

Arts & Entertainment

Locally-authored Halton Sketches in third printing

History comes alive in collection of stories

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**
The Champion

Almost 30 years ago, Milton resident John McDonald set out to collect some life stories he felt were in danger of being lost forever.

One by one, he spoke with Halton residents, carefully recording their family histories. Mr. McDonald found the mostly elderly people willingly sharing their life stories — usually at their kitchen tables — amid laughter and sometimes tears.

It was a job he viewed as a privilege. The stories Mr. McDonald collected were for a series of newspaper articles on Halton's history, which eventually became a book, *Halton Sketches*, in 1976.

"People would be pleased to be (in it), knowing their family names would be part of it. I never had anyone refuse to sit down and be interviewed," Mr. McDonald said.

Now, more than two decades later, Mr. McDonald is celebrating the third printing of the book, entitled *Halton Sketches Revisited*.

Enjoying writing book

McDonald said he values greatly the stories he was told and is glad he was able to record them before it was too late.

"One of the sad things is that a lot of people acknowledged in the book are no longer with us. There's a lot of stories that would have been lost," he said.

It all started when Mr. McDonald, who was born in Milton, moved to the Limehouse/Dolly Varden area.

He was fascinated by the lime kiln ruins, as well as the intriguing name of Dolly Varden. He decided to seek out its meaning. He began his research in 1971, and "amassed quite a bit of information" on Halton.

In 1974, Mr. McDonald was approached by Hartley Coles — then editor of the Acton Free Press and Georgetown, Independent papers — to write a series of articles on Halton's history.

Two years later, Mr. McDonald was approached by the owners of the Georgetown and Acton newspapers and the Dills Printing and Publishing company, and asked if he was interested in compiling

the articles into a book.

And so *Halton Sketches* was published. Two years later, after all the copies were sold, people asked Mr. McDonald when he would do a reprint. His answer: on the 20th anniversary of the first printing.

That day came in 1996 and true to his word, the updated *Halton Sketches Revisited* was reprinted. This year, Boston Mills Press put out its third printing.

Mr. McDonald describes the book as a "socio-economic history of North Halton." He said the book shows the social development of the area as well as the business and industrial development. It focuses on the history of Halton in the 1800s and 1900s.

From the very beginning, Mr. McDonald said he wanted to capture the stories of the people, rather than just the history behind buildings and companies.

Interviews a treat

The best part of the journey, Mr. McDonald said, was talking with the people and collecting the stories.

"It was like putting together a jigsaw puzzle," he said, adding that he was amazed at what people would confide to him.

Obituaries proved to be one of the best ways of collecting information about the original inhabitants of the area. The obituaries in *The Champion* and other area newspapers were scoured, he said.

Mr. McDonald said he hopes that after reading his book, people will drive by buildings and places that once seemed ordinary and recognize their significance to Halton.

Both long-time and new Halton residents have proven responsive to the book, Mr. McDonald said. The long-time residents enjoy seeing bits of their own family history, while the new residents appreciate finding out more about the area they've moved to.

