

Title: Amalgamation - The Town of New Tecumseth. Page 1/14

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Description: This essay looks at the process of amalgamation. It discusses the announcement, the role of the ministry as well as the town councils, and the new boundaries. Next, it discusses how three of the larger municipalities, Alliston, Beeton, and Tottenham, were affected and what their response was to the announcement. After this, the essay discusses how the town chose its new name. Problems of amalgamation are also discussed.

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After a study commissioned by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs found that the issues of South Simcoe were too pressing to wait for a larger study, it was decided that the boundaries of South Simcoe would be redrawn as of January 1991. While eight municipalities were affected, the essay will concentrate on the four municipalities of Alliston, Beeton, Tecumseth, and Tottenham. The amalgamation of these four municipalities into the town of New Tecumseth was exciting and confusing for the communities. This essay will focus on the immediate announcement of amalgamation by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, and how the communities dealt with it in the first year.

The essay will look at the process of amalgamation. It will discuss the announcement, the role of the ministry as well as the town councils, and the new boundaries. Next will be the discussion of how three of the larger municipalities, Alliston, Beeton, and Tottenham, were effected and what their response was to the announcement. Some of the municipalities were in favour of amalgamation, while others were not. Then the discussion of the name for the new town will be presented. The name debate started as soon as the new town was called "The Amalgamated Town of Alliston, Beeton, Tecumseth, and Tottenham." Citizens debated over names like "Tecumseth" and "Banting" before a name was chosen in November 1991. Problems and areas of concern regarding the amalgamation will also be discussed in the essay. Finally, the conclusion will look at the present situation in the new town and some of the problems they are dealing with today.

Process of the Amalgamation of South Simcoe

Municipal Affairs Minister John Sweeney announced at a closed meeting with the mayors and reeves of eight municipalities, that their municipalities ceased to exist and that the political boundaries of south Simcoe be redrawn as of January 1991. In

January 1991, Alliston, Tottenham, Beeton, and Tecumseth Township formed one municipality, Bradford and West Gwillimbury formed another and Cookstown and Innisfil formed a third. The move came after the Minister's decision in November 1998 to undertake a comprehensive study of boundary issues in south Simcoe.

The study was commissioned in response to demands made on the municipalities as a result of the growth. Since 1970 the study area containing the local municipalities has undergone a population growth of 90 per cent compared to 25 per cent for the province as a whole.¹ Factors cited by the ministry as a result of the study include: a proliferation of joint service agreements, fringe development, lack of servicing capacity in urban centers, consumption of agricultural land for urban purposes, stains on ground water resources and sewage systems, and affordable housing and planning disputes.² The Ministry of Municipal Affairs decided to draw the boundaries along existing service lines. Sweeney said that with that decision the new municipalities could meet the needs of the community and create a stronger base from which to work.³

The municipalities were expected to carry out the decision making themselves. Sweeney said, "we're leaving a fair bit of the decision making to them, but we will be right there beside them."⁴ A South Simcoe Local Government Study from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, stated that the province would provide some financial assistance to the new municipalities to offset amalgamation impacts and equip them to manage growth. The report also recommended a comprehensive service approach to the area to reduce the environmental impact of proposed development. Assistance in funds and staff expertise were to be received from areas such as the Ministry of the Environment

¹ Alliston Herald (January 17 '90), p.1

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 2

and the Solicitor General. According to Sweeney, a further county-wide study would also be undertaken as part of the ministry's province-wide county reform initiative. However, Sweeney said that restructuring had to be done immediately because the problems in South Simcoe were too pressing to wait for the results of a broader study.⁵

To aid in the transition, a committee was formed. The South Simcoe Transition Team was developed as an umbrella group for the three new municipalities own implementation committees which in turn divided into subcommittees to determine how best to adjust to their new status. Sitting on the umbrella transition team was a staff person and an elected representative from each of the existing municipalities. The implementation committees were designed to decide what direction was to be taken on such things as policing, fire departments, roads, hydro, administrative staffing and new town names. To help with these issues Municipal Boundaries branch representative Don Taylor, from the ministry of municipal affairs, suggested the new towns could possibly hire a consultant. Alliston's deputy reeve Aiden Whelan agreed that some kind of assistance would be needed. Whelan said, "there's a big difference between twelve and three municipalities. We are definitely going to want at our disposal ministry assistance."⁶

Who made up the town council, once the new town was implemented? Rick Milne, mayor of Alliston remained mayor, with the former reeve of Tecumseth Jim Heath assuming the deputy mayor seat. Former Tottenham reeve Joan Sutherland continued as reeve while Beeton reeve Gary Burton became deputy reeve. Alliston reeve Jack Anderson was chosen as county councillor. Rounding off the rest of the council were five members from Alliston, four from Tecumseth, four representatives from Beeton, and four from Tottenham, making it a twenty two member council.⁷

⁵Ibid.

