

The Old Britannia Schoolhouse

1852-1959
restored 1982

Fall 2023

A Heritage Treasure Lost

Daryl Cook



Student Visits

No program offered in 2023/24

This newsletter

is published by *The Friends of the Schoolhouse* every Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer to inform members and the teachers of the Peel District School Board of activities and events organized by The Friends.

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More information?

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Around 6 pm on October 4 flames were seen coming from the Conover Barn on the Britannia Farm property. By the time fire-fighters arrived the entire structure was engulfed and all efforts to save it were futile. The Conover Barn dates to about 1900 and was donated to the Peel Board of Education a number of years ago. It has been a prominent structure on the property, easily seen from Hurontario Street and a reminder to all who passed by of the rich heritage of farming in the area. Together with the old farmhouse, the Gardner/Dunton house and the Britannia Schoolhouse, it formed the core of the historic property granted by King William IV in 1833 for the purpose of providing funds for the education of children. This trust is now held by the Peel District School Board and almost 200 years later continues to be a valuable historic asset for the community of Mississauga. There is now growing concern for the safety and preservation of the remaining buildings.

The Friends of the Schoolhouse are involved in advocating for the protection of the schoolhouse and its program and welcome any comments or assistance from anyone interested in historic preservation. If interested contact dlcook@rogers.com and use the heading Conover Barn.



Photo by Jim LEVAC

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From the Chair

Ruth Taylor

Most of you will know that the Conover barn, located on the Schoolhouse property, recently burned down. Peel Police could find no evidence of arson. When the "sugar shack," located in the sugar bush, burned a few years ago, an accelerant was found. The loss of two heritage buildings is tragic. It is encouraging to hear that more security features are to be put in place to protect our beloved Britannia Schoolhouse, the original farmhouse and the Dunton house.

Friends continue to meet monthly. It is nice to know that the Schoolhouse has some visitors. We are always hoping for good news when Schoolmistress Cafaro updates us on plans regarding the Schoolhouse. We continue to support the preservation of the Schoolhouse and its valuable artifacts. Friends have supported the Schoolhouse program in various ways. We hope that children will soon be welcomed back to Britannia as part of their enriched education.

My parents were married in December of 1937. My mother saved the Christmas cards they received congratulating them on their marriage. They were in their original envelopes. The cards were quite small, with simple pictures. Most of them had 1 cent stamps. Handkerchiefs were included in some cards. Those cards required a three-cent stamp. Edward the 8th abdicated the throne on December 11, after being king for only 325 days. He was never crowned king. Therefore, I think that the stamps portrayed King George the 5th.

I would like to share a greeting from one of the cards.

A cheery wish at Christmas time
to hope that you will have
the jolliest sort of holiday.

Membership Drive

Shirley Hoad

It is important at this time to ensure that our membership is strong and our records are up-to-date.

Renewal forms for our present membership have been mailed to everyone in November. Please return them to me as soon as possible.

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If you have not received this letter by Canada Post, please contact me at shoad@bell.net.

Be sure to check our website regularly. The Current News page is updated every month and has information about what is happening with The Friends, historical information, activities for the family, recipes and more. Although we have not had our usual events for several years, we hope to have Open Sundays again sometime in the New Year. WWW.friendsoftheschoolhouse.org

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From the Schoolmistress

Lisa Cafaro

It seems like just a short time ago we were commenting on the summer heat. Then in a blink of an eye...the trees have no more leaves and the temperature takes a sudden drop.

I know many folks including myself love summer season, those long days filled with sunshine and down time. However, I love the fall season even more. I enjoy watching the leaves change colour as the trees prepare for a winter break. I appreciate watching for animal migrations and seeing the shift in local birds. I also love putting on a warm sweater, some cozy socks and going for a hike where if I sweat, I've earned it (unlike the summer when I only have to breathe to sweat).

I also adore that first snow fall and the beauty of that white blanket on the tree tops. There's always a little extra sparkle to the trees when the sun is shining on the snow.

