

Spring, 2002

Some Figures and Facts:

Pupils attending classes at The Old Britannia Schoolhouse:
January 386, February 465,
March 327. Year 2002 to date:
1178

Jim Potter's career at The Old Britannia Schoolhouse saw some 5000 pupils attend the classroom.

16 members volunteered their time to be at our booth at Square One during Heritage Week and 2 members represented the Friends of the Schoolhouse at the one-day Heritage celebration at the Brampton Museum.

James C. Potter, Esq. 1920-2002



A Tribute to The Old Britannia Schoolhouse's First Schoolmaster, page 2.



This 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.

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A Life to Celebrate - James C. Potter, Esquire

It was with deep sadness that we learned of the sudden, yet peaceful, death of James C. Potter, Esquire at his home in Brampton on February 12, 2002.

We are indebted to Jim Potter for the very existence of The Old Britannia Schoolhouse as a living history site for Peel students. Not only was he the first schoolmaster but as W.J. Lambie, a former Peel superintendent put it, "... the entire project was stimulated by his creative planning. He was the one person who pushed us continuously to turn this idea into a unique educational experience for Peel students."

It was Jim who developed the schoolhouse programme, who enlisted his friend, artist Audrey Caryl, to design all of the schoolhouse logos, stationery, certificates and wonderful drawings and who worked with Hugh McPherson to furnish the classroom. Many of the items in the schoolhouse are from Jim's own collection (and he was a collector!) of rural school memorabilia. The wooden teacher's desk

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came from the old Brampton High School via Jim's classroom at Brampton Centennial Secondary School. The dunce stool was used by his sister when she worked in a bank. His mother's and grandmother's slates are displayed on a schoolhouse bulletin board ... and on and on. Detail after detail and item after item were incorporated by him into the classroom and into the programme to enrich the experience for the visiting students.

During Jim Potter's 2½ years as schoolmaster, some 5000 Peel students

were magically transported back in time by his dramatic re-enactments and were enchanted by his stories, anecdotes and piano renditions. He liked to quote from a favourite letter he received from a grade 4 boy: "Dear Mr. Potter, I just loved your old school and I loved you and I hope you don't die before my little brother gets a chance to come, 'cause he'll love it too."

Teachers and adults who visited the schoolhouse will remember being served tea or coffee, with homemade goodies (made by Jim himself), on a silver tray and using the Brampton Rose cups and saucers he had salvaged from the old Brampton High School staff room.

Jim's 46 or 47 year professional teaching career began as it ended, -in a one-room schoolhouse, though his salary improved considerably over the years. He started teaching when he was 17 years old in Northumberland County in 1938, a few miles away from his Warkworth farm home, at a salary of \$600 a year. During the forty some years between one-room schools he taught with the Air Force in Britain during WWII, for the Department of National Defence Schools in Europe, at a teacher training college in Botswana, Africa, at the Creemore Continuation School, English and Latin at the old Brampton High School and, after that school closed, at Brampton Centennial Secondary School.

Jim Potter loved to teach. He knew from his pre-school days that he wanted to be a teacher. Although he was offered promotions over the years, he opted to stay in the classroom. He was the teacher students never forgot. He was the teacher who rekindled the spark of learning in many students. Lloyd Dobson, a colleague from his Brampton High School days, said of Jim at his retirement in 1984, "I was always impressed with his ability to motivate young people. He always seemed to find ways of making the programme live for them!" Jim was awarded the Queen's Silver Jubilee medal for excellence in classroom teaching. He once said, "The worst thing you can be as a teacher is dull!" Jim

Potter was certainly never dull!

Jim embraced life with a zest and an endearing sense of fun. He had so many talents, so many interests, so many skills, so many friends and such a close-knit family! Retirement gave him more time and energy for all of these - but he was always a teacher. He recently took on teaching a 15 year old boy Latin. He commented that: "this hour is the highlight

"Dear Mr. Potter, I just loved your old school and I loved you and I hope you don't die before my little brother gets a chance to come, 'cause he'll love it too."

of my week because I see the world through the eyes of a teenager."

Jim's interest in, his generosity to and his caring for others was genuine and enduring. He kept in touch with friends around the world and with a multitude of students. Over the years he attended literally hundreds of weddings, christenings, graduations and other special events which former students wanted him to celebrate with them.

Jim Potter was a giant of a man!

I am so very grateful for having had the gift of his friendship. I really, really miss him.