⁶Alliston Herald (January 31 '90), p. 1

⁷(January 2 '91), p. 1

When the municipal election was held in November, it was pared down to seven members. Alliston had representation from its three wards, Beeton from its ward, Tottenham from its ward, and Tecumseth also had a ward representation. Rick Milne from Alliston, was elected as the new town's mayor. The issue of amalgamation had all of the four communities confused and in an uproar, as this political cartoon from the Alliston Herald of January 17, 1990, shows.

Alliston: In Favour of Amalgamation



Alliston headed into the 1990's with the potential to more than double its population. Town councillor Ken Pratt said there were many factors to determining the upcoming growth including sewage, water and the decisions of the new amalgamated municipality. Pratt felt that in the amalgamation, the south of Alliston would become

an industrial corridor.⁸ Before the amalgamation, Alliston employed 45 full-time, 55 part-time and 20 seasonal employees, and entered into the municipal merger with the largest administration of the four communities. Alliston had unionized works and public utilities departments, while the other municipalities did not.⁹

Regarding the proposed boundary changes, Alliston Mayor Rick Milne suggested that if it had to happen, the townships of Adjala, Tosorontio and Essa would be better off joining the new town. He pointed out the area already shared services such as recreation, hospital care and in most cases fire protection services.¹⁰

Beeton: Afraid of Losing Identity

The village of Beeton had a population of just under 1,000 but some local politicians felt the population would swell to over 1,000 and the small town character would be lost in the process. Reeve Gary Burton commented on the fact that Beeton had just built a new firehall and wondered if it would stay within the community. There was concern that community pride would be lost if the new municipality amalgamated all of the fire departments. Councillor Ralf Klopf was concerned about the village's representation in the ward system. There was hope that the village would have more than one voice on the new council. There was also hope that Beeton would become the hub for residential development but there was little expectation for industry in the village.¹¹

The village is serviced by a library, an arena and parks and also had arrangements with the Township of Adjala for the use of the library and parks. There were agreements with the Township of Tecumseth for fire protection services and the

⁸Alliston Herald (March 7 '90), p. 1

⁹Ibid., p. 2

¹⁰(October 3 '90), p. 1

¹¹(March 7 '90), p. B1

parks and these agreements ceased with the amalgamation into Tecumseth Township along with Tottenham and Alliston.¹²

Tottenham: Not Thrilled

Village reeve Joan Sutherland said that while she was not thrilled at having to merge with the other communities, she said Tottenham was eager to face the challenge. She said "although I have reservations about the village losing its uniqueness and character, I hope the four communities can retain their own essence."¹³ The municipality employed 23 full-time non-union employees and several service departments including building inspection, recreation, accounts payable and receivable, public works, and utilities. At the time of amalgamation, Tottenham had a population of approximately 3,500 people. While more industries like F&P Manufacturing and CanadianOxy were not expected, councillors expected many more homes and businesses. But there was concern that Tottenham was not serviced by a major corridor within the boundaries of the new municipality. Highway 50 runs to the west of the boundary and County Road 10 is the major corridor through the middle of Tottenham and the new municipality. Reeve Sutherland was concerned about the heavy truck traffic through the village's main street, Queen Street.¹⁴

But later in the amalgamation debate, Tottenham was no longer eager to face the challenge. A petition dated October 18, 1990 from the village of Tottenham to Premier Bob Rae, requested the premier take necessary action to rescind parts of Bill 177, the Act respecting the Amalgamation of certain Municipalities in the County of Simcoe, relative to Tottenham. Tottenham suggested that amalgamation was not structured along the lines of communities of interest and said it would destroy the existing social

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., p. B1

¹⁴Ibid.

