

# The Old Britannia Schoolhouse

1852-1959  
restored 1982

Spring 2024



## Student Visits

No program offered in 2023/24

## *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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## *More information?*

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## We Welcome Trustees to the Schoolhouse

On May 22 we hosted the trustees and members of the senior administration at a late afternoon reception prior to their board meeting. For some it was their first time to be inside the schoolhouse. Here are some photos of the event. Read more about it in Ruth Taylor's Chair's Report on page 2.



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### From the Chair

Ruth Taylor

Our members decided it was time to invite the trustees and senior administration to visit the Schoolhouse. We have done this in the past, but not for a few years, and not since before Covid. Some of the trustees have been here before, but many of the people being invited may not have been inside the Schoolhouse. We will be serving light refreshments before they have their board meeting.

We have many display boards from previous events. The ones we display will focus on the history and restoration of the Schoolhouse. Our photo albums will show what the gardens looked like before the clearcutting that took place on December 12, 2023, ironically the date of our celebratory potluck supper.

A few flowers have survived, for instance, the daffodils put on a showy display at our April meeting. A little ray of sunshine.

Since there is no program at the Schoolhouse, our current mandate is to protect and preserve the Schoolhouse and the treasured artifacts. We are currently cataloguing the artifacts and photographing those not already on the website.

### Trustees and Senior Administration Visit the Schoolhouse

Ruth Taylor

On May 22, Friends welcomed seven trustees, two superintendents, and one other board employee. Some faces were familiar. We were pleased that the chair of the trustees attended. Some of the visitors took photographs and we, in turn, photographed our visitors. Light refreshments, as well as tea and coffee, were served. Our visitors had a chance to look at items we had on display and at the artifacts in the Schoolhouse. There were many conversations with individual visitors before the chair addressed the group. We shared some of the accomplishments of Friends of the Schoolhouse during our over thirty years in existence.

We have supported the Schoolhouse staff by providing costumes and artifacts to support the program. We provided classroom supplies such as slates and slate pencils.

We paid to have many of the maps and charts professionally restored.

Heritage gardens were established to maintain a rural and historic atmosphere by establishing a variety of gardens and to create a positive environmental impact and to provide a separation from the board office.

Several of our members researched and compiled information on older schoolhouses in Peel. They published a book called "Echoes of the Past."

We erected a sundial to honour Eva Ardiel, a Schoolmistress when the Schoolhouse reopened.

We established "Ben's Corner," to commemorate Ben Madill's history as a student at the Schoolhouse and his assistance in rescuing old registers and working to preserve the Schoolhouse.

We were involved in community events such as the Brampton Fall Fair, Heritage Brampton and events in Mississauga to promote the Schoolhouse. The Strawberry Social event we held at the board office was always popular.

We felt this was a worthwhile event and a positive experience. It gave us a chance to share our history.

Be sure to check our website regularly. The Current News page is updated every month and has information about what is happening with The Friends, historical information, activities for the family, recipes and more.

**Schoolhouse Musings**  
Lisa Cafaro

Companion planting, an ancient agricultural practice, has found a steadfast home in Ontario's gardens.

Rooted in indigenous wisdom and cultivated through centuries of farming traditions, companion planting offers a holistic approach to gardening that fosters biodiversity, enhances soil health, and promotes natural pest management.

As gardeners across Ontario embrace sustainable practices, the art of companion planting continues to flourish, weaving together a tapestry of interconnected plants and fostering resilient ecosystems.

The practice of companion planting traces its origins to indigenous communities worldwide, who observed the natural relationships between plants and leveraged these connections to improve crop yields and resilience. In Ontario, First Nations communities traditionally interplanted corn, beans, and squash—a trio known as the "Three Sisters." This symbiotic planting scheme provided mutual benefits: corn provided a natural trellis for beans to climb, beans fixed nitrogen in the soil, benefiting corn, and squash acted as a living mulch, suppressing weeds and conserving moisture.