As December approaches I look forward to the time I get to spend with family. My husband and I drive to New Jersey every year to spend a week with relatives who come from various places around the United States and Canada. The time together is spent eating, laughing, sharing stories of the times since we've last seen each other, and more eating! I always feel renewed with a feeling of love and joy after the holidays and then time with my mom and local friends and family once we've returned home.

The time off during the holiday season is a time to celebrate, relax, reflect on that year that is coming to a close and look forward to what is to come in the next year.

I hope that you take some time with family to enjoy the beauty of the outdoor spaces in your community during the winter break. Build a snowperson, ice skate at a public rink, build a snow fort or go for a walk on one of the many local trails.

Whether you celebrate Hanukkah, Winter Solstice, Christmas, Kwanzaa, or Ōmisoka, I want to wish you a lovely holiday season with those that you love.

*Sincerely,
Lisa Cafaro*

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A Message From Japan

Dennis Patterson



In early August, after a five year absence, the Patterson Minami family again visited The Old Britannia Schoolhouse. We were accompanied by the wonderful Chris Chapel who, after many years working at the Schoolhouse and field centres, was "let go " by the Peel District School Board.

I felt a mix of emotions being back: - happy to see the schoolhouse still standing and looking much the same inside; - sad to hear the full story of the suspension of programming and the reduction in staff, - concerned about the instability at the Board level and the lack of a plan for the return of students. I won't comment further on the closure but sincerely hope there is a plan for students to once again enjoy and benefit from visiting this engaging historical facility called The Old Britannia Schoolhouse.

My girls had a great time exploring the schoolhouse. Schoolmistress Chapel put them through their paces with sample lessons using slates and writing with steel nib dipping pens. They tried on "papa's" top hat and frock coat, played some tunes on the piano and watched Schoolmistress Chapel climb the step ladder to wind the old Regulator clock one final time. Out in the schoolyard they tried the sour apples from trees planted during my time at the schoolhouse. These apples are not easily found in Japan.

The pendulum of education, that swings back and forth as the years pass, has left the schoolhouse without students. As an educator it is my hope that we will soon once again see Peel students learning about the past in the Schoolhouse's authentic environment.

Friends of the Schoolhouse can take courage from a quote by Margaret Mead. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world: indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

Thank you to The Friends of the Schoolhouse for your unwavering support while I was Schoolmaster and your tireless advocacy on behalf of the students of Peel.



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A History Lesson Daryl Cook

I'm someone who has always loved to find out what happened "way back when". This is evidenced by my small collection of various antiques like a 150 year old wash stand and several items of Medalta pottery made in Medicine Hat, Alberta. I love these antiques but I love more the story they tell. So it's not a surprise that I'm still trying to find out more about the history of S.S. No. 12 Toronto Township, the official name of the Britannia Schoolhouse.

Recently I was reminded that we had missed a major milestone in the history of schools in Britannia. When land was originally surveyed and lots designated, some lots were set aside to be used for a church or a school. In 1819 a school lot was set aside for the little village of Britannia. It was not the lot the present school sits on. There was also a lot which the church at the south east corner of Hurontario Street and Britannia Road still occupies. The present school lot was not designated until King William IV granted 200 acres of land to three men, residents of Britannia, to be held in trust for the education of children. This is the 200 acre property where the present school sits.

Britannia had a number of school buildings before the current brick one built in 1852. Details are vague, but we think there was a log building and perhaps more than one frame schoolhouse. Before there were actual school buildings, education was done in the home. Sometimes several families would gather their children in one location and have lessons. The building of an actual school and the hiring of a teacher must have been welcomed by the community.

Unfortunately few of these early one room schools still exist. In 2015 when we researched our book, *Echoes of the Past*, we found only a few. These were mostly converted to homes and none except the Britannia Schoolhouse still welcomed children. Many of those who owned an old schoolhouse knew its history and were anxious to talk to us about it.

