

Milton's "Mr. Education" retires

Edgar Foster, 44 years an educator

By Roy Downs

When school doors closed for the summer at the end of June, Edgar W. Foster closed the doors on a career in education that spanned 44 years. For 36 of those years he was engaged in the education of Milton students, first as a teacher, then as principal and later as supervising principal. He closed out his career with a two-year stint as principal of a large public school in Oakville.

To "Mr. Education", as he is commonly known in Milton, retirement is just another step up the ladder of life. He doesn't plan to rest on his laurels and sit around home "getting fat and growing grey". Although he won't say just what he has "a couple of irons in the fire" and expects to launch himself into a new career in the not-too-distant future.

Plans two trips

Meanwhile, he's enjoying his retirement by putting around the house and looking forward to two holiday trips. He and his wife Kathryn are heading "north to Alaska" this fall and they hope to revisit Scotland for a few weeks next spring. They toured parts of the land of the heather last summer and are looking forward to a return visit in 1972.

Born in Mulmur Township, Dufferin County, Edgar William Foster had a rather traumatic beginning in his educational career. He'll never forget his first day at school, because he wasn't there very long. He wasn't too keen on the teacher (who was a boarder at his parents' home) and he had his mind made up he wasn't going to go. His father coaxed, cajoled and finally threatened young Edgar, to no avail. Finally his father delivered him to the front door of S.S. 10 Mulmur and left him in care of the teacher.

Young Edgar beat his father home.

Toronto Normal School

Discipline won out and Edgar was soon back at school. He finished his grade eight there, attended Shelburne High School, then decided to become a teacher and graduated from Toronto Normal School in 1927.

His first teaching post that fall took him to S.S. 18 North Dumfries in Waterloo County, a little one-room school on the banks of the Grand River. He recalls a couple of memorable things about old S.S. 18. He was just 18 at the time and one of his students was 16—no "generation gap" there. Being situated so close to the river, in the first two years there were four floods. "The water came in the door and the windows—it was right over the tops of the desks," he recalls.

Safer with boats?

The experience of the floods soon convinced the young teacher he might be safer in a town where they built boats, so he moved in 1929 to Collingwood as vice-principal of the 16-room Victoria Public School. He remained there as teacher of grades seven and eight and during the course of his work met another talented member of the teaching profession, Kathryn M. Bell. He remembers one teachers' convention where he demonstrated a science project and Kathryn played her violin for the visiting teachers.

In 1933 Milton Public School was looking for a principal and he accepted the job. When he arrived that summer he brought his new bride Kathryn with him to settle in Milton and take over at the helm of the eight-room, 260 student school.

He continued as principal until 1954 when he was named supervising principal of Milton Public Schools. The New J. M. Denyes school opened in 1955 and the W. I. Dick school opened to serve north end students in 1958.

System grows

In 1959 he took on the added responsibilities of secretary and business administrator for the Milton Public School Board, a post he held for the next 10 years. Among his tasks was the laying of the groundwork for the town's first senior public school on Martin St. which was opened in 1967. By the time he left the Milton system it had grown to four schools, 49 teachers and over 1,000 students.

When the Halton County Board of Education took over from local school boards in 1969 the position of supervising principal was eliminated and he was given a choice between taking an administration job and becoming principal of a large public school. Mr. Foster chose the principalship and was transferred to the 20-room Oakwood Public School in Oakville where a new program in special education interested him. He concluded his teaching and administration career in June after two years at Oakwood.

Many highlights

There have been many

highlights in Edgar Foster's life. He holds a record in education and community service that will be hard to beat and he has always adhered to a philosophy that has successfully carried him through his 44-year career as an educator.

"Make haste slowly" is one of his favorite credos.

He doesn't recall any particularly unhappy times in his life's work, but he has a whole store of stories about the good times.

"I was most fortunate that sports has been a big part of my life, both in school and out," he says. His six foot, two and half inch frame made him a natural for basketball and he played for a junior Ontario Basketball Association club in Galt for two years. He also found time to get involved in softball and played that sport in Galt, Collingwood and Milton.

