

2023-10: Coakley v Hamilton Spectator

February 28, 2023

The National NewsMedia Council found that corrective action was taken to address a concern about accuracy in a January 19, 2023, obituary, “Rabbi Bernard Baskin, Hamilton’s wise man, dies at 102,” published by the Hamilton Spectator.

Mark Coakley filed a complaint with the NNC stating concern that the article inaccurately referred to the late Rabbi Baskin as having lived in the Hamilton, Ontario, neighbourhood of Westdale. The complainant pointed out that the rabbi’s long-time residence was in fact located in the nearby neighbourhood of Ainslie Wood.

The complainant had filed similar complaints with the NNC in the past about articles incorrectly identifying Ainslie Wood locations as being located in Westdale. He argued that the misidentification of the neighbourhood indicated a "deliberate attempt to show contempt for Ainslie Wood" and its residents.

The complainant said, “Rabbi Baskin was for many years the most famous resident of Ainslie Wood.” He also stated that Westdale was “a different, more-privileged community,” and argued that it was “inaccurate and insulting to misname our community.”

He added, “All of the streets entering Ainslie Wood have large street signs reading ‘Ainslie Wood - Strength in Diversity.’ This is how people in Ainslie Wood refer to ourselves.”

The NNC heard from the news organization on this matter which stated that a correction ran in the January 24 print edition. The correction read:

"Two Spectator stories about the late Rabbi Baskin, one printed Friday and one Saturday, stated that he lived in the Westdale neighbourhood when in fact he lived in Ainslie Wood."

The news organization also updated the online article with the correct identification and appended an editor's note, stating, "This article has been corrected to clarify that his home was in Hamilton’s Ainslie Wood neighbourhood, not Westdale as originally stated."

The news organization noted that it ran a similar correction in the November 11, 2021, edition about an October 7 piece. The correction stated that it had incorrectly identified the Ainslie Wood area as Westdale and that it regretted the error.

The NNC stated in a 2019 [decision](#) about a similar complaint, filed by the same individual, that while the issue of neighbourhood inequity is beyond the NNC mandate of dealing with issues of journalistic standards, it recognizes the impact of stereotyping geographical locations.

The NNC would emphasize that accuracy in reporting the facts, including attention to details such as place names, is a fundamental aspect of responsible journalism, and minimizes the risk of perpetuating misinformation, stereotypes, or other harm.

At the same time, the NNC recognizes that human error can result in unfortunate mistakes in published reporting. In these cases, standard practice is to correct the inaccuracy and clearly alert readers to the change to mitigate and address the impact of the error.

The NNC understands that this matter represents a particularly significant issue to the complainant, and that avoiding negative stereotypes is an important issue in general. In reviewing the matter, the NNC noted that the news organization corrected the statement in the article and issued corrections both online and in print. This adheres to standard practice when errors have occurred.

Further, the NNC agreed that it is an unfortunate error that is similar to concerns the complainant has raised in the past, and recognizes that it is frustrating to see the same neighbourhood misidentified. However, the NNC found no evidence that the error in identifying the neighbourhood was intentional or malicious in nature and observed that errors in previous reporting have been corrected and acknowledged appropriately.

For the reasons outlined above, the NNC found the matter resolved due to corrective action.