

Education in the wilderness

# Frost Centre teaches greater awareness

**By Bob Burt**  
Surrounded by dense hardwood forests, lakes and rugged terrain the Frost Centre promises to become one of the province's foremost facilities for research in and demonstration of resource management, recreation and public education.

The centre, situated on Highway 35 at Dorset, is used primarily by school groups from across the province. While the facility there makes available an endless list of things to do and see, the inevitable effect is a greater awareness of nature.

The centre bears the name of former premier Leslie M. Frost. It was largely due to the work of Mr. Frost and the Algonquin Park Advisory Committee that the centre was converted into an operation fostering a public understanding and appreciation of natural resources, their management and use.

**Was ranger school**  
Prior to 1968 the centre was known as the Ontario Forest Technical School or Ranger School. For many years the ranger school had been the qualifying institution for employment with the Ontario

government and forestry industry. Forest technicians and conservation officers took in-service training there.

With the coming of community college courses in 1968, the centre found itself out of business.

In the intervening years between 1968 and 1974 when the centre opened, the facility was used for in-service training and increasingly by boards of education for a variety of outdoor education exercises.

Although the centre has only been open for about a year, its popularity can be easily

documented. The centre runs at about 80 per cent capacity. Groups are urged to make bookings as soon as possible and some are made a year in advance.

**All specialists**  
The centre is under the direction of George Hamilton. Mr. Hamilton has collected a team of staffers that include specialists in forestry, recreation, fish and wildlife and land management.

Structured programs in deer yard management, fur management, forest management, timber felling and chainsaw use are available.

Other programs tie in with forest measurement, tree identification, fish and wildlife, a sawmill demonstration as well as interpretive trail walks.

Recently this writer joined a group of newspapermen from the Ontario Weekly Newspapers Association on a visit to the centre to learn of the facilities available and experiences being offered.

While experts are on the centre staff, they are not always available for conducting tours or head up hikes. According to Mr. Hamilton, the staff encourages teachers or group leaders to visit the centre, see the facilities in advance of the trip and then prepare a program using centre staffers as resource people only.

The centre operates all year with the busiest season being winter. During the winter season a lighted rink, cross country skiing trails, snowshoe trails and snowmobile trails feature the winter recreation program. A gym, auditorium, games room,

labs, library and a museum are available all year.

Canoeing, water polo, soccer, horseshoes and baseball are among the activities available in the summer.

**83-room dorms**  
The site takes in some 55 000 acres. Visitors to the centre sleep in dormitories, eat in the large mess hall and have access to the variety of indoor and outdoor recreation and learning experiences. In all there are 83 rooms with two beds to a room.

With a properly arranged program, visitors young and old have an excellent opportunity to be exposed to plant and animal life in a way that is easy to learn.

According to some staffers at the centre, one of the benefits of the school trips shows up in the form of improved relationships between teachers and students. The teacher-student interaction outside the classroom is reported by teachers to be of considerable benefit.

Acton High School is one school that has made the trip on at least three occasions. Brian Skerrett speaks highly of the centre.

**Get more there**  
"In my opinion it is one of the most significant things I've been involved in. I feel students get more out of that than many things that are done in the school. Each time up, it's been something different."

In the past Mr. Skerrett has looked at the trips as a means of increasing the students' consideration of each other. "We hope they'll learn to take care of each other. It gives them a chance to be close."

Student Lorella Deptieri thought the trip was "really good" but she noted not everyone was interested in what was happening.

"It helps people learn to cooperate, to get along and to reason out problems. It's a chance to get close to people. We go to the same school but really don't know them."

Lorella felt students would benefit more by having a more structured program and less free time.

Tie with courses  
Teacher Skerrett agreed

that a more structured program would be helpful and noted efforts were being made to tie in the trip with courses of study at school.

He expressed disappointment at the behavior of some students on a recent trip. "They really goofed. They littered the place with their garbage and kept others up during the night with their singing."

