

At left, a workman loads limestone blocks onto a pallet to be loaded onto a transport as part of the dismantling and moving of the old limestone block home — seen intact above — that sat behind Home Depot. The home features 21-inch walls, six by eight foot oak lentals and roughly 120 tones of limestone that was used in its construction. Below, historic building restorer Tom Murison holds up a child's dress found in the walls of the house during the dismantling.

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# Preserving piece of Milton's past

*Historic home saved from demolition tells lots of tales*

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For historic building restorer Tom Murison, every house he works to preserve tells a story.

It's something that rang true for an old stone home he recently worked to move from land that's now being turned into a power centre at the corner of Steeles Avenue and Thompson Road.

The modern buildings and big box stores are a far cry from the family farm Murison said was started there more than 150 years ago in what was known as the Township of Trafalgar.

"The population of the area would've only been a couple hundred at the time," he remarked.

Now, as he tries to piece together the details of the house and its past, he listens to an intriguing but tragic tale it reveals.

As the home was being dismantled, Murison came across a small child's dress from about 1855 in a sealed space under the stairs.

## Enlightning discovery

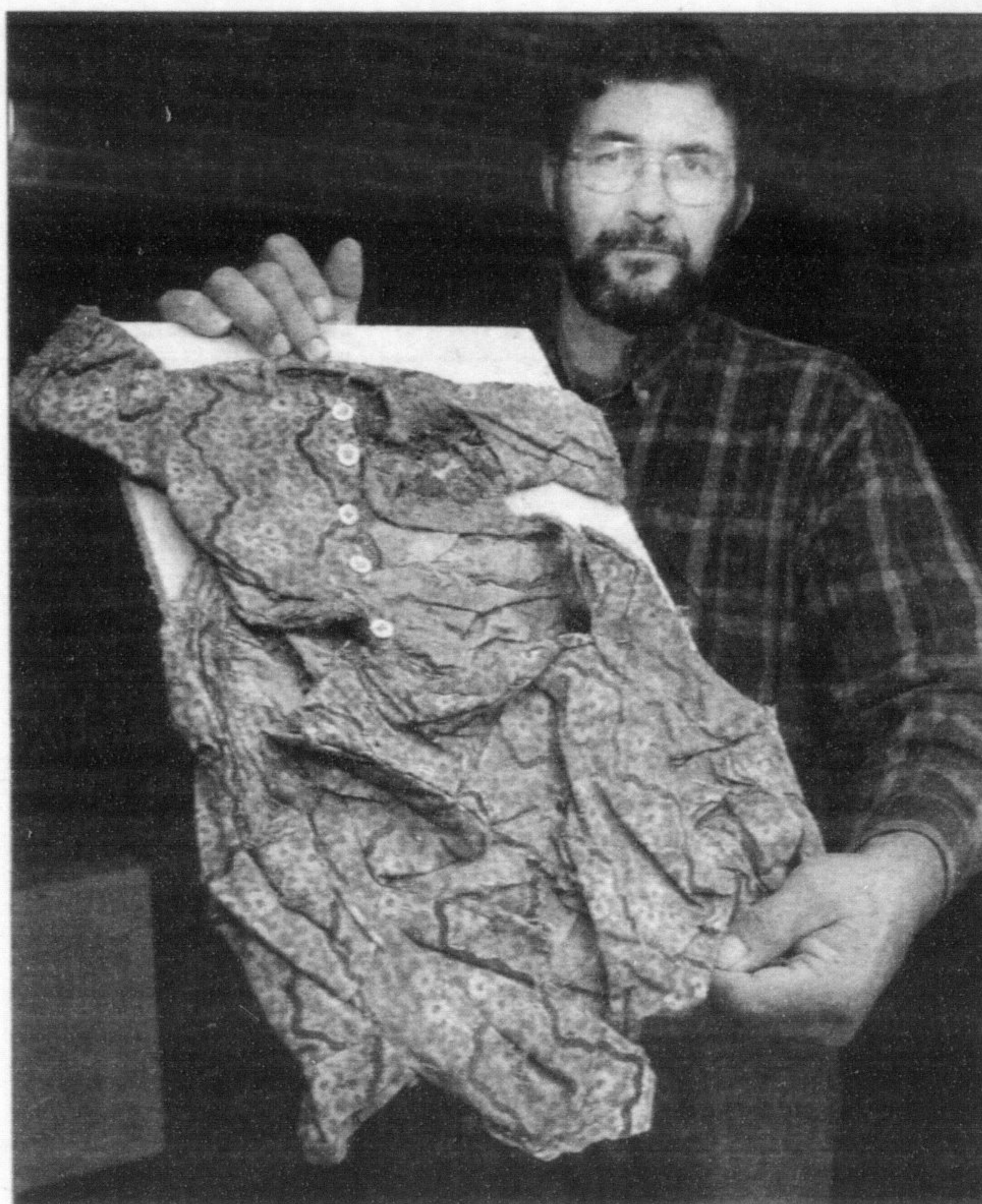
The dress, made of purple fabric with a blue flannel lining, was pinned to the floor by two bricks.