fabric of their community. Tottenham felt that Bill 177 was developer driven and only suited the interests of Alliston.¹⁵

The Name Debate

The Amalgamated Town of Alliston, Beeton, Tottenham and Tecumseth did not have a name when the new town came into being on January 1, 1991. There was no name until just before the municipal election in November of that year. Strong debate regarding the name of the new town appeared in many letters to the editor in the Alliston Herald from citizens in each of the effected municipalities. Councillor Ian McKay of Tecumseth did not hide his preference. In a letter to the editor, McKay claimed that Alliston, Beeton, and Tottenham would retain their names and identities as communities within a municipality, but not Tecumseth. He said, "it would be both terribly unfair and a loss to history if the illustrious name of Tecumseth disappeared forever."¹⁶ McKay commented on the fact that Tecumseth was named in honour of the Indian Chief Tecumseth, considered by some to be one of the greatest north American Indian leader of all time. Local author Allan Anderson also agreed, stating "naming the town after the great Indian chief would send a positive message to the native communities."¹⁷

But others did not agree. Other letters to the editor revealed the community's dislike for the name. Many felt the new town would be confused with Tecumseh, near Windsor, stating the former Township of Tecumseth received so much mail for Tecumseh that they kept a stock of preprinted envelopes to forward it!¹⁸ One in agreement with that argument stated:

¹⁵Alliston Herald (October 24 '90), p. 1

¹⁶(March 14 '90), p. 4

¹⁷(September 11 '91), p. 2

¹⁸Ibid., p. 5

Our forefathers sought names for new settlements. We should seize the initiative to give this new municipality a good new name, one which will not be confused with another town of a similar name.¹⁹

The name debate continued with the name "Banting" suggested for the new town. The co-discover of insulin was born in Alliston and the town's high school bares his name. Gord Wright of Alliston supported this name in a letter to the editor stating:

Thousands of students from Alliston, Tecumseth, Beeton and Tottenham are carrying educational certificates with the name Banting prominently displayed...We are fortunate in having an example in Banting, one of our own local sons. What an oppourtunity to set the sights of the new area above local politics and provide a leadership target that can become an incentive to youth, organizations and politicians in the area.²⁰

Banting Memorial High School's student council president, Corrie Brisco, agreed saying that Banting is the sole connector of all four towns.²¹

The finance and administration committee of council recommended the two names appear on the November 12, 1991 municipal election ballots. This came after an Alliston contest, sponsored by the library board, found that the names "Tecumseth" and "Banting" received the most votes.²² When the election occurred, the name "New Tecumseth" was chosen for the new amalgamated town. Although the town changed boundaries, there were no changes in postal addresses. Even after the new name was chosen Alliston, Beeton and Tottenham residents still continue to use their town names.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹(September 11 '91), p. 2

²²*Ibid.*

Problems and Areas of Concern

The amalgamation of Alliston, Tottenham, Beeton, and Tecumseth offered oppourtunities for growth, but the oppourtunity for disaster was also present. On the issue of hydro and water supply there were two public utility commissions, one in Alliston and one in Tottenham while Beeton had a utilities committee of council. All three had to be amalgamated, but that did not prove to be too much of a problem. One concern was that if they had to buy all of Ontario Hydro's equipment and services throughout the new municipality, the cost would reach into the millions of dollars. But this was remedied because among the areas the new town was in agreement with the study committee were forestry and electricity. It was felt the distribution of electricity should remain within the jurisdiction of Ontario Hydro.²³ Another problem was what to do with the police force. At the time, the new municipality basically had three choices in regards to policing: expand the Alliston Force, create a new municipal force, or contract from the Ontario Provincial Police. The new municipality decided on the latter. Another area of concern was political representation. It was stated during the amalgamation process that political representation had to be based on a ward system. Critics felt there would be a big political edge because the municipal act does not require candidates to live in the ward in which they are running, only the municipality.²⁴

A letter to the editor in the Alliston Herald appeared regarding the misconceptions about restructuring. Bryon Montgomery, President of Matrix Research and Consulting in London, Ontario said he was intently reading about the comments being made from various sources about restructuring in Simcoe County. His letter said that the ministry's proposal was basically made to allow for the reduction in size of

