

Why do men batter? There are answers

By WILMA BLOKHUIS

Why do men batter? Why are they physically assaulting their wives or fiancées?

Helping a small group of men come to grips with their abusive and violent behaviour, which they for the most part regret, is Dan Silvester of Burlington.

Every week, for just over a month, men from across Halton meet in a church basement to discuss their behavior and gain some insight into the reasons for their violent outbursts from Silvester's counselling.

Almost a year of preparation and study has gone into the formation of this self help group for men who batter—everything from research into family violence to developing a rapport with a number of social agencies, the police, family court and Halton Women's Place. Silvester's undertaking complements the work done by Halton Women's Place in Milton which offers direct assistance to an abused wife, by trying to get at the root of the violent behavior which 'explodes' in the men who have attacked their mate.

Two Mentors

Silvester's mentor in his effort is David Currie, who runs a similar group in Toronto

and the originator of this type of counselling during the early 1970s, Dr. Anne L. Ganley, a Washington psychologist. Surprisingly, both social workers wrote independent reports recently which were very similar in their approach to this problem.

Since the inception of this type of counselling, some 10 to 12 programs have been established across the United States; and in addition to the Halton and Toronto sessions in Ontario, there are groups meeting in Ottawa, Hamilton, and Guelph. Silvester describes self-help for men who batter as something being "quite new" and very necessary.

It is believed the male abuser's actions are triggered by five psychological-social factors, according to Currie, and supported by Silvester.

No Responsibility

The first is externalization of blame, "where the man refuses to take responsibility for actions and places the blame on the woman." This causes the wife or fiancée to feel guilty about something she has not done, yet "with time, she comes to feel a reason for her needing to be punished," explains Silvester. A cycle of physical abuse versus guilt feelings develops, and she

begins to think she is wrong and has "let her family and husband down."

Only after a serious attack, despite repeated beatings, do the women reach out for help, explains Silvester, hinting the abuse may have reached a point of no return. She comes to believe the action is provoked, "but in no way shape or form did she cause his hand to move and make contact with her body" he stresses, adding the men are themselves responsible for this action.

A fear of becoming dependent upon one's wife or fiancée is the second reason a man may become violent. Under a threat of 'losing out' and being dominated by the woman, he reacts violently.

A man's "rigid definitions of masculinity, whereby he ascribes to the old traditional male roles of the man being the breadwinner and head of the family making all of the decisions," supports the notion of possession of one's wife, laments Silvester. "The wife is an extension of him, and if she does something that's not agreeable to him, he feels he has to bring the situation back into control. And, he does this physically." This constitutes the third reason for wife abuse.

Silvester adds such men are "so rigid" there is no room for flexibility in their sense of values, and "they can't seem to adopt another way of thinking."

Want Control

Poor impulse control is the fourth reason. "Without thinking, a person reacts. He constantly reacts without regard or thought to consequences." Coupled with this emotional reaction is one's low self-esteem. "A lot of abusers fall into this category," says Silvester, in explaining the fifth reason. "They don't feel good about themselves, are not successful and lack self-confidence.

"They want to get on top of the situation and declare their superiority in a physical manner over a woman" he adds. "This is a primitive way of thinking."

Surprisingly though, many wife batterers are "very charming fellows," Silvester observes, yet they seem to maintain a distance between themselves and others and fear intimacy.

"A charmer has good looks and pleasant talk. He does not have to do anything to attract a woman. With their charm and looking pretty, they feel everything else will fall into place." However, they tend to avoid expressing feelings and generally "keep

people at bay."

Perhaps men who batter lack 'an escape'—leisure time activities. Silvester calls these "appropriate tensional outlets," and men who have no recreational pastimes or hobbies "cannot adopt other ways to get rid of their tension." But, stresses Silvester, "even a walk will help."

Generally speaking, he concludes an abuser is a man who "gives no thought to being sensible, thinks rigidly, does not back down from any stance, and has no consideration of the consequences for his actions."

Silvester works with a group of five men hailing from across Halton region, dealing with their problems confidentially. Conducting this group is a volunteer effort for the social worker, who is employed by the Ministry of Correctional Services in the probation and parole office in Burlington. "In no way is my job connected with my work with male batterers," he stresses. His involvement in helping such men overcome their abusive behavior is merely out of concern. Silvester became interested in this type of counselling through a friend, Donna McElroy, who is the executive director of a women's hostel in Brantford.

