

The Canadian Champion

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Improving Viewpoint media image

with JIM ROBINSON

One more look

It really is too bad we cannot find some form of use for the old post office besides a roosting place for the pigeons.

About this time last year, members of the Milton seniors community said they would have liked the use of the old post office for a drop-in centre. They noted most of their numbers live in the urban part of town and it was just too far to walk to get over to Halton Centennial Manor.

But that request sort of faded from sight.

Now we have Rev. Ken Campbell asking the town to make the old post office available so it can be used during the summer as a drop-in centre by the Golden Horseshoe Youth Association. While councillors would probably like to help out, this request will probably also fade out of sight.

The reason is the old post office, despite its architectural in-

terest, is in a bad state of repair. Clerk Co-ordinator Roy Main has spelled out some of the problems and we agree it probably is, to use Mr. Main's words, "unfit for use."

But what is to be done with the post office?

Mr. Main would like to see it torn down. That's a simple expedient to a difficult problem to be sure.

But we note in the Lyon-Turner Partnership Civic Study, the old building is seen as an expanded form of farmers' market.

Now the town, and that means its ratepayers, just handed over the final payment of that \$15,000 to the consultants and they are already thinking about going against one of the major recommendations it contains.

Before we bulldoze, perhaps some form of use should be found.

Idea has merit

Councillor Brad Clements might have been a bit too hasty when he spoke out against a suggestion Milton and Halton Hills should hold a joint meeting to discuss problems of common concern.

Mr. Clements said he thought Oakville and Burlington might view the meeting as two northern regional towns trying to combine forces and perhaps start voting as a block at the region.

But we do not think this was the intent of the motion nor the spirit.

Halton Hills and Milton are as different as night and day from Oakville and Burlington, but it is not a question of the north being separate from the south.

Milton and Halton Hills are both now facing serious encroachment from the aggregate extraction industry, which is not being curbed by Halton Region despite the best

speeches to the contrary.

Also a bulk of the regional roads are in the north and they are not being kept in good repair.

Similarly, both towns are ready, willing and able to attract and support industry and commerce on much more attractive terms. The Milton Highway 401 Industrial Park will be very near the Milton-Halton Hills municipal boundary. Industry is going to grow northward and services eventually are going to have to be phased in together or result in wasteful duplication.

We are not talking about a summit conference here, only a first informal talk to look at what Milton and Halton Hills can share together and how things can be improved on a strictly municipality to municipality basis, without having to involve the region for no reason.

The ideas has merit and should be pursued.

More money needed

It looks like council made the right choice when they hired new Public Works Director John Matthews.

Mr. Matthews did some considerable juggling of priorities recently to get a sidewalk in for people living near Woodward Ave., east of Ontario St.

He was asked during that time to make a list of priorities for the councillors and he presented it recently.

Of the 12 items on the list, the town only has enough money left to do the first four.

Mr. Matthews said he had been surprised to find the \$30,000 for sidewalk construction and maintenance has been a figure in the town's budget which has been unchanged for the past four years.

He said he has already had some talks with the mayor and others and he is going to be making major requests in 1982 for sufficient funds.

An example of just how things stand now is a group of people

from Anne Blvd. who showed up at council recently to ask for sidewalk maintenance in their area.

The group had to be told flatly there is just nothing the town can do for them this year with no money available. Mr. Matthews said he would take a look, but we doubt the people hold much hope.

And the situation on Anne Blvd. and Woodward Ave. is not unique. We predicted editorially many people would start lining up for sidewalk improvement when they heard about Woodward Ave. and Anne Blvd. is just one of the first.

Councillor Jim Watson has noted there are 85 square miles of roads in the rural part of Milton, much of which could use sidewalks.

Now the time has come for pressure to be put on for much more money for sidewalks, and we urge Mr. Matthews to start plugging for the money now and keep plugging until he gets it

Some Halton Regional senior staff and a few councillors are concerned about the quality and quantity of media coverage the region has been getting recently and that has prompted the formation of the Public Information Subcommittee.

Chaired by Oakville Councillor Terry Mannell and with Burlington Councillor Steve Toth, the committee met for the first time July 2 with Chairman Jack Raftis, Councillors Bill Johnson and Walt Mulkevic, Chief Administrator Dennis Perlin, and Public Works Director Bob Moore.

For the "media" there was Jack DiNardo, Oakville Beaver; David Greenberg, Oakville Journal; Terry Ruggles, Burlington Post; Evelyn Durham, Burlington Gazette; Al MacRury, Hamilton Spectator; Brian Dexter, Toronto Star; Chris Aagaard, Georgetown Herald; Mike Patton, formerly with The Post and now a correspondent with the Globe and Mail; and yours truly for The Champion, The Acton Free Press; and Georgetown Independent. Please note there were no television or radio representatives present.

The reason for the meeting was, Mr. Mannell said, to find out in what ways the region can get its message across in a better manner and what the media needs in order to get the message across.

