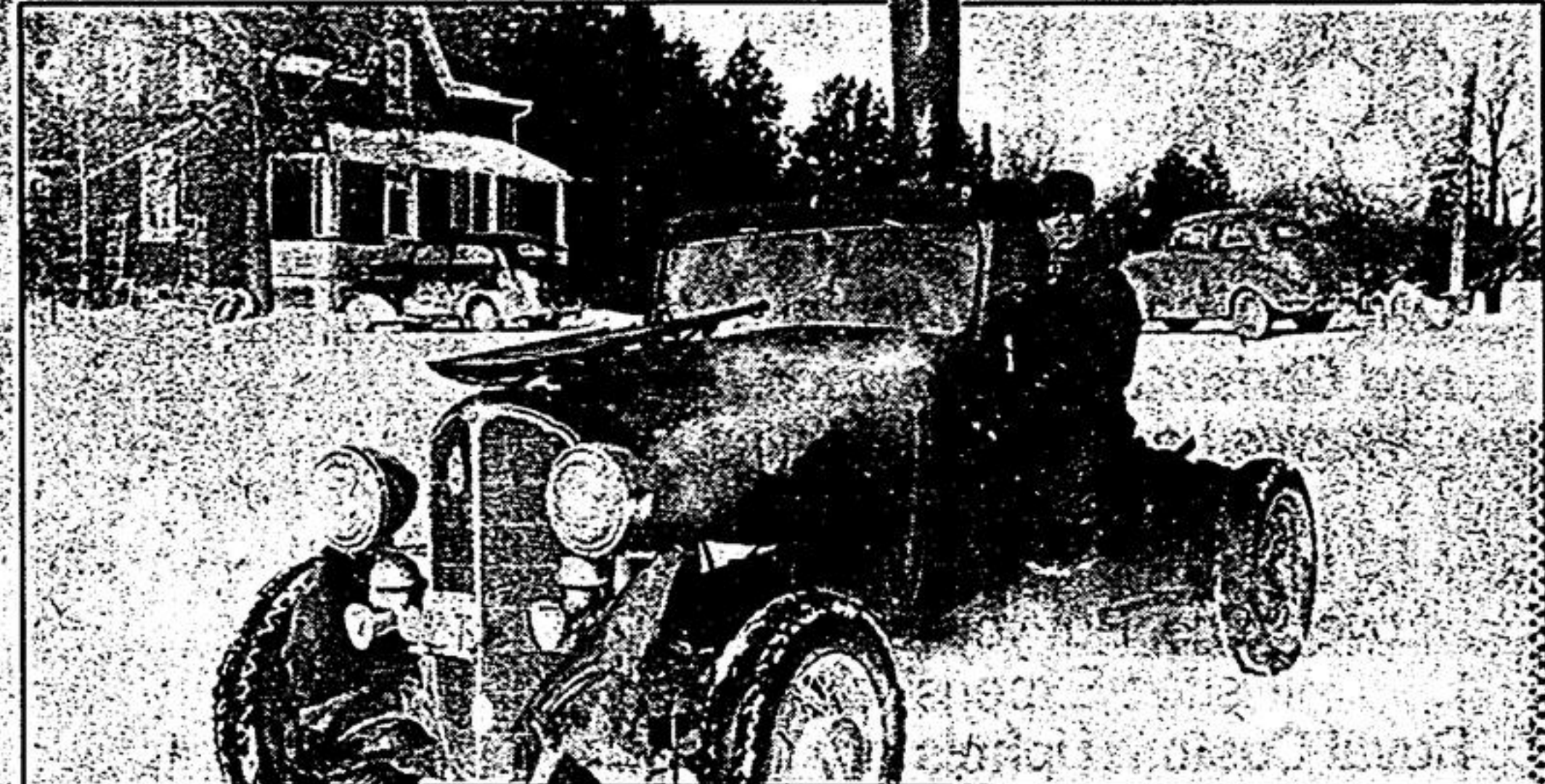


Mechanical Mac can get the job done

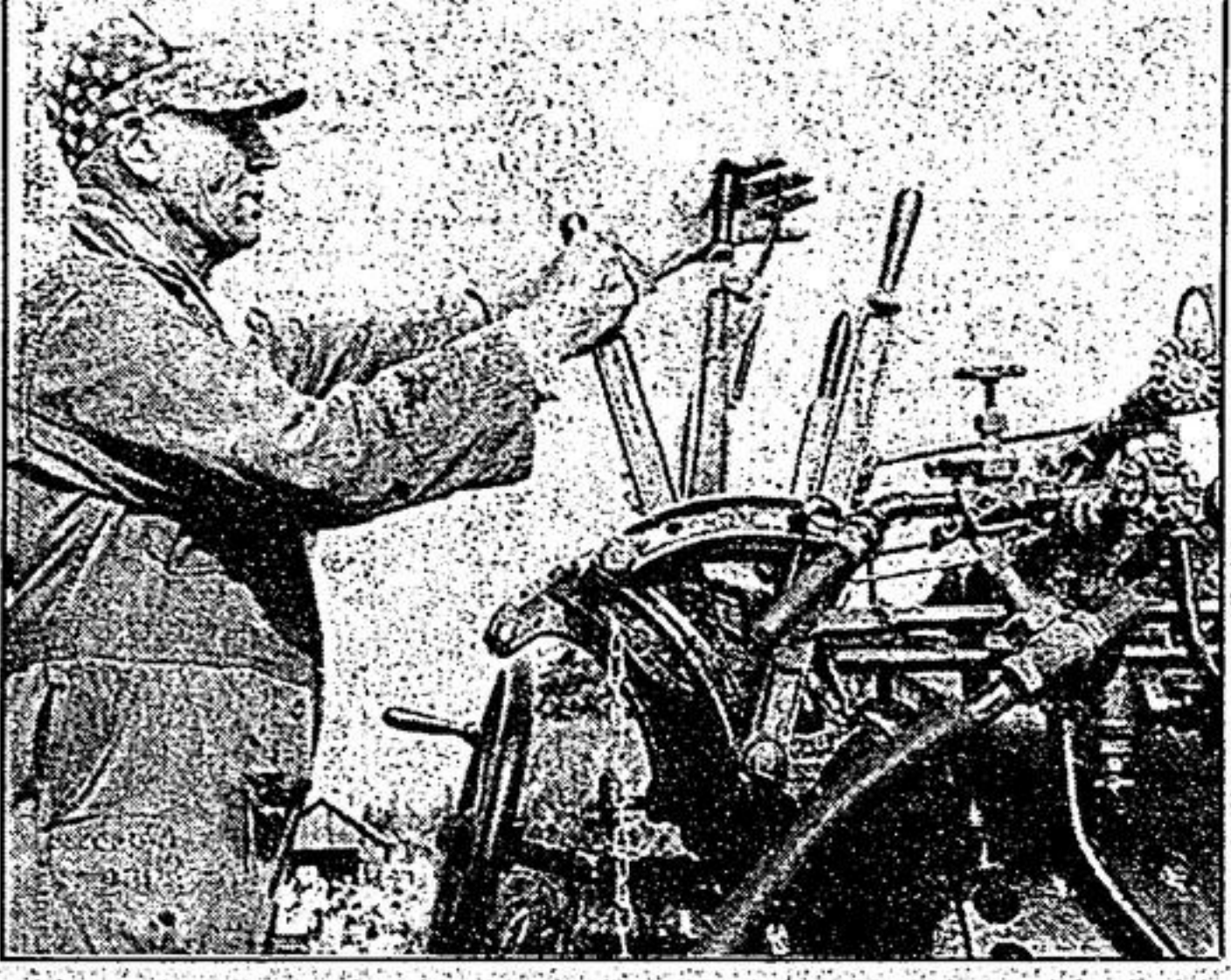
By BRUCE STAPLEY
 He's slowed down a step, and a recent fall restricts his head movement, but at age 87, Claremont's Mac Middleton still has a passion for things mechanical. The lifetime area resident has become known for his intense interest in steam engines through the years. He has built them, restored and reconditioned them, and still goes out to the shed to tinker with the old Waterloo model he is so proud of.
 Born Malcolm Middleton on April 9, 1901, "Mac" caught on as a section keeper in the Claremont area for the CPR at the age of 17, staying on until he was 61.
 While his job description did not specifically include working with motors and engines, he could always be counted on to fix an ailing "jigger," those little cars used by railroad maintenance men.
 After retiring in 1961, Mac went to work for 15 years as a caretaker-maintenance man for