While Murison pondered why the piece of clothing would be preserved in such a fashion, an old Celtic tradition came to mind, where a person's dead body is pinned down with a stone so that its spirit doesn't wander.

Although Murison said no skeletal remains were found, he drew another conclusion.

"The couple may have lost a child and pinned the dress down because they were trying to keep the child's spirit in the home. It's really sad," he said. "This tells a story that the house by itself doesn't tell."

He suspects the child may have been a member of the Simpson family, which owned the land for several decades in



the 1800s.

Murison has also been examining other aspects of the home to try to determine exactly when and how it was built.

At this point, he believes the one-storey portion extending behind the back of the Loyalist Georgian-style home would've actually been built first in about 1838, since it was common to build a small house and then add something larger onto the front at a later date.

The large one-and-a-half storey part of the home was most likely constructed in the 1850s, he said.

He explained using limestone like the Simpsons did for the house would've been a massive undertaking. Since it likely came from the Niagara Escarpment, they would've made dozens of treks with a horse and wagon to pick up the stone, with each trip taking the better part of a day.

"They were probably hauling back two to four tonnes at a time, so it would take 50 to 100 trips," said Murison.

Another interesting aspect of the home he found was log joists that appear to have come from a log cabin.

With a bit of timber dating work, Murison figured the logs are from a cabin that dates back to about 1825 or 1826.

"I'm pretty sure the log house was on the same property," he said, adding he also thinks the Simpsons built it. "Most pioneers never threw anything away. They recycled them."

In addition, he discovered that the home is very similar to at least a dozen other stone houses in the Milton area, meaning it's probably the same group of people who worked on all of them.

## Home to be rebuilt soon

Today, the home sits in pieces on a nearby rural property, where local lawyer Dale Fitzpatrick plans to have it rebuilt next year to a likeness of its original splendour.

"I want to preserve its character," Fitzpatrick said, noting he was drawn to the historical aspect of the home and its stone appearance. "It was a little run down, but my mind's eye saw what it could be."

Murison credited the Town, Heritage Milton and Rio-Can — the property's developer — for helping facilitate the preservation of the home.

The trio worked together to determine whether to relocate the house or adapt it for an alternate use. But it was decided the latter wasn't suitable because the building would've required extensive alterations. Heritage Milton also expressed concern that the architectural and historical significance of the building would be placed out of context in the commercial surroundings.

Fitzpatrick then bought the home, with Rio-Can contributing to its relocation costs.

"Preserving Milton's long history has always been and continues to be a priority of town council," said Mayor Gordon Krantz. "We are delighted to have worked with Heritage Milton to find a purchaser for the home, and to help preserve an important piece of Milton's heritage for our residents."

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