

The Old Britannia Schoolhouse

1852-1959
restored 1982

Winter 2024



Coming Events

No events are being held

School Visits

The Living History Program for students has been cancelled

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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Living History Program for Students Cancelled

In December the Friends of the Schoolhouse received sad news about the wonderful living history experience that children of the Peel District School Board have enjoyed for many years. The program was on hold during the two years of COVID. Since then there has been no effort to begin offering it again and no reason given for putting it on hold.

The schoolhouse staff had been reviewing and revising the program to meet the requirements of the Equity Initiative the Board has been involved with for the past three years. One room schoolhouse education of a hundred years ago is now seen by many to have been racist and exclusionary. The program offered at the Old Britannia Schoolhouse, though a living history portrayal of education in the late 1800s, was always focussed on the positive aspects of life in a one room schoolhouse with no mention of the exclusion of black and indigenous children.

At our December meeting, the principal in charge of the schoolhouse program informed us that the reason for the closure is the lack of funding. Staff cuts have meant there are only enough personnel to staff the two outdoor education centres with no one to teach the program at the schoolhouse. We were told that the living history experience is cancelled for the foreseeable future.

It was suggested that the Friends of the Schoolhouse now focus on looking after the artifacts and monitor the condition of the building. We will do this, but are also trying to find other ways to involve the community, especially the children, in learning about the kind of education children received a hundred years ago.

Let us Remember the Good Times



Winter 2024

From the Chair Ruth Taylor

Since this is the first newsletter of 2024, I will share this New Years wish that was in the Toronto Star as a Christmas wish.

*I am thankful to be alive and relatively healthy.
My New Years wish for you, my family and friends, is that you have enough.
Enough good health even if that means taking medication.
Enough friends to see you through good times and bad.
Enough face-to-face contact with everyone who is important to you.
Enough laughs to keep you happy.
Enough hugs to keep you feeling cared for.*



On the day of our December meeting, Friends arrived to see that the landscaping at the Schoolhouse grounds had been decimated by clear cutting. It destroyed gardens that had taken decades to establish. Volunteers have spent thousands of hours working on the gardens. Some plants were donated, but thousands of dollars have been spent as well. Some plants were special ones in

memory of loved ones. So far, no answers have been forthcoming as to why this occurred. You will read more about this unfortunate incident in the report from Marg Carson, our dedicated Chief Gardener.



Friends did not meet in January due to inclement weather. Our February meeting had a Valentine theme.

Since no staff have been allocated to the Schoolhouse, there will be no program in the foreseeable future. We will focus on the preservation of the Schoolhouse and its artifacts. We will be cataloguing and recording these precious artifacts. Some of them were photographed and appear on our website. It will give us a starting point.

This has certainly been a milder than usual winter. I always plant a couple of pots of pansies in the spring. As it gets hotter, I move them into the shade and tend to neglect them. In late fall, some were still blooming. Imagine my surprise to see some blooms in January. On January 16th I picked what I thought were the last two surviving blooms. They were not finished yet. I picked the (for sure) last bloom on January 31st. Talk about nature's resilience! Hopefully, some of our plantings at the Schoolhouse will be as resilient.

Membership Shirley Hoad

It is important at this time to ensure that our membership is strong and our records are up-to-date. Renewal forms were mailed to present members in November and there has been a number of renewals. If you wish to join there is a membership application on our website www.britanniaschoolhousefriends.org The Canada Post mailing address has changed. Please direct any mail to: Friends of the **Schoolhouse**, Box 21022, Mississauga RPO, Meadowvale ON L5N 6A2

Schoolhouse Musings

Lisa Cafaro

Sap to Syrup: Tracing the Sweet Evolution of Maple Syrup in Canada

From humble beginnings to a global symbol of Canadian culture, the journey of maple syrup is as rich as its flavor.

For centuries, Indigenous peoples in Canada tapped maple trees, collecting sap and boiling it down into syrup—a tradition that predates European colonization. This practice not only provided sustenance but also held cultural significance, with maple playing a central role in ceremonies and celebrations. Fast forward to the arrival of European settlers, who quickly adopted Indigenous methods of harvesting sap. Over time, techniques evolved, with innovations such as metal taps and large-scale production transforming maple syrup from a homemade delicacy to a commercial commodity.