a local farmer, applying his considerable mechanical skills to the upkeep of the farm equipment.
 He lives in the same house he has occupied for 49 years, the dwelling in which he and his wife, who died in 1975, raised his four children.
 While he can still recall the days when he would parade his steam engines and diesel tractors in fairs and demonstrations from Brougham to Beaverton, he continues to spend time out in the shed with the old Waterloo.
 Along with a few of his friends of the same era, Mac goes about the annual exercise of preparing the old steam engine for winter, draining the water and greasing down the moving parts.
 "I built my own steam car from a 1932 Buick," he states. "I took a cutting torch to the back end of it, then installed the steam engine."
 When asked just how fast the car would travel, he looks up, chuckles, and teases, "Oh, about

400 miles per hour."
 Having got the laugh, he was looking for, he settles down, explaining that he would run the car at 40 miles per hour on occasion. "I'd drive it into Stouffville, fill her up with water, then head back home to Claremont."
 Mac would make saws out of old gas engines, when he was younger and once took an engine from a Stanley Steamer to make a steam engine of his own.
 His Waterloo was driven in this year's Claremont Sesquicentennial Parade by Brian Benson, his grandson. Mac's living room contains a collection of plaques and mementoes acknowledging his expertise with steam engines through the years.
 And he was never reluctant to use his mechanical know-how to help his neighbors. "Every summer, he would fix everybody's lawn mower, he'd work on anything that involved machinery," says his daughter, Grace Benson. "That was his hobby that kept him going."
 But his hobby had to be put on hold following a bad fall in October, 1987, that resulted in a broken neck.
 Mac spent 10 months in Uxbridge Hospital, the first six with a "halo" on his head to keep it straight. That device was then replaced by a standard neck brace.
 While his head and neck mobility is restricted, he is currently able to function without a support apparatus.
 Sitting at his kitchen table, he recalls the faces and names in most of the old newspaper clippings that chronicle his steam engine outings in days gone by.
 "Why, that's Bill Fox's engine," he exclaims, smiling. "It was a lot like mine."



At age 87, Mac Middleton still enjoys tinkering with all things mechanical. His pride and joy in past years was this steam-driven automobile that he'd often take out for a drive. A younger Mac Middleton posed proudly here with his machine. A lifelong Claremont resident, Mac is still recovering from a broken neck he suffered in a fall last year.

