

# The Old Britannia Schoolhouse

1852-1959  
restored 1982

Winter 2007



## *Facts and Figures*

Number of students attending in

November: 438

December: 328

January: 350

Number of events:

November: 1

December: 2

February: 1

## *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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## *Need more information?*

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[britanniaschoolhousefriends.org](http://britanniaschoolhousefriends.org)

## *Introducing Schoolmaster Patterson*



Schoolmaster Dennis Patterson arrived in December and has already impressed us with his enthusiasm and expertise. I had the opportunity to talk with Dennis in mid January after he had been in his new role for about 6 weeks. I discovered that he brings to the role of schoolmaster a wealth of experiences which will help him create for visiting children the feeling of a one room classroom of long ago.

Dennis was born in Lambton County near Sarnia and lived with his family on a dairy farm. His ancestors settled in the area several generations ago in Lucan, famous for the Black Donnellys. He assured me that his family didn't socialize with the Donnellys. In fact, one of his early relatives was a constable, the sort of folk the Donnelly family would choose to avoid. His life on the farm has given him an interest in gardening and Dennis is enthusiastic about expanding the historic gardens and involving students in creating vegetable gardens as they would have done in the early 1900's when schoolhouse gardens were part of the curriculum.

During his university days at Lakehead University he studied history and geography and was enrolled in the concurrent teacher training program. One of his teaching assignments was with the Field Centres of the Peel District School Board. He had the opportunity at that time to observe the Britannia schoolhouse program as well as helping with the maple syrup making. Having enjoyed working with the Field Centre staff he hoped one day to return as an employee.

Continued on page 2

*Introducing Schoolmaster Patterson Cont'd*

During his university days at the Lakehead Dennis spent two summers as an historic interpreter at historic Fort William. There he played the role of a gunsmith and learned the skills of repairing muskets, maintaining the arsenal, making ammunition and firing cannons. He also did some blacksmithing and once a week got to play the role of the drunken blacksmith who gets thrown in jail. I got the feeling that he particularly enjoyed that role. These two summers of historic interpretation will be valuable as he takes on the persona of the schoolmaster.

Another summer job gave Dennis experience in working with children in an outdoor setting. He worked for the Tim Horton's Children's Foundation at the St. George children's camp where he was the agriculture program coordinator.

Following graduation Dennis left Canada for Japan and taught at the junior high and elementary level for two years. In addition to this experience he has secondary school teaching qualifications.

When asked what it was that attracted him to the job, Dennis mentioned the positive experience he had with the Field Centres and the fact that this type of job is quite rare. It seems to combine many of his interests and past experiences.

Dennis is already planning some new experiences for the children who visit. As already mentioned he would like to involve them in creating schoolhouse gardens. Nature study could be expanded to take advantage of the natural environment right outside the classroom door. He is already including current events of the late 1800's such as celebrating Sir John A. Macdonald's birthday, Robert Burns day, Empire Day and Arbour Day.

Finally, I asked if there had been any unusual or funny experiences in his first few weeks of teaching. He mentioned an occasion when the grade 3 students were discussing Queen Victoria and he asked if Canada has a queen today. There was mixed opinion on that but about half the children decided we did have a queen. When asked her name, one child put up her hand and responded "Hazel". Our mayor is certainly a well known and dominating force and would probably be amused to think at least one child thinks she is "Queen of Canada".

We are indeed fortunate to have Schoolmaster Patterson recreating those early days in a one room school. We welcome him and wish him well.

*Membership*

*Reminder*

Now is the time to renew your membership for November newsletter. Thanks to those who have label on this newsletter. The year of your latest paid corner.



2007. Renewal forms were sent with the already renewed. Check the mailing up membership is in the upper right hand

Please complete your renewal form and make your Friends of the Schoolhouse. If you have lost your renewal form there is one that can be printed on our website. If you are making a donation of \$50.00 or more please make that cheque out to the Peel District School Board to ensure an income tax receipt.

cheque for membership fees payable to

Send all renewal forms and cheques to:

Friends of the Schoolhouse  
c/o The Old Britannia Schoolhouse  
5576 Hurontario Street  
Mississauga ON  
L5R 1B3

*From the Chair*

Joan Reid

Congratulations to Jean Robinson and to Eva Ardiel for the very successful sale in the Board Atrium on November 16, the tree trimming on December 1, and the Open House at the Schoolhouse on December 3. All of these events were well-attended and well-staffed by volunteers. The new tree decorations are charming and gave the well-shaped tree a lively and fresh appearance. It was a pleasure to have our new Schoolmaster, Dennis Patterson, with us at the tree trimming and open house.