The 19th century saw the establishment of sugarbushes and sugarhouses across Canada, marking the beginning of organized maple syrup production. As demand for maple syrup grew, so did its economic importance. Canadian producers capitalized on the country's vast maple forests, establishing Canada as the world's leading producer of maple syrup.

Today, the industry contributes millions to the Canadian economy and supports countless livelihoods, from small family farms to large-scale operations. But maple syrup is more than just a sweet treat—it's a cultural icon. From the iconic maple leaf on the Canadian flag to the annual tradition of maple syrup festivals, maple syrup is deeply woven into the fabric of Canadian identity. It's a symbol of resilience, tradition, and connection to the land.

These contributions are highlighted during visits with students. Previously, we offered a sugarbush program at both the Jack Smythe Field Centre and the Britannia Sugarbush, located on the McLaughlin and Bristol road side of the board office property. However, in August 2022, tragedy struck when the Britannia sugarbush was destroyed by arson, bringing programming to a halt on that special part of the property. This loss deeply affected the staff and students in Peel. Despite this setback, we are grateful to maintain a thriving sugarbush program at Jack Smythe, allowing us to continue sharing this incredible Canadian tradition.

The evolution of maple syrup in Canada is a testament to the ingenuity and perseverance of its people. From ancient traditions to modern innovation, the journey from sap to syrup is a sweet reminder of the rich history and enduring legacy of Canada's maple heritage.



Garden News
Destruction of a Heritage Garden

Marg Carson

The previous year ended on a sad note, In December, a clearing of trees and shrubs growing near the schoolhouse occurred. Unfortunately some of the trees and shrubs planted by the Friends were cut down. The shaded pathway that led from the parking lot to the schoolhouse saw the removal of the lilacs. Cutting was also carried out in the area of the Teachers' Arbor and Ben's Corner resulting in the loss of a variety of plants, among them Spireas, Hydrangeas, Viburnums, Pagoda Dogwood, Weigela, Rose of Sharon and others.

A lot of thought and effort went into the selection and planting of these items. Shrubs were chosen not only for their hardiness and drought tolerance, but also for their colour and to provide food for the birds, bees and butterflies that depend on these plants during the growing season.

These plants helped to create a buffer zone between the urban landscape of the parking lots and modern buildings and the schoolhouse property. As one passed through the Teachers' Arbor or walked by the lilacs that led to the schoolhouse, you got the impression of entering a different time and place. However, as a result of the clearing, that has changed. Our challenge now for the coming gardening season will be look for new ways to fill these spaces.

Editor's Note: Marg did not mention the high cost of creating the historic gardens over the years. Restoring the gardens will cost a great deal, not only of money for new plants, but of time and effort on the part of volunteers.

Lilacs Around the Outhouse



Then



Now

Years ago, before the advent of indoor plumbing, rural folks planted lilac bushes around their outhouses. If you visit old farm sites today you may see where these outhouses were as the lilacs still grow and thrive although the buildings are long gone. The lilac bushes around our schoolhouse outhouses were donated years ago by a local farmer. They were truly a part of local history that had bloomed each spring for years. Now this part of the Britannia heritage is gone.

Ben's Corner

Over the years when designing and developing the historic gardens, the Friends of the Schoolhouse have honoured people who contributed a great deal to the schoolhouse past and present. Former teachers of the schoolhouse were remembered in the Teachers' Arbor at the entrance to the schoolyard from the Board office. Eva Ardiel was honoured with a bird bath in the rose garden and Joan Reid, who had the vision of an historic garden and worked tirelessly to create it, has a bench and arbor in the garden.

