

To convention or not to convention that is the question

LET'S have a convention! In what primeval swamp, by what hairy ancestor, was that suggestion first offered 60 million years ago?

Wherever it was, and whoever it was, an institution was born that has proliferated into a countless-billion-dollar business, a source of pleasure for millions, and a mountain-sized headache for hundreds of thousands, each year: the convention.

Can't you see them sitting around on their haunches, chewing a morsel of mammoth, and sweating out the details?

Where to have it, the big cave or several smaller ones. Size of the convention fee -- two round stones or three? Women allowed? Unanimous NO. Door prizes? Entertainment? Keynote speaker? Agenda?

Little did they know what they were letting their descendants in for.

Dragooning into service a Convention Committee: Burp, Yob, and Gunk. Setting up sub-committees: the Round Wheel Committee; the Fire Without Lightning Committee; the Bigger Slingshot Committee.

Forgive them, Father, they knew not what they did.

Like many another great, simple idea, that of The Convention has grown in scope and complexity until it employs a staggering amount of time, money and nervous energy in the twentieth century.

In today's society, and especially in the western world, The Convention is a fact of life. Everybody from librarians to lawyers,

Bill Smiley

from postal workers to politicians, from hairdressers to hustlers, is into the convention syndrome.

Housewives are nervously planning their wardrobes for the newspaper convention. Doctors are putting the final touches to their cure-for-cancer paper for the medical convention. Writers are polishing their latest creative explosion for the authors' convention.

Politicians are frantically reinforcing their ramparts for the party convention. Reeves and deputy-reeves are wangling a pass to the Good Roads Convention. Shriners are refurbishing their fezzes, lawyers tarting up their torts, and labour leaders seeking new slogans, as convention fever slowly but surely seizes them.

A convention is many things to many people. To the organizers, it is a nerve-frazzling ordeal, a labour of love, and a pain in the arm, the pain replaced by exhausted bliss when everything goes well, there are no fist-fights and no heart attacks.

To the hard core who attend the business

sessions, it is an intense exercise of picking others' brains, discovering new ideas, and working themselves up in the pecking order toward that shining summit -- President of the organization.

To the casual convention-goer it's a combination of a little business and a lot of pleasure: living it up in a swank hotel; meeting old friends; post-prandial parties; "hospitality suites" with free booze; pleasant outings planned by the sweating organizers; a little trade or professional gossip; a once-a-year holiday; making new friends. All in all, a bit like a ship's cruise, without the possibility of mal de mer, although a distinct probability of mal de tete.

My first acquaintance with conventions was slightly traumatic. I was a night porter (cleaning latrines, scrubbing floors, polishing brass) on the old Hamonic, a passenger boat plying the Great Lakes. We'd picked up a load of conventioners at Duluth and taken them to a convention in Detroit, where they used the boat as a floating hotel.

And floating was the word. Many of them

were awash by the time we reached Detroit.

About three a.m. I was polishing the brass rails leading down from the lobby to the lower deck. Gruelling, lonely work. Out of nowhere appeared a very drunk lady who felt sorry for me, and offered to remove the brass polish to help me.

So saying, she hoisted her skirt, straddled one of the brass rails, and slid down it, vigorously shining with her stockinged legs until collapsing in a crumpled heap at the bottom.

I was a bashful seventeen. She was an old lady (at least thirty-five). It was an alarming, fascinating experience.

As a weekly editor, I soon discovered that the newspaper convention was the only anodyne to a slavish sixty-hour a week occupation. Turn off the presses, lock the doors, and head off for the convention.

In those days, conventions were held at some of the great old railway hotels like the Manoir Richelieu at Murray Bay, on the St. Lawrence. For four or five days, we lived like royalty, before going back, sated, to the old editorial desk, where we lived like peasants.

Right now, I have to decide whether to attend a convention of old fighter pilots. I know I should burn the invitation. I don't think I could survive it. But I'll probably go, if they'll just promise to scatter my ashes to the four winds, and let me keep on flying.

Ladies and gentlemen, the winners as selected are...

Three weeks ago I announced a contest for "one liners" or Epigrams, which my faithful Funk and Wagnall Dictionary defines as "a brief, clever, pointed remark or observation, a short, pithy piece of verse with a witty, often satirical point" pithy, it goes on to say is "forcefully effective" see also under terse, and so it goes on.

Anyway, the contest did two things, it gave me some good quotes as I was down to the unprintable ones for the end of my column, and then it gave readers some worthwhile prizes.

Doug Reed, managing editor, did the honours in accumulating them and pre-judging them.

YOUR RESPONSE WAS UNDERWHELMING

Picking a few "freebies" off the streets I asked "why didn't you phone 'em in?"

"I couldn't be bothered" or "I wouldn't have a chance."

Ah well...enough were accumulated, however, to keep me going for a year or so, then we might try again.

Doug had run his eagle eye over them and we were to discuss these and make a final choice. Only one thing went wrong - I had no voice.

Calling in to see him at lunch time (I had visited the dentist earlier), my mouth was as

Ray Baker

frozen as a polar bear's bum; cold as a frog in an ice-bound pool; cold as charity; and as unfeeling as the grave!!

Giving him what I hoped was a smile I grunted and pointed to my mouth.

"You have a sore throat," said Doug.

I wrote down the word DENTIST.

"A Ha!" he said, "Now I understand, your dentist has a sore throat!"

On this happy non-communicative note he handed me the replies, passed a few comments on them without the slightest fear of interrupting and said "What do you say?"

I happily dribbled blood on his carpet in trying to frame a reply, and left. Luckily, his observations closely paralleled my own, so applying the criteria from Funk and Wagnall, here goes...

