

**Preserving the past**

# Dills helps keep Milton's history alive

By Stephanie Hounsell  
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

He may be a historian, but Jim Dills has never been one to live in the past.

That's reflected in everything from how he writes his stories to how he spends his time.

And so, even at the age of 76, Dills is proficient on the computer and depends on it to keep all his data secure and organized.

Although he's a long-time Milton resident, he welcomes the new-comers and said he's never met one he didn't like.

And, perhaps most importantly, Dills lives for the moment, not letting his interest in the past squeeze out the joy from today.

"You have to be careful not to be so enamoured with history that you forget the present," Dills said.

Sitting in a room filled with windows letting in the day's sunshine, Dills is hesitant about having an article written about him. He knows the idea is to profile notable Milton residents who've done a lot for the community in conjunction with the Town's 150th anniversary, and he's not so sure he fits into that category.

**Quite humble**

"There are many people who have done so much more," he said, humbly.

With a bit of cajoling, he agrees to an article, realizing he can provide a historical perspective on growth and some of the issues Milton's facing.

"The town has gone through many transitions," he said, relaxing. "We talk now as if it (growing pains) all began when we arrived. But what we see now is a reflection of what happened much earlier."

Whether it's complaints about the state of roads or the rapid growth of Milton's population, these aren't new issues, he said.

Dills is the Milton Historical Society's founding president of 1976, which he insists simply means he was one of many passionate townsfolk who wanted to see such a group take shape.

The historical society has provided the avenue through which Dills' various ventures have flourished for the past few decades.

The group's main concern initially was that the Halton Region-owned county buildings — what's now Town Hall Victoria Park —

not be demolished. They succeeded in their efforts. The Town of Milton bought the buildings for \$1, and spent \$3 million fixing them up in the '80s, Dills said.

"The council struggled with the decision, but finally reached the right one. We benefit today from their vision," he said.

Today, the historical society raises money to keep its archives and the Waldie Blacksmith Shop going. It operates the only public archives the Town has, Dills said.

"We enrich the archives by collecting data generations in the future will want to see," he said.

Dills and his wife, Shirley, came to Milton from Acton in 1951 when he was transferred by his father — who bought the Milton Canadian Champion in 1943 — to publish the paper.

**Jack of all trades**

"Titles didn't mean much," Dills said, explaining he sold ads, swept the floors and did whatever else had to be done.

He was on call 24/7. Any time he heard a siren, he stopped what he was doing and took off to find the news. Shirley, his wife of 55 years, said it wasn't always easy.

"It was sometimes hard because business sometimes interfered when he wanted to be one place but he had to be somewhere else," she said.

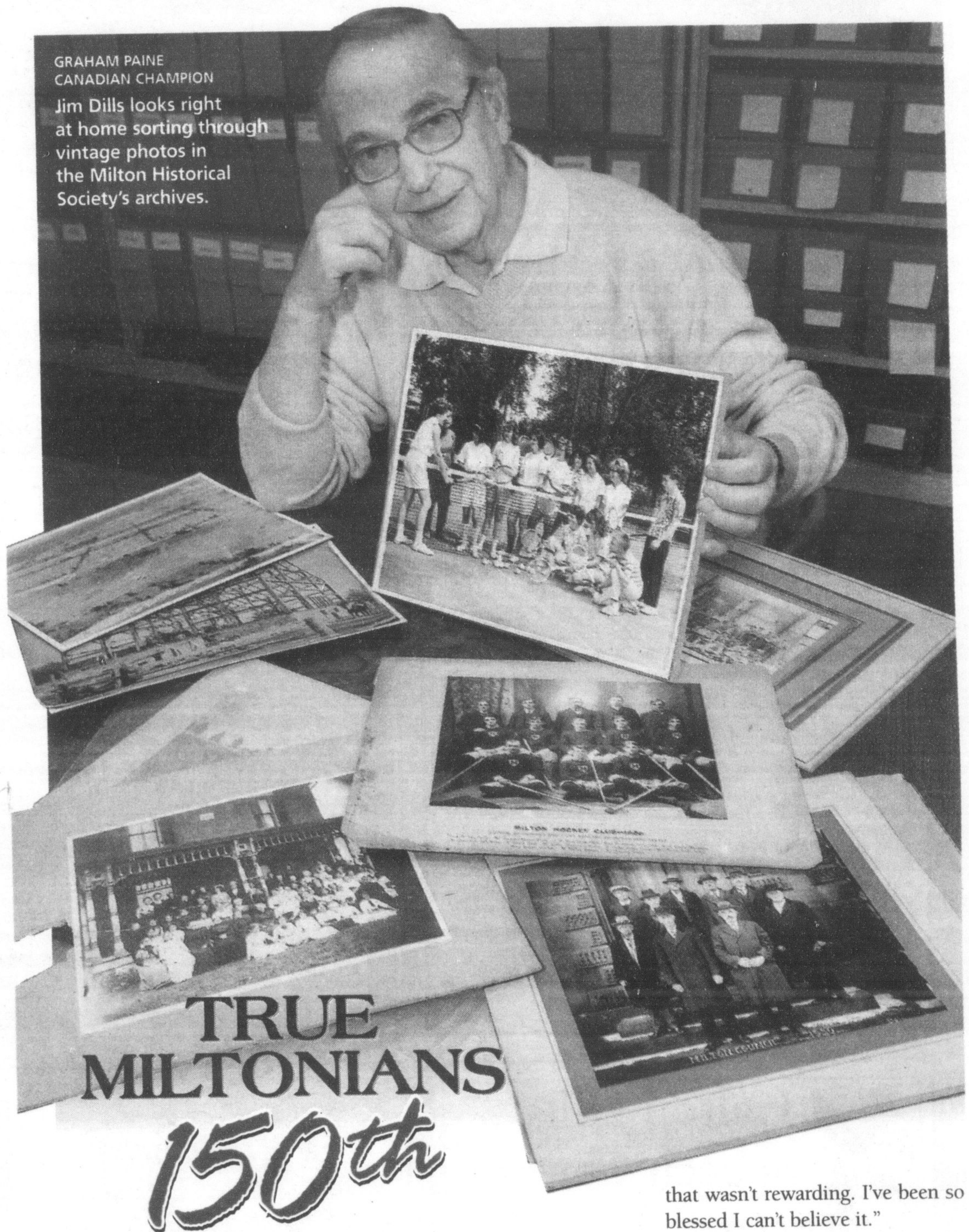
The couple has five adult children. Two of their sons followed in their father's footsteps and are in the newspaper business — Mark Dills is director of production for Metroland West, while another is an editor in Alberta.

