

Turning Back the Clock

Historic photo courtesy of Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum



SCHOOL DAYS - These kids from Miss Harman's 1916 class at Hillcrest School (the old schoolhouse is still there on Kennedy Road just south of Bloomington) look as enthused about being there as all our children will be when they return to the books and blackboards next week. Photo courtesy of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum.

Letters

Politics not like shopping

Dear Editor,

If voting in recent elections was like buying a product at a local retail establishment, I think there would be a lot of people looking to get their money back by now.

Take for instance the provincial Liberals. Dalton McGuinty expects us to fall for that whole "sure we lied, but it was for your benefit" line. Right.

Consider this.

Gentlemen, next time you want to spend a night out with your buddies, carousing, drinking beer

and such, just tell the little lady you are going down to the church for a hymn sing or to assemble care packages for orphans in some third world country. Then, when you come home at 4 a.m., stinking of beer, cheap cigars and bratwurst, and your significant other figures out that you are lying (and let me tell you, she will), just admit the deception but then tell her that you were doing it for her own good, "trust me honey, just wait, you'll see!"

According to ol' Dalton, this is a good plan.

Then there's Paul Martin. He campaigned by promising us a "new kind of government". That isn't going real well, is it, Paul?

What with the Adscam scandal that refuses to go away, a helicopter purchase decided by political expediency rather than the needs of the military, the Post Office run by a bunch of crooks, health care chaos, and the premiers ganging up on you, what is so darn different about this government from the last

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Con-fessions

Roadside Attractions

by Conrad Boyce

On holiday in Pennsylvania recently, the Spouse and I noticed that it is distinctly hazardous to your health to try and learn about the history of the Keystone State. Even on the remotest backroad, with next to no shoulder, historical signs are inevitably placed right beside the traffic lane, like speed limit signs or stop signs — no pullout, no nothing. And the print is so small, you catch only the title at 40 m.p.h. So if you really want to absorb a little of the local colour, and learn all about the battlefield over yon hill, you are forced to stop right in the middle of the highway and hope nobody plows into you. No wonder the fatality statistics are so high down there; Pennsylvanians do love their history.

Things aren't so bad here in Ontario; in almost every case I recall, you need to pull off the road to read about a church or a prison. Often, in fact, you need to pull way off the road, and the on-road sign gives no clue as to how far away the historical marker is. More than once, I've driven around an unfamiliar town forever, searching in vain to learn about some fascinating local character, only to give up in frustration and return to the highway (having dropped potato chips to re-trace my route), my thirst for historical knowledge un-satisfied.

But even though the history signs are a safe distance away, this does not mean there aren't an over-abundance of roadside distractions in Ontario, cumulatively designed to pull your attention away from that approaching semi-trailer at just the wrong moment. I'm not used to this, being a native of Alberta, where there is seldom anything to divert your gaze from the hardtop, not even scenery, not even curves in the road. Just miles and miles of wheat fields.

But here in Ontario, there are plenty of curves, and plenty of fascinating things to make sure you never see those curves coming: giant billboards, beautiful century estates that look just like your dream home, and, of course, a million things for sale. Ontarians, it seems, will sell anything at the end of their

driveway. But they will also give away anything at the end of their driveway.

One week, you'll roll by and you'll see a mattress, or a set of plastic lawn chairs, or even an old fridge. The unwritten invitation is: "You want this, load it up and drive it away. It's yours!"

So you do. A couple of weeks later, you go by the same driveway, and there's something else sitting at the end of it, something of about the same vintage as the lawn chairs you grabbed before. Only this time, it's a tractor or a Mercedes. Maybe there's a for sale sign, maybe not. I think the law would be on your side if you said, "Sorry, bud, you were nice enough to leave out the lawn chairs when you were done with 'em, I thought you meant me to have the wheels, too. Didn't meant to disturb you by loading 'em up in the middle of the night."

Roadside merchants are the most trusting people in the world. I knew of a maker of wooden furniture up near Cannington, used to display his lawn swings and picnic tables all along the road for about an eighth of a mile, and never chained down a bit of it. Can't imagine his insurance premiums. To their credit, though, most of them actually sit beside their wares with cashboxes on their laps, whatever the weather, like grown-up versions of the lemonade stand you operated as a kid.

As an Albertan and Yukoner unfamiliar with these phenomena, perhaps my favourite roadside discovery has been the 'chip truck', although its version of poutine is probably every bit as lethal as the Pennsylvania historical marker. Of all the chip trucks I have come to know and love, the most irresistible is one in Leaskdale, north of Uxbridge, which is painted to resemble a Holstein and called "Cow Chips". Silly but splendid; I recommend the banquet burger.

One of the things I enjoy most about southern Ontario is "running the roads", experiencing all the different ways to get from A to B, and all the neat stuff that you see along the way.

It'll be the death of me, no doubt, but it's better than wheatfields. Trust me.

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