

Opinion

Council, boards are working for you

Why is it public institutions, public bodies, public meetings tend to intimidate most of us?

In reality they shouldn't, but in most cases they do.

How many of you have actually toured town hall or taken in a council meeting? How many then have seen the board of education in action or attended one of their special committee meetings?

Not many, right?

If you were asked your opinion about how this town is run or the people who run it; or what you thought about the education system and the amount of money it takes to run it, we're sure you would be able to give us an earful. But it stops there. Why?

That's also a dilemma faced by the Task Force on Public



Viewpoint

John Sturup

Participation (TOPP), which recently released its findings to the York Region Roman Catholic Separate School Board.

In its report the group said that parents want the board trustees to be heard by the public.

"Give information to the parents. Then the parents can decide when they want to get involved," was the way TOPP co-chair August Chow summed up the committee's report.

But while they want more information to go to the parents, do the parents actually want to get involved?

When TOPP hosted information-gathering hearings earlier this year, parents across the region failed to make an appearance.

The area meeting on June 2 drew 11 parents.

Call it apathy or call it intimidation, we shouldn't feel that way about our public bodies.

What we have to remember is that they work for the taxpayer and you essentially call the shots.

While The Tribune very much enjoys being an outspoken contributor to debates on issues involving York Region, we believe strongly in public participation. Your voice is

also very important. So don't be apathetic, don't be intimidated.

We all have some very important choices to make come the Nov. 14 municipal election.

Take the time to check all your candidates' credentials, take some time to attend some of the all-candidates meetings that will be running between now and the election, because we can't complain about it later.

If you have to go, go in one piece

I don't know if you've made out your will yet, but if you haven't here's a piece of advice you might want to consider.

Make sure that the undertaker gets all of you.

Many folks — some of them famous — neglected to write that proviso into their check-out contracts. They subsequently paid the price.

You could check it out with Galileo if he was still around. The celebrated astronomer shuffled off his mortal coil back in 1642, but his finger is still with us. If you visit the Florence Museum of History and Science in Italy you can view a special display that shows the poor man's blackened digit pointing eternally skyward.

It is Galileo's middle finger, significantly enough...

America's most famous president, George Washington, was buried with all pomp and ceremony back in 1799, but someone neglected to throw his teeth into the coffin. Actually, it was George's fault — he had mailed his extracted teeth to a dentist for use as a model for his dentures. The dentist hung on to the originals for souvenirs. He used to take them with him to parties as a conversation piece. They're still out there somewhere, so if you're at a soiree and somebody offers to show you George Washington's molars... don't be afraid to bite.

Nothing as trivial as teeth or fingers for Jeremy Bentham. The English philosopher who died in 1832, left all his money to the London Hospital.

With one small catch. Bentham insisted that his body be dissected and the remains "mummified". What's more, he directed that his preserved corpse was to be arranged sitting in an armchair at the Board of Directors table in the London Hospital in perpetuity.

To paraphrase Gertrude Stein, a bequest is a bequest. For the next 92 years, members of the London Hospital board got to share space at the table with the desiccated carcass of Jeremy Bentham smiling over them.

Mind you, to avoid any confusion, they placed a sign in front of Jeremy. The sign read NOT VOTING.

And then there's Speedy. Few deceased persons have spent as long between the mortician's slab

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Basic Black

Arthur Black

and the grave as good old Speedy. His real name was Henry Atkins. He was a black laborer in a tobacco factory in Paducah, Kentucky, back in the 1920s.

In 1928 while fishing on the Ohio River, Henry fell out of his boat and was drowned. He was poor, with no next of kin and no real friends.

Not yet anyway.

Speedy's corpse was about to meet A.Z. Hamock, a Paducah funeral director who happened to be fascinated by the Egyptian practice of mummification. Since nobody had claimed Speedy's remains, Hamock decided to try a little experimental embalming.

It worked. Although he turned the color of a russet apple, Speedy did not undergo the usual process of decay.

