

# The Old Britannia Schoolhouse

1852-1959  
restored 1982



Spring, 2003

## Some Figures and Facts:

**P**upils attending the Schoolhouse in the first three months of 2003: **1190**

(January **472**, February **403**; March **315**); Friends attending the 2003 S.L.A.T.E. Conference: **10**; Student volunteer hours attributed in fall, 2002: **22**; from January to April, 2003: **34**; Number of newsletters produced by this editor: **20**



**T**his newsletter is published by the *Friends of the Schoolhouse* every Fall, Winter and Spring, in an effort to inform its membership, and the teachers of the Peel District School Board of its activities and events.

Editor: Brian Holstein  
briaahols@yahoo.com



## Greetings from the Schoolmistress

**A**fter a long, cold winter it is a pleasure to see the first signs of spring appear. The cloakroom is no longer crowded with boots and snow-pants. The wind is no longer rattling the windowpanes. The garter snake has finally emerged from his hibernation underneath the front stoop and the birds are chirping all around. It was a fun and busy winter here at the schoolhouse, but I look forward to the days when



visiting classes can eat their 'dinners' outdoors at the picnic tables under the shade of the big the maple tree and we can open the windows to let in the warm breezes.

**During the month of April, when we were blessed with far too much snow and sleet, I arrived at school one morning to find the front door half covered in ice and very solidly frozen shut! Despite the cold, my 'pupils' and I managed to keep our spirits up by reciting the following poem as part of our choral reading practice each day:**

### The Voice of Spring

*I am coming, little maiden!*

*With the pleasant sunshine laden;*

*With the honey for the bee;*

*With the blossom for the tree;*

*With the flower and with the leaf;*

*Till I come the time is brief.*

*I am coming, I am coming.*

*Hark, the little bee is humming;  
See, the lark is soaring high,  
In the bright and sunny sky;  
And the gnats are on the wing  
Little maiden, now is Spring.*

*And on mossy banks so green  
Star-like primroses are seen;  
Every little stream is bright;  
All the orchard trees are white.*

*Hark! the little lambs are bleating;  
And the cawing rooks are meeting  
In the elms, a noisy crowd;  
And all birds are singing loud;  
And the first white butterfly  
In the sun goes flitting by.*

*Turn thy eyes to earth and heaven!  
God for He the Spring has given,  
Taught the birds their melodies,  
Clothed the earth, and cleared the  
skies.*

*For thy pleasure or thy food, -  
Pour thy soul in gratitude!*

from the *Second Book of Lessons, for  
the Use of Schools*  
1865

The month of May is filled with older 'pupils' as I have the pleasure of welcoming twenty Grade 7 and 8 classes from several Peel schools as part of our Intermediate Drama Unit. For the fourth year running, this program has had a tremendous response. I look forward to the many interesting characters and monologues that the students will bring to the Schoolhouse. It's hard to believe another year has flown by so quickly!

Megan Curtis

## Executive Report

**2003** is off to a good beginning. We began our year with a presentation by Simona Lau from Heritage Mississauga at the Centre for Education and Training. This event provided an overview of the educational programme that Heritage Mississauga is undertaking.

February was Heritage Month. Friends of the Schoolhouse participated in this event at Square One. The theme was "What's Your Story?" Well stocked tables of sales items, archeological artifacts, and a pictorial display of various schoolhouse activities attracted a number of visitors. Thanks are extended to George Christian and Joan Reid for organizing our participation in this event.

Congratulations are extended to members, John and Sandra Emerson, who received a Heritage Mississauga Members' Choice Award at the Annual Awards Dinner. This event was held at The Tower Restaurant at City Hall on February 17 and was well attended by members of the executive. John and Sandra are also the recipients of the Ontario Heritage Foundation Award



In the first three months of 2003, 1190 students have visited The Old Britannia Schoolhouse. What a marvelous way for students to be able to compare their school opportunities to those of children from the past!

In April a large contingent of members will be participating in the annual S.L.A.T.E. Conference. This year's event is hosted by The Victorian Classroom Society in Berlin (Kitchener). Part of this day will be spent in the Victorian classroom, set up in the historic 1857 Suddaby School

which is still in operation. This school had Berlin's first grammar school, was a model school for training teachers and housed Canada's first Kindergarten in 1882.

The Friends will be participating with displays and some of our sales merchandise at the Region of Peel Agricultural Society's April 26 celebration of Brampton Fair's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

The Sales Committee has accepted an invitation to set up a vendor's table at the Professional Development Conference for the Peel Board's business staff on May 13.

