



Winter 2006

We're New on the Web



Facts and Figures

Number of students attending in

November: 446

December: 270

January: 281

Number of events:

November: 2

December: 2

January: 1

Major project in November, December and January:

Creation of a new Friends website.

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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britanniaschoolhousefriends.org

In January The Friends of the Schoolhouse launched our own website. Be sure to visit often as there will be something new every month. The web address is www.britanniaschoolhousefriends.org.

We began discussing the merits of having our own website two years ago. The Communications Committee of Brian Holstein, Daryl Cook and Dennis Taylor considered issues such as the type of content, design, maintenance and cost and made several recommendations. In October of 2005 a contract was signed with Pentura Solutions, a local Mississauga company, to design, create and maintain our website. Then the real work began.

An initial meeting with the design staff at Pentura established the categories of information we wanted to include on our website. Then a writing committee of Eva Ardiel, Daryl Cook, Cathy Harper, Melissa Jacobs, Joan Moon, Jean Robinson and Karen Simmons met four times in November. Tasks were divided up and at each session content prepared by each writer was reviewed and revised. In addition to text many photographs were included. Our criteria were to make the website user friendly, informative and attractive. By the beginning of December the content was ready to deliver to Pentura. Throughout December and January we watched their talented staff bring our website to life.

Some features to look for:

- Something new each month in Current News
- A larger picture that pops up with more information when you put the pointer on a photo in the Photo Gallery or an item in the Catalogue
- The latest newsletter and all earlier ones

Let us know what you think of the website. We welcome your comments and ideas for Current News items.



Previewing the website. L to R:
Tyson Kingsbury, Scott Ord, Jean Robinson, Daryl Cook, Eva Ardiel

Christmas and the Sales Committee

Eva Ardiel

Christmas preparations for the Friends' Sales Committee began in October with assessing our inventory and meeting to lay our plans and assign chores.



Mary Corrigan and Val Hosty check items for sale.

Thanks to tips from Lang Pioneer Village we were able to add to our inventory a number of good quality, brightly coloured wooden toys from a Vancouver importing firm and several reproduction painted tin toys from an Oakville importer. Andy in Vermont, our source for flip books and other optical toys, came up with three or four intriguing new items from the past. So as well as our usual assortment of interesting items, we had (and have) lots of fascinating new choices.

Marjorie Madill made more rag dolls. Ben Madill made lots more of the popular "make a square" and "Make a T" puzzles. Margaret Storey rolled beeswax candles again. Joan

Moon transformed little bears into little Christmas bears. Jean Robinson was thankful no more spool dollies or sheep were required this year!

Our November 17th day of **selling at the Board Office** was successful again. This time we stayed open for business until 6:00 P.M. to give people a chance to drop in after work. While it wasn't very busy between 4:00 and 6:00, we felt the extra hours were worthwhile and plan to do the same this coming year. We extend our thanks to the Peel Board employees who helped facilitate this event, as well as to all of the volunteers who helped that day.



New this year our garden urns filled with greenery at the front door. Inside, as always, the Christmas tree with popcorn chains and hand made ornaments.



The biggest crowd we have ever had turned out for the **December 4th Open House**. We were de-

lighted



Volunteers make it happen. Ben demonstrates his unique nesting tables and chairs. Sandra Emerson with Joan Moon hiding behind greet the visitors.



to see so many children and a large number of first time visitors. The schoolhouse looked festive and beautiful thanks to the Friday decorating crew and Schoolmistress Jacobs. Ray Hosty's lovely violin music truly enhanced the Christmas spirit. Thanks are extended to everyone who helped with all the details that made our Christmas events so successful. And, of course, we sincerely thank everyone who supported the Friends and the schoolhouse by attending our events and purchasing our merchandise.

We were pleased that Mike Harmer visited the December 4th Open House and appreciated the article he wrote for the Booster. We have reprinted his article on page 3 with his permission.

The spirit of Christmas past

Mike Harmer

From *The Booster*, December 23, 2005

Reprinted with permission

It was like traveling back in time when The Old Britannia Schoolhouse held its seasonal open house a couple of Sundays ago. Only a snowball throw from fast food emporia and six lanes of SUVs, to be sure, but all at once you found yourself thinking about one-horse open sleighs and chestnuts roasting on an open fire.