Jim published the *Champion* until 1978 when it was sold to Inland Publishing Co. Ltd. He then became executive director of the Canadian Community Newspapers Association.

He's been awarded numerous accolades. In 1977, Dills received the Queen Elizabeth Jubilee Medal and in 1993 he was given the Confederation Commemorative Medal, to name a few.

In the early 1990s, Dills became an author, writing 'Moments in History; Reflections of Halton's County Town 1833-1864'. Since then, he's collaborated with numerous people to publish books about Milton's heritage.

His most recent project was with John Challinor, who wrote 'Milton Remembers World War I: The Men and Women we Never



GRAHAM PAINE  
CANADIAN CHAMPION

Jim Dills looks right at home sorting through vintage photos in the Milton Historical Society's archives.

Knew'.

Volunteering has been a big part of Dills' life, be it involvement at his church, with the Chamber, the Rotary Club or with various committees he's sat on.

"(Jim) likes to do what he can to help," Shirley said, adding he's "very kind, loving and concerned with things going on."

Although it's clear Dills believes in moving forward, there are some things he misses from the "good old days".

For example, there seemed to be more citizen initiative in the

past, he said.

"Everything didn't require municipal leadership," he said. "If there was a need, a group formed and accomplished it. That's what I'm missing these days. People look at things and say, 'The Town should do it.' But we're the town."

Progress has its downside, he admitted.

"Progress is something I always thought was good. But with all the greenhouse gases, maybe not."

Pondering his accomplishments, Dills said they've all been fulfilling. "I can't think of anything

that wasn't rewarding. I've been so blessed I can't believe it."