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Hands on learning gets thumbs up results at museum

By JANE MULLER
Staff Writer

Michelle Holmes always wanted to try it and Wendy Shaw decided she enjoyed it but couldn't live the way early pioneer women did.

The 14-year-olds lived a pioneer life at the Ontario Agricultural Museum Wednesday, working as women would have on an 1830 farmstead.

Malcolm McPhee was amazed by the origins of wool and linen fabric and the methods used to create them in pioneer days.

The day-long immersion program was an experiment for the museum and the Peel Board of Education. The local museum was one of 15 bases for hands-on sessions concentrating on a rural heritage theme.

Part of two-week camp sessions sponsored by the Peel board, the one day experience has been termed a success by Mary Robertson, the museum's education and interpretive supervisor and Rob Taylor of the Peel Board.

Last week's visit to the museum was the second and the last for this summer as the camp operates only in July. The results of the experimental program could lead to a credit course of a similar nature. Another offshoot could be the involvement of students in Halton in a similar program.

Mrs. Robertson plans to contact the local board of education with the good news of the pilot project's success.

If the idea does catch on it would bring young people much closer to the way of Canada's early settlers than the tours which include many children and entail a brief look at the various aspects of the museum.

A tour would never have allowed Danny Yuasa the time to help museum blacksmith Bud Snow sharpen the teeth of a harrow. Danny, a 15-year-old who was one of three mentally retarded boys involved in the camp, heated and pounded into shape the metal harrow teeth as well as removing and replacing them on the farm implement.

After a morning of working pioneer style, the five students were treated to a lunch prepared by Wendy and Michelle. The girls spent most of the morning churning butter, collecting eggs and making scones, beef stew, Irish soda bread and corn bread with currents.

"I always wanted to go back and try it," Michelle said of the life of settlers.

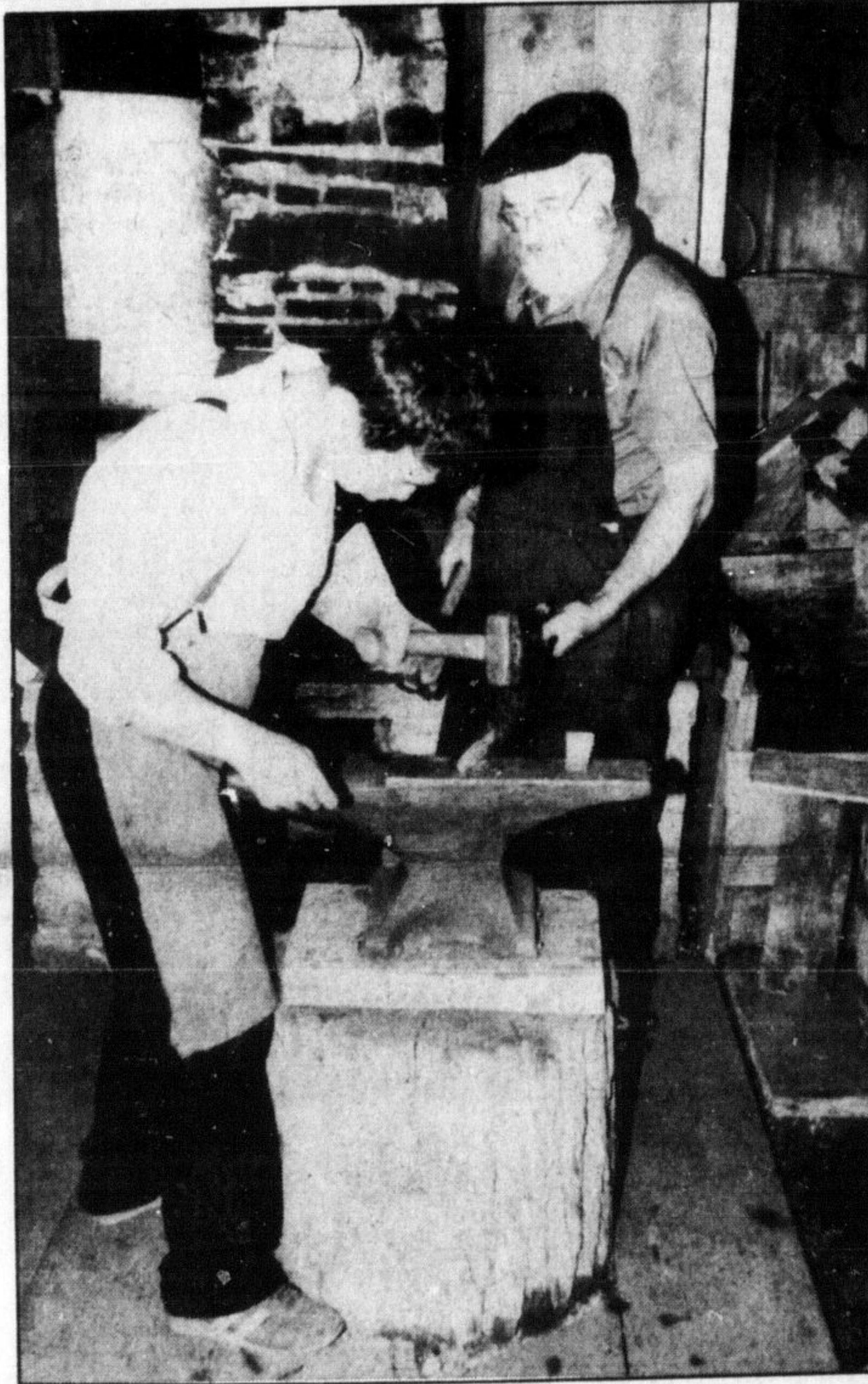
She added, "I'd rather be playing sports or something than being in the kitchen all day though."

