

# Treasures And Heirlooms

By Rob Reid

A sunny and warm November to all. Here we have a neat group of men's jewellery. They are all sterling silver, made in England and with one exception, date from the late Victorian or early Edwardian period. During this time it was the height of men's fashion to wear a vest with a suit and all of these pieces would complement the affluent gentleman's wardrobe.

It is always a pleasure to research English silver because of the marks that the items carry. All sterling silver made in Britain should have a standard mark which confirms that the piece has been assayed as 92.5 percent pure silver. This symbol is a lion standing on four paws, referred to as the lion passant, and was adopted as the standard mark in 1544.

The next mark identifies the location of the assay office that determined the silver content, such as Birmingham (an anchor), London (a leopard's head), Newcastle (three towers), Sheffield (a crown) or Dublin (Crowned Harp) and for Irish silver that of Hibernia, which replaces the lion passant as the standard mark. Most pieces made between 1784 and 1890 should bear what is called a duty mark. This is a picture of the reigning Sovereign's Head and is proof that duty has been paid on the item at the time of manufacture.

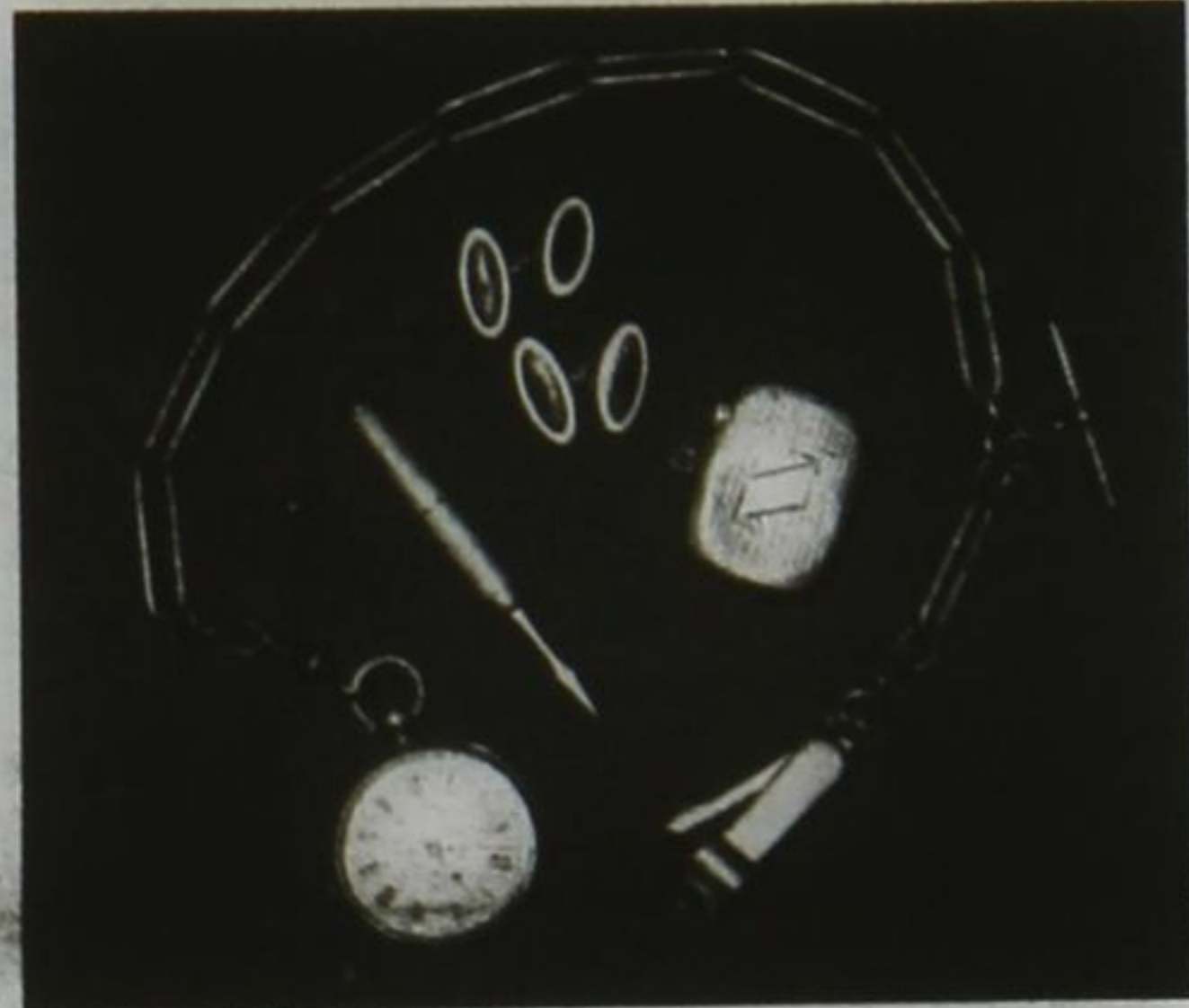
Lastly it should also have a letter mark representing the year the piece was assayed. Every year is assigned a different letter of the alphabet. In each cycle the font and the case are changed, as well as the shape of the shield around the symbol, so that no two years are exactly alike. With some pieces one

may also identify a mark that indicates the maker.