**Benefits of Companion Planting** Companion planting offers many benefits for gardeners:

1. **Biodiversity:** By diversifying plantings, companion planting creates a vibrant ecosystem that attracts beneficial insects, pollinators, and birds, promoting overall garden health.
2. **Natural Pest Management:** Certain companion plants emit odors or compounds that repel pests, reducing the need for chemical pesticides. For example, marigolds deter nematodes, while aromatic herbs like basil and thyme repel aphids and cabbage moths.
3. **Soil Health:** Nitrogen-fixing plants like legumes improve soil fertility, while deep-rooted plants like comfrey mine nutrients from deeper soil layers, enriching the topsoil.
4. **Space Optimization:** Intercropping compatible plants maximizes space utilization, allowing gardeners to grow more food in limited areas. For instance, interplanting low-growing lettuce beneath taller tomatoes optimizes vertical space.
5. **Enhanced Flavor:** Some companion plants, such as herbs and flowers, enhance the flavor of neighbouring vegetables. Planting dill near cucumbers or borage near strawberries can elevate taste profiles.

Here are some tried-and-true companion planting combinations for Ontario gardens:

- **Tomatoes and Basil:** Basil improves tomato flavor and deters pests like aphids and whiteflies.
- **Beans and Corn:** Beans fix nitrogen in the soil, benefiting nitrogen-hungry corn.
- **Carrots and Onions:** Interplanting carrots and onions deters pests and maximizes garden space.
- **Cucumbers and Nasturtiums:** Nasturtiums attract aphids away from cucumbers, acting as a sacrificial trap crop.
- **Lettuce and Radishes:** Radishes deter cucumber beetles when planted alongside lettuce.
- **Peppers and Chives:** Chives deter aphids and mites when planted near pepper plants.
- **Squash and Borage:** Borage attracts pollinators and deters pests when planted near squash.
- **Cabbage, Broccoli, Kale and Thyme:** Thyme helps deter cabbage worms when planted near brassicas.

Companion planting allows for the harmonious relationship between plants, fostering resilient and sustainable gardens across Ontario. By embracing this time-honoured practice, gardeners not only cultivate abundant harvests but also nurture ecosystems that thrive in harmony with nature's rhythms.

As Ontario's gardening landscape evolves, companion planting stands as an example of sustainable stewardship, weaving together past wisdom and future aspirations for a greener tomorrow.

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## **The History of Ice Cream**

Lisa Cafaro

As you savour the delightful coolness of a scoop of ice cream, have you ever wondered about the rich history of this delicious frozen treat?

Dating back to ancient China, around 200 BC, early versions of ice cream were made by mixing snow with fruit juices for flavor. Fast forward to the 7th century, and the Chinese began freezing dairy with salt (which created an exothermic reaction) to create a precursor to modern ice cream.

In the 4th century, ancient Persians mixed vermicelli noodles, ice and either fruit syrup or honey to create a sweet treat called faloodeh. It is still a popular dessert to this day in Turkey and neighbouring countries like Iran and Afghanistan during the hot summer months.

In the 13th century, Marco Polo returned to Italy from his travels with tales of frozen desserts. Soon after, Catherine de Medici of Italy introduced ice cream to France during her reign as queen.

However, it wasn't until the 17th century that ice cream gained popularity in Europe, with cafes and confectioners serving it to the elite. In the 18th century, advancements in refrigeration techniques made ice cream more accessible to the masses.

The United States got its first taste of ice cream in the 1700s, thanks to Quaker colonists who brought their recipes with them. It quickly became a favorite dessert, especially after the invention of the hand-cranked ice cream churn in the early 19th century.

Throughout the centuries, ice cream has evolved with the times, with new flavors and innovations continually delighting taste buds. From the humble beginnings of snow and fruit juice to the vast array of flavors and toppings available today, ice cream remains a timeless indulgence cherished by people worldwide.

So the next time you indulge in a scoop of creamy goodness, remember the centuries of history and innovation that have gone into creating this sweet sensation.