Mr. Skerrett said students were warned that their actions could scuttle the whole program. "The message seemed to get through. It was a real situation, not a gamey one. It was a case of kids away from home and pushing a panic button."

The following morning the culprits offered apologies and went about cleaning up all of the litter they had left behind. "They did that on their own," he noted.

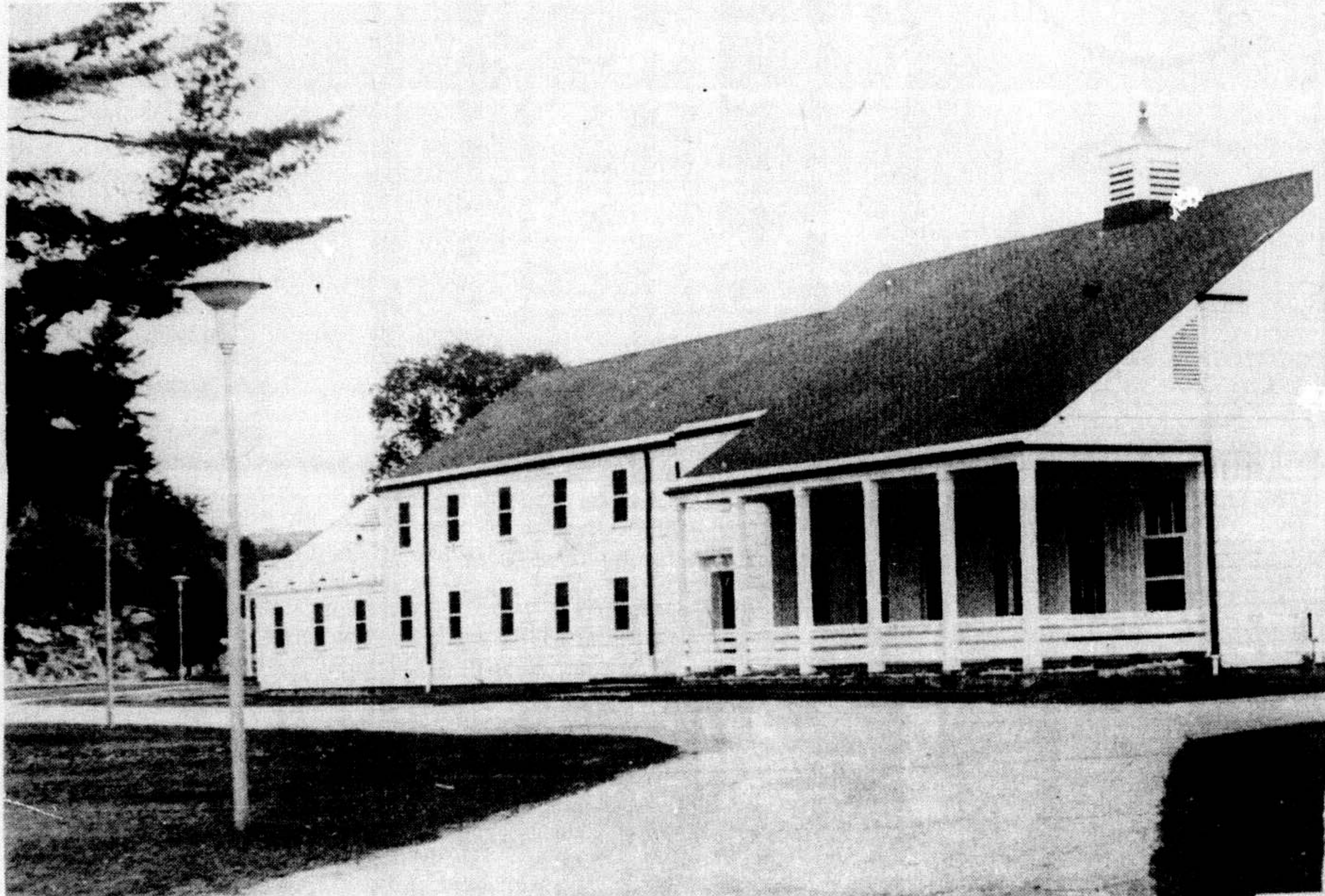
Skerrett said the school's Dorset program would be linked with the Outers program at the school so that the human relations and outdoor skills experiences could be coupled in one trip.