It probably had something to do with pinafores school-marms a pot-bellied stove, paper chains and peppermint sticks, the smell of apple cider and cedar boughs, a chalkboard ode to “merry little snowflakes”, and an obliging overnight snowfall, but suddenly a Victorian Christmas in a rural school was not such a stretch.

Built in 1852, the one-room, red-brick schoolhouse began life as SS No. 12 and served the village of Britannia and its surrounding farms for more than 100 years. Now, lovingly restored and preserved, it invites today’s students to experience the structured atmosphere, austere teaching methods and rudimentary school equipment of yesterday’s classroom.

But it was the holiday spirit that took precedence over history on this occasion: the tree, strung with popcorn-and-cranberry tinsel and hung with simple, homespun ornaments, stood proudly at the front of the room; Ray Hosty played medleys of carols and Christmas tunes on the violin; and Schoolhouse grad Ben Madill shared stories of earlier times.

And you can be certain that Christmas shopping, not the 3-Rs, was uppermost on the minds of the children in attendance. They were positively regaled with a host of period toys (wooden, tin, die cast) and amusements.

They marveled at pewter jacks and flip books, clay marbles and clothes peg dolls; they were intrigued by thaumatopes and phenakistascopes; and they paid rapt attention as Friends of the Schoolhouse Marg Carson and Jean Robinson demonstrated Tumbling Tom and Pecking Hens, Jacob’s Ladder and the Leather Buzz Saw ...batteries not only not included, but not required.

For the parents there was a grand assortment of tree ornaments, beeswax candles, traditional recipes, and all manner of Schoolhouse greeting cards and stationery.

It was truly a special afternoon: a chance to look back at a gentler, less frenzied era; an opportunity to indulge in lots of good cheer and a good chat, and a generous dose of the spirit of Christmas past.

Membership

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

Please complete your renewal form and make Friends of the Schoolhouse. If you have lost your renewal form there is one that can be printed on our new 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.

Send all renewal forms and cheques to:



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

Reminder

for 2006. Renewal forms were sent with the have already renewed. Check the mailing paid up membership is in the upper right

your cheque for membership fees payable to

Candlelight Concert

Eva Ardiel

On Sunday November 13th Canada's foremost bassoonist, Nadina Mackie Jackson, entertained at The Old Britannia Schoolhouse with a candlelight concert of Baroque music. Nadina played the Twelve Fantasias for Solo Bassoon, originally written for the flute by Georg Philipp Telemann. All those in attendance thoroughly enjoyed the wonderfully unusual sounds of the solo bassoon as well as learning about the vivid life of the composer and the history and characteristics of this woodwind instrument.



Nadina was delighted with the wonderful acoustics of The Old Britannia Schoolhouse.

We sincerely appreciate Nadina's generosity in providing us with this exceptional concert.

Thanks also to the committee members who provided the delicious goodies for intermission.

Nadina's CDs are available through www.nadina.ca or www.calibanquartet.ca.

More Madill Memories

Editor's note: While researching the history of the Britannia community, Joan Reid came across this interesting article from The Brampton Conservator, June 26, 1952. We share it with you along with Ben's and Marjorie's personal memories of the day.

Hoe-Down Friday Night At Madill's New Barn Big Dance To Celebrate Completion Of Mammoth New Building Erected To Replace Barn Lost in Fire Last January

The "yo-heave" of the barn raisers gives way to the shouts of the square dancers this Friday night when Ben Madill throws open his big new barn for an evening of old and modern dancing. Located on Ben's farm, five miles south of Brampton on the west side of No. 10 highway, the barn is one of the largest in the county and was built by W. E. Silk of Shelbourne.

The timber frame structure is 104 X 60 and cost more than \$15,000—not including the stone and concrete stable basement which was salvaged from the fire which destroyed the barn in January.

The barn is 40 feet high from the tongue-and-groove second floor to the peak. Tongue-and-groove flooring was used to eliminate the necessity of an under floor, and at the same time keep the stable free from hay dust and chaff.

The well built structure is supported by 159 rugged elm beams of various sizes. There are two hips, and throughout the design the traditional barn-building methods have been observed. Wooden dowels have been used wherever possible. The elm used in the building was gathered throughout various parts of the province and cut at Shelburne. The lumber used in the sheeting is spruce from Quebec. There is as much timber in the Madill barn as in three ordinary barns.