Ben Madill was a student of the Britannia Schoolhouse in the 1920's and remained connected with the school all his life. When the school closed in 1959 it sat vacant for many years and Ben kept watch. He and a friend saved the building from burning down when they discovered a fire in the classroom and extinguished it. He was a member of the Friends until his death, a valuable source of information about the schoolhouse and an enthusiastic volunteer. Ben and his wife Marjorie are greatly missed. The Friends honoured and remembered him by creating Ben's Corner. It is one of our favourite spots in the garden.

Ben loved seeing children attending the schoolhouse. He also loved gardening. Farming had been his whole life. Ben's Corner is a quiet place in the garden with large rocks to sit on where children can have an outdoor lesson in good weather. It was designed to be secluded from the busy parking lots to minimize distractions. A variety of bushes were planted that would provide colour, protection and a sound barrier.

The day it was officially opened, Marjorie Madill planted a shrub in honour of Ben and a plaque was unveiled. It was a special occasion to remember an amazing former student and mentor.



Years ago Ben helped prepare the gardens for planting.

Sadly, this is what his special place looks like today.



Afternoon Tea

Margaret Storey

"A cup of tea makes everything better!" Bindi Irwin This past summer I was given a beautiful book. *The Great Tea Rooms of America*, by Bruce Richardson. He outlines twenty fabulous tearooms all across North America. Four are highlighted in Canada too - Butchart Gardens and The Fairmont Empress Hotel, both in Victoria, British Columbia; Fairmont Chateau Banff Springs, Banff and Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise, both in Alberta. Each tearoom is described beautifully, a history is given and several photos of the three tiered platters on the tables as well as photos of the gardens and surroundings. There are also photos and information about a number of tea shops in the United States as well as many delicious recipes to try.

I have enjoyed several wonderful afternoon teas here and in England. I started to think about how this tradition started. The Duchess of Bedford, Anna Maria Russell, began what we now know as afternoon tea around 1840. At that time dinner for high society was an elaborate affair at 8pm or later. The Duchess found that she was hungry by late afternoon. Summoning her servant, she asked for a tray with a pot of tea, bread and butter and a piece of cake to be delivered to her room. She enjoyed it so much that it quickly became a regular routine for her. She soon began inviting friends to join her in her drawing room. This ritual of afternoon tea soon spread across the country. The Duchess was also a friend and a lady-in-waiting to Queen Victoria. The Duchess and her husband, the 7th Duke of Bedford entertained the Queen at their country home, Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire in 1841. The Queen approved of this new afternoon custom. By the 1880s she was hosting official tea receptions at her palaces. The women of high society at this time would wear long gowns, gloves and hats to have their afternoon tea in the drawing rooms of manor houses around the countryside. Makes me think of Downton Abbey and the ladies at Highclere Castle in their beautiful dresses and elbow length gloves.

For an Afternoon Tea there is a classic menu. Often we see beautiful three tiered serving platters being presented at the table together with a fine china teapot, cups and saucers. The lower tier is for the savoury items. These would include dainty sandwiches, often with the crusts cut off and cut into triangles or "fingers". The fillings could include egg salad, thinly sliced ham, smoked salmon, chicken salad and the classic cucumber with cream cheese. Mini sausage rolls, quiche and savoury small pork pies could also be on the lower tier. The middle tier will be plated with scones together with pots of jam or preserves and clotted cream. The top tier is reserved for dainty slices of little cakes such as Victoria sponge or Battenburg cake, shortbread cookies, squares and iced cookies. Of course, there would be a selection of teas offered such as Darjeeling, Earl Grey, Assam or English Breakfast tea.



Perhaps some might have heard of a Cream Tea. That is tea served just with scones, jam or preserves and clotted cream. There is a great debate about the order of jam and clotted cream on a scone once the scone is split apart using your hands. In a Devonshire Cream Tea, each half of the scone is covered with the clotted cream and then the strawberry jam is added on top. The Cornish Cream Tea or the Cornish way is to split the scone, spread each half with the jam and then a dollop of clotted cream on top of the jam! Either way, it is a delicious way to enjoy your scones! Interestingly, in tearooms and cafes, scones are rarely buttered. A warm scone is felt not to need the addition of butter.