Housekeeping matters will be the focus of our attention for some time. The clock has been repaired thanks to the generosity of Gordon Anderson. A new floor has been laid in the back room and the walls have been painted. The Friends hope to correct the historic plaque by the front door so that it reflects the actual date of the construction of the brick school in 1852. Ben and Marjorie Madill have set aside funds for the reconstruction of the fence on the east side of the schoolyard. We hope to see it built in the near future. The purchase of more authentic lights is also on our agenda. We look forward to the planting of several mature maple trees in the schoolyard to replace the stately trees lost to age and disease.

The age of the schoolhouse and the fragility of the artifacts within it are a constant concern. We are delighted that large numbers of visitors come to activities, but we are also keenly aware of the degradation such visits bring. We are currently considering ways to preserve our historic maps, books, toys and so forth in order that access to this community treasure may be increased, not restricted.

Our major winter activity will be the Heritage Week celebrations at Square One on February 16, 17, and 18. We hope to see you at our booth!

*From the Schoolmaster*

Dennis Patterson

Robert Burns is a very difficult poet who doesn't much excite today's students. Not many Peel residents speak Scots very well after all. The mostly grade 3 students that come to the schoolhouse would also, I fear, find it a bit confusing. We celebrated Robert Burns Day, here at the schoolhouse mostly by learning a bit of *Scotland the Brave* and talking about Scots being a language spoken in the border lands between England and Scotland. Today however, I was able to pull out *To a Louse* and give a poetry reading to students from Hillside Sr. Public School, my first intermediate class. With frequent stops to help with some explanation and the skipping of a couple of the more difficult verses, a bit of Burns' rhythm was lost but I feel *To a Louse* was well understood by today's Schoolhouse visitors. At very least they are glad they live in an age where head lice is a bit less common and much more easily treated.

*Website News*

Our first year on the internet has been a great success. Almost 4000 people visited the Friends' site and we have had a number of emails requesting further information about the Old Britannia Schoolhouse. On some days there is high usage which suggests perhaps a class of students is using the site for research. Monthly updates keep the Current News section really "current". We encourage you to visit often in cyberspace and to visit the "real" schoolhouse too.

*Another Great Christmas Season*

*Tree Decorating*

The ornaments we have used on the Christmas tree for many years were getting a little tired and battered. In addition, the popcorn chains we always use had become a favourite of the mice who managed to eat most of the popcorn in a few days. So late in November we had an ornament making and tree decorating afternoon. New snowflakes, baskets, cornucopias and paper doily ornaments were created and chains were strung with very realistic looking plastic popcorn. The tree looked wonderful and we are pleased to report we have some very unhappy mice who left the popcorn chains alone.



Left and right: Samples of our new ornaments. Centre Left: Frances Kay and Shirley Hoad create tiny baskets (not easy!). Centre right: Our beautiful tree with its new ornaments and plastic popcorn chains.

*Christmas Open House*

The Annual Christmas Open House and sale proved to be the busiest ever. Visitors began arriving even before the doors opened at 1 o'clock and the schoolhouse was filled with parents and excited children all afternoon. It was a joyful start to the holiday season.



Visitors enjoyed the Christmas cookies and cider



Ben Madill signed his book for our visitors



Children as always were fascinated by the old fashioned toys

*Former Students*

**Joan Reid**

*The Friends offer condolences on the recent passing of Earl Dunton.*

From time to time in our newsletter we will tell the stories of families who attended S.S. No.12 in years gone by. This issue features the Duntons.

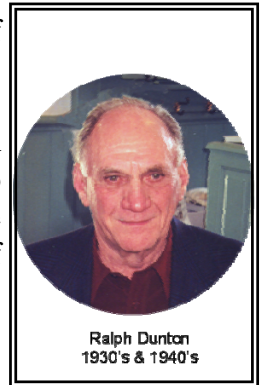
The extant registers for S.S. No. 12, Toronto Township, contain the names of Duntons who attended the school: Leonard (1880's), Walter (1880's), Wilfred (ca.1904-1910), Douglas (1908-1916), Mary (ca. 1909-1916), Earl (1937-1945), Ralph (1938-1943), Donald (1946-1952), Judith (1958-1959) and James (1959).