Eva Ardiel



Heritage Mississauga Showcase 2002

This annual event took place at Square One on February 15, 16, and 17. "Fragments of our Past" was this year's theme. It was a successful event with exhibits and demonstrations by local heritage groups. Square One was very appropriate for all groups and will be next year's site for Showcase 2003!

Very special honours are due to Joan Reid for her endless hours of research and artistic displays on local schools. Many passers-by were intrigued with the information and photos. Yes, we're indebted to Joan whom we've adopted as our local historian!

Sincere thanks to Eva for organizing the sales table and for purchasing two appropriate display boards.

Appreciation goes to Daryl for organizing our student volunteers from local high schools. We're fortunate to have their commitment to community service!

Finally, we are grateful to our adult volunteers - Eva Ardiel, Joan Reid, Kay Robbins, Jean Robinson, Frances Kaye, Jenny Roberts, Shirley Hoard, Cathy Harper and Earl Bonner, Daryl Cook, Karin Henderson, Linda Kenny, Marjorie Madill, Margaret Draper, and Dawn Pollard for their participation!

George Christian

Heritage Brampton Showcase was fortunate to have the services of Joan Reid and Marg Storey on Sunday, Feb. 17. Again, Joan had very capably researched and displayed information about local Brampton Schools! *Ed.*



Right: Karin Henderson demonstrates a Jacob's Ladder to visitors at the Friends' booth during Heritage Week

From the Schoolmistress

Spring has finally sprung at the schoolhouse! The pussywillows are out, the snow has melted, and the mice and other creatures that inhabit the classroom have seemingly returned to the great outdoors. I can finally breathe a sigh of relief as my largest indoor opponents are now ladybugs and 8 year olds! A couple of months ago, however, it was a different story!

One sunny day in February (yes, things were strange from the outset!), as I cleaned the slates and lined up the desks in anticipation of the day's class, I heard an unfamiliar scrambling in the west wall of the schoolhouse. Looking up, I could just see two little paws pushing on the grate high above the blackboard. This little squirrel was persistent - and making quick progress! By the time I had spotted him he'd manage to move the grate by at least an inch. Stomping my feet, clapping my hands and thrusting my long wooden pointer in his direction did little to dissuade

him. I had to call for reinforcements or face the prospect of the grate, and the squirrel, landing on the floor in the middle of class. While we do try to provide an 'authentic' experience for the visiting children - I thought this would be a bit much!

Moments later, the custodians arrived with a ladder and a roll of duct tape. They did a handy job of taping those grates to the wall. Our visitor did not seem the least bit concerned as his nose and paws were frequently spotted poking out as the day went on. Needless to say, the children and I came out of role more than once that day to cries of "I see him, Schoolmistress!" and "Look! There's his paw!"

I left for the day, being assured that animal control would 'take care of it' before next morning. All they found was a crow in the attic. Our rodent visitor was never caught, and I haven't seen hide nor hair of him since.

Megan Curtis



Executive Committee News

2002, Year of Celebration at The Old Britannia Schoolhouse!

This year is the 150th Anniversary of the of The Schoolhouse; the 20th Anniversary of the restoration of the building and the initiation of the present programme; and the 10th Anniversary of the beginning of Friends of The Schoolhouse. We certainly have much to celebrate!

In February, Friends of OBS had a wonderful display at Square One for Heritage Week. Thanks to George Christian, Eva, Margaret Storey and their helpers for setting up and volunteering at the display, and especially to Joan Reid for the research material and artistry which made the display so important.

On April 15th Friends of The Schoolhouse will be hosting the Annual S.L.A.T.E. (So Let's All Talk about Education in a one-room schoolhouse) Conference, which brings together people from all around Ontario and from Western New York, who are involved in delivering and preserving educational programs in historical settings and school buildings. Friends have planned an interesting and informative day.

The month of May will be especially busy. On Friday, May 10th we shall have an old fashioned Arbour Day programme with the planting of a "heritage" tree, donated by the Streetsville Horticultural Society to commemorate the 150th anniversary of The Schoolhouse and the 50th Year of Queen Elizabeth II's reign.

At Britannia School, a royal oak from Windsor Forest was planted in 1939 to mark the visit to Canada of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. Another oak from Windsor Forest was planted in 1989 to mark the 50th anniversary of that Royal Visit. Call Joan Reid (905 277 3396) for information about the Arbour Day Programme.

The 150th Celebration begins May 25th in the school yard. It is rumoured that Queen Victoria plans to attend the festivities so be on the look out for Her Majesty as she strolls the grounds.