An Afternoon Tea is a wonderful way to celebrate a special birthday, anniversary or any other occasion. There are a number of hotels and restaurants in our area that offer these experiences. Or perhaps you could just bake your own scones and enjoy them right out of the oven.

A quote I found states "Tea is a gentle reminder to slow down and savour the moment". Think it is time I made myself a cup of tea!

Preserving Wall Maps and Charts

Dennis Taylor

Years ago, when the Peel Board helped restore the Old Britannia Schoolhouse, the intent was for visiting students to see how students in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were taught and to be able to compare it with their own schooling. There were no school buses, so the students had to walk and there were no computers or even workbooks for students to write in. Instead, there were blackboards and slates for teachers and students to use.

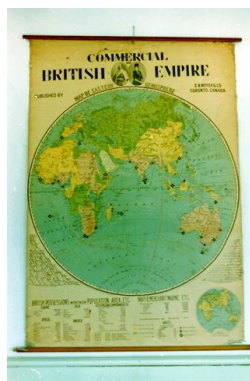
The Friends of the Schoolhouse was founded to help bring this about. There were other aids for students to use. There had been textbooks and there were wall maps and charts to present to the whole class. Unfortunately, many of these aids were old and many were so worn out, that they were simply discarded. Some books and maps and charts did exist, but many were well worn and so the Friends began to look for ways to put these back in use. Some of the books could be rebound. The intention became to preserve what was left rather than restore them. Restoration was not usually possible, but preservation meant they could be used.

As the work progressed on preserving some of the texts, attention was turned to the wall maps and charts that several schools had donated to the Britannia Schoolhouse. Preservation isn't as easy as it sounds and after consulting Peel Archives, we were put in touch with someone who had the skill to preserve these artifacts. Many maps were not handled well, often rolled up which weakened the backing on the maps, and many were made with acidic materials. These acidic materials will age and cause the map or chart to deteriorate.

We took several of these important learning materials to a very skilled woman, Jayne Woods, who explained what had to be done. In most cases the map or chart had to be separated from the backing which meant they had to be soaked. In most cases the materials came away in pieces and so they had to be reassembled like a giant jigsaw puzzle, but upside down. A better backing which included mulberry paper was then glued on and a canvas backing was added rendering the map much stiffer, but free of the acidic material. Two dowels were added, at the top and bottom of the chart or map to keep it from curling. These maps and charts can no longer be rolled up as this would eventually cause the map or chart to crack and break up. The schoolmaster, at that time, had contact with someone who could produce wooden racks so that maps or charts could safely be hung in the classroom.

Ms. Woods who did the preservation work spent many hours with each map or chart. It was time consuming, tedious, and expensive so only a few were done at any one time, as money from the Friends' sources was dedicated to this job. In addition, we had others such as the Retired Teachers of Ontario, District 39, who committed some funds to help with this. Once we had a reasonable cross section of material, we left any remaining to be preserved in the future. How tedious was the job this crafts person did? Well, her standard answer was that after each job, she had her hair coloured!

These photos show the condition of the maps before restoration



Winter 2024

From You

We love to hear from our members. Especially those who once attended the Britannia Schoolhouse, were involved in its restoration or volunteered for the Friends of the Schoolhouse. Each time we send out a newsletter we receive emails of appreciation. Bob Sandusky was a student and recently sent this email. It tells a little of his experiences and his family. Thank you for sharing this Bob.

Hi Daryl:

Thanks again for the annual schoolhouse update. It's always good to hear about anything going on around the old brick building. I used to keep an eye on it whenever I passed but the government finally decided I shouldn't be driving, so I rely now on your report about how its surviving. I may be almost the last Sandusky to have attended it after the first group of my aunts and uncles moved away from the Britannia area (and lingered around the area until my mom Millie and dad Richard departed in the 1970's). (I live at 89 in Leaside now.)

Best wishes and good health for the new year.

Bob Sandusky

Unexpected Visitors



This might have been a familiar sight around the Britannia community at one time, but I didn't expect it on my front lawn this month. These wild turkeys visited several times.

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.

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.

**Check our website often for the latest information.
www.britanniaschoolhousefriends.org**