

Drugs, Alcohol, Oak Ridges Teens Figure In Sauna Bath Arson Trial

Drugs, alcohol, Oak Ridges teenagers, retribution, running away from home, confession and conflicting testimony were all involved in a sauna bath arson trial completed Tuesday of last week in Richmond Hill Court.

Heather Giles, 17, of 11 George Street, Oak Ridges was acquitted on an arson charge but now faces trial June 5 for conspiracy to commit arson.

Provincial Judge Maurice Charles acquitted Giles, saying, "This case may be fraught with suspicion, but it's not for me to record a conviction on the basis of suspicion." The judge said the charge wasn't proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

Judge Charles added that he rejected the evidence of a prosecution witness impeached by Crown Attorney William Rankin. Witness Barbara Lusk, 16, of South Road, Lake Wilcox, a former runaway from home denied on the stand a statement she signed in a policeman's notebook saying the accused Giles told her she (Giles) paid \$10 to an accomplice to burn down a sauna bath belonging to the family of a youth who sold the accused girl drugs and then exposed her to police. Giles was convicted about a year ago on a drug possession charge.

REJECTS EVIDENCE
The judge said he rejected the evidence of Lusk about police saying to her the accused was an ugly girl while she (Lusk) was good looking and wasting her life leaving her parents. Lusk denied Giles told her the story about paying for the arson. Lusk said what she told police was a rumor she heard in the district. She was backed up on the stand by her mother who was present when the statement was made to police, and also signed it.

SAUNA EXPLODED
Johnson testified he then went inside the sauna and lit a match. The shack exploded and his pants caught on fire. He put the flames out on his clothes with his hands. Seeing a car coming in the Farnon driveway he went home, changed his clothes and went to bed. Although his hands and face were burned he didn't see a doctor and they healed in two weeks. His parents noticed the burns but he told them he was working on a car and it blew up.

COUNCIL REMEMBER
On the witness stand Johnson at first said he was drunk when he left a Richmond Hill hotel on the night of the arson and couldn't remember. Confronted with his second statement to police implicating Giles, he remembered and told the court what he told police. Johnson said Giles telephoned him at home after midnight, wanting him to burn Farnon's shack for \$50. He knew where the shack was because he'd been at the Farnon house, although he hadn't been in the sauna. He agreed. He knew she didn't like David Farnon because he sold her drugs and telephoned police on her.

FRIEND OF ACCUSED
On the stand Barbara Lusk said she was a KCSS student and had nine brothers and sisters. She knew the accused Heather Giles for quite a few years and lives about a 1/2-mile away. She told of hitch-hiking to the Richmond Heights Centre about a week before the fire and talking with Giles. Lusk said she and Dave Farnon had a friendship, but she'd had a spat with him and she didn't think she should "hang around" with him anymore.

PROSECUTION WITNESS
Johnson said he walked to Yonge Street, met Giles, walked back home to get a can, walked back to the gas station beside the Harris Drug store and bought 50 cents worth of gas. At the Farnon place he poured gasoline all over the outside of the shack and tried to light it with matches. It wouldn't burn so he decided he didn't have enough gas and went back to the service station for more. Back at Farnon's he poured the gasoline around on the inside this time. He tried to light it by throwing in matches but five of them went out.

PHOTOGRAPHY
Giles Defense Attorney argued before the court it would be very dangerous to find his client guilty because there was no witness to corroborate the testimony of the convicted man Johnson. Giles' attorney wanted the second charge of arson conspiracy withdrawn or dismissed, but Crown Attorney William Rankin said he was determined to proceed to trial before another judge on the conspiracy charge. Judge Charles said he couldn't dismiss the second charge because the defense hadn't agreed to have the two charges tried together.

MEALS ON WHEELS
Plans to bring a hot meal to about 30 shutin senior citizens for three days a week and had asked to have meals prepared at Don Head.