The pocket watch case was made in Birmingham in 1884 and is referred to as an open face watch, as it has no cover. This is a relatively small watch and would have fit comfortably in the front vest pocket. Pocket watches usually have an attached chain that allows them to be fastened to a belt loop, vest or waistcoat. Here is a lovely chain with big box links.

Each of these links has been individually stamped with the lion passant, while the clasp and t-bar also bear the hallmarks for London 1902. The t-bar would fit into a button hole and the short end with a clasp would hang from this. A gentleman would attach any manner of items to this clasp.

The first shown here is a device for cutting off the end of a cigar and is hallmarked London 1901. The next is a match safe, or Vesta case. This would be used to carry matches and is dated

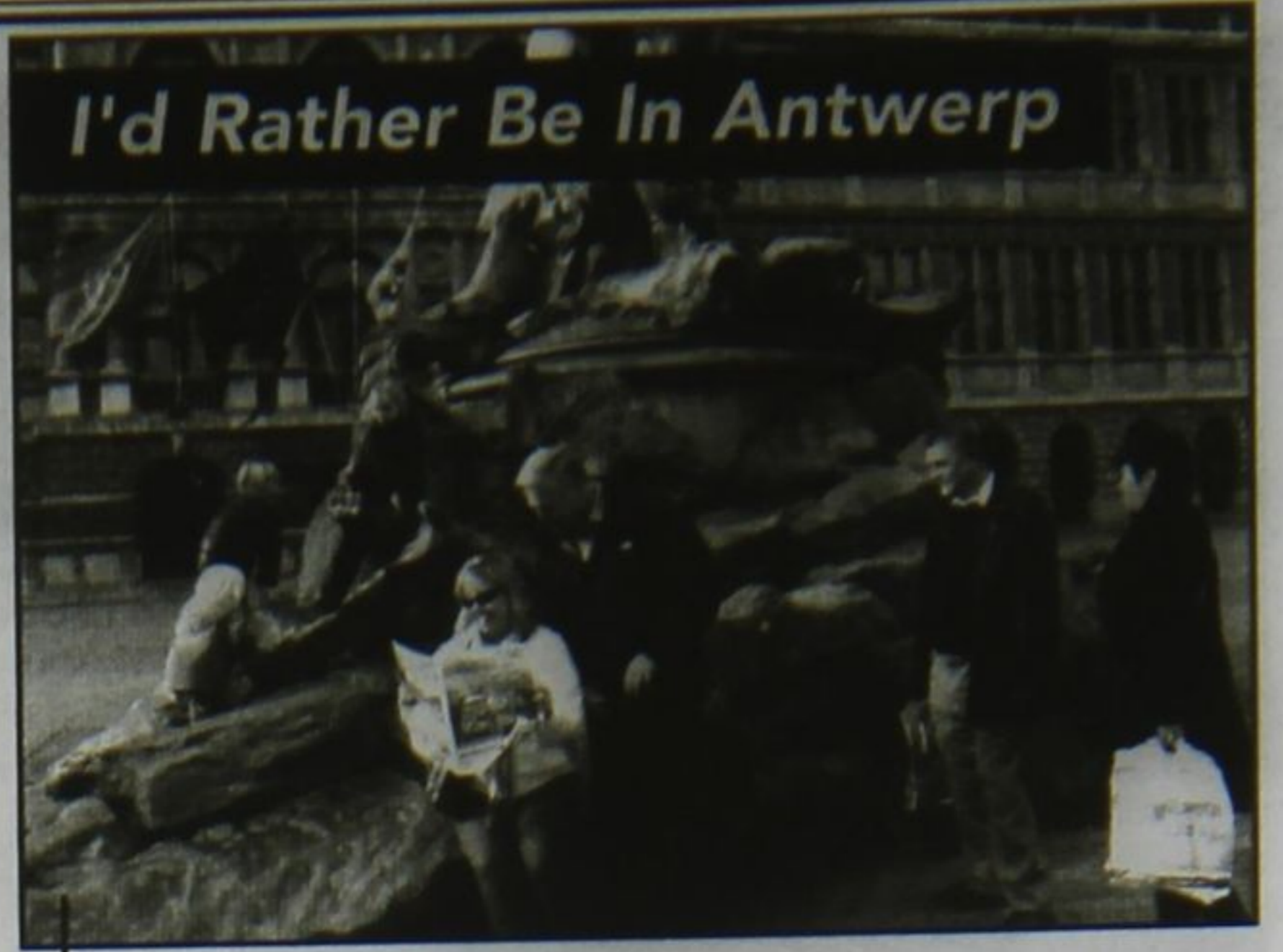


Birmingham 1907. The third item is a little more unusual. At first glance it appears to be a pencil but when the cylinder is twisted a toothpick appears! This is a more modern device but is still sterling and was made in Birmingham in 1968. Other things like rings and seals could be attached to the end of a watch chain and all of these items were referred to as fobs.

The last item is a pair of cufflinks. They bear the hallmark for Birmingham 1908 and have a beautiful enamel face in a starburst pattern in cobalt blue and ivory which would look great against a nice white set of cuffs.

While the use of pocket watches and jewellery like Albert chains with fobs is certainly not as popular as it was a hundred years ago, there are still some who appreciate and wear them. These sterling fobs range in price from about \$50 for the toothpick to \$100 for either the match safe or the cigar cutter. A simple open faced watch like this one would sell for less than \$100 while the chain would be a little more. And if you could find a pair of cufflinks like these for less than \$50 you could consider yourself lucky.

I welcome inquiries about any objects and look forward to seeing and perhaps writing about them. Please forward a photo and a description to me through Stouffville Free Press or drop them off at Reid's Antiques, 6397 Main St. Stouffville during regular business hours or via [Robert@reidsantiques.com](mailto:Robert@reidsantiques.com).