Three generations. L-R: Ralph, Douglas, James at the official opening of the Old Britannia Schoolhouse, May 1983

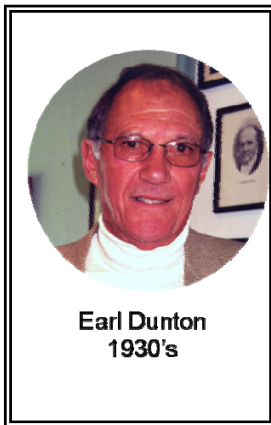
The family home now stands south of the schoolhouse on the Britannia School Farm. It was moved there in 1989 from the Dunton family farm which was Lot 5 at the south-west corner of Britannia Road and Hurontario Street. James Dunton purchased the property in 1882 from the estate of Robert Gardner.

The Duntons were highly successful farmers. They were prize-winning Holstein breeders and were very active in the Peel County Holstein Club and 4 H activities. Douglas Dunton became President of the Holstein-Friesian Association of Canada.



Ralph Dunton  
1930's & 1940's

All the Duntons were deeply involved in the affairs of Britannia Methodist Church (later United Church). Some helped to train the choir and to supervise the Sunday School, others were active in the Ladies' Aid, Epworth League, Cemetery Trust, Bible Class, Young People's Society, Union Literary Society and LOL 263. Garden parties in support of the church were held on the lawn of the Dunton house.



Earl Dunton  
1930's

Douglas Dunton acted as a trustee for S.S. No. 12 for twelve years. He also served on the Toronto Township Council and eventually became reeve of the township. In 1950 he was acclaimed Warden of Peel County.



Douglas Dunton

*Medals and Memorabilia*

Pupils in one room schools in Peel won many prizes, ribbons and trophies at field days, school fairs and the Peel Music Festival. Prizes were awarded for public speaking, essays, proficiency in Canadian History, good behaviour and perfect attendance. Many pupils were awarded medals when they passed their entrance examinations. The pupil with the highest entrance marks in Peel County was awarded the Warden's Medal.

We hope to make a permanent collection of school medals, prizes, certificates and trophies. Please call Eva Ardiel (905-459-9158) or Joan Reid (905-277-3396) if you can contribute.

*Ben and Marjorie celebrate 60 years of marriage*



Ben and Marjorie Madill have been hard working supporters of the Friends of the Schoolhouse since its founding. Ben's association with S.S. No. 12, the Old Britannia Schoolhouse goes back even further to his days as a student here in the 1920's. This February they celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary and all of the Friends wish them continued health and happiness together.

The *Port Credit Weekly* newspaper of January 30, 1947 carried this engagement announcement.

**Mr. and Mrs. A.J. Tipping, Cooksville, announce the engagement of their daughter Marjorie Elizabeth to Benson Alvin Madill, son of Mr. and Mrs. W. Madill of Britannia.  
The wedding will take place quietly in the middle of February**

Several showers were held as reported in the same newspaper on February 13,

**Miss Marjorie Tipping, who is being married on Saturday to Mr. Ben Madill, has been the guest of honour at several miscellaneous showers. On Wednesday, January 29th., Mrs. Donna Stewart, Long Branch, entertained about twenty guests at her home. Mrs. W Fenwick, Centre Road, Cooksville, held a shower on Wednesday, February 5th. Mrs. Lloyd Moore, Islington, aunt of the bride-to-be, entertained in her honour last Friday evening, when she received many beautiful gifts. Miss Lois Brunskill also held a miscellaneous shower on Saturday evening.**

**Last Saturday afternoon and evening Mrs. A.J. Tipping entertained a number of guests at a trousseau tea in honour of her daughter Marjorie. The tea table was decorated with pink and white flowers and candles. The hostess was assisted by Lois Brunskill, Shirley Pickett, Donna Stewart, Pearl Madill and Rena Tipping.**

A wedding announcement appeared on March 6, 1947

**The home of Mr. and Mrs. A.J. Tipping, Centre Road South, Cooksville was gay with spring flowers last Friday afternoon for the wedding of their daughter Marjorie Elizabeth to Benson Alvin Madill, son of Mr. and Mrs. W. Madill of Britannia. Rev. A.E. Owen officiated.**

**The bride, given in marriage by her father, wore her traveling suit of turquoise blue wool with corsage of white roses. Miss Rena Tipping and Mr. Earl Madill were the attendants.**

**A reception was held for their relatives and friends. The couple left on a motor trip, the bride donning a black coat and black accessories. They will reside in Britannia.**

Ben and Marjorie's daughter, Shirley McFarlane sent this invitation for us to include in the newsletter.