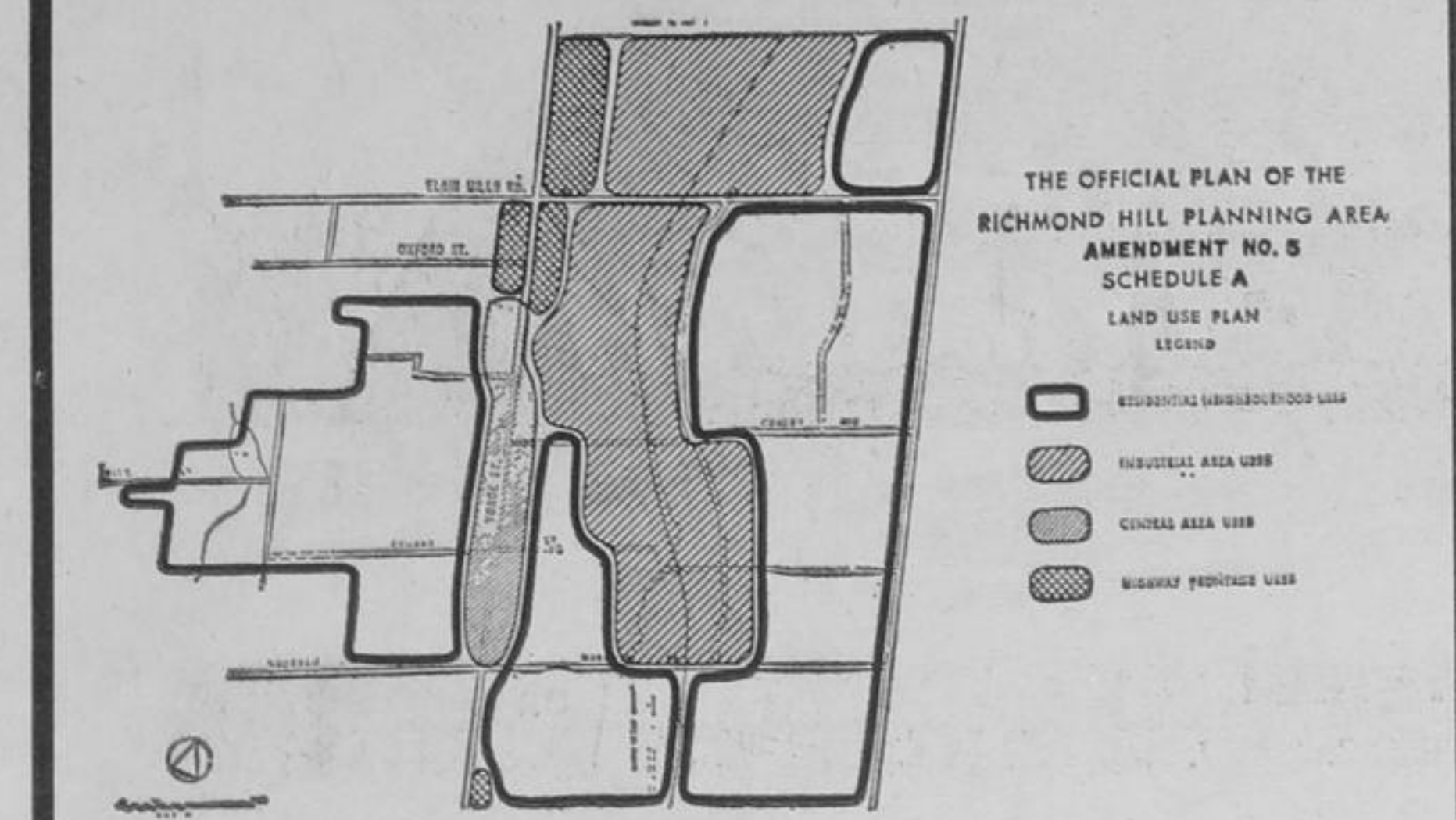
TRUSTEES HESITATED
To grant the request on the grounds that it could mean unfair competition to local businesses and that it could develop into an exploitation of students.

RICHMOND HILL TRUSTEE
Warren Ballie assured board members that those receiving the meals would be shutins who would not be going out to restaurants in any event and that the local businesses would therefore not suffer. Mr. Ballie felt the project would help to develop social conscience in the

STAFF ADVISED
That the principal of the school and the head of the food school felt the project could be a learning experience for students but only on a short term basis.

IT HAD BEEN SUGGESTED
By the school staff that the meals could be prepared, packaged and frozen during May for distribution by Meals On Wheels committee in June. The committee would pay the 90c cost of each meal. On motion of Trustee Ballie the board agreed that the program be initiated for this trial period and that it then be evaluated and a report brought back to the board.

PLANNING DIRECTOR
H. Rimon



School Board Appeals Farm Assessment Cut

Worried about the impact on education of losses in farm assessment, York County Board of Education has appealed to the province for relief.

Board Chairman Ross Jolliffe told a meeting of the board April 17 that a delegation of board and staff members has been well received by Education Minister Thomas Wells that morning.

Farm assessment appeals this year have reduced the total assessment of the region by about \$30 million. Because this assessment reduction was not taken into consideration in arriving at the 1972 education grants, the grants are short by \$305,000.

The farm appeals have shifted the tax burden more heavily onto the home owner. A house assessed at \$25,000 faces an increase of \$5.40 in school tax as a result of the reduced farm assessment.

Reporting on the meeting with the minister, Jolliffe said, "We came away with the feeling we were going to get some relief." Trustees agreed that finalization of the budget should be delayed for two weeks.

Final assessment figures, including estimated local mill rates, should be available at the May 8 meeting of the board.

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