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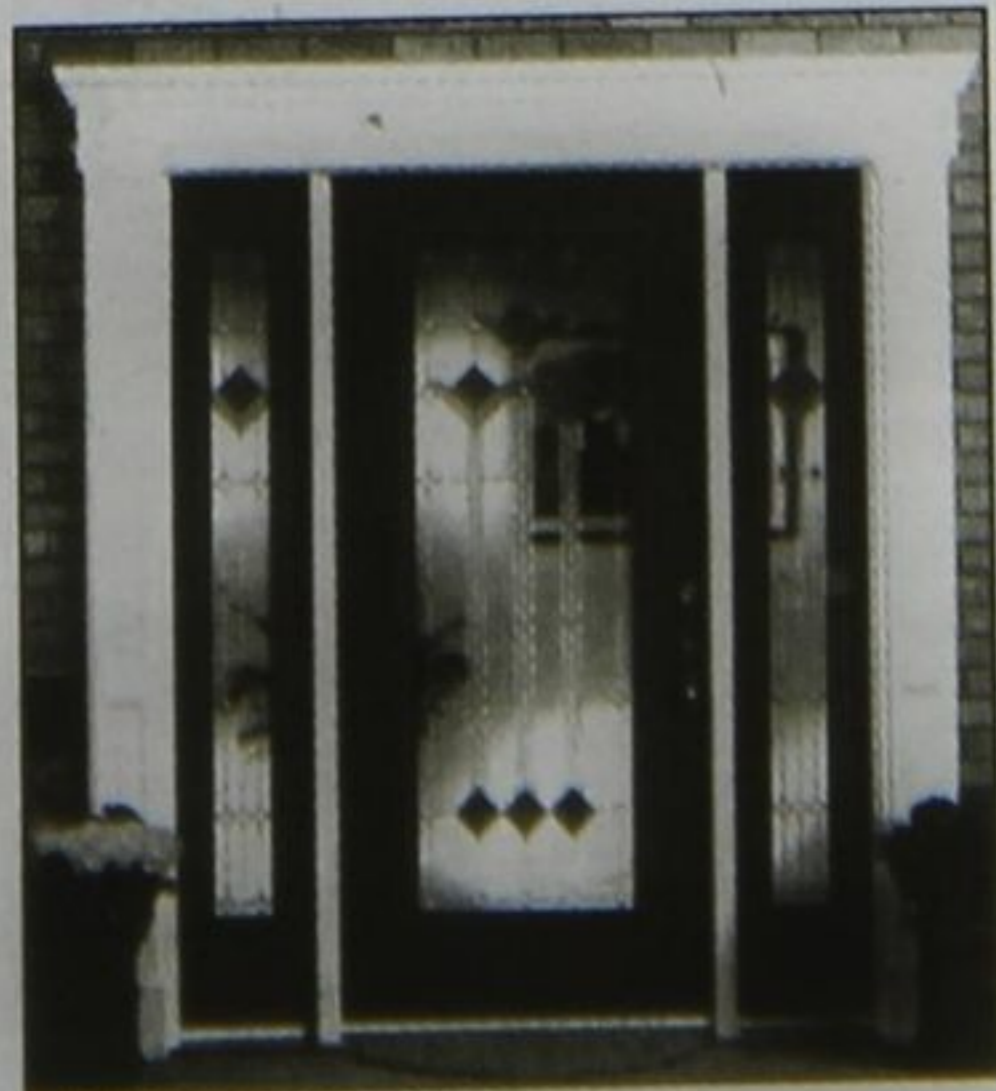