The 150th Reunion of S.S.#12, The Old Britannia Schoolhouse, takes place on Sunday, May 26th. If you know of a former teacher or pupil of Britannia School please pass on this information and/or call George Christian (905 275 8038). There are many former pupils planning to attend this event.

We were all very saddened by the death of James Potter, the first Schoolmaster of The Old Britannia Schoolhouse. Jim was an enthusiastic participant in many of the events and activities at Britannia Schoolhouse and he will be sorely missed.

On Sunday, June 9th we are having a Celebration of the Life of James Potter at The Schoolhouse. Elsewhere in this newsletter is information about this Celebration.

The final event of our busy school year is the Old Fashioned Strawberry Social, held in the atrium of the H.J.A. Brown Centre (The Board Office) on Tuesday, June 25th. Tickets will be available soon so mark your calendar for a very special treat.

We have been fortunate to have many dedicated secondary school students who volunteered at Ghost Walk, the Christmas Open House, and The Old Britannia Schoolhouse display at Square One

for Heritage Mississauga. These young people have been a wonderful resource and helped with the smooth running of many of these events. We look forward to seeing them again at the spring happenings.

Secondary school students looking for volunteer opportunities toward their community service credit can contact their school guidance counsellor for information about **volunteering at The Old Britannia Schoolhouse**. Daryl Cook is the convener for our Student Volunteer Committee. For more information about getting involved in this project you can also contact Daryl at: dlcook@echo-on.net

There are many opportunities for you who are 'slightly older' than teens to volunteer at our upcoming events at The Schoolhouse, Saturday, May 25th for our 150th Celebration, the 150th Reunion, May 26th and the Strawberry Social on Tuesday, June 25th.

If you have not yet renewed your membership for this year, please send in your cheque so that you can continue to be informed about the happenings at The Schoolhouse. Remember to check off the section at the back of the form indicating how you would like to help. Thank you to all the people who gave of their time and expertise at events at The Schoolhouse this fall and winter. We would love to have you join in any activity you choose

Hope to see you at one of the Spring Events.



Marg Draper and Dawn Poitard, hard at work at the Heritage Week booth in Square One.



Old Fashioned Family Fun
at
The Old Britannia Schoolhouse
As we celebrate our
150th Birthday
Saturday, May 25, 2002

11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

No admission charged, but a donation is expected

Baseball

Croquet and horseshoes

Role playing in the schoolhouse

Spelling bees

Old fashioned races

Tractor and wagon rides

Rope making

Log sawing and nail driving

Fish pond and other games

Ice cream making

Bubbles and stilts

... And lots more to see and do!

For Sale: snacks and drinks; Friends of the Schoolhouse wares.

*Meet Queen Victoria on her Royal Walkabout.
Enjoy Refreshments, Birthday Cake and Lucky Draws!*

*Come and spend the day in this truly unique setting from the past -
right in the middle of Mississauga.*

Bring a picnic lunch or purchase food on site.

5576 Hurontario Street (Highway 10 at Matheson)

Free Parking at H.L.A. Brown Education Centre (enter off Matheson)

CHILDREN MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT.

For Your Calendar:

April:

- 9 At 4 p.m. Friends of the Schoolhouse Meeting
 14 The Old Britannia Schoolhouse is open to the public from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
 15 S.L.A.T.E (So Let's All Talk About Teaching (in a one-room schoolhouse) Conference at The Old Britannia Schoolhouse.

May

- 10 Arbour Day Tree Planting in the schoolyard 1:30 to 2:30 p.m.
 12 The Old Britannia Schoolhouse is open to the public from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
 14 At 4 p.m. Friends of the Schoolhouse Meeting
 25 150th Celebration at The Old Britannia Schoolhouse
 26 Britannia School Reunion

June

- 9 Open House to celebrate the life of James C. Potter, Esq.
 11 At 4 p.m. Friends of the Schoolhouse Meeting
 25 Strawberry Social in the Atrium of the H.J.A. Brown Education Centre.



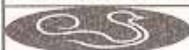
Erik, one of the Friends' Student Volunteers, demonstrates how easy it is to master one of the pioneer toys that is offered for sale by the Friends of the Schoolhouse.

Need to speak to the
Schoolmistress?



The Old Britannia Schoolhouse can be contacted directly, by dialing

890 1010, ext. 2911



We are on the web at
www.britanniaschoolhouse.org

Heritage Mississauga

can be accessed on the internet at:

<http://www.city.mississauga.on.ca/heritage/>

Or by phoning 905 615 4415

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

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Jeannine Dykstra;
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Helen Savage;

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