Plans are well underway for Queen Victoria's Birthday Celebrations on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May. We are eagerly seeking adult and student volunteers. If any of you feel you have a few hours to spare on the 24<sup>th</sup>, we would appreciate hearing from you. This is an excellent opportunity for secondary school students who are

seeking credit for community service.

They may contact their guidance counselor for information about volunteering at The Old Britannia Schoolhouse. Daryl Cook is the

convenor for our Student

Volunteer Committee. You may contact Daryl at [dcook@echo-on.net](mailto:dcook@echo-on.net) for more information about getting involved in this project.

To round out our year, the annual Old Fashioned Strawberry Social in the atrium of the H. J. A Brown Centre is Wednesday, June 25. So mark your calendar for this special event. Tickets will be available shortly.

We are excited about plans for Mississauga's "Open Doors Ontario"

## Become Involved:

**April 26:**

Celebration of Brampton Fair's 150th Anniversary;

**May 24:**

Queen Victoria Fête;

**June 25:**

Strawberry Social;

**September 12/13/14:**

Brampton Fair;

**September 13/14:**

Mississauga's "Open Doors Ontario".

on September 13 and 14. The Old Britannia Schoolhouse will be open and we hope to make it an interesting stop for visitors. It will be a busy time for the Friends of the Schoolhouse as we plan to be at the Brampton Fall Fair that same weekend.

Memberships are now due. If you haven't joined, please send in your cheque so that you can be kept informed of happenings at The Schoolhouse. Thank you for your participation, whether as a visitor to an event or as a volunteer. Remember to tell your friends that The Schoolhouse is open the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of every month. This is a super opportunity for them to take a step back into the past.

This is the last newsletter until September, but, as you can see, we have lots going on.

We hope to see each of you at least once during our busy schedule of events over the next few months.

*Cathy Harper*

## Victorian Flower Messages

**F**lowers were not just pretty to look at in the Victorian era. Each flower, in addition to its common and botanical name, had a hidden meaning. Flower dictionaries existed, the first one written by Mme. Charlotte de la Tour in 1818. Miss Corruthers of Inverness wrote a book about the language of flowers in 1879 and later lists were published in 1883 and 1885.

There were many "shades" of meaning. Not only did each flower have a particular word association but the colour of a flower could change the meaning. For example, a red rose means love, but a white rose means "I am worthy of you" and a white rose bud signifies "girlhood". No wonder dictionaries were published to keep all this straight. Young Victorian women spent hours studying these so they would be sure to interpret correctly the hidden meaning in the flowers given them by young gentlemen.

Often messages were conveyed in small bouquets called tussie mussies or nosegays. Flowers were chosen carefully to have a specific meaning and were often surrounded by a doily. The tussie mussie was given to the young woman and after due consideration if she accepted the message she touched the bouquet to her nose - thus the name "nosegay". Pictures of flowers were also used on stationary to add a different level of meaning to the letter.

The tussie mussie pictured above contains pink roses, white lily, daisies, lily of the valley and rosemary. The message is "Happiness returns remembering the innocent purity of romance". In simpler terms "Thinking of our love makes me happy".

In 1847 *The Floral Fortune-Teller; a Game for the Season of Flowers* was written by a Miss S.C. Edgerton and published in Boston. This must have been a popular pastime at gatherings during the summers. Guests selected up to five flowers from a bouquet of many different garden and wildflowers provided by the hostess. A "fortune teller", using the dictionary of flowers and a knowledge of the subtle shades of meaning related to colours, told the fortune of each guest. In this game white flowers were related to a

person's character, red to the character of people important in one's life, blue to the person's love life, purple to worldly fortune, and yellow to the person's environment.

Here is a very short list of some of our common flowers and their meanings. The dictionaries run on for pages.

Amaryllis	Splendid beauty
Anemone	Expectation
Apple blossom	Preference
Azalea	Romance
Bachelor's Button	Hope in love
Birch Tree	Meekness
Camelia	Pity

Carnation (yellow)	Disdain
Clematis	Artifice
Daffodil	Chivalry
Dandelion	Coquetry
Evening Primrose	Inconstancy
Forget-me-not	True love
Fuchsia	The ambition of my love thus plagues itself
Gardenia	Ecstasy
Geranium (ivy)	Your hand for the next dance
Golden rod	Encouragement
Hollyhock (white)	Female ambition
Lavender	Distrust
Lily	Purity
Moss	Maternal love
Narcissus	Egotism
Pansy	Think of me
Primrose	Early youth
Strawberry	Perfect excellence
Thyme	Activity
Violet (white)	Modesty
Wheat	Prosperity

Next time you send flowers to someone, think about the "hidden" message you are sending with the bouquet.

If you want to know more about the language of flowers here are some good websites.