THE GRAND WINNER: A plane ride for two over Historical Huronia, courtesy of Four Seasons Flight Academy is: Bonnie Zoloty of

RR 1, Victoria Harbour for this brutal one... "When God Created Man She Was Only Kidding! ... no comment!"

SECOND WINNER: Two tickets for a cruise aboard the "Miss Midland", courtesy of Midland Tours Inc. (PMCL) is Mike Muxlow of Huron Park School, Midland, who puts new meaning in an old saying: "Cleanliness Is Next To Soap."

Incidentally, Huron Park Grades six and seven swept the board as part of their curriculum in creative writing and journalism. They were encouraged to take up the challenge by their teacher, Gail Waters.

Thank you, Gail, and Huron Park.

THIRD WINNER: For two tickets on the cruise boat "Ste-Marie I" courtesy of Midland Tours Inc. (PMCL) is John Brobbin of Huron Park, Midland: "A Friend In Need, Is A Friend In Need Of Money" ... terse, succinct, but realistic!!

General alarms galore

Volunteers from three of Tiny Township's four fire halls were called out to deal with two minor emergencies late last week.

At 9:45 p.m. last Wednesday, Lafontaine firefighters were able to successfully control a chimney fire at the Desroches Potatoes building on the west side of town. A small brush fire beside Hwy. 93 near Johnston farm prompted alarms to both Wyevale and Wyebridge fire halls at 2:51 Thursday. The blaze was extinguished without injuries or significant damage.

JUNE 1

Vasey United Church are holding an Old Fashioned Auction on June 1, at the Vasey Community Park. A giant bake sale at 10:30 a.m. and the auction begins at 11 a.m.

Antiques, crafts, many items of interest, lucky draws will all be a part of this sale. For more info call 534-3298 or 835-2637.

Springtime fires in chimney and brush quelled in Midland

With wood stoves burning slowly on cold Spring nights and the bush outside generally dry after a long winter, firefighters expect a rash of brush and chimney fires at this time of year. Town of Midland Fire Department extinguished one of each over the weekend.

Vandalism is the suspected cause of a small fire among the trees at the end of the Montreal Street extension at 4:56 p.m., Friday. The fire was burning about 15 minutes before firefighters brought it under control.

A woodstove chimney fire caused an estimated \$1,000 damage to the masonry smoke pipe in a residence at 296 John St. around 9:45 a.m. Sunday. A ball and chain lowered down the burning chimney allowed firefighters to clear the blockage and extinguish the flames.

Patients vote for first time during May 2 election

Polling stations were set up for the first time in an Ontario provincial election in the Huronia Regional Centre and in the Penetanguishene Mental Health Centre.

The result at the polling station in the Huronia Regional Centre in Simcoe East was Conservative 11, New Democrat 28, and Liberal nine. Twenty-seven ballots were rejected and three were unmarked.

In the Mental Health Centre the result was Conservative 58, Liberal 60, New Democrat 53, and Green Party 21. Six ballots were rejected and four were not marked.

Neighbours pitch in as Tay firemen battle fence fire

Tay Township firemen answered an unusual alarm at 4 p.m. Friday, when an old pine stump fence burst into flame beside the Sturgeon River,

near the 8th Concession.

With a dense cedar bush and a rural residence close beside the fence, firefighters worked quickly with axes and hoses to get at the flames. People from the adjoining house helped out with a hose and buckets of water from the river.

Only the prompt action of the neighbours who sounded the alarm, and the lack of a strong wind, prevented a catastrophe, says Fire Chief Tom O'Hara.

It is suspected that careless fishermen may have caused the blaze.

North Simcoe Newsbriefs

A narrow escape from careless smoking

A quick thinking and observant neighbour may have saved the life of an elderly man at 199 Fox St. in Penetanguishene, early Saturday morning.

The neighbour, out to check the weather at 1:30 a.m., noticed the house next door filled with smoke and immediately called the fire department.

Firefighters discovered a smouldering fire in an upholstered chair, apparently caused by careless smoking. The elderly resident, who lived alone, was escorted to Penetang General Hospital for observation in a Town of Penetang police cruiser, while the firemen remained behind to clear the house of smoke with their large exhaust fans.

About the same in Simcoe East

Simcoe East voters last week offered a model of stability Conservative supporters wish had ex-

tended to the whole of the province.

The percentage of eligible voters who voted last Thursday was less than one percent less than the percentage of eligible voters who voted in the 1981 provincial election. The candidates received roughly the same share of the vote again.

The 1985 turnout represented 63.5 percent of the eligible vote.

Conservative, 1981, 12,487; 1984, 13,371. New Democrat, 1981, 9,085; 1984, 11,002. Liberal, 1981, 7,320; 1984, 7,566.

In 1981, Independent candidate Ted Wolda drew 749 votes.

In Simcoe Centre last week the result was 15,379 for the Conservative, 14,845 for the Liberal, 9,639 for the New Democrat, and 566 for the Green candidate.

Five fire halls, but just one weekend fire in Tiny

Generally damp conditions over the weekend kept the hazard of fire to a minimum, over the weekend, across Tiny Township. Of the five firehalls - Wyebridge, Wyevale, Lafontaine, Northwest Basin, and Woodland Beach - only Lafontaine reports a fire since Friday. A minor chimney fire, in a house at 99 Silverbirch Dr., just off the 18th Concession, was brought under control about 1 p.m. Sunday without injuries or significant damage to the home.

OPP looking for driver involved in hit-and-run

Midland OPP are looking for the driver of a vehicle that hit a Port McNicoll bicyclist and then failed to stop, Sunday evening.

According to police, 16-year-old Mark Larocque, 467 Wardell St., was riding his bike on Seventh Street and was struck by the vehicle in question while he was turning onto Sixth Street.

The youth reportedly suffered minor injuries as a result of being involved in the collision.

The mishap is said to have occurred at 7:41 p.m.