She and Wendy had a bit of a workout in the barn however, where they had to develop a technique to get fresh eggs from the straw under the disconcerted chickens. Their running shoes looked out of place when they were exposed from beneath their period costumes which included full length skirts and aprons.

The pair agreed the day was enjoyable and educational as they learned first hand the challenge of cooking without the aid of modern conveniences.

Mrs. Robertson indicated the program was welcomed by museum staff who seemed to share the students' enthusiasm.

"It's satisfying for us to be able to spend this much time with the students. We have some very talented people who are knowledgeable in these early crafts," she said.



Bud Snow shows Danny Yuasa the craft of sharpening a harrow tooth at his blacksmith shop on the grounds of the Ontario Agricultural Museum. (Staff photos by Jon Borgstrom)

The remaining students involved in the camp spent the day at country general stores and various farming operations to get a taste of rural life.

As Mr. Taylor explained, most of the 31 children who attended the two camp sessions are from large centres like Toronto and Mississauga.

"I had an idea of immersing city kids in a rural situation," said the outdoor education teacher with the Peel board.

He managed to develop his idea this year using a heritage concept for the camps. It took many phone calls and personal visits to the immersion locations to organize the program but he has had the satisfaction of positive feedback from participants in the first session.

Mr. Taylor said he found it interesting that the students indicated the "highest impact from the immersion" on their program evaluation forms.

Campers take part in outdoor activities like hiking and horse back riding as well as their individual immersion experiences.

The camp is based at the G.W. Finlayson Field Centre at Caledon, a facility utilized by the Peel board for aquatics and winter sports during the school year.

Big Brothers

A big need

By VIC MACBOURNE

Vic MacBourne is a reporter with The Champion's sister newspaper the Oakville Beaver—he is also a Big Brother. The following is his personal view of performing this volunteer service.

I've always wanted to be a Big Brother. I guess most young men, at one time or another, give it a thought. They like to think they can share their happiness, interests and time with a little boy who doesn't have a father or brother to take him fishing, take him to the park or lend a sympathetic ear to his problems.

But being a Big Brother for a day changed all these preconceived ideas about making a young boy happy by sharing time with him.

I soon realized that it is a lot more than just giving of my time; it is the giving and receiving of a real friendship.

When the day ended, I realized it was more of a receiving on my side than a giving.

Brandon, my seven-year-old little brother for the day had as much love to give me as I had interests to share with him.

"You're my best buddy, aren't you?" he asked me about a half hour into our Saturday morning adventure at the Metro Toronto Zoo.

It was the one question I needed to break the ice I hoped would not come between us. "You betcha, buddy," I said as I picked him up to get a better view of the baby hippo who clung to its mother in the den below.

Graham Scott, executive director of the Big Brothers Association of Oakville and Milton, told me to take my Little Brother someplace of interest to both of us. It doesn't have to be anywhere expensive—a park, a fishing pond, to the library anywhere that interests you, he told me.

The Metro Zoo was a great spot. Brandon had not been there before and I had plenty to tell him about the more than 3,000 animals that roamed the 700-acre park.