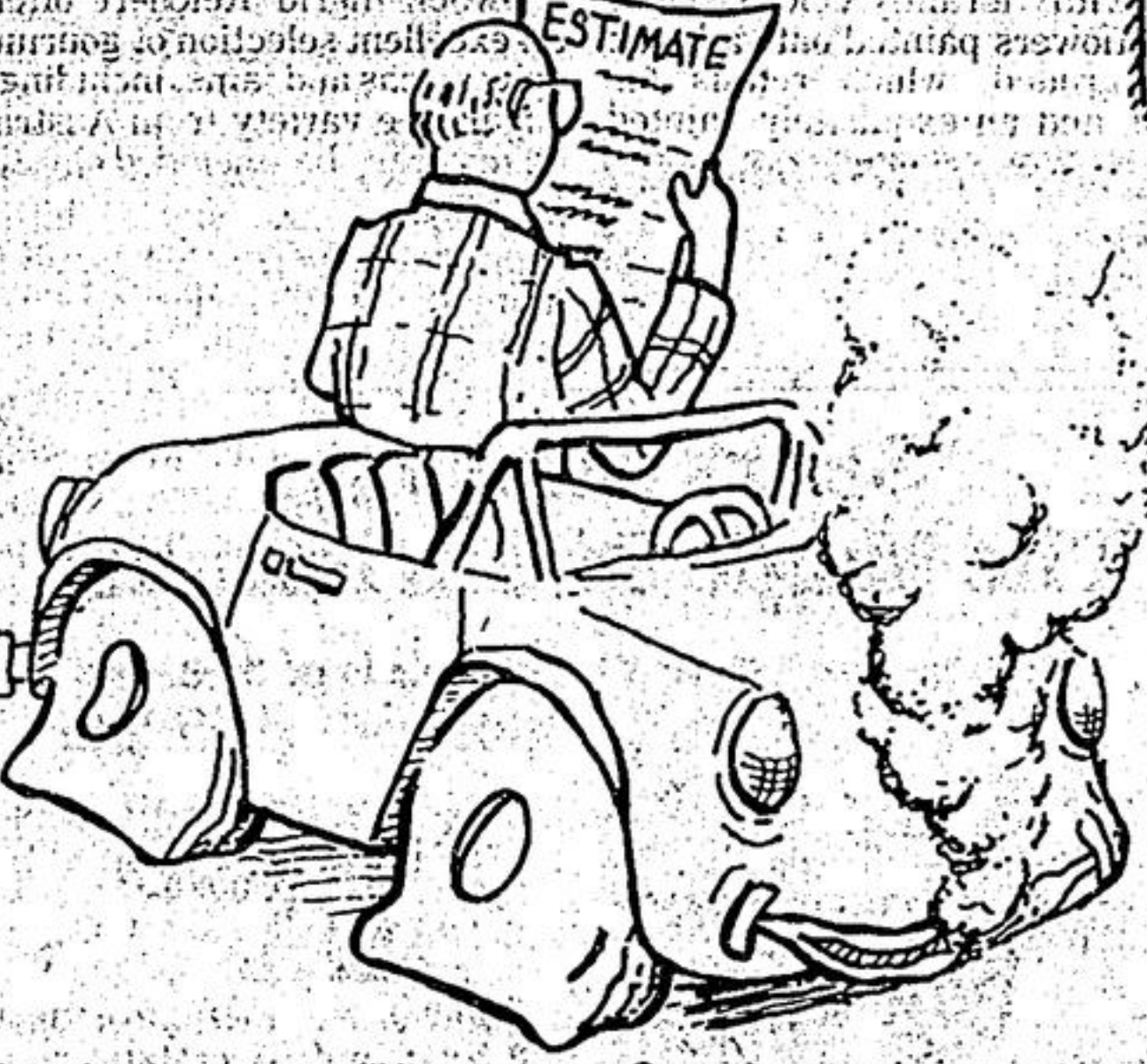


Fine tuning intricate engines has always been a snap for Mac Middleton. He's seen here working the levers on a steam engine. Friends have always counted on him when something went wrong with their machines. Mac has collected many memories over the years and has watched Claremont grow from a tiny farming community to one that attracts more residents each year.

Each picture triggers a mini-remembrance, and more than the odd smile. He then recalls the Claremont of his youth, and comments on the changing times.
 "It's a city now," he says of his home town. "But the growth is good, as long as the town keeps going. That's the main thing."
 He then puts on his coat and heads out to show off his pride and joy, taking full note of the positions of the levers and gauges. "Who let this lever down?" he asks, exasperated.
 He knocks it back into place with his cane, tests the fly-wheel to make sure it hasn't seized, nods approvingly, and moves on to the next piece of antiquated machinery.
 "Maybe we'll start it up again in the spring," he offers, then heads back inside to the warmth of the kitchen.

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