Even if we had remembered the date of the assignment of land for a school in the survey, COVID would not have allowed any kind of event to recognize it. As a lover of history, I realize that all memories are not good ones. I can admire and perhaps envy the beautiful architecture of eighteenth century homes, but I am glad that modern bathrooms have replaced outhouses. While there is much to like about the rigor of the "reading, writing and 'rithmetic curriculum of the Victorian era, the children of Britannia in that era lacked the experience of interacting with children of different backgrounds that children have today. There were few, if any, black children in the village and no indigenous children since the Mississaugas of the Credit had moved to Hagersville. Today's children are much more fortunate and S.S. No 12 now welcomes children of all ethnic backgrounds.

We learn valuable lessons from studying the past. The beauty of my antiques and my volunteering with the Friends of the Schoolhouse have helped me discover both the good and not so good things of the past. History teaches us how to be better and to do things differently so we do not repeat the mistakes of past generations. I hope children today will have those living history experiences and in future will enjoy as I do collecting reminders of the past and visiting historic sites.



The Old Britannia Schoolhouse before students at Streetsville Secondary School started to do the restoration. The school board completed the renovation.



Something to try this Holiday Season

Some of our Christmas activities have been passed down through generations. Others have been lost to time and we don't do them anymore. Although mincemeat tarts are still part of Christmas, few people make their own mincemeat. Store bought is easier as you will see from the following recipe.

Until the mass production of tree ornaments, children would have fun making their own to decorate the tree. Here's an idea for making a simple fragrant ornament this year.

Mincemeat for Pie

Ruth Taylor

4 pounds ground beef, cooked, twice as many apples.

Add enough water to cover mixture.

Add 2 pounds corn syrup 1 heaping tsp. nutmeg

2 pounds raisins 1 heaping tsp. cloves

1 pound currants 1 rounded tsp. salt

5 pounds brown sugar 1 cup vinegar

2 heaping tsp. cinnamon

Cook 2 hours.

Bake pie for 10 minutes at 450 degrees, then for 25 minutes at 350 degrees.

This is a family recipe probably handed down from my maternal grandmother. It would have been canned to use at Christmas and during the winter, I suppose. We had many apples trees on the farm. Now purchased mincemeat doesn't contain any meat.

One of my sisters used to make the recipe and we would split the cost. However, instead of canning the mincemeat, we would freeze it in plastic containers.

A Cinnamon Stick Ornament

Margaret Storey

Here are some easy family ornament ideas using cinnamon sticks. Get all your bits and pieces ready - cinnamon sticks, star anise pods, little ornaments, pieces of greenery, little artificial flowers, ribbons, binder twine and a glue gun.

Glue the sides of two cinnamon sticks together. Once they are set then start to decorate, again using the glue gun. These can be very simple or as "busy" as you like. If you have the star anise pods they could even be spray painted gold or silver before gluing. It is up to you as to how to embellish your cinnamon stick ornaments.

For your hanger, just make a loop of ribbon or string and glue it to the back of the sticks. Then you are already to hang it on your tree.

These could also be used to decorate a special gift instead of ribbons.

Remember, an adult should do the gluing as the glue is very, very hot when it comes out of the gun.

Have fun!



The Nutcracker

Margaret Storey



The Nutcracker, a favourite fairy tale ballet, has been delighting audiences of all ages at Christmas time for over a hundred and thirty years. The first performance was held just a week before Christmas in Moscow in 1892. Tchaikovsky had composed the music to Alexandre Dumas' adaptation of E.T.A. Hoffmann's, *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*.

The ballet takes place in Germany on Christmas Eve. A family and their friends are busily decorating the Christmas tree. The children were all so excited to see the tree covered with decorations and lit with candles. A special visitor, the godfather of Clara, and an exceptional toy maker, arrives with gifts for the children including some lifelike dolls. The children are amazed to see the dolls dancing. Another special toy he has for the children is a wooden nutcracker. Clara is captivated by the nutcracker and is very upset when her brother, Fritz, accidentally breaks it. Fortunately, the toy maker is able to repair the nutcracker and it is put away for safety.

