

**Ernest C. Drury**

# Farmer premier represented Halton 1919-1923

By Bob Burt  
The school in Milton for 10 years which carried the name Ontario School for the Deaf has recently been renamed the Ernest C. Drury School. The change comes as a result of a new government policy that will see government buildings and institutions named after famous Canadians.

Drury served as premier of Ontario from 1919 to 1923 and he is probably the only man ever to represent Halton Riding and be premier at the same time. He had been a successful farmer and became known as "the farmer premier".

While Mr. Drury did represent this riding during

the life of the UFO Government (United Farmers of Ontario) his roots were not in Halton but at Crown Hill near Barrie.

Drury's rise to power was indeed unusual. He had run in his home riding of Simcoe as an independent Liberal, campaigning removal of tariffs and in defence of free trade in 1917. He lost that election.

**Needed leader**  
During 1919 the UFO was formed and two men—one from Ontario County and a second representing Manitoulin Island—ran and won in by-elections. Later that year the party fielded candidates throughout the province and won 45 of the 111

seats in the legislature. The party agreed to a coalition government with the 11 Labor members who had been elected.

Unlikely as it seems, the party had fielded candidates and won the election but still had no leader. Drury was approached and accepted the challenge. Now the government had a leader without a seat.

It was John Ford of Halton who resigned his seat to cause an opening for Drury. For a considerable period of time it appeared Drury might be in for an acclamation.

No such luck.

A Toronto compositor Edward J. Stephenson, who had just returned from duty

overseas, challenged Drury and ran as an independent.

**Good majority**  
According to records in the files of The Canadian Champion of the day, Drury won the race with a good majority but the urban polls in Milton and Georgetown swung in Stephenson's favor.

"Some voted UFO out of friendly feeling to the new Government and on the grounds that it should be given an opportunity to govern. Other supported the premier to avoid a general election, hoping for one later after a government defeat in the legislature," the paper said.

Drury attended a victory

party in Milton after the election. One of the speakers at that meeting was Col. Ptolemy, representing the Board of Trade.

**Service vote**  
"We do not propose to apologize for the support Mr. Stephenson received in this town," stated Col. Ptolemy. "This is a manufacturing centre and many workmen were not yet ready to endorse the farmer's government. Milton was headquarters for a famous battalion and a lot of returned men live here. It was natural they should rally around their comrade last Monday. These boys stuck together in France and they stuck together here," the Col.

is reported as saying in the records of The Champion.

There had been considerable opposition to the UFO because it was a class party. It was shortly after the founding of the UFO that Drury introduced what he called a broadening out policy. That policy incorporated broader and wider aims of the party and helped removed the stigma that the party was simply a farm organization.

One of the achievements of the Drury government laid claim to was the improvement of roads in the province. When the Drury government took office there were only two paved stretches of highway in the province, one from Brockville to Ottawa and a second from Toronto to Hamilton.

**Road repairs**  
During the UFO government's term over 400 miles of road were improved, although not all of that road was necessarily paved.

The Ontario Provincial Police was also overhauled. According to Drury in his book "The Farmer Premier," the force was too few in numbers, did not wear distinctive uniforms and morale and discipline were low. General Victor Williams was appointed the man in charge of revamping the force.

It was Drury and his government that took part in the founding of Kapuskasing. In his book Drury recalls considering on which side of the river the town should be developed. Drury favored one side of the river but the mayor of the area had favored the opposite side where, it turned out, he owned a number of buildings.

**Wrong side**  
"The town of Kapuskasing was incorporated at the next session of the Legislature, and a local resident was named as its mayor pro tem. Before long we began to hear rumors that the mayor was telling newcomers that a town would never be built on the east side of the river, but

rather the west side, where he owned property including the old houses of the prison camp. The construction work on the paper mill and the power site attracted a number of gamblers, bootleggers, prostitutes and the like, who moved into the old buildings owned by the mayor. The place became a disreputable huddle of disreputable shacks, mostly tenanted by disreputable people. I was in one way relieved when we got word that a fire had wiped the whole thing out. After that there was no question as to where the town would be," Drury said.

The UFO government's downfall came about partly as the result of a political ploy by the Tories and partly due to scandal perpetrated by enemies of the government.

The government had been pressing for bills concerning redistribution and the transferable vote near the end of the session. The government had been led to believe that the bill had support from all three parties but when the proposal was tabled, the Conservatives filibustered and managed to stall the proceedings for close to two weeks.

**Frayed nerves**  
The long drawn-out session played heavily on the nerves of the government members who were required to be on hand during the rambling sessions to assure the presence of a quorum.

It was during one of those all-night sessions that the premier was advised a party had been in progress in one of the government member's offices. There were several people drinking and women were in attendance.

The premier opted to take no action in order to avoid undesirable publicity so close to an election. News of the drinking party soon fell into opposition hands, however, and the matter became public information.

The following day pandemonium broke loose in the legislature where opposition members hurled barbs at the

government and referred to the party as "that last awful night."

**Goes to people**  
Tired under the heavy pressure and attacks, Drury in a fit of impatience and without consulting his cabinet announced he would dissolve the house and go to the country.

"The plain fact is, I dissolved the House in a sudden fit of temper. I have regretted it ever since. Heads of government cannot afford to lose their tempers," Drury said later.