Sports essential

"Any principal knows a good sports program is essential. It runs off surplus energy for the students and helps with discipline problems," he says. Among his happy memories are the field day competitions with Acton and Georgetown schools.

Music and humor are two other subjects he feels are most necessary in school. A past president of the North Halton Music Festival, he was one of the festival's key supporters for many years. And there was always a smile or two sprinkled into the learning process in his classrooms, as any student or former student can tell you. His regular "thought for the day" featured humor and poems from the books of Edgar Guest.

School trips are another happy memory for Mr. Foster. He holds a record for grade eight trips to Toronto, an institution he launched in 1935 when he and his wife took George Williams and Peggy Galloway to Toronto as a reward for being top boy and girl in history. They bundled them into the rumble seat of his old Ford car for the trip. For over 30 years he made an annual June pilgrimage to the city to tour the students through the parliament buildings plus CasaLoma, Fort York or other city attractions.

War years

Mention of the war years brings more pleasant memories for the retired educator. Students sold war stamps and collected all kinds of material to help out with the war effort. He remembers a truckload of used rubber they collected. And of course there were those milkweed pod collections.

The wonderful school concerts and operettas, the music festivals, inauguration of Halton's first home economics and manual training classes in Milton, bus trips to Midland, the purchase of the school's first movie projector and the eventual introduction of radio broadcasts and television programs into the classroom are also pages in his book of memories.

He remembers starting courses in basic English for Polish farm workers who immigrated to this area, back in 1947.

And the terrific growth of student population and the resulting expansion headaches it brought the staff and board in the 1950's and 1960's were another challenge.

"Loved kiddies"

But his association with the children are his happiest memories. "I certainly loved the kiddies," he admits. During his career, over 1,000 students came under his tutelage and thousands more came into contact with him during his years as principal.

If he had to start life all over, would Edgar Foster be a teacher and principal again? His answer came quickly: "There is no doubt there, I loved the teaching."

Asked to single out those who gave him the most help and support, he centred his appreciation on his wife and his parents. "Kathryn has been a wonderful wife, mother and helpmate," he said.

Father's influence

"I grew up in a God-fearing Christian home and my father's influence was very strong," he added. His father was a widely known farmer, once president of the Ontario Field Crops Association, a director of the Canadian National Exhibition, president of the Ontario Association of Fall Fairs, and also a township clerk and later an insurance agent.

Mr. Foster is pleased that one of his three sons has followed him in a teaching career. Ian Foster is principal of Maple Grove Public School in Oakville. He is married to Win Marshall. Don,

the oldest son, is a traveller for Goodall Rubber Co. and is married to a teacher, Marilyn Campbell. They live in Brampton. Douglas, the youngest, is currently working at Canadian Tire in Brampton and plans to return to Guelph University this fall.

Receives B.A.

Although busy in the classrooms 10 months of the year, Mr. Foster used much of his spare time furthering his own education. He completed summer school courses which gave him a supervisor certificate in physical education and an

intermediate certificate in agricultural science.

He also spent his summer vacations and winter evenings and weekends working on his Bachelor of Arts degree at McMaster University in Hamilton. He started on the BA in 1942 and completed seven and a half credits. He took a rest from it for a few years but in 1958 started working toward the degree again and finally amassed enough credits to receive the degree in 1961. "It took a lot of patience and understanding from the family," he noted. Plus an untold amount of midnight oil.

Community worker

During his years in education Mr. Foster was active in his church and community too. His enviable record of public service includes past chairman of Milton public library board, former member of Milton District Hospital Board, former member and two years treasurer of Halton Children's Aid Society, past Master of St. Clair Masonic Order, 32nd degree Scottish Rite Mason, former member of Milton Boy Scout and Cub Association, and past president North Halton Music Festival Association.

In church work he has also been active. He's a former superintendent of St. Paul's United Church Sunday School and was a Sunday school teacher for a number of years. He was an elder of St. Paul's for 25 years and is now an honorary elder.