During the night, Clara comes back to the parlour to see the nutcracker once more. The clock chimes midnight and, as we know, Clara's adventure begins with her handsome Nutcracker Prince.

The Nutcracker is also famous for the use of a celesta, also called a bell-piano. It has a keyboard and is shaped like an organ, but the sound is very different. Tchaikovsky first heard this instrument while in Paris. He thought the clear, bell-like tone was perfect for the music he was composing for the ballet. He requested that such an instrument be bought specifically for *The Nutcracker*.

This Christmas ballet was performed in England in 1934. That was the first time it had been performed outside of Russia. The first staging of the ballet in the United States was in 1944 and was performed by the San Francisco Ballet. The New York Ballet performed it for the first time in 1954. Since then it has become a holiday tradition by ballet companies worldwide. This includes the National Ballet of Canada, founded by Celia Franca in 1951. Since 1995 the Company has been dancing James Kudelka's version of *The Nutcracker*. He changed a few things such as the focus from Clara to two argumentative siblings, Misha and Marie. The original ballet took place in a parlour whereas Kudelka's *Nutcracker* takes place in a barn where the cold winter weather adds a different interpretation. James Kudelka grew up on a farm in Newmarket, Ontario. He would be all too familiar with the wonders and hardships of winter weather.

Another change he has done is that instead of the toys coming to life, Kudelka introduced a lifelike dancing horse, bears, one of whom is on rollerblades, other farm animals, a fox and a unicorn.

Although the very first performance was not well received, it has, over the years, become a favourite Christmas tradition around the world. Many local ballet companies here have been advertising their performances to take place this December. Maybe you might like to see it for the first time or perhaps it is a family tradition as it is a wonderful way to introduce young children to a classical performance. It is a joy to watch no matter how many times you have seen it.



Note from Margaret

Here is a little Nutcracker tree that we put up every year on my buffet in the dining room. When Todd, our son, was little he loved nutcrackers so often got one in his stocking. My mum had cross stitched several for him as well. The rest I have collected over the years and some were Christmas presents from students.

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Nature Brainteaser

Marg Carson

The birds, bees and butterflies have been visiting the bounty of flowers that grow in the schoolhouse garden. Here is a challenge for you. Unscramble the letters in the word below to discover what these plants are.

- 1 YOPEN
- 2 DEWOMA TWESE
- 3 LHOXP
- 4 SATHO
- 5 AAYHRDEGN
- 6 NOECFLWROE
- 7 USNIARSEASG
- 8 SROE
- 8 LENICMUOB
- 10 YLLIAD
- 11 MSSUDE
- 12 EBEMALB
- 13 SRII
- L4 ALLMIU



Find answers below.

We welcome newsletter submissions

The editor welcomes articles and ideas for the newsletter. There are still many people who experienced life in a small community like Britannia and attended a one room school. Do you have a story about your experiences? Do you have an old family recipe with a story to tell? Are there old fashioned games that you played years ago that children today don't know about? Schooling is different today than it was two hundred years ago when the first school was established in Britannia. Is there anything from the "old days" that should be brought back. These are only a few of the ideas that would make for interesting reading. If you would like to submit something, contact Daryl.

dlcook@rogers.com

Answers

1. Peony
2. Meadow Sweet
3. Phlox
4. Hosta
5. Hydrangea
6. Coneflower
7. Russian Sage
8. Rose
9. Columbine
10. Daylily
11. Sedums
12. Bee Balm
13. Iris
14. Allium

Thank You

Friends of the Schoolhouse is a non-profit organization of concerned citizens dedicated to assisting the Peel District School Board in the support of the Old Britannia Schoolhouse and its programs. Your donations are much appreciated.

E-mailed Newsletters

If you are not already doing so, why not consider receiving your newsletters by email. This helps us save the cost of paper, printing and postage and also is kinder to the environment.

Contact dlcook@rogers.com and put "Emailed Newsletter" in the subject box to make this arrangement.