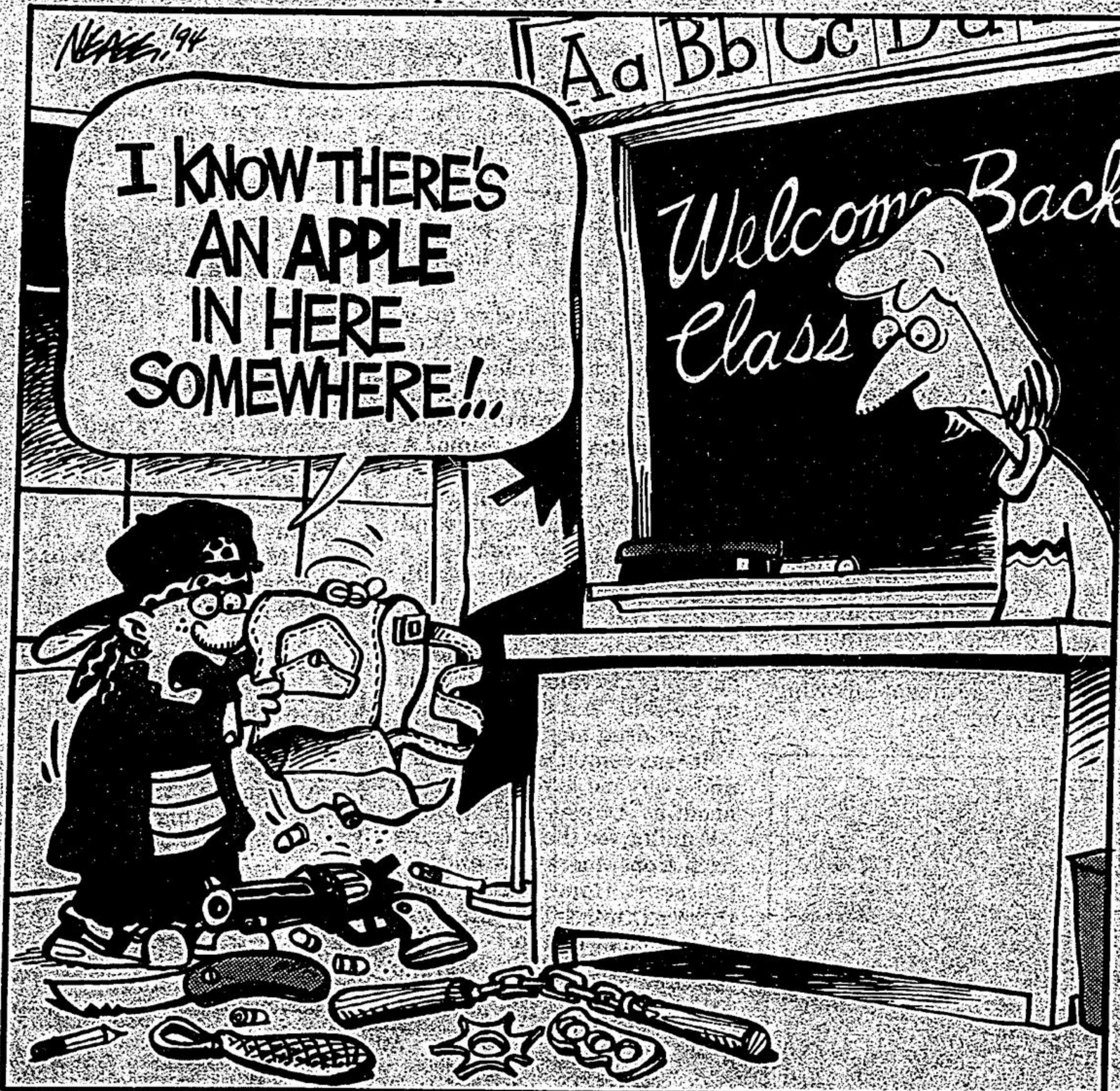
Over the next 66 years, Speedy, an itinerant laborer, became probably the most famous citizen Paducah, Kentucky ever spawned. The Hamock family adopted him. Three times a year he was carefully washed and dressed in fresh clothes. Sightseers could come to the funeral home and see Speedy, free of charge. TV camera crews showed up and put Speedy on national TV.

Museums and carnivals sent agents to try and buy Speedy. They offered lots of money but the Hamocks turned them down.

Speedy was family. Finally this summer, the descendants of A.Z. Hamock decided it was high time to treat Henry Atkins like a real member of the family. They laid him out in a black tuxedo and showered a blanket of red carnations on his coffin. The church choir sang a half dozen spirituals to Speedy, and the minister at the local Baptist church gave him a rousing send-off sermon.

Sixty-six years after he tumbled out of a boat in the Ohio River, Henry Speedy Atkins finally went to his grave.

Rest in peace, Speedy.



ADAM

Adam

by Brian Basset



Brian Basset