



2000: Councils fight education cuts

Jim Quantrell, At a Glance

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Cambridge archivist Jim Quantrell takes our readers back for a glance at events which occurred 10, 15 and 20 years ago.

20 YEARS AGO - Third week of March 1990

Minor sports groups from around the city were voicing dismay at a deal that had seen the city sell the bulk of off-season ice time in the new Hespeler Memorial Arena to a private company reportedly without first notifying city council or consulting other user groups. Under the terms of the agreement, 1,200 hours of summer ice time at the Olympic-size ice rink were to be set aside for renowned figure skating coach Kerry Leitch who was to operate a summer skating school and programs for the Preston Figure Skating Club and the National Pairs Training Centre. City officials noted that there was nothing illegal or inappropriate in the way the deal was put together and that other user groups had indicated that they were not interested in the ice times that were included in the agreement. Under the deal, Mr. Leitch agreed to take over the operation of the municipal summer skating program that had been offered at Galt Arena Gardens. In return, the city was to receive \$75,000 from the agreement and looked on the deal as a sound financial arrangement for the city.

One of the city's oldest commercial landmarks was about to undergo what many believed would be its final metamorphosis. The tiny old whitewashed building at the corner of Cedar and St. Andrews Streets was soon to disappear as Buck Variety Store moved into new quarters – then under construction on the same site. For decades the soon to be demolished Buck Variety had been a community crossroads for west Galt serving intermittently as a general store, diner, garage, convenience store and gas bar. The new modern store was to have an extra 3,000 square feet in which to display its merchandise while the gas pumps were to be moved further back and would now fly the Shell Oil banner.

15 YEARS AGO - Third week of March 1995

Spring seemed to have arrived early in the city with unseasonably warm temperatures and plenty of sunshine. Temperatures had reached a balmy 18 C but had stopped short of the record of 21 C set for the date in 1990. It was expected that more seasonable temperatures would return by the end of the week. Average daytime high temperatures for the period usually reached about 2 C.

10 YEARS AGO - Third week of March 2000

School councils in the region joined forces to fight back against the threat of cuts of education that loomed year after year. A spokesperson for the region's school councils noted that "there is no more fat to cut in the system and cuts have to stop so we can continue to have a good education system for our kids". Coincidentally, the same day the representatives of the school councils met to resolve to fight continuing education cutbacks, the provincial government announced an additional \$190-million in education funding that was to help resolve the \$5-million shortfall the public board was facing. Voicing opposition to an increasing government emphasis on ensuring that students were "ready for the workplace", the school council spokesperson pointed out that "kids need a well rounded education and not just be equipped for the workplace and that translates into continued investment in programs, particularly arts programs and music that often end up being the ones that seem easy to cut".

Cambridge's "all-councils summit" set a timetable for coming up with a local solution for regional restructuring but a question remained as to whether it could actually be accomplished. To meet the timetable requirements a co-ordinating committee was to compile the necessary data by the end of May and was to reach a consensus of how to proceed by the end of June. The cost of the exercise was to be borne by each council on a per capita basis. The "summit meeting" identified five models for local government to be studied: a single city; a two-city model that simply split the region in two; a three-city model that combined Kitchener and Waterloo, left Cambridge separate and combined the townships into a third "city"; a modified three-city approach that created municipalities out of Cambridge and North Dumfries, Kitchener/Wilmot and North Waterloo; and finally to stick with the two-tier system that would be highly modified.

Plans to bring people closer to the Grand River were moving forward as members of the core area revitalization advisory committee reviewed and fine tuned recommendations for three major projects. The first project involved creating a new landing at the water's edge somewhere between Park Hill Road dam and the old Carnegie Library at the foot of Dickson Street. The second project was a joint public-private initiative on the west bank of the river at the foot of St. Andrews Street. The city was to work with the Galt Horticultural Society and other area stakeholders to redevelop the vacant area around Barnacle Bill's into a sculpture garden. The third project was an elevated boardwalk at the rear of the buildings that overlooked the river's east bank from Dickson to Warnock Streets.

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