Armed with our own 35 mm cameras, Brandon and I were set loose on the Metro Zoo.

9.30—Our first stop was Little footland, a great spot for shooting barnyard animals up close. Maybe too close for Brandon who jumped into the feeding and petting areas and was immediately surrounded by young goats and lambs looking for an early morning snack. He soon lost his initial fear of animals and I had to pull him away from these critters so we could to the Africa Pavilion.

10.00—He told me he liked monkeys best, so I took him to see the gorillas. The baby gorillas were in a separate den and I couldn't help pointing out the similarities between the baby gorilla and Brandon. He replied, rather wittingly, that I looked like the fat one in the other cage. I told him he was going into the lions den the next time he made fun of my "stored energy" I liked to carry around with me!

He liked the African pavilion and by the time he finished taking pictures of the hippos, baboons and crocodiles he was a full-fledged photographer.

10.30—By this time Brandon was in a frenzy to see everything that moved—in a hurry. He raced ahead of me as I tried to keep up, weighed down by a thirty-ton camera bag, a tripod and as Brandon reminded me, a couple of extra pounds of excess weight! At the Canadian Domaine, Brandon and I shot pictures of a cougar, a huge reindeer and grizzly bears before jumping on the mono-rail to head in the direction of the "birds of prey" show.

11.15—He's hungry so we stop at a McDonalds snack bar for ice cream, popcorn and pop.

12.30—We jumped on a train for a grand tour of Eurasia.

1.00—Brandon liked the polar bears best. The two bears rolled around in their den just a few feet from where Brandon and I were taking pictures. At one point I turned around and Brandon was gone and I thought for sure he was going to climb into the den to get a better picture, but I soon found him (outside the den) looking for a better place to position himself for a picture of the two beasts.

1.30—Brandon loved taking pictures and as we toured the America Pavilions he

finally came to the end of the 36-roll film. No film, no problem—Brandon took a picture of every animal he saw in his mind and I had to tear him away from a couple of the animals in the American Pavilion which he took a liking to. The beaver, the otter and some kind of muskrat could have kept the young fella going all day. But it was time to get back.

2.00—We grabbed a quick bite before heading home. Brandon wants an another ice cream, a milk shake and coke, but instead settles for a hamburger and a milkshake and a couple of my french fries.

2.20—It's been a long day for both of us. He says his feet are tired, but when I ask him if he liked the zoo he said a familiar phrase I had heard throughout the day—"oh yea, yea yea." There was nothing to say on the way home. Brandon slept from the minute we got on the highway to his front door step.

It was a day I will not soon forget. Despite the fact that Brandon said I was fat, looked better with my glasses on and reminded him of a gorilla, I knew what he really meant.

And towards the end of the day he told me: "you're a nice man you know, mister... you're my Big Daddy."

A little effort a lot of gain

It was Big Brother week recently, but for at least 15 Little Brothers in Oakville and Milton there was no Big Brother to celebrate with. The pancake breakfast and the sailing afterwards are no fun without a Big Brother.

These boys need a Big Brother, says Graham Scott, executive director of the Big Brothers of Oakville and Milton. "These kids long to have someone to love and care for them," says Mr. Scott.

Becoming a Big Brother is easy.

An application form is filled out and four references are required. These references are asked a series of questions relating to the man's character and ability to be patient and deal with children's problems. A police check is conducted; an interview is held with members of the Big Brothers executive and the Little Brother—Big Brother match-up is done based on the needs and interests shared by the two people.

Three to four hours a week is the minimum amount of time required to spend with the Little Brother, but it has to be consistent, insists Mr. Scott who says the "Little Brothers really look up to their Big Brothers. It's really something big in his life when he gets his Big Brother."

Mr. Scott always suggests that the activities the pair do are inexpensive. Throw a frisbee, play football, racquetball, or go to sporting events. Some of the Big and Little Brothers like to do wood working—they build go-carts, bird cages, anything that might be of interest, he explained. Big Brothers is located at 191A Lakeshore Rd. E. telephone 845-6456.