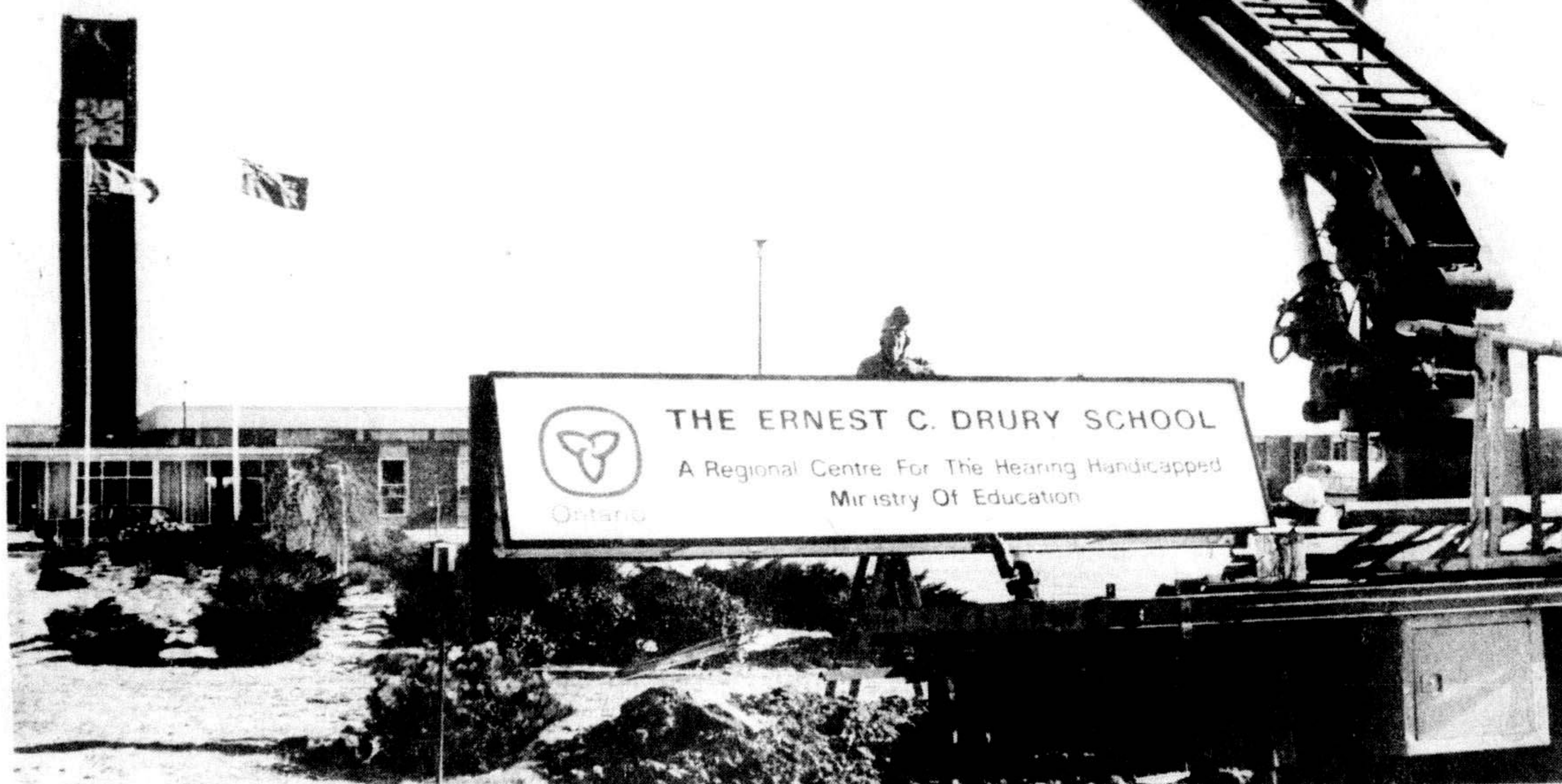
The decision proved fatal for the UFO government as it lost the election of 1923. Drury lost his seat in Halton, defeated by George Hillmer, an Oakville Reeve. Tory Leader Howard Ferguson formed the ninth session of

the provincial parliament and Drury's career as an active politician came crashing to a halt.

Drury tried unsuccessfully in a number of subsequent elections to seek a seat on the federal Liberal team. Prime Minister McKenzie King had promised him a seat on the cabinet.

**Out of money**  
Drury had given up farming at his 250 acres at Crown Hill near Barrie and, having financed his own campaigns for the better part, found himself out of active politics and financially embarrassed.

When the Tories were turfed out of power some years later, Drury accepted a government appointment as Sheriff, County Clerk and Registrar at Barrie.



A SIGN HERALDING the new name of the former Ontario School for the Deaf was installed last week at the Ontario Street facility. The school was named last year after Ernest C. Drury, a former premier of Ontario. Frank Vanaken, a Hamilton employee of Claude Neon Ltd., prepares to unhook the cable which held the sign while it was bolted into place. Co-worker Bob Larwood (white hat) of Hamilton installs fluorescent lights inside the sign.

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(b) 20 people must register before course begins.  
(c) Deadline for registration, March 14, 1975, 5 p.m.

**Obituary**

## Calvert Kitchen

Calvert Heath (Cal) Kitchen of R.R. 1 Puslinch died at Guelph General Hospital on Wednesday, Feb. 26 in his 69th year.

He was the husband of Annabelle Stokes and father of Lois Warner of Morrison, Edgar of Guelph, James of R.R. 3 Puslinch and Douglas of R.R. 1 Puslinch. Brothers Lloyd of Hamilton and James of Morrison also survive, as well as eight grandchildren. The funeral service was conducted by Rev. Tom Brelsford from Wall-Custance Funeral Home, 206 Norfolk St., Guelph on Saturday, March 1. Interment was at St. David's Cemetery, Campbellville.

The pallbearers were Russell Inglis, Barney Warner, Ivan Bousfield, Carl Bousfield, Ben Beavis and Ken Gunson.

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