### **Ingredients**

9 oz. (250g) cottage cheese (5%-15%)  
3.5 oz. (100g) blueberries  
2 tbsp. maple syrup or sugar  
1/2 tsp. vanilla extract

### **Instructions**

1. Add the cottage cheese, blueberries, maple syrup or sugar to a bowl. Blend with a hand mixer or stand mixer until smooth
2. Transfer the mixture to a freezer safe container and freeze for 2-3 hours. Note—if frozen for more than 5 hours it may harden and need some time to soften out of the freezer.





## **More Ice Cream Stories**

Margaret Storey

Ice Cream - a quintessential summer treat we all love from the old fashioned flavours of vanilla, chocolate and strawberry to the newer flavours like Tiger Tail, Moose Tracks, Reese's Pieces, Cookies and Cream or Rocky Road!

Do you know the history of the ice cream cone? The first ice cream cone was made in 1896 by an Italian baker, Italo Marchiony. He had emigrated to the United States in the late 1800s. He invented his cone in New York City and applied for a patent. He was granted this in December 1903.

A similar cone was introduced, by accident in a way, at the World's Fair in St. Louis, Missouri in 1904. Ernest Hamwi was a Syrian vendor making and selling a crisp pastry similar to what we know as a waffle. He just happened to be next to an ice cream vendor. When that vendor ran out of dishes, Hamwi saw an opportunity. He quickly rolled one of his pastries into a cone shape. He passed it over to the ice cream vendor and once cooled it was able to be filled with ice cream. Everyone was happy and as they say, the rest is history. Soon special baking equipment was invented for making these cornucopia type cones. By 1924 an estimated 245 million cones were being produced. Imagine how many cones have been produced and enjoyed in the hundred years since then?

Now, what about the ice cream sundae? There are three historical versions about how this treat was invented. In the 1890s laws were being passed that prohibited the selling of soda water on a Sunday or the Sabbath. Evanston, Illinois was one of the first towns to pass such a law in 1890. These were known as the Blue Laws or Sunday Laws. They were to restrict or ban some activities on specific days. These were most often Sundays in the western world to preserve the observance of a day of rest. These laws often restricted shopping or the sale of certain items. So instead, local soda fountain owners would sell just the ice cream and the syrup without the soda on a Sunday. In Two Rivers, Wisconsin, Ed Berners, a soda fountain owner sold a dish of ice cream topped with syrup. It was so tasty he soon added this to his regular menu and charged a nickel.

A competing soda fountain owner nearby decided he too had to offer this new dish. He decided to charge a bit more but only offered this treat on a Sunday. He advertised it as a special Ice Cream Sunday. Once he realized he was making a profit, he changed the name to the Ice Cream Sundae and offered it every day of the week.

Still a third version takes place in 1903 in Ithaca, New York. A drug store owner, Chester Platt, prepared a dish of vanilla ice cream for a customer at his soda fountain. The customer also asked for some cherry syrup and a cherry on top. The customer was the Reverend John Scott! Since it was a Sunday it became known as a Cherry Sunday.

No matter who invented the Ice Cream Sundae it continues to be a well loved specialty treat!

The Banana Split is another specialty with varying soda fountain owners claiming to have invented the treat in the early 1900s. Using a boat shaped bowl, a banana was split in two. Three scoops of different flavoured ice cream were placed in the middle of the bowl. Then the flavoured syrups, whipped cream, chopped nuts were added and it was all topped off with a cherry. I have two friends in Chattanooga, Tennessee who celebrate their birthdays every year with a Banana Split. They have been doing this for at least 50 years!



So no matter whether the ice cream is in a bowl, a cone, as a Sundae or a Banana Split just enjoy every mouthful this summer!

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## **Saving History**

Daryl Cook



The Old Britannia Schoolhouse, S.S. No. 12 Toronto Township, stands today as it did one hundred and seventy-two years ago, thanks to the vision, dedication and energy of a group of students and staff at Streetsville Secondary School.

The one room school closed in 1959 and sat empty except for occasional renting to various business enterprises for a number of years. Vandals lit a fire in the middle of the schoolroom floor, using old school registers for fuel. The building could easily have been lost if Ben Madill and a friend had not seen the smoke and extinguished the fire. In the 1960s and 70s the building stood alone on Hurontario Street, a sad reminder of a vibrant era in the little community of Britannia. Large regional schools had quickly replaced the small one room schools and what once had been part of the communities' centre along with the local church no longer welcomed the children of the village. Britannia wasn't the only Peel school that fell into disrepair. Many were sold and turned into homes. Others disappeared entirely. Britannia was lucky that it survived.