The message for the past two years has not been a good one. Deficits, blunders, in-camera sessions anything but sacred, confidential reports getting to the media even before the councillors have had a chance to read them. Yes, the message in the past two years has not been good and for that reason alone, a meeting had to be called.

Public Works Director Bob Moore said he thought it strange when the region does something good, the story is buried. When there is a problem it is page number one. It does seem incongruous at that, and Mr. Moore made a point this writer will not soon forget. If there is good news, perhaps page one is the place for it.

Unfortunately, Chairman Raftis was having sport that day. He wasn't trying to bait anyone, he doesn't have to. Jack is a kiddie. He does it at council and he does it in the hallways.

And when he did it to a group of mostly young people who are called "reporters" the result was a slide downwards to recriminations, explanations, and just bragging.

I sort of wish Jack hadn't been there because the two hours spent mulling things over did not produce a hell of a lot, although there are many things which the

region should be aware of and why certain things are done.

But Brother Raftis did bring up a point which deserves some discussion. He notes a story in the Hamilton-Spectator about a verbal disagreement between himself and Burlington Mayor Roly Bird. Although the Al MacRury story was quite accurate, the headline said the two had a "brawl" in the council chambers.

Brother Raftis wanted to know who wrote the headline. We know Al didn't and we know it was written by a desk man at the Spectator. Because the story was the most "important" on the regional page that day, it had to have a juicy headline, i.e., Bird and Raftis had a "brawl."

Halton Chief Administrator Dennis Perlin, a lawyer by training who is naturally very precise when it comes to words and meanings, said he did not understand the use of all the adjectives. It was a "hotly debated item," or someone "angrily stormed out of the room."

He is right of course. How does one storm out of a room or hotly debate anything. But to leave out adjectives leaves out the flavor of the incident. We are not alone in this. Mr. Perlin's own legal counsel, Edgar Sexton, at Osgoode Hall called Milton's contempt action a "scandalous demonstration." People in glass houses... s.

And like it or not there are people like Dennis and Brother Raftis and Bill Johnson and Roly Bird who stir things up. It is as simple as that, they get things going. After three hours of droning over committee recommendations, anyone who gets the action going is going to get the reporters going.

But I can agree, although I'm glad I wasn't one of the ones asked by Brother Raftis, that the whirlwind turnover in the media covering Halton Region has led to no continuity of understanding. I've been at the region for just about two years and I am by far the longest to attend on a regular basis. We've watched something like five people come and go from one weekly newspaper alone.

It is not just depressing, it leaves a person like me in a position much like the councillors. When some new person asks me about who such and such is or "is there anything important in this Site F stuff," I shudder. No wonder councillors and senior staff are reticent to talk to "the media"—I would be too.

And that boils down to "who do you trust." And that in turn boils down to a lack of trust and the reason why there is, at times, a very real lack of communication on the part of Halton and "the media."

How do you stop it? One suggestion is a press relations officer. Half the people liked the idea and half disliked the idea.

I dislike it. From my experience at Queen's Park, when the Minister signs your pay cheque, you make sure information does not reflect badly on the Minister or he will be signing the termination of your contract.

Similarly, no Halton press relations man in his right mind is going to give out the inside information on the next deficit because Brother Raftis and Chief Perlin sign the pay cheque.

It's a nice idea but it just will not work. Similarly the idea of councillors hanging around the region for an hour or two to answer questions sounds good. But Murphy's Law states just the councillor you want to talk to will be heading off in a hurry to another appointment he is 30 minutes late for already.

Lastly, they talked about setting up a little press room with telephones and desks for typewriters. That is a nifty thing for the daily papers who have to file their stories in a hurry. But that is only two or three of the 20 or so people who cover Halton Region.

Nix to that. That means spending money on something frivolous and Halton has already spent too much on dumb ideas.

The best solution is to just keep going in the manner in which we are going now. The light at the end of the tunnel with regard to deficits and personnel has already started to show.

And in truth, there is only going to be bad publicity when something goes bad.

When the provincial support grant for water and sewer services terminates at the end of the year and the rates go up another 50-100 per cent, there is just no way we can make that out as "good news."

Similarly it is "good news" Halton's fiscal problems are over, but we have all been waiting for the day when someone will hold a press conference to say "look, we've been through a lot, but now look at the future."

As for press bashing, secrecy, in-camera sessions—if someone is going to talk out of class it will be done.

In the meantime the new sub-committee has potential. In fact it has so much potential that it could be like the PM's regular news conference.

And if that is one suggestion I can make, perhaps it is time for a monthly news conference.

Everybody gets the same story and no mistakes are made.

Pages of the Past

One year ago

From the July 16, 1980 issue
Hundreds of Halton residents gathered at Sheridan College Sunday to meet Canada's latest hero, Terry Fox. But many left disappointed—the one-legged jogger was late. Scheduled to arrive Sunday at 4 p.m., Terry was whisked in just after 6 p.m. amid full police escort. And what was left of the dwindling crowd gave him a hero's welcome: uproarious cheers along with wishes of good luck and congratulations.