[http://www.livingvictorian.com/pm/journal\\_tussie.html](http://www.livingvictorian.com/pm/journal_tussie.html)

<http://www.literarycalligraphy.com/books/usingthelof/flowergame.html>

<http://www.cybercom.net/~klb/flowers.html>

<http://www.cybercom.net/~klb/flowa.html>

<http://www.cybercom.net/~klb/flowold.html>

Daryl Cook



## THE WALLAROBBA SCHOOL.

**T**his year I didn't stop. I drove by, I slowed down and explained its importance to my passengers, but I didn't pull over, didn't walk around, didn't reflect or stare into the past.

Last year the spell was broken. I stopped by to take a closer look and found that the dear old lady had been violated. She had been desecrated and changed forever, stripped of her glory, her importance, her history. She had been converted into a garden and storage shed.

She had been my one-room school.

She had been the place where several of my brothers and sisters were educated, some against their will, and around which the social life of Wallarobba revolved.

It was not exactly a "bush school" - it was in the heart of dairy country - but the mileage peg at the nearby railway station (also long since bulldozed in the name of progress) read "146", making us almost 150 miles from Central Station in Sydney. A few hours travel, but in those days a lifetime away.

I started school at the end of summer, in February, 1948. I recall my older sister asking how many sandwiches I might want. I reflected on this important decision and replied "sixteen"! The four that were packed ended up being quite sufficient.

And so began a sojourn of six years that opened my mind to the world. My teacher was Mr. Hogan, a returned soldier from World War 2, who travelled daily the 10 miles from Dungog in his little roadster, bringing his two sons with him. He may not, by today's standards, have been an excellent teacher but to me he was the fount of knowledge, an inspiration. When he talked about his travels in the South Pacific and elsewhere I was infatuated - I think that those were the moments that planted the seeds to travel.

For the first two years we survived without electricity. This was no hardship, as there was nothing but kerosene lamps and kerosene refrigerators in our homes. During the coldest days of winter the fireplace in the schoolhouse was lit and the twenty odd pupils would be assigned their seats - the smallest closest to the fire.

Then came electricity. On the first day after we were "hooked up" Mr. Hogan produced a film projector. From the moment that screen lit up the whole class was mesmerized by the images of the world around us. When the Hogan's moved into the house built for them on the

schoolyard I would spend part of a Saturday playing with "the kids". My real purpose was to get into the school where we would watch filmstrip after filmstrip over and over again.

Except in the coldest months, it was not unusual for kids to come to school barefoot. Most walked, one or two rode their horses, some of us hitched a ride in the back of Presland's milk lorry. It was often my job to take our dairy herd down the two miles to a paddock near the school. At lunchtime I would have to round up the herd and send them on their way home. This they did without being guided, but often, on reflection, to the chagrin of motorists. The walk home would be with the Maurer's - Gwen, Kathy, Tony and later Paula - and my young brother. In rain or flood time we would walk the entire distance in the drains beside the road. On other days we would take our time, the only scurrying was when someone yelled "Carl!" or "Kill-Me-Quick!", the latter signifying a motor bike was approaching. Other than that, life was relaxed, lunch eaten at leisure under the spreading pine trees, away from the heat, and close to our marble holes and snail homes.

Not all of our time was spent inside the school. Beside it, and close to the road, we were each assigned a garden plot. It was our jobs to work the soil, plant our own seeds and care for the vegetables as they grew. We got to take most of our produce home, but I daresay Mr. Hogan may have helped himself to a sampling or two for his supper.

Our report cards would not have measured up to toady's standards. Three times a year he would have us tear a page from a notebook, copy the headings from the board and list our subjects. Then he would systematically call our name and our mark for each subject! We would copy down these marks, he would sign the bottom and the folded paper would be taken home. Oh to find one of those long-lost gems from the past.

I recall the library system. Every month two of the bigger boys would take a large chest of books to the railway station, put it on the "dinner-time" (12 noon) train and retrieve an identical chest sent from the school just up the line. Oh, the treasures those chests contained: picture books; story books; novels - these were the gems that sparkled far more than the comparatively dull School Magazine, sent out monthly from Sydney - a different booklet for each grade level. The magazine meant poems to be learned, work to be done. The library chest meant pure enjoyment.

*(Continued on page 5)*

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Four times a year, on the last day of term and again prior to the inspector's visit, we would be set to work, scrubbing the place from top to bottom. Boys would be assigned to weeding and digging and watering, the girls would be on their knees with soap and water. Nobody minded – it was not considered an imposition but an occasion!

Then, on the very last day of school in December, the teacher would have us assemble outside the school porch and pitch the remainder of his chalk. A mad scramble ensued, and the roads leading away from the school were well decorated that afternoon.