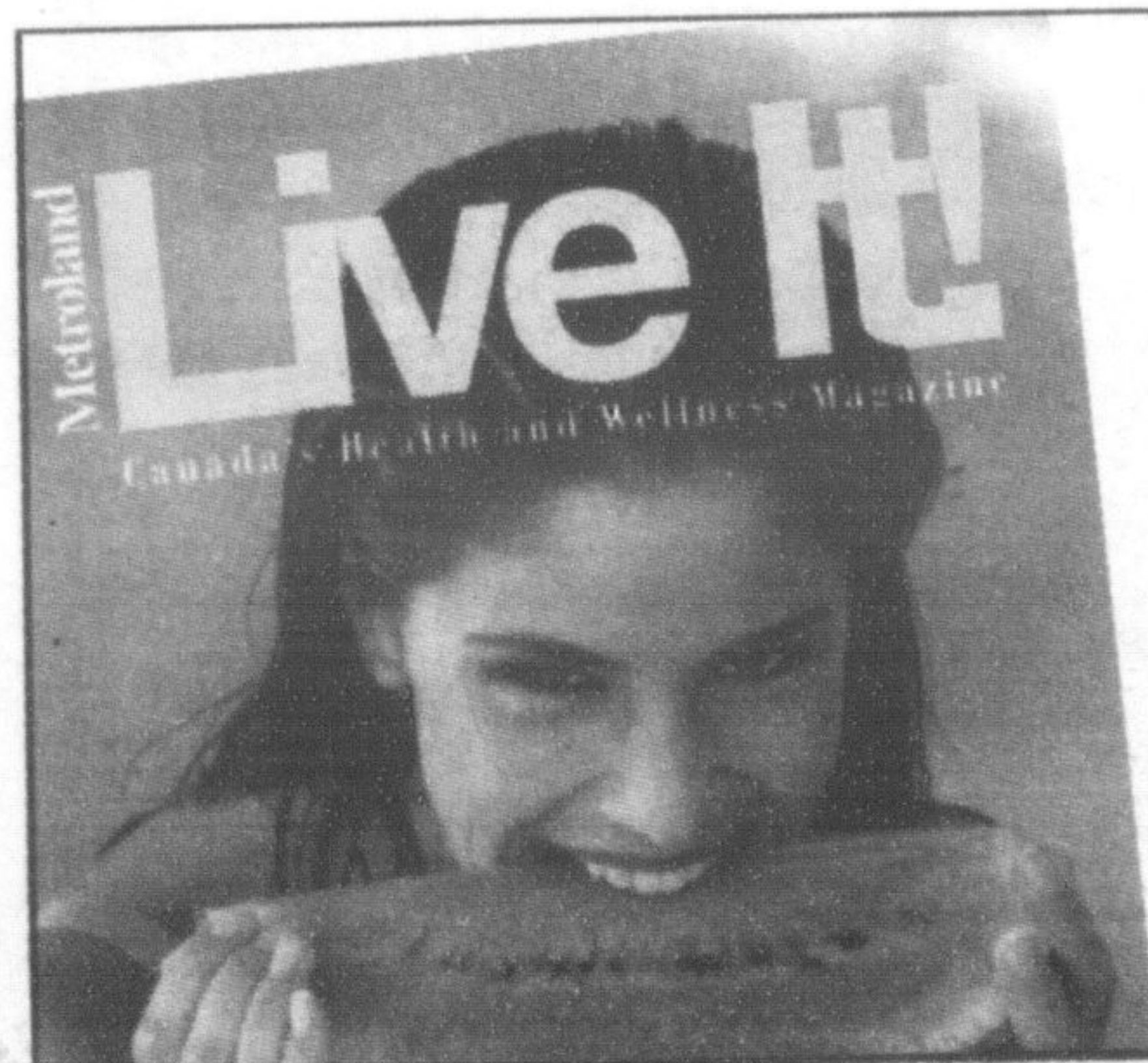
Looking back, what are the highlights of his career?

"I always remember the people," Dills said. "There are great people in Milton."

Never one to sit idle, Dills continues to have projects in the works.

"There's thousands of things to do," he said. "I wish I had more time, more researchers, something."

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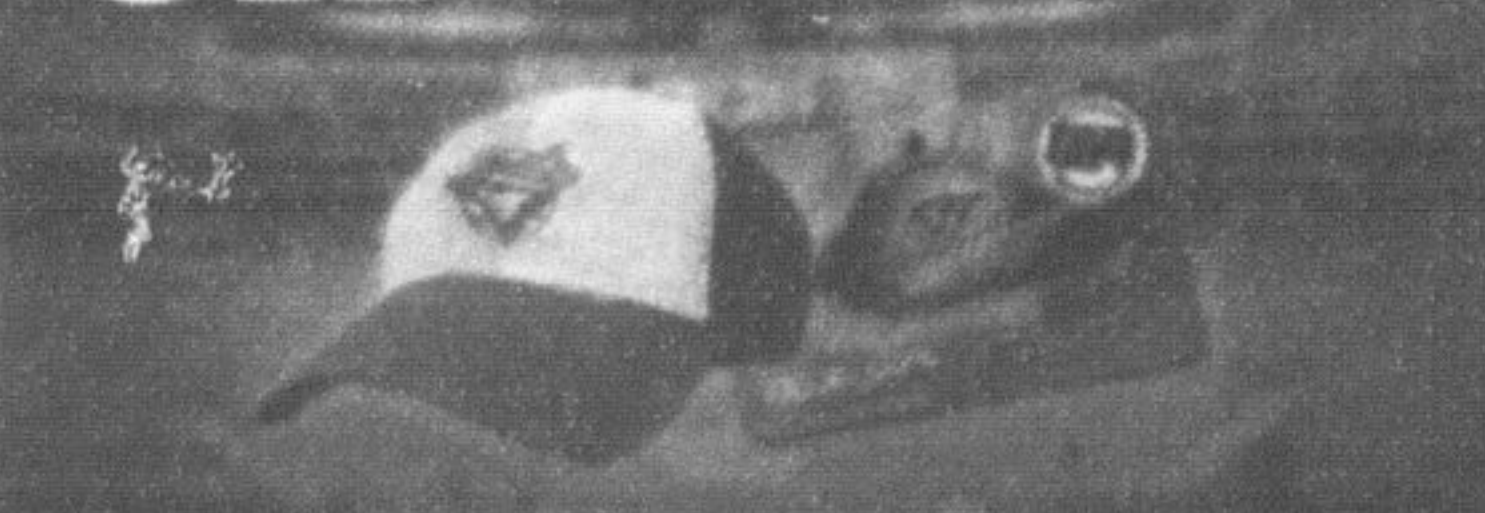
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