Education work

In the field of education he has also served on many groups. He's a past president of North Halton principals' Association and past president of Halton Men Teachers' Association. Since the county board was formed he served as a member of the editorial board for the board's newsletter Halton Education News and was also a member of the council on special education and the paraprofessional committee.

As an appointee of the Ontario Teachers' Federation he has served as a director of the Ontario Educational Research Council for 10 years. G. W. 'Pat' McKenzie, an Acton principal who has known Edgar Foster since 1939 and who boarded for two years with his parents at Honeywood while teaching in that area, gave the presentation speeches when the Halton Principals' Association held a retirement dinner at Georgetown and the Men Teachers' Federation honored him in Milton during June. He calls Mr. Foster "an educator, a family man, a churchman, a disciplinarian, a sportsman, a civic-minded citizen, a world traveller, and still a 'farm boy' at heart."

Served faithfully

He praised Mr. Foster's "perseverance, hard work, and

his ability to provide challenging leadership to young and old alike. He has served his community well and faithfully by contributing his time and talents. . . a very enviable record of service to others."

"He has always given freely of his time to every phase of education", he said, and praised the guest of honor's "Christian attitude, his desire for fair play, his willingness to help others, the knowledge that he operates by a code of ethics right or wrong, black and white with no shades of gray—and a firm but fair attitude."

He called him a pioneer in education in Halton who, with the other principals of those early days, helped lay a firm foundation for the present county board.

Tree in his name

On his last day of school in Oakville, two grade two students presented their beloved principal with a hand-made ceramic ashtray as a token of their esteem. The student council and staff gave him a two-suiter pullman case and matching weekend bag. Earlier in June Oakwood School had an arbor

day celebration and the students planted a tree in his name. Mr. Foster helped plant the tree with a golden shovel and promised to come back to Oakwood occasionally to check on the tree's progress.

"I have tried to be straight, I hope the tree grows straight too," he humbly told the students.

When his retirement was announced in the Halton Education News, the board paper reported "All who have been privileged to be associated with him, whether as pupils or teachers in any of the many responsible positions he has held over the years, have come away enriched by the contact." He was among the retiring teachers, bus drivers, secretaries and custodians honored at a board dinner on June 17.

Silver cup

Back in 1958, the Milton Public School Board presented him with an engraved silver cup to mark his 25th anniversary of teaching in Milton. The cup still retains a place of honor in the Foster's home at 254 Woodward St.

In June of 1969, when he left the Milton school system, the board and teachers honored him with a