The school picnic meant fun for children and adults alike. Delayed until after the milking had been done, the entire community would gather at the school on a Saturday for races and competitions for both the young and their parents. I have been able to retrieve a notebook that records my father taking 2 hits to drive a nail, an older brother 3, while my sister-in-law took the prize for throwing the broom some 47 feet!

The year culminated with a Christmas Concert in the neighbouring hall. Imagine if you will, the three wise men et al. decked out in costumes in stifling heat. But we did it, because Santa would then arrive with a gift for everyone (I later found out that parents had given the toys to Santa to pass on to us – what a disappointment!). I recall a pop-gun being unwrapped one year. Oh, the joy that that would bring.

At the end of my elementary education I left that school to take the long train ride each day to High School. Daily I would leave my bike and walk (though sometimes run!) through the schoolyard to the train station. The school was never looked at with contempt, "because I was too big for that", but with fondness for its memories and the love of learning that Tom Hogan instilled in me.

Now it's a bloody storage shed for some bloody Sydney-ite who wanted a place in the bloody country! The building needs paint, there are locks where there were never locks and the gardens are weed beds. The schoolyard is dotted with cages for dogs and poultry. The cricket pitch, the horse paddock and the outhouses are but memories.

Warmed by the memories from afar, but disappointed by the closer inspection, I shall no longer visit in person, but instead travel back to the early fifties, watch a filmstrip, eat my four jam or meat sandwiches under the branches of the pine trees and live again those precious memories when my mind was first opened.

*Brian Holstein*

## Heritage Mississauga Showcase

**O**n February 14, 15 and 16, Square One was the site for many interesting heritage groups in this year's theme, "What's in a Name".

Friends of the Schoolhouse contributed to the success of this event with its displays, artifacts and many appropriate sales items. The latter was so successful that we almost doubled our sales over the 2002's showcase.

The committee is very grateful to many people, including:

- ♦ Joan Reid for her research on John Carberry, her beautiful photographs of the proposed Heritage Garden and particular artifacts found in our on-site garden. Visitors were intrigued by these finds and many were eager to ask us or tell us about many of them. In fact, a couple of visitors identified a mysterious metal object as a transformer plate;
- ♦ Eva Ardiel for organizing and supervising the sales tables and for her excellent poster boards that tell the story of the Friends of the Schoolhouse;
- ♦ Daryl Cook for organizing and supervising the high school student volunteers. The commitment of these youths to community service is appreciated;
- ♦ All our adult volunteers for their continuous support. Thanks go to Cathy Harper, Eva Ardiel, Joan Reid, Kay Robbins, Jean Robinson, Frances Kay, Marg Carson, Shirley Hoad, Karin Henderson, Anna Brezden, Margaret Draper, Dawn Pollard, Anne Brownjohn, Sheila Northover, Daryl Cook and Linda Kenny.

*George Christian*



*A student volunteer demonstrates one of the many toys at the Showcase*

**J.K. 1936**

The exterior brick walls of The Old Britannia Schoolhouse are a veritable treasure trove of graffiti. At some point in time "J.K. 1936" was carefully incised on the south side of the schoolhouse. The pupil list for September 1934 to June 1939 does not show anyone with the initials "J.K.". Was he/she a visitor? A passer-by? A boyfriend? A girlfriend? We may never know.

**Need to speak to the Schoolmistress?**

The Old Britannia Schoolhouse can be contacted directly, by dialing  
**890 1010, ext. 2911**

**A Final Word**

**S**t has been five years since I began the editing of the Friends of the Schoolhouse newsletter. Twenty issues later, I am ready to move on to new challenges, move over to allow others to demonstrate their skills.

Being the editor of a newsletter can be frustrating with deadlines to meet, the extraction of materials from contributors and the actual fitting together of the final product. Such was not the case with this organization, indeed this newsletter, of all three that I have been working on, has been the most relaxing to create.



It is not without the assistance and guidance of Eva Ardiel that this chore was turned into a pleasure. I shall miss our quarterly rendezvous at Tim Hortons in Acton as we met "half-way" to scrutinize the copy and improve the script. Thank you, Eva, it's been "worth the drive"!

Nor should I ignore the many Friends who willingly contributed material, and those who took the time to acknowledge the effort put forth and the appearance of the final product. Such support keeps one going when nothing seems to be working out.

Thank you for the friendships created and for the opportunity to pass on the Friends' message to its members and to the teachers of Peel. It's been a hoot!

*Brian Holstein*

**We are on the web at  
[www.britanniaschoolhouse.org](http://www.britanniaschoolhouse.org)**

**The Friends of the Schoolhouse wish to thank the following for their support:**

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AN ENCOUNTER WITH AN EDITOR.