The group at Streetsville Secondary School began researching the history of the school and became interested in trying to preserve and restore it. This involved students interested in history and also those in the building and construction classes. A survey of the building showed that it was in serious disrepair.



Sometime in the early 1900s a second classroom was added to the back of the schoolhouse.



By the 1970s the addition was in disrepair along with a storage shed at the back of the schoolhouse.



A boy checks the view from the bell tower.

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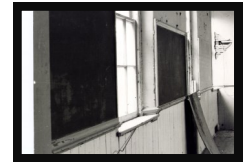
The interior, having survived the fire, was in bad condition too. There were no school desks or teaching materials left. Walls were filthy and falling apart. Photos of the back wall show what appears to be mould along the floor at the base of one wall. This is in an area below a drinking fountain. On the wall above this is a handwritten word "DRINK" though it's hard to imagine anyone would want to.



The front of the classroom shows the door to the second classroom, two slate blackboards with chalk markings on them and a platform that was traditional in these schoolhouses. A window shown in the photo has been boarded up and several glass panes are missing.



A photo of the south wall shows the same damage to the wall. In one section the plaster is broken away and the lathe exposed. This window seems to be in better condition, but the wood surrounding it is decayed. Electrical wires are strung along the wall as they are in other areas of the room. As in other areas, the wainscoting is damaged and in need of replacement. Slate boards seem to be in relatively good condition.



Streetsville students and staff took on the project of cleaning up the schoolroom and doing what repairs they could. It soon became apparent that the job of restoration was much too demanding for volunteers. The school board hired a consultant to evaluate the site and make recommendations about the restoration of the building.

Friends of the Schoolhouse have part of this report. It not only identifies areas that need to be repaired, but offers reasons for saving and restoring the schoolhouse.

**"To be familiar with the lifestyle of the people who pioneered in this area, is to identify with their capacity for hard work, their co-operative spirit, their discipline, their integrity and even their follies, under what must have been difficult conditions."**

...

**"The realization of this study could provide for people of all ages and for future generations opportunity to gain understanding into the educational heritage of this area."**

The study identified the same areas of concern noted in the photographs and listed many others as well. The exterior walls and foundation needed pointing, the chimney and bellfree were in poor condition. The report noted that in a number of areas deterioration is in an advanced state as a result of "indifferent maintenance procedures or poorly executed alterations in previous years." It also noted that restoration was possible and recommended.

In it's final summary the report notes:

**"The greater potential use of the schoolhouse is perceived to be an educational-historical orientation. As an historical site it exhibits a great deal of information about Peel residents in the middle 1800s."**

The Peel Board of Education funded and supervised the restoration and, following the report's recommendations, began a living history program for students. The Friends of the Schoolhouse have provided support for many years. We replaced the windows with period appropriate glass, had the chimney repaired for the second time, had a new cedar shingle roof installed. We continue to keep watch and report any necessary work that needs to be done. The building will be 200 years old in 2033. We hope it lasts for many more years to come.

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**What Is This?**

Here is one of the items that we have in our schoolhouse artifacts collection.

Can you identify what it is and what it was used for?



Answer below

**We welcome newsletter submissions**

The editor welcomes articles and ideas for the newsletter. There are still many people who experienced life in a small community like Britannia and attended a one room school. Do you have a story about your experiences? Do you have an old family recipe with a story to tell? Are there old fashioned games that you played years ago that children today don't know about? Schooling is different today than it was two hundred years ago when the first school was established in Britannia. Is there anything from the "old days" that should be brought back. These are only a few of the ideas that would make for interesting reading. If you would like to submit something, contact Daryl.

[dlcook@rogers.com](mailto:dlcook@rogers.com)

**What Is It Answer**

This is a butter press. After churning the butter you packed it into the press, let it harden, and then pressed it out to form a nice cube of butter.

**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.

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