*Ben and Marj Madill are celebrating 60 years of marriage as well as 60 years of ownership of the home property where they still reside on #10 highway/#401. In honour of their anniversary, the*

*family is hosting an OPEN HOUSE*

*At the farm on Saturday, April 7th, 2007 from 1:00 to 4:00 pm.*

*All welcome*

*Best wishes only*

#### *Heritage Showcase*



Canada celebrates its heritage each year in February during Heritage Week. The Friends join the celebration at the Heritage Showcase held at Square 1 in Mississauga. . Our booth was smaller this year but still attracted children who played with the toys and tried to solve the puzzles. Volunteers demonstrated the various toys and talked to visitors about the schoolhouse. Displays and sales items rounded out the exhibit. We also introduced our colourful new brochure prepared by Jean Robinson and her committee. We will have these available at all our events and are including one with this newsletter. We hope the brochure will be one more way to inform the community about the Old Britannia Schoolhouse, its history, programs and events. Thanks to George Christian and his committee for organizing the Heritage Showcase.

**For the latest news and items of interest go to our website at  
[www.britanniaschoolhousefriends.org](http://www.britanniaschoolhousefriends.org).**

*A Lost Register Recovered*

Donations can come in many forms. One recent one which is greatly appreciated is the General Register, 1934-44 for S.S. No.12, Toronto Township donated by Jennifer Welch. The register contains a wealth of information about the operation of the school during this ten year period. The names, addresses and telephone numbers of the 76 pupils who attended during this time are listed along with the details of their year to year promotions. Twenty-seven of them passed their entrance examinations and 20 of these went on to high school, mainly to Brampton, but a few to Cooksville Continuation School or to Port Credit high School. Fifteen moved to different school sections in Toronto Township such as Dixie and Meadowvale. Fifteen others moved out of the municipality to places such as Toronto and Rice Lake. Nine retired to do home help or farm work.

Inspector M.R. Fydell paid yearly visits from 1934 to 1937 and W. Frank Smith was the inspector from 1939 to 1944.

Our thanks to Jennifer for preserving and passing on this piece of history.

*What is it?*

Here is the mystery artifact for this newsletter. Can you guess what it is?

The answer is at the bottom of the page.



*Does this sound familiar?*

From *The Brampton Conservator*  
September 6, 1961

Discipline is the biggest headache facing teachers today. This isn't because children have really changed very much. They dress differently, talk differently from when we went to school but those are all surface changes. Underneath they are all basically just like you and I were with one very important difference. They are CONFUSED. Now you might say that most children are that way more or less and that is so, but our youngsters are more confused than is healthy for them or us. The reason for this rests right in the home and the problem is fought out on the battlegrounds of the classroom and the schoolyard.

I say the blame is in the home. The teachers have a tough job to do and many become embittered trying to do it conscientiously. These teachers earn every cent they receive and more besides. They have the most important job in our community today. But they cannot succeed in the face of upset world conditions unless their charges have a guiding home influence.

Confusion in our children stems from confused parents who live day by day with no plan for the future.

Did you guess that this is an early version of a slide projector? They were called Magic Lanterns and the light was supplied by burning kerosene. Many were smaller versions than this one and were made as children's toys. The burning kerosene was rather dangerous and definitely smelly and smoky. They became much safer with the introduction of the electric light bulb.

Glass slides - sometimes photographs, sometimes hand painted nursery rhymes - were placed in the projector and the lens enlarged the image so it could be shown on a wall or other flat white surface.

Magic lanterns in one form or another have been around for hundreds of years. The first picture of one was published in the 1600's. Until the advent of movies in the mid to late 1800's these were the only projectors. It has been said that the magic lantern was the father of the movie projector and the grandfather of television.

*Answer to "What is it?"*