Movie nights at library

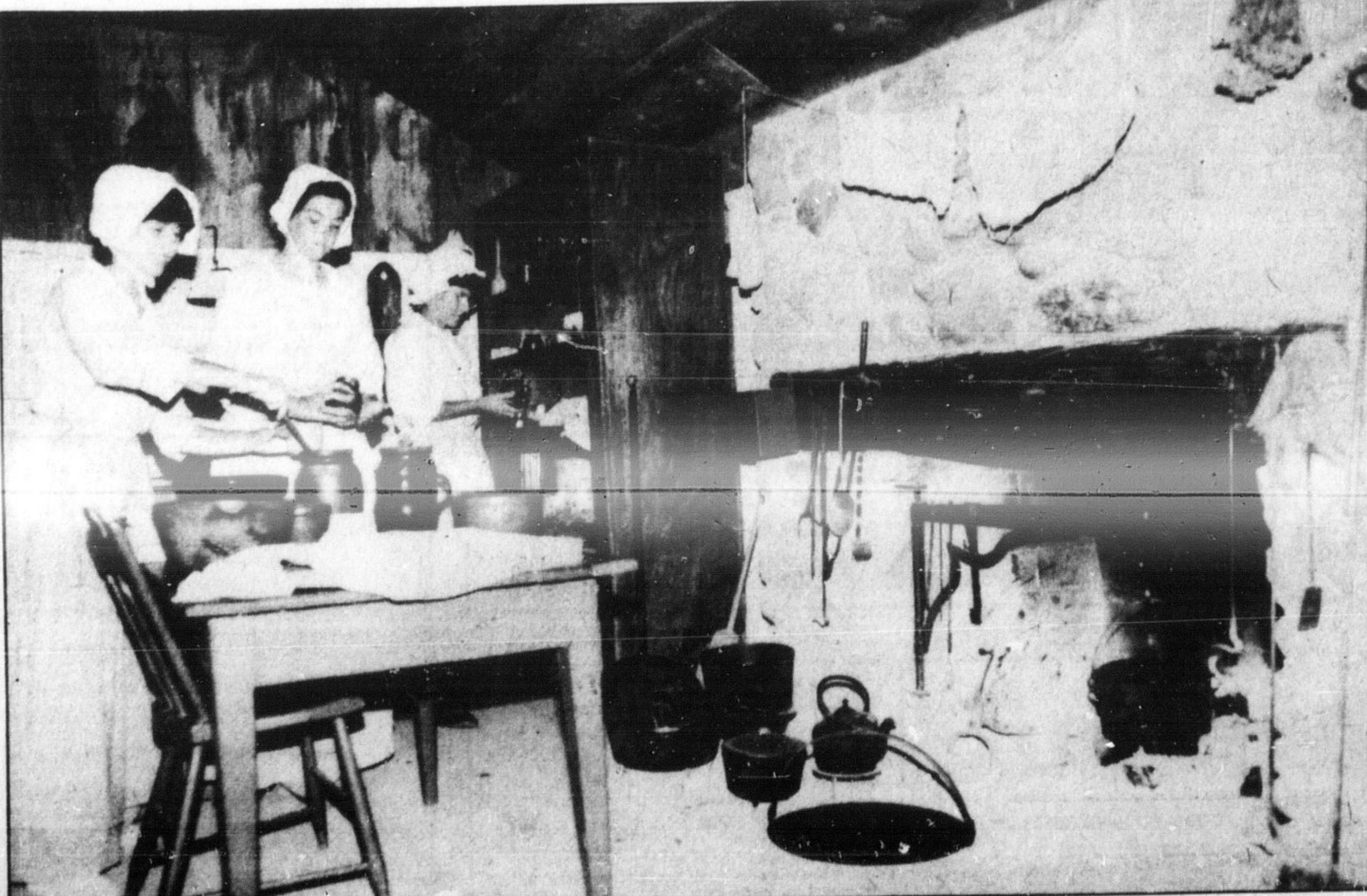
"Moonlight Matinee", outdoor films for the whole family will be offered by the Milton Public Library for the months of July and August.

The films to be run every Tuesday evening beginning July 5, will include Invisible Man, Abbott and Costello meet the Keystone Kops, Rookie of the Year and Mars Attacks the World.

Showings begin at 8:45 p.m. in July and 8:30 p.m. in August. Admission is free.

Visitors are asked to bring their own blankets or lawn chairs. In case of rain, the movies will be shown indoors at library hall.

For more information call Sylvia Fallis at 878-2879.



Making lunch in a pioneer kitchen was the task undertaken by Michelle Holmes (left) and Wendy Shaw last week. The girls were given assistance by museum worker Marg Roberts of Milton.