²³(October 3 '90), p. 1

²⁴(January 17 '90), p.4

county councils which were becoming so large as to be "unworkable and utterly undemocratic." His letter discussed some positives to restructuring. He stated that:

Some services will finally get to residents of the county in rural areas. This could mean better roads, land use planning, and waste management. It could mean the return of separated municipalities to the county structure. This would enhance the tax base of the county as a whole and permit greater coordination between the county and these municipalities. It would also mean larger provincial grants for the county.²⁵

Area member of provincial parliament also became involved in the amalgamation process. Jim Wilson, the Progressive Conservative representative of Simcoe West, introduced Bill 132, a Private Member's Bill intended to stop county restructuring. Bill 132 would only allow restructuring with the approval of both county council and the council of each affected municipality. Wilson said the bill "transfers the right to decide the fundamental issues of amalgamation and restructuring in the collective hands of the public."²⁶ He stated that he is not opposed to restructuring if the affected municipalities agree. But he is opposed to "a process that ignores the wishes of the majority of the people."²⁷ But the Bill was not passed and the amalgamation continued.

Conclusion

January 1991, saw the amalgamation of Alliston, Beeton, Tecumseth and Tottenham. But in order to have some breathing space, the new council said it was not a year for spending. Amalgamation was only beginning and patience was required by the community until the basic guidelines were worked out. In an attempt to gain some space for long-term planning, the new Town considered an interim control bylaw. The

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶(October 2 '91), p. 2

²⁷Ibid.

Planning Advisory Committee stated that it was not proposed to stop development but rather give the new town the power to hold proposals at the committee levels rather than pass them through the entire system. The Planning Act allows municipalities to pass interim control bylaws for a period of one year, after which it can be extended for another year.²⁸ Whether it could be lifted for a specific development depended on how the act was interpreted. The reason for the request was so the planning committee would not be burdened with any future development proposals. The current or already approved proposals were slated to continue.

Industrial development was not a problem, but residential development increased with amalgamation. In August 1991, 3,565 residential units were proposed for New Tecumseth.²⁹ The increase in population had a direct impact on schools, water supply, sewage, recreation, traffic, noise, air pollution, and local merchants. Two new schools were built in the new Town—a Catholic high school in Tottenham, and a new public elementary school in Alliston. Today, there is another elementary school proposed for Beeton. But Beeton has a huge problem with its water supply. The residents never know what colour their water will be when they turn on their tap. This was a problem before amalgamation and it still has not been fixed. Traffic was a huge problem in Alliston where it was known as “Truckville” because of all the trucks going to the Honda plant. Finally, just last year, a truck by-pass was built. Some residents are happy about the by-pass and others are even more angry because it was built through a residential area and they feel the long term effects have not been considered.

Honda Manufacturing of Canada, located at the edge of Alliston, also seems to have community members up in arms in Tottenham and Beeton. Some of these residents feel that the town council caters to Honda. They feel that council makes

²⁸(January 30 '91), p. 1

²⁹(October 2 '91), p. B1

decisions that favour Honda, and not the residents. This also has to do with their hostility over political representation. Alliston, the largest community in the municipality, has three representatives on council, Tottenham has one, Beeton has one, and Tecumseth has one. While Alliston has the largest population and therefore more people to represent, some communities were still angry about their lack of representation on council. This is happening even today. The smaller communities were also very concerned about maintaining their identity. They felt their small town character and uniqueness would be destroyed in the process of amalgamation. While, today many of these communities are bigger because of population increase, they all maintain their identity. The signs outside of Alliston, Beeton and Tottenham, read "Alliston", "Beeton", and "Tottenham." Their addresses are the same, each have their own branch of the New Tecumseth Library, and each has their own fire halls run by volunteers.

While confusion and debate encompassed the first couple of years of the town of New Tecumseth, the communities have thrived and maintained their identities within the new Town. There are still minor complaints today, but overall the communities have benefited from amalgamation. The four communities were so interconnected through schools, businesses, industry, recreation, and events that it seemed only fitting to put them together. The county restructuring had to occur because of the problems in South Simcoe. Fortunately, while these communities were the first to amalgamate, they came out of the decision with little problems compared to others amalgamating today. Today, Larry Keogh is the new mayor of New Tecumseth. A fresh new face for the new town with new ideas for even greater benefits for the entire municipality.

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