financing the \$5,000 project was outlined to ratepayers this way: \$600 to be taken from the present school rates without lessening the government grant; \$400 from the Clergy Reserve Fund and about \$1,500 from the non-resident land tax which was to be collected before the first of October; the \$100 being paid for rental of the town hall of that day. This would leave \$1,250, the interest of which was to be obtained by renting portions of the building "as offices, butcher's stalls etc."

But all was not to be smooth sailing. Obstacle on obstacle began and before the month of June 1865 had completed its days, a large number of ratepayers had assembled for a special meeting of the town council at which final arrangements were to be concluded for the town hall.

Armed with a petition signed by 39 ratepayers,

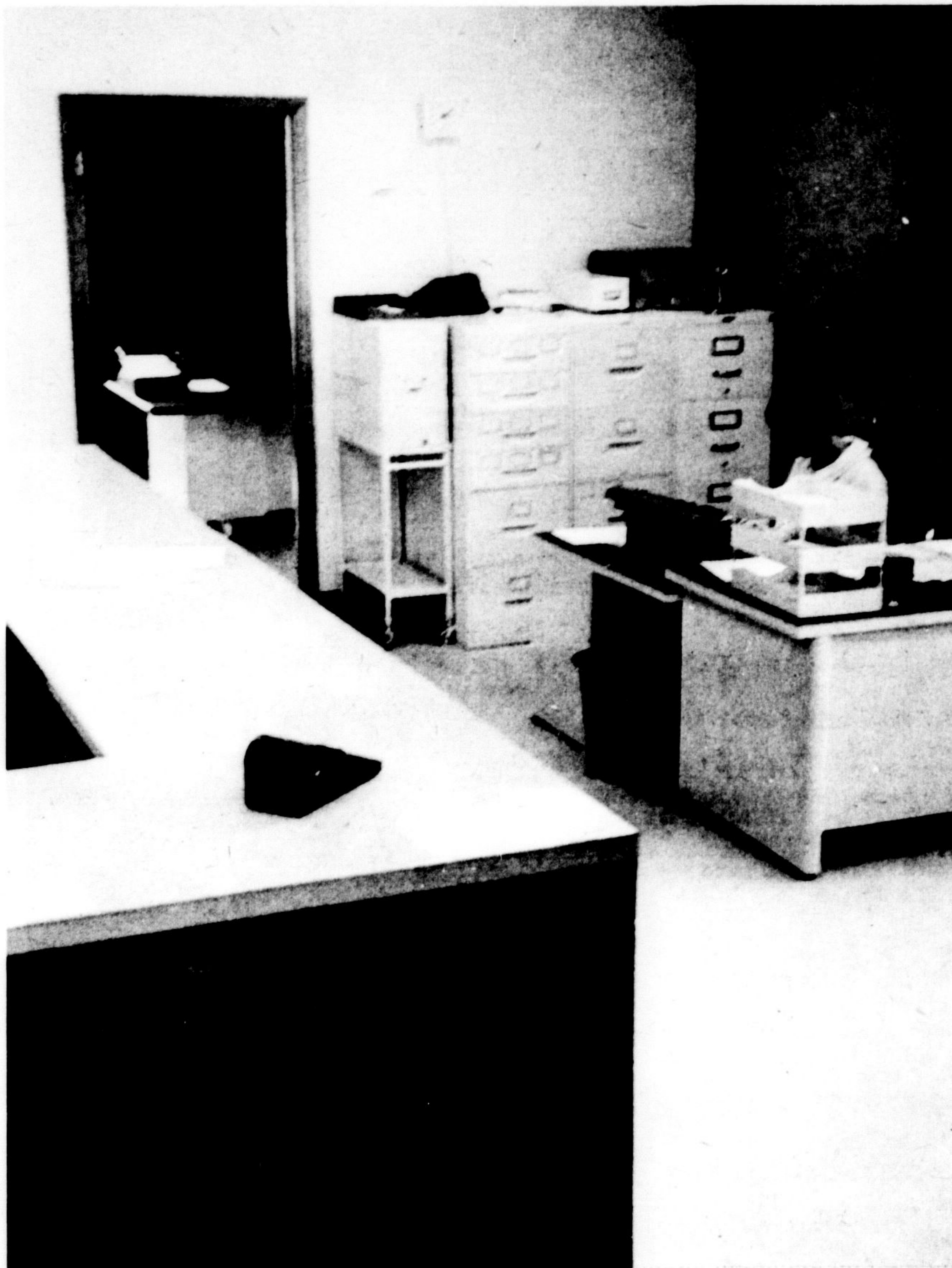
the Mayor was urged to call a public meeting to discuss the project but Mr. Martin declared that as the season was getting late he could not delay any longer and the council must decide on the project that night or he would withdraw his offer.

The building committee had recommended the adoption of the project but The Champion of the day reports the meeting this way. "A long discussion followed in which nearly every member participated, although the greatest share of the speechifying was monopolized by Messrs. Bastedo and McKindsay, the former opposing and the latter advocating the erection of the hall, and if we may judge by the cheers of the spectators, the great majority of the meeting were for the building. The vote upon the report was as follows: Yeas — Messrs. Smith,

(Continued on Next Page)



A 1936 picture, taken by the late L. R. Campbell, showed the Town Hall complete with front steps and tower still intact.



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