

# The Old Britannia Schoolhouse

1852-1959  
restored 1982

Winter 2014



## Coming Events

Open Sundays:      April 13  
                                 May 11  
                                 June 8

Garden cleanup

## School Visits

December 2013      207 students  
January 2014        345 students

## *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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## Come Play in the Garden

We're already thinking of getting the historic schoolhouse gardens ready for summer. Soon the children who visit the schoolhouse will help to start growing the vegetable seedlings for planting outside when the ground warms up. Seeds of various kinds of vegetables are carefully placed in seedling trays and placed on the school window sills. They are carefully watched and watered until they are ready to plant in the warm spring earth. For many students, especially those who live in apartments, this is the first time they have experienced the "magic" of producing food from a tiny seed. Students who visit the schoolhouse in the fall will see the results of the summer's growth.

That magic also happens in the flower gardens. In March and April we watch as green shoots appear where before there was snow and brown earth. Bluebells, trilliums and mayapple are the first to appear—and, of course, the weeds.

We are always looking for interested garden volunteers, both adults and students, to help with the spring cleanup of the flower beds. Students can earn community volunteer hours. April and May are the busiest months. We usually work (play) four Saturday mornings when the weather cooperates. If you would like to help us please contact:

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



**Secondary school students gain community service hours while they help in the garden**



**There are always lots of bags full of debris at the end of a Saturday morning cleanup**

## From the Schoolmistress

Christine chapel

This winter has felt like a true Canadian winter with cold temperatures and loads of snow. One can imagine the conditions that the early settlers of Britannia endured and wonder at how they managed to survive and thrive. This has been a great topic of discussion with the children visiting the Schoolhouse this winter.



As the days begin to lengthen, our minds turn to a traditional rite of spring whose origins lie with the First Nations people of Canada – maple syrup making.

Centuries ago, the First Nations people learned to extract the sweet sap from sugar maple trees in order to produce maple syrup and, more often, maple sugar. Making a gash in the bark of the tree, they would set a birch bark vessel, known as a mukuk, beneath the cut and catch the dripping sap. They would then cook this clear liquid by pouring it into hollowed out logs and dropping hot rocks into the sap. Steam would rise from the log thus removing water from the solution and creating a more highly concentrated substance. The procedure was repeated over and over until, hours later, the liquid became thick, dark and sweet. Maple syrup! Further heating caused crystallization; maple sugar as we know it today.

The native people shared their knowledge with the European settlers who knew little about the climate or natural history of their new home. Maple syrup and sugar became welcome staples in a time when sugar was expensive and difficult to purchase. These settlers, having metal tools and utensils, were able to refine the method and speed up the process. They made metal spiles to be inserted into small holes drilled into the trees to extract the sap. The sap, collected using wooden yokes, was boiled in huge cast iron pots over large fires. Enough syrup and sugar was made for the entire year.

The entire family was involved in the activity. Children were kept out of school and expected to work in the sugar bush with the rest of the family, often for the entire maple syrup season, which generally begins at the end of February when temperatures rise above 0 degrees Celsius and the beginning of April when the buds start to flush. Some believe that this was the early beginnings of "March Break". The students today love the prospect of a six week March Break! The season would culminate with a "sugaring off" party, often with neighbours coming together to celebrate the end of the maple syrup season.

At the Peel Field Centres, the tradition continues. School children visit us at the Jack Smythe Field Centre and the Britannia sugar bush where they can experience the process of making maple syrup through hands on activities and demonstrations, walking in the very footsteps of those people from so long ago. Another wonderful example of the value of living history!



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### From the Chair

Ruth Taylor

Although we are not offering as many items for sale, we still had a successful day on December 8 when we combined Christmas sales with our Open Sunday. We had a very busy day on February 8 at Bramalea City Centre when we took part in Heritage Brampton. We do not sell there, but promote the schoolhouse and demonstrate our stock of old-fashioned toys. Adults and children alike are fascinated by them.