It took four days to raise the barn, with 25 neighbors pitching in on the pike poles and pulley ropes. A tractor was used to help raise the big beams. In the farmhouse, Mrs. Madill and a half dozen neighbours' wives worked equally hard to keep up with the appetites. A well stocked table required plenty of refills.

Mr. Silk, his son Dave, and his nephew, Alvin Silk, built the barn. Mr. Silk Sr. is a veteran barn builder, having been at it for 48 years. He learned his trade from his father and admits that the cost of barn-building today is a much more expensive proposition than it was half a century ago when many timbers could be cut from the farm. He has built more than 200 barns in his career, and recalls that his father had built as many as 20 in one year.

The best of material has gone into the Madill barn and modern ventilators and top grade roofing complete the structure.

In the fire which destroyed the original barn in January, Ben Madill lost about 180 pigs, four calves and 200 chickens.

The public is invited to the dance tomorrow night with admission 50 cents. Bert Gardhouse is floor manager.



The barn building crew of the Silks and the Madill's neighbours.

Ben's and Marjorie's Memories of the Hoe-down Ben and Marjorie Madill



Ben and Marjorie in front of the barn as it looks today.

We had two very successful barn dances after the barn was erected and before the hay was put in. A barn dance seemed to be a small token of appreciation to all who helped. All the others were charged a small fee to pay for the orchestra. The first night was so successful we decided to have another the next weekend. It was also very successful, 150 to 200 attending each night. The Britannia Church choir ladies catered both nights and did very well. We were blessed with fine weather both nights.

Back then barn dances were considered a special event in a new barn.

To give something back to all who helped was certainly something to make us very happy and something we will never forget.

We were well cared for by the O.P.P. The night of the dance two different O.P.P. cars (that had been in the night of the fire—one Officer was my cousin) were in early to check on everything and again at midnight after the dance.

A message from the Chair

France Kay

We are starting a new year with a great new initiative—our very own website. You will read more about it in this newsletter but for a first-hand experience visit www.britanniaschoolhousefriends.org.

This past Christmas Season was an enjoyable—if busy—time for the Schoolhouse committees. We had a successful sale at the Board Office, and at the Schoolhouse the Christmas tree was trimmed and the classroom decorated in readiness for the Open House on December 4.

Plans for our participation at Heritage Showcase February 17, 18 and 19 at Square One are in the capable hands of George Christian and Joan Reid. Ben Madill's clock display should be of interest to visitors. Drop by and say "Hello".

Britannia Farm News

We promised to keep you updated on plans for the Britannia Farm property. Here are two reports of interest.

Britannia Farm Master Plan

Eva Ardiel

As reported in the last newsletter, the Friends have actively participated in this planning by attending meetings and submitting a detailed report with recommendations. We also indicated that we wished to receive updates about the progress of any Britannia Farm Plan.

In October, therefore, we were surprised and concerned to see in the Brampton and Mississauga newspapers that the Peel Board had hired a consultant to determine what interest existed in building an office complex or other commercial development on 22 acres of the land running along Hurontario Street from the schoolyard fence to Bristol Road. The Board officials hoped that revenue generated from this development would support environmental programs on the remainder of the property.

On November 4th we wrote to the Peel Board stating that we recognized the Board's need to



Area of Britannia Farm property proposed for development. Photo taken from the corner of Bristol Rd. and Hurontario St. looking north. 1 is the Conover Barn, 2 the original farmhouse with the Dunton House hidden behind and 3 is the schoolhouse.

generate revenue from the property in order to support future programs there. We were, however, very disturbed that the area under consideration for development included the Farm House, Dunton House and Conover Barn and that the integrity of this heritage cluster of buildings would be violated. It appeared to us that these buildings would be surrounded by and dwarfed by modern structures, or worse still, that these historic buildings would have to be moved or removed.

We received a November 14th letter of response from Janet McDougald, Chair of the Peel Board. It stated that the Board has not yet issued a request from interested parties and that the framework for their proposal would require minimal disturbance of the heritage buildings. Ideally, the best plan would integrate the heritage buildings in a way that complements their historic significance.

We were assured by Ms. McDougald that the wishes of citizens and groups they have consulted would be respected. The best proposal, she said, would have the least impact on the heritage buildings and would benefit the majority of the farm which is to remain open green space.

We were assured that Friends of the Schoolhouse would be advised of the Board's evaluation of proposals prior to any development commitments.