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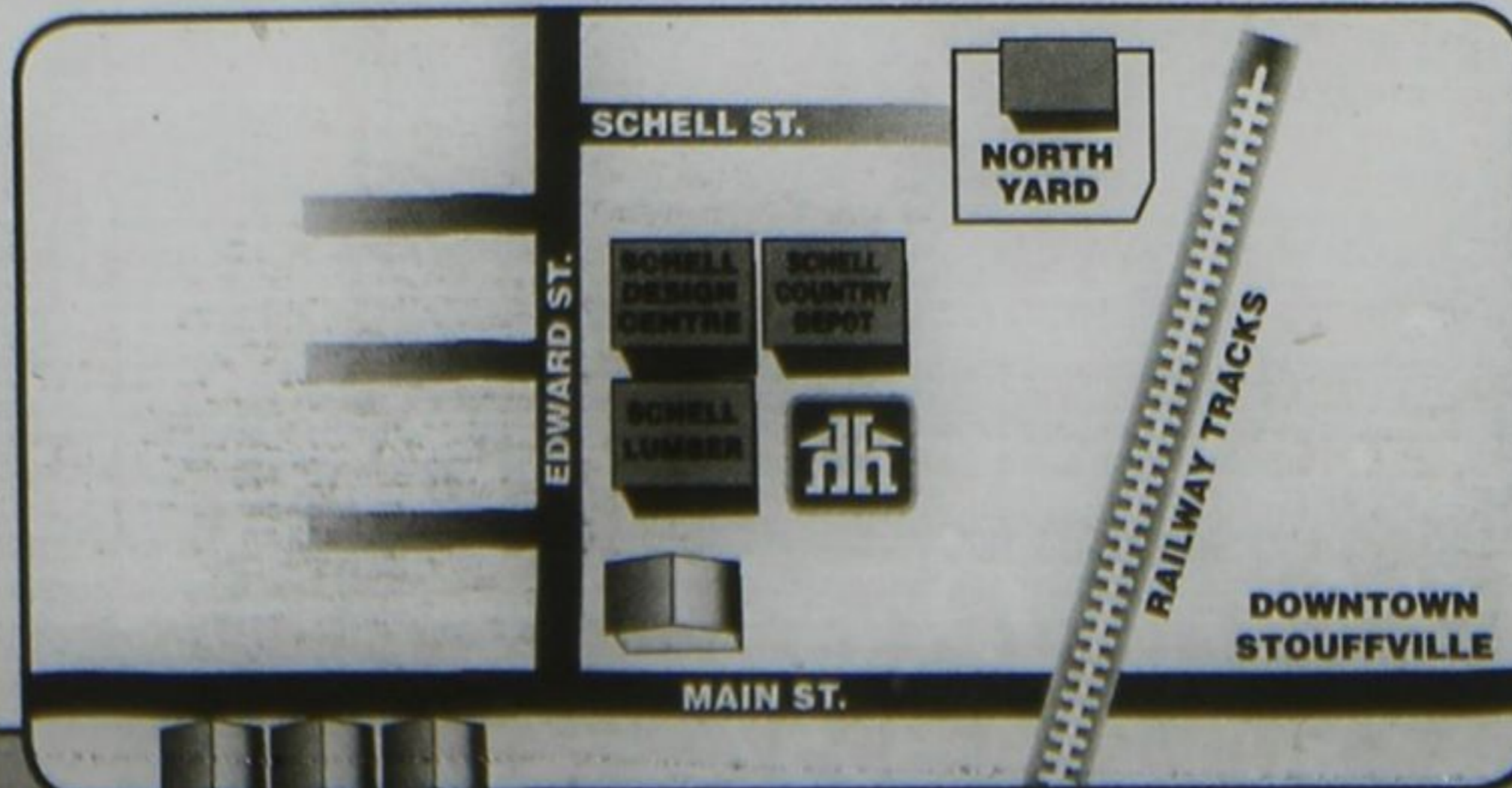
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