The Town of Milton will hold centrestage tomorrow (Thursday) at Exhibition Stadium where more than 350 will see Toronto Blizzard tangle with California Surf in a North American Soccer League game. It will be "Milton Day at the Blizzard." The town will be honored in a pre-game ceremony and to top it off, two Milton rep soccer teams will play an exhibition game prior to the contest.

Halton has spent about \$500,000 on consulting and legal fees since it has been trying to establish a garbage dump at Site F in Milton, says a regional official.

A 28-year-old man is recovering in hospital with major injuries following a serious fall at a Market Dr. warehouse last Wednesday afternoon. Harvey Christie of Hamilton was rushed to Milton District Hospital by ambulance after falling 10 feet off a scaffolding platform in a warehouse owned by Fifth Wheel Truck Stop at 140 Market Dr.

20 years ago

From the July 13, 1961 issue
Halton's new Dairy Princesses for 1961 will be named this Saturday night during the annual Hornby Garden Party. Sisters Mary Lou and Eleanor Taylor of Burlington and Audrey Brown of Milton are competing for the title and the winner will go to the CNE for the Ontario contest.

Two Indonesian men, who are in Canada to study local government under the Colombo Plan, have been given approval to visit Milton and study government operations.

Milton Recreation Committee, in a letter to council this week, urged the formation of a local parks board. The committee noted many recreational projects take place in parks and an effective relationship between parks and recreation must be established.

Halton and Peel Counties may triple their populations between 1956 and 1976, a 340-page Economic Survey of Ontario has predicted. The reports suggests Halton will have a population of 216,000 by 1976, compared to a 1956 figure of 68,297. Some interesting facts on Halton were revealed in the study. The average Halton family is made up of 3.5 persons and the birth rate of 29.27 per 1,000 population exceeds the provincial average by 3 per cent. There were 680 horses in Halton in 1960. Milton had 15 industrial establishments in 1958, employing 888 with a payroll of \$3.5 million and Milton had the highest average wage (\$4,084) in Halton. The survey said 94% of Halton homes had television, or 20,000 sets in the 21,900 households.

50 years ago

From the July 16, 1931 issue
Growers report many gooseberries cooked on the bushes by the hot sun. The apple crop also has suffered.

The Japanese young lady who was a recent guest at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Clements, and who recently graduated from Alma Ladies' College at St. Thomas, returned to her home in Tokyo, Japan, via Vancouver, last week.

At the recent Junior High School entrance examination 45 pupils wrote from Milton Public School, and 44 were successful, 20 of whom took honors. P. D. Shorey is Principal of Milton Public School. Congratulations.

As Wm. Patterson was driving along the road in Nassagaweya Township, opposite the McKinnon farm, a year-old deer ran along the road in front of the car for 100 yards or so and then leaped over the fence and disappeared in the bush. Deer are getting to be numerous in this part of the province.

The Acton Free Press has entered upon its fifty-seventh year of publication. Despite its maturity it is keen and eager, and energetic in its many duties of reflecting the life of its community.

Though herring and lake trout are very scarce, Bronte fishermen are having fairly good luck in catching whitefish. Prices are low, being 25 to 30 cents per pound retail, as compared with as high as 55 cents per pound last winter and spring for whitefish.

75 years ago

From the July 19, 1906 issue

There was another wreck on the G.T.R. on Tuesday. A freight train going south became separated, the last half of the train ran into the front part just above Mansewood, about 4 a.m. on Tuesday. Eleven cars were thrown off the track, four of which were burned badly. The track was blocked until about 6 p.m., when traffic was resumed. No one was hurt. The people around Mansewood were awakened by the sound and thought an earthquake had struck.

The garden party at the residence of W.T. Beatty passed off with great success. There was a large crowd present from various parts of the township. The weather was perfect. Every part of the program was most enjoyable.

Stuart Murray, son of James Murray, Esqueving township, was operated on for appendicitis at the residence of Dr. Stuart, on Saturday evening. Stuart is doing well and will soon be all right again.

William McKenzie who had a tailor shop in Milton a few years ago, started for England and Scotland Tuesday. He will visit his mother.

Collective Column

SIGNS OF THE TIMES
Sign outside a nursery: We have Laurel and Hardy plants.
Sign at a roofing company: Does your roof have a bad case of shingles?
Orthodontist's sign: Smiles under construction.
Bakery sign, on day-old doughnuts: Born yesterday.
Wrecking yard sign: We sell only road-tested auto parts.
Farmers' co-operative store sign:

Everything for the farmer but rain.
A hotel has a sign proclaiming "We take pets." Then in small type underneath: "Cougars, T-Birds, Pintos, Jaguars, Wildcats, Falcons, Mavericks, Impalas, even Broncos."

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WEDNESDAY WIT
Never go to a doctor whose office plants have died.
There are three ways of getting

something done: Do it yourself, hire someone, or forbid your kids to do it.

Old age is always about 15 years older than I am.

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THOUGHT FOR TODAY
There is never time to do it right, but always time to do it over.