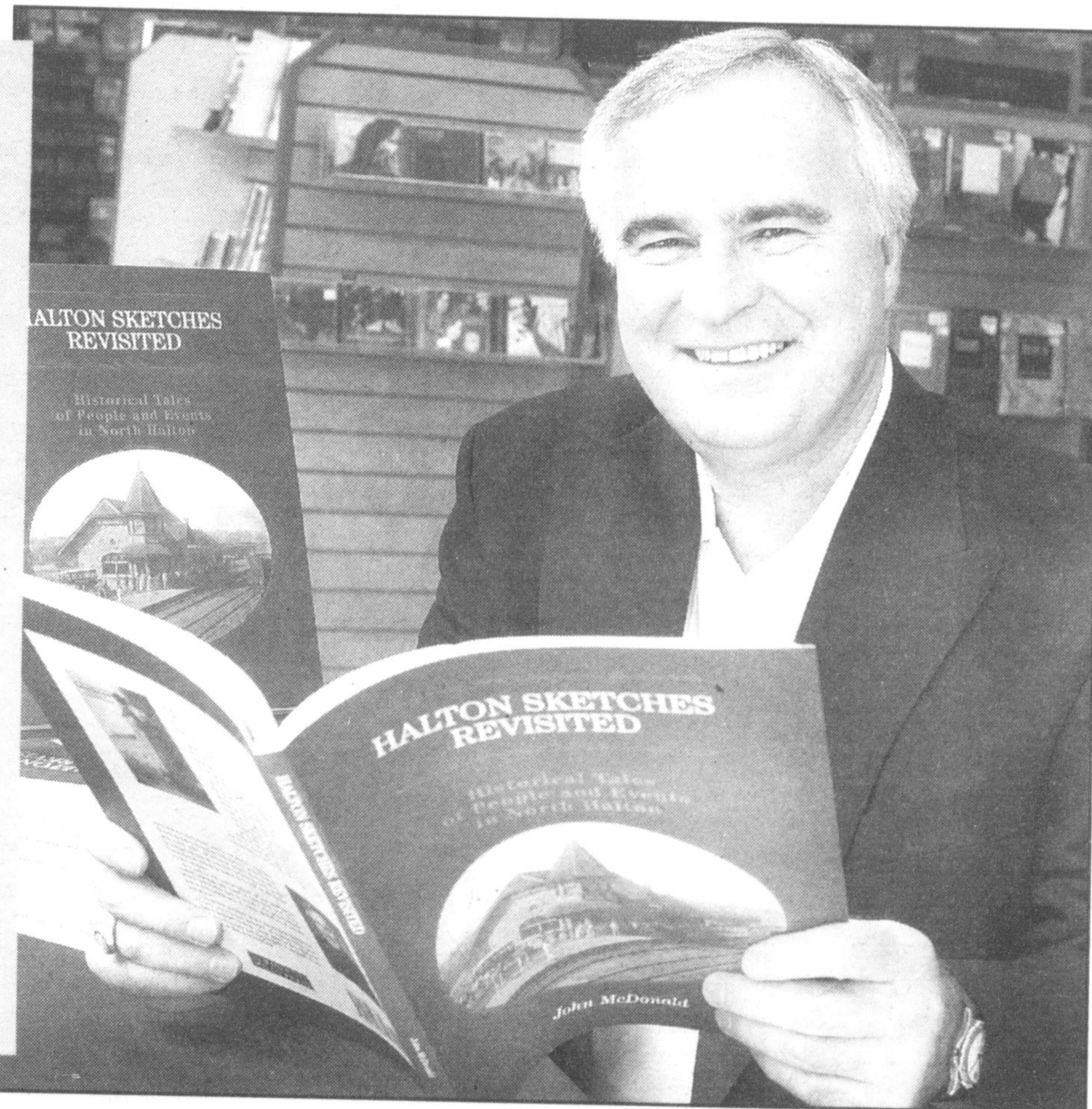
"It's rewarding to know that people old and new are learning about the heritage (of Halton), whether it's their family heritage or their new heritage," he said.

Copies of the book, which costs \$24.95, are available at Coles at Milton Mall and Global Genealogical Supply at 13 Charles St.

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Author John McDonald displays a copy of his historical book *Halton Sketches Revisited* — a collection of colourful stories now in its third printing — during a recent book signing at Coles Book Store at Milton Mall.

Photo by GRAHAM PAINE



Dancers to compete in Vegas next month

Eight Dancers from Milton's Ronda Copeland School of Dance have been selected to participate in an international competition in Las Vegas next month.

From July 1 to 10, the eight dancers will attend classes run by professional teachers from all over the U.S., and prepare for a performance at Caesar's Palace at the end of the 10 days.

The following are the dancers attending the competition: Rachel Guglick, 9; Alexis Westwater, 8; Kourtney Russiani, 12; Julia Winter, 10; Nicki Patafio, 10; Amy McCahery, 9; Jordan Winter, 11; and Alysha Kobow, 16.

In February, the dancers participated in I Love Dance preliminary competitions held in the U.S.

From the thousands of dancers — who were from Canada, the U.S. and Australia — about 120 dancers were selected to participate in the Las Vegas competition.

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