

1859 bylaw made police chief road builder, tax collector

One of Oakville's outstanding citizens of the nineteenth century was George Johnson Sumner, who for many years filled the position of chief constable and performed a number of other civic duties. Born in Nelson township in 1834, he grew up in Oakville, where his father was proprietor of the Oakville House. He attended the common school and learned the trade of ship's carpenter.

The chief constable, according to a bylaw passed in 1859, was required to enforce town bylaws, to superintend all work on streets and see that the sidewalks were kept in repair, and to supervise all work, "other than mechanical ordered by council, when said work is done by the day." He was also pound keeper and health officer.

"He shall see that the town hall is kept in order, attend prisoners in the lock-up, and, when absent on other than town business, shall have a competent substitute, and pay all charges. He shall, when practicable, attend magistrate's court and serve all summons and warrants issued by the same."

These stipulations were embodied in a town bylaw dated January 10, 1859, relating to the chief constable's office. Several men held the position before Sumner's appointment, but none of them were equal to its demands.

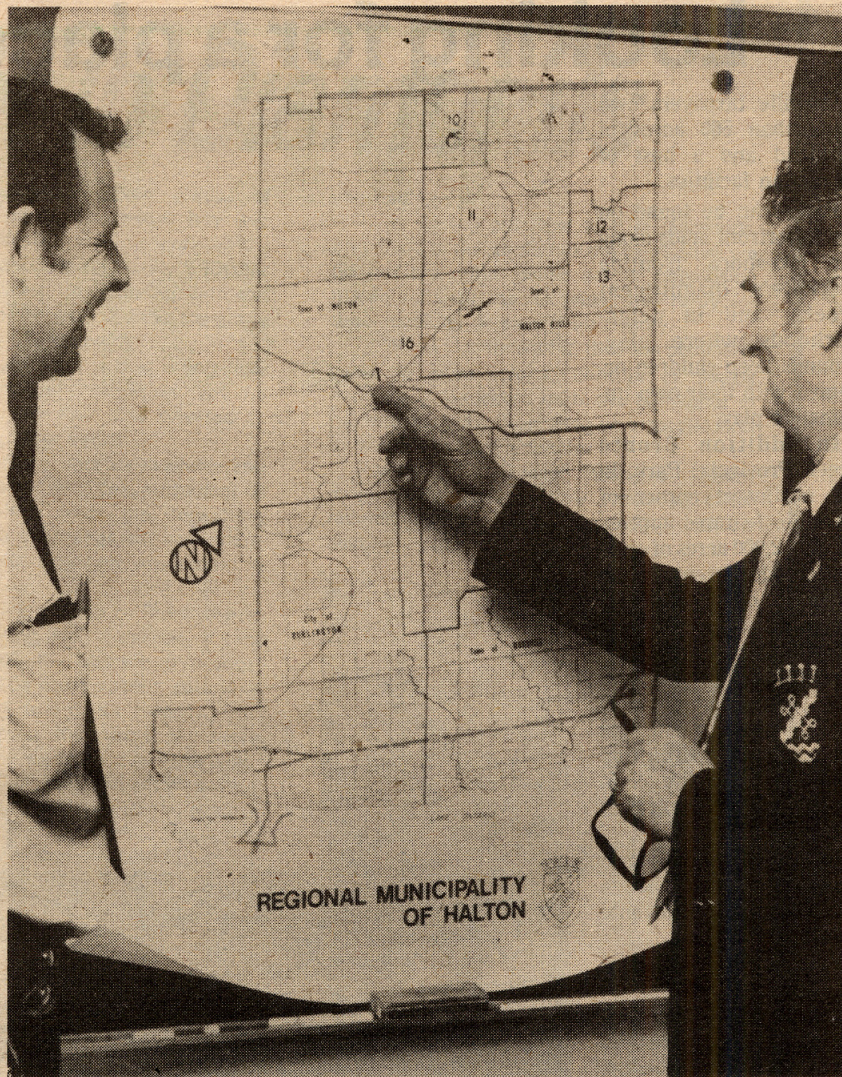
Sumner was appointed in 1857, and remained in office until 1902. He proved extremely efficient and conscientious. He looked after the town hall,

and when public functions were held there he was on hand to take tickets and maintain order. He would sit through the night with people who were seriously ill or dying, and sometimes would go about his day's duties without having slept the previous night.

He looked after the prisoners and indigents in the lock-up, and although he was an ardent temperance worker he was extremely patient with troublesome drunks. He acted as tax collector, making out and delivering the tax bills and later collecting the taxes from door to door. He also performed the duties of truant officer and harbor master. He also superintended the work on the town roads and sidewalks.

In spite of the demanding nature of his official duties, George Sumner found time to work now and then in the shipyards, do jobs of carpentering, painting and paper-hanging. He would assist the town undertaker, a relative of his, in his duties, would weigh grain for a grain merchant, and sell steamer tickets.

But perhaps the most unusual achievement of this remarkably energetic man was the keeping of a diary over the greater period of his life. He hardly ever failed to make a daily entry in this diary. About forty of these books have been preserved, and contain a wealth of information about the community during the life of George Sumner, who died in 1911.



Halton police chief Ken Skerrett (right) shown here with Sgt. Jerry Penman, can concentrate on enforcing the law — unlike his 19th century counterpart George Sumner who repaired streets and sidewalks, collected taxes, sold and collected tickets, and ran the animal pound among his many duties. Photo by DAVID WITAKER

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long way in the past 3 years and hope to go a longer way in the future.

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From our files Village Vanished

In the valley of the Sixteen Mile Creek, just below the Dundas highway bridge a hamlet thrived in years gone by. The last vestiges of it vanished years ago, and nothing now remains to show that it ever existed.

The Sixteen Hollow was the name given this pioneer settlement that came into being in 1811, when the surrounding countryside was being settled by United Empire Loyalist families from the United States. In 1817 the population of Trafalgar township was 547. The township had one grist mill and four sawmills.

The little settlement of Sixteen Hollow grew and prospered. It had a population of 300, a woollen mill, sawmill, blacksmith shop, store and tannery. Its industries also included both a brewery and a distillery. The head distiller of the latter establishment was a Scot named Dan MacKay who received \$100 to \$120 a year, plus the board.

There were not many houses in the settlement. Among the householders were Colonel George Chalmers the settlement's founder, and Matt Baillie. There was also a family by the name of Dorland.

One of the industries of the hollow was the production of white oak staves, which were floated down the creek to Oakville, for export to the United States. White pine timbers were also sent down by the water route to be used as masts in Oakville shipyards.

When William Lyon Mackenzie, the leader of the rebellion of 1837

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