

# A Waste of History

By Conrad Boyce

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A crime happened this week down in the southwestern corner of our township. A building which was part of the golden years of the region's growth, which played host to hungry and weary travellers for almost a century, which watched over the grave of Stouffville's founder Abraham Stouffer, was recklessly demolished by an uncaring federal government to make way for... nothing.

The Altona Inn was originally built in 1850, but that was a fragile frame building which came down a couple of years ago. What remained, a sturdier brick addition, was constructed in 1875, so it stood guard at what is now the corner of the Second Concession Road and the Uxbridge-Pickering Town Line, for more than 136 years. Like many other buildings in the Altona area, it was purchased by the federal government in the early 80s because it was on the infamous Pickering Airport Lands... and left to rot. And rot it most surely did, steadily deteriorating until it was a danger to anyone who might enter. Dozens of residences within a few miles of the Inn suffered the same fate.

A number of months ago, the Department of Transport gave local municipalities a list of its buildings on the Airport Lands that it intended to tear down, for reasons of safety. At that time, most designated historic buildings (like the Inn and the church down the road on the Pickering side) were left off the list, but reserved for future study. Now, just a few months later, the Township was given only a few days' notice that the Inn had been condemned. Less than 10 days into the new year, it is gone.

We sincerely doubt if any study went into a possible future for the Altona Inn. Certainly no one in Uxbridge was consulted, certainly not the good people at Heritage Uxbridge, who tried for years to figure out a way to save the Inn. And of course it came down to money. Councillor Pat Mikuse, vitally interested in things historical (her Roseville home is now one of only three historic inns left in the

township), estimates that it would have cost \$100,00 to just stabilize the Inn against further decay, and many times that to fully restore it. But it could have been done.

But restore it for what? This was undoubtedly the rationalization of Transport Canada. Why pour a bunch of money into a building in the middle of nowhere, on a road hardly anyone uses? What could it be used for?

We contend that the Inn could have been stabilized, utilizing the resources the federal government has at its disposal, for a whole lot less than \$100,000. That could have bought a few years to do a proper study on Altona's potential as a tourist site, with Abe Stouffer's burial ground as the key, and the Inn and the church as supporting structures. A nice little heritage village could have happened there, recreating life during the Inn's heyday.

But of course the feds aren't interested in a heritage village at Altona, having recently expressed a renewed enthusiasm for the Airport, albeit a quarter century down the road. You're not reading it here first, but we fervently believe that the Pickering Airport will never happen, not in 25 years, not ever. And now, thanks to a government that could not give a fig about history, nothing will ever happen in Altona either.