We appreciate Ms. McDougald's response, clarification and reassurance. We are cautiously optimistic about the future of the farm. We are very interested in the recent activity at the Dunton House (see Cathy Harper's article on page 7) and hope that it bodes well for a brighter future for this beautiful old Georgian House.

For the latest news and items of interest go to our new website at
www.britanniaschoolhousefriends.org.

**Britannia Farm News
Dunton House Plans**

Cathy Harper

Randy Wright from the Board’s Planning Department contacted me on December 19 to let the Friends know that the Dunton House would be used for administrative purposes for the next couple of years. It was cheaper to restore the Dunton House than it was to rent space in other facilities in the city.

In order to restore the house and make it usable as office space several things needed to occur. They will be installing a proper heating and cooling system, restoring the structural integrity of the second floor, plastering wherever needed, repairing the water pipes and decorating the interior of the house in the original colours. The exterior brick requires pointing. A new sprinkler system will not be installed at the present time. This may come later if the Dunton House is set up as the site for many of the archival items and artifacts that belong the Board. We hope that the Friends will be able to utilize a portion of this facility at a later date in this manner.




Rear entrance to the Dunton House



Our immediate task was to remove everything belonging to the Friends that was stored in the Dunton House. Where were all these items going to be put? When was this going to happen? How was it going to happen? Randy indicated that everything would be stored at Central Stores on Central Parkway in the archival area. That sounded good. But, would we have ready access to our materials? Yes! When was this going to happen? We were to have everything out by Friday December 23. Oh no! They would provide the trucks and staff to help. All we had to do was see that everything was packed.



By Tuesday afternoon Eva Ardiel, Sandy McGowan and myself were quickly organizing our materials into two piles, those that weren’t needed on a regular basis and those that were. After a couple of hours we called it quits for the day. Next morning we were back by eight o’clock to finish the job. A good six hours later after throwing out junk and repacking the materials we had packed and labeled 95 boxes. Our work was done!



Thanks to the men from Central Stores who helped pack and carry all of the boxes for us. It has always been so handy to retrieve necessary materials for our various functions from the Dunton House. Now we will wait and see how easy it will be for us to access our materials from Central Stores when we need them.



Editor’s note: Many thanks to Eva, Cathy and Sandy for their hard work under pressure at a very busy time of the year.








News from the Past





The Brampton Conservator—December 17, 1908





The following appeared in the columns of a local Peel paper last week. “Wanted—for School Sec-




tion No 5, Macville, a teacher. Must be member of the church, a leader in the Sunday School, and



must be a good Grit. No others need apply. Lady teacher preferred, as the rate-payers are thinking



of having lady trustees next year.



Thanks to Joan Reid who found this while researching the schools of Peel.




An update on the old maple trees

As reported in the last newsletter, one of the 1890's heritage maples had to be removed from the schoolyard. Given it's decaying state when cut down, the Board staff decided to have an arborist look at the remaining maples. Two different arborists have made recommendations. It appears that all of the trees are in precarious condition, some worse than others. The Friends have recommended that efforts be made to preserve the trees if possible and to begin planting new trees as replacements. We have offered to assist with the cost of this. In the meantime, for safety, the swings have been moved away from the trees .



The remaining maples
Photo by Kelly Cook

We will continue to report on the status of these beautiful old trees.

What is it?



Here is the mystery artifact for this newsletter. Can you guess the purpose of these interesting items?

The answer is at the bottom of the page.

The Gardens



We're already thinking of Spring and the heritage gardens. Each year the gardens expand thanks to our dedicated volunteers. If you enjoy working with plants and learning about native and heritage varieties we would welcome your help. The busiest time is early Spring for garden cleanup and planting. During the summer we need volunteers to do a little weeding and water the gardens once a week. Joan Reid would be interested in finding some students who want to earn Community Service credits to help on a Saturday in April. If you would like to volunteer or know of a student who would be interested, please contact Joan at 905-277-3396 or email her at jem1mma@aol.com.

Answer to "What is it?"
These are not bowling pins as many students believe.
Did you guess that they are Indian Clubs, sometimes called Dumbbells. They were used in physical training classes in Ontario schools from the late 1800's and are still used in strength training. The British brought the use of clubs back from India where they saw Indian soldiers using club swinging as a way to improve strength, agility and balance. This form of training eventually moved from the army to the schools.
Two interesting websites give more information.
http://www.karatessupply.com/indian_clubs.htm
http://ejmas.com/pt/part_dick_0101.htm