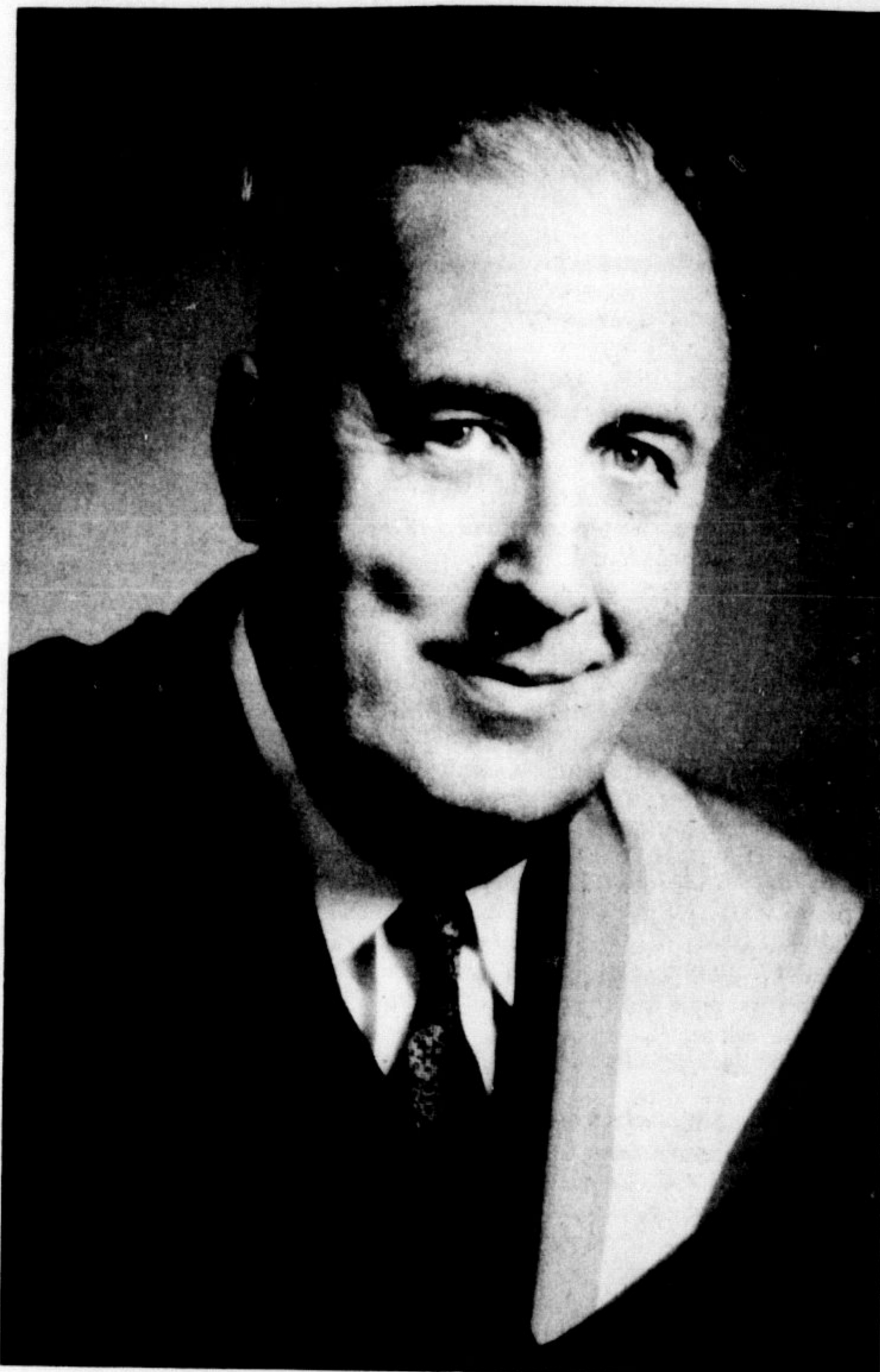
testimonial dinner when an occasional chair was presented. His good humor, his patience in overcoming problems and his willingness to accept fair reasoning were praised.

"The guidance he has given us through the years has mostly been by example. The high ideals he has had speaks extremely well and has made it easy to work with him," said principal W. J. Clow. Board chairman Don Stinson praised his administrative abilities and felt a set of 10 hatboxes might be an appropriate gift, as Mr. Foster seemed to be able to wear that many different hats to do that many jobs.

Finest tribute

Probably one of the finest testimonials to his work came from Miss M. Gemmill, who was a teacher for 31 of Mr. Foster's 36 years in Milton.

Mr. Foster gave unstintingly of himself and his ability. He has given much of himself in the hearts and minds of hundreds of pupils. Their lives have been enhanced by his guidance and the teachers have been enriched by his leadership, she told that gathering.



EDGAR W. FOSTER—"MR. EDUCATION" Retires after 44 years in teaching career

Librarian resigns

Following six years of service, librarian Mrs. Jo Johnson of

Milton Public Library, has resigned.

"I plan on just being a housewife for a change," she told The Champion. "I have a lovely home in the country but am never home to enjoy it."

Mrs. Johnson plans leaving her job as soon as a replacement is named. She is a resident of the Acton area.

