



Rear-view Mirror

Apostrophe Angst

By Maurice Smith

What has me perplexed these days is not the state of the economy or the doom and gloom in the auto industry, but a historical fact for which I do not have an answer, the apostrophe's question.

Those who make a living teaching the correct usage of punctuation in the English language will no doubt have a clear understanding of why and when to use apostrophe s (or s apostrophe, as in the plural form), or when it is not required at all. However, according to books I have read on the subject, there has never been a time in history in which the rules for the possessive apostrophe were known, understood or followed by most people.

In 1807 two brothers, Peter and Jacob Musselman, along with their extended families, immigrated from Pennsylvania and set up a homestead at the west end of a then unnamed 25 acre lake north of Stouffville. Since there was no way to identify this body of water, it soon became known as the lake out near where the Musselman family had settled. Years later folks started to refer to it as Musselman's Lake.

I have been unable to find any evidence the Musselman family ever owned the lake. They simply had a homestead on its shore. Why then did it start to be called Musselman's Lake? It was never theirs, so to drop an apostrophe into the name does not seem to make sense to me. Of course there is only one lake, therefore it should not be identified, as some would call it, Musselmans'.

Some folks have their own point of view on this subject as evidenced by the altered hamlet signs you see today as you approach this wonderful lakeside community.

There are a number of other lakes in Whitchurch-Stouffville where the 's' issue does not seem to be a concern. Preston Lake

in the west-end of Whitchurch-Stouffville is named after George and Annie Preston who actually owned the lake. This lake and a few surrounding acres had been under the ownership of the Reesor family from the early 1800s until about 1900, when they sold it all to the Middleton family who actually registered the name as Middleton Lake. In 1920, the Middletons sold their property and the lake to George and Annie, who changed the name to Preston Lake.

The body of water was never named or called Reesor's Lake or Middleton's Lake or Preston's Lake, even though each had owned it.

The whole apostrophe s question really came home to me when, as part of a municipal election questionnaire for those living in the south-east portion of Toronto, the city invited residents to decide how they wanted a certain area of their community identified. Should it be the Beaches, a name which was growing in popularity, or should it remain what all old-timers called it, The Beach? Level heads prevailed as the name The Beach won the day.

I can only assume, linguistic anomalies aside, the obligatory apostrophe s is a social statement for many folks, as there have always been acceptable exceptions to the use of the apostrophe. This is the simplest answer to my dilemma.

So from a historical perspective, since that was so easily resolved, I will start working on the history of the problems in the auto and banking industry.

Editor's note: Since the name refers to several members of the Musselman family, an apostrophe could be applied after the 's' to satisfy uptight, picky grammarians such as myself. On the other hand, if it refers to the collective family, apostrophe s would be fine. Maybe that's why the non-apoplectic community gave up and opted for Musselman.

The Most Wonderful Gift Of All

By Kate Gilderdale • Stouffville Free Press

When Frank May started having trouble with his eyesight in early November, he initially thought he'd wait until his January checkup with his optometrist, Dr. Sanjay Khurana, to investigate the problem.

Frank had purchased his glasses from the optometrist about a year and a half ago, so he thought the prescription was not working and wanted to get it checked. He asked his wife, Cathy, to make an appointment, which she did the next day. They went to see Dr. Khurana, a graduate of SUNY State College of Optometry in New York City, who has worked in Stouffville's Wal-Mart Plaza for the past two years.

"When Frank came in he told me he was having blurred vision," said Dr. Khurana. And while changes in vision are a normal part of the aging process, "I was surprised by the way his eyes had changed since his last visit. I took a quick look and I knew that something wasn't right. The right eye was worse than the left and the changes just didn't fit with my expectations."

When he put drops in Frank's eyes to examine them, he found that papilledema,

a swelling of the optic disc, was present in both eyes. "I remembered a case where I saw a little girl who had the same thing and she had a really bad case of meningitis," he said. "I saw this and I was thinking of that girl. I knew this had to be looked at as quickly as possible."

Dr. Khurana contacted Frank's GP, who agreed that he should go to the emergency department at Markham Stouffville Hospital, where he was diagnosed with a brain tumour. He was immediately referred to Mojgan Hodaie, a neurosurgeon at Toronto Western Hospital, who saw him just two days later, on Nov. 6, and arranged to operate on Nov. 10.

For Frank, being in hospital was not exactly a novelty: He was still recovering from hip replacement surgery on Oct. 15, so the prospect of another major operation was daunting, to say the least. But he and Cathy were optimistic. Thanks to Dr. Khurana, the tumour had been discovered and was operable. "And we were going to the University Health Network, where they have the best doctors," said Frank.

Throughout the Mays' ordeal, the health

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