WITH THE DEXTERITY of a surgeon, this trucker tosses logs into the lake where they will sit until they are drawn into the saw mill and cut. The demonstration mill is operated by the Ministry of Natural Resources and hosts several groups of school students each year.



ONTARIO NEWSPAPERMEN and Ministry of Natural Resources officials take a look at a canoe from yesteryear. A privately operated canoe museum exists only a few minutes' drive from the Frost Centre.



BUILDINGS USED BY the "old ranger school" remain largely untouched. This shot shows the large mess hall. The complex backs onto Lake St. Nora.

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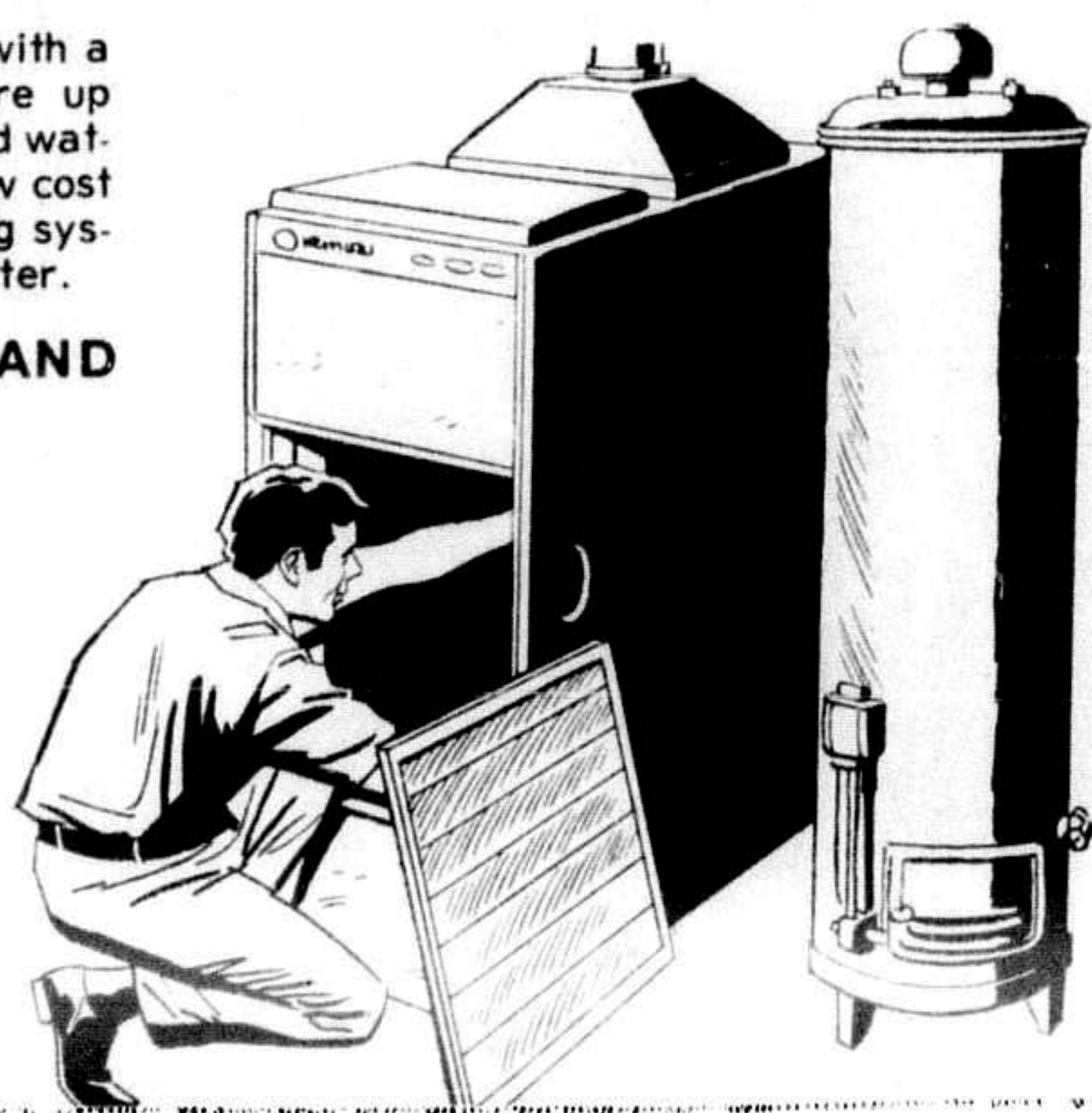
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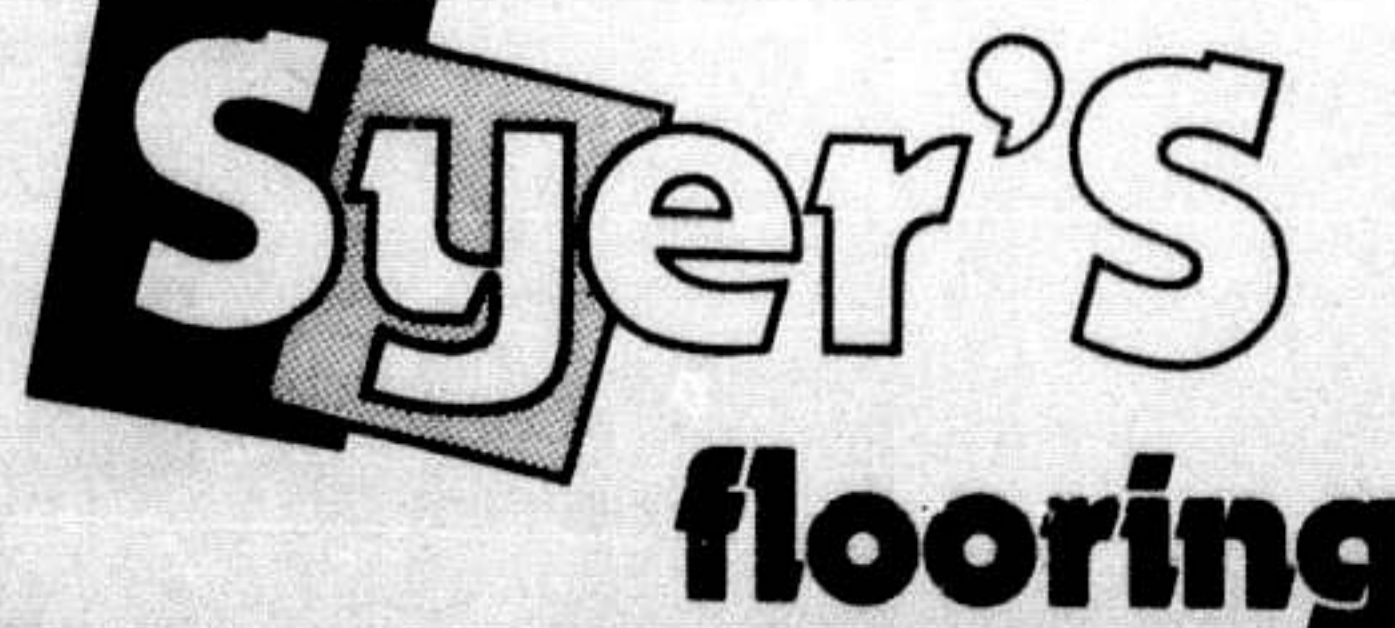
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