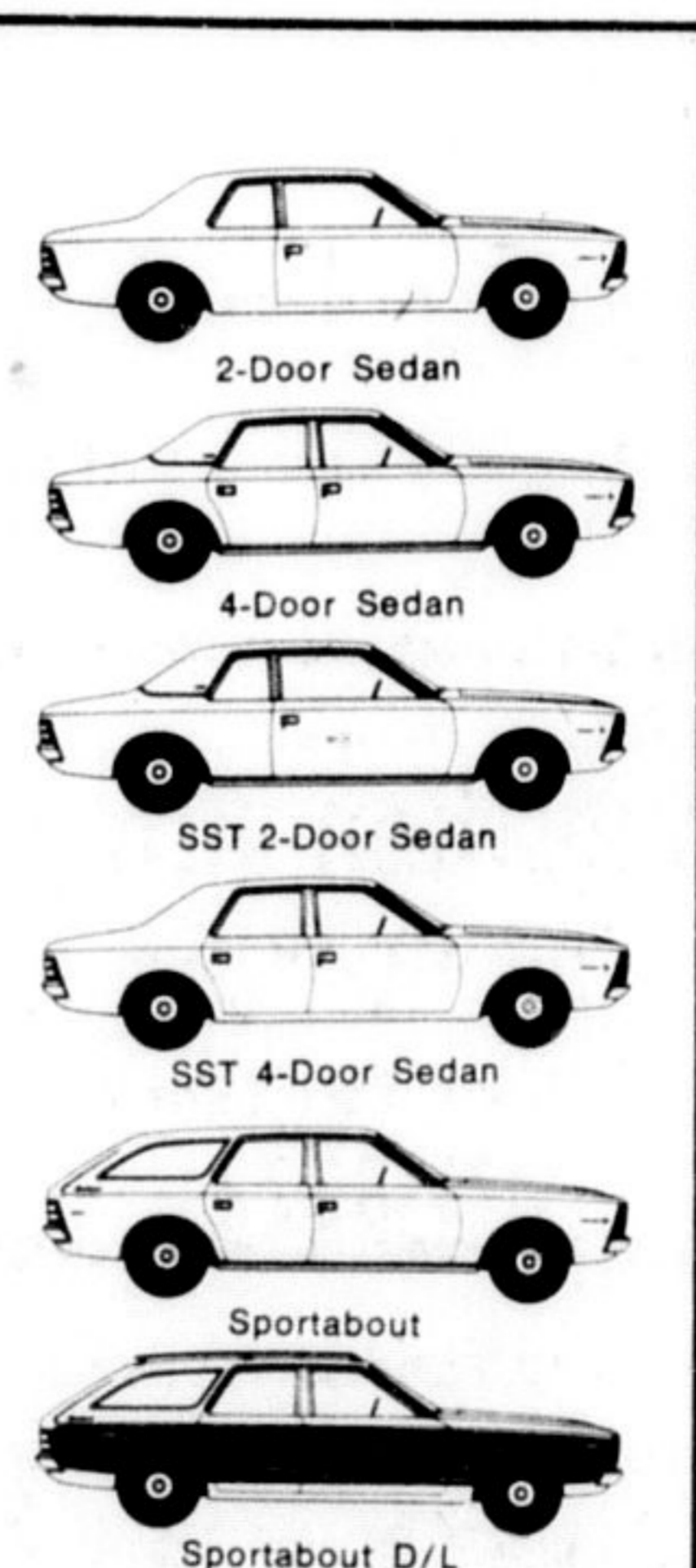
Call bids on 25 job

Engineering consultants called tenders for Milton Council this week on the widening, reconstruction and asphalt paving of the Highway 25 connecting link road at Milton's northern entrance.

Work covers the section from Highway 401 south to Base Line Rd., a distance of 2,900 lineal feet. Work includes excavation, grading, culverts, granular base construction and paving. Bids are due on Monday, Aug. 9. Duncan Hopper and Associates, Weston, are consulting engineers on the job.

OSP on holidays

Employees of Ontario Steel will observe two weeks' holidays. The plant will be shut down from July 17 to Aug. 2. Stan Edgar, OSP spokesman said a layoff is still pending. "I couldn't make any firm commitment at this time. The number of men laid off will depend on orders from our customers," he said.



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