Although hosting at the schoolhouse has been replaced by providing a setting for engagement and/or wedding photos and some weddings, Friends made an exception by hosting a fortieth wedding anniversary celebration for my husband Dennis and me. We were pleased to be able to invite family and friends to gather in a place that means so much to us. A bonus was that the schoolhouse was decorated for Christmas. The actual date of our anniversary is December 22, but we held the event earlier due to its proximity to Christmas and the impending birth of our first grandchild. It was fortunate that we had an early celebration since our grandson arrived 5 days later. In addition, our anniversary coincided with the ice storm. Our grandson has now paid his first visit to the schoolhouse, although he did sleep through it.

Attendance at our January and February Open Sundays has been sparse, probably due to the severe winter weather. The theme for our March Open Sunday is Think Green! If we are lucky, we may even see some green grass emerging from under the growing mounds of snow.

### Sales Committee

Eva Ardiel

The Sales Committee was very pleased to have Julie Dippelhofer and Amy Smith join the committee in September. Julie was teaching at West Credit Secondary School and is now at Erindale Secondary School. Amy teaches at Thomas Street Middle School. Their fresh ideas and enthusiasm are a welcome addition to the committee.

The Friends did not sell their wares at the Peel Board Office this past November but did sell at the schoolhouse Christmas Open House. No new stock was purchased but the committee members made a number of items such as lavender sachets, beeswax candles, clothes peg and rag doll kits, Jacob's ladder kits, slate kits, ribbon angels, etc.. These items, along with the remnants of our former stock and the schoolhouse note and greeting cards, sold well to the good turnout of visitors on December 8<sup>th</sup>.

The future direction of "sales" is still being considered. Storage of our merchandise is a major problem.

We thank everyone who has supported the schoolhouse by purchasing our wares.

### Memorable Moments at Old Britannia Schoolhouse

Our schoolhouse has become a popular location for engagement and wedding photographs. In 2012 we played host on 16 such occasions. Photographers seek backgrounds at the schoolhouse as well as exterior shots at the Dunton House and the barn. Many couples visited the Schoolhouse when they were students, and now have a new memory to associate with us. **To arrange for a booking, please contact Sandy McGowan, Alternative Education Department at CBO (905-890-1010, Ext. 2152) to obtain a Board permit (\$56.94) and to make a donation to the Friends (\$150.00).**

## Credit Indian School

Joan Reid

*We have been working for over a year to prepare Joan's research and writing for publication. All of her work is now safely stored at the Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives in Brampton and has been converted to digital format. Here is a sample of her documentation of one of the many one room schools she researched. In future newsletters we will include other schools.*



**The Credit Indian Village was established on the west side of the Credit River approximately one mile from its mouth. From left to right are the school and council house, the church and Peter Jones' study.**

*Egerton Ryerson, *The Story of My Life*.*

One of the most intriguing one-room schools in Toronto Township was the one established at the Credit Indian Village. The school is of interest for several reasons: first, it was one of the earliest schools in the area; secondly, its teachers used the progressive teaching methods of the great Swiss reformer, Pestalozzi, whose ideas are a fundamental element in Ontario elementary schools today; thirdly, it was associated with Egerton Ryerson who laid the foundations for the public school system of Ontario; and finally, it was visited by a number of European observers whose biases flavoured the vivid accounts they left of what they saw. The key piece of the puzzle which is missing is a first-hand account by a native pupil.

Peter Jones was the son of surveyor Augustus Jones and his wife, who was the daughter of a Mississauga chief. In 1825 he and his brother John got permission from the Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada to build 20 houses and a common school for the Mississauga Indians. The project was sponsored by the Methodist Church. The government provided land for the village on the west bank of the Credit River approximately one mile from its mouth. Tenders for building the dressed log houses were given out in the fall of 1825 and a town site was laid out on the reservation. The village was in part payment to the Mississauga Indians for the surrender of their lands on either side of the Credit in 1818.

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Egerton Ryerson came to the Credit Indian Village at this time as a young 24-year-old Methodist missionary. With from 12 to 20 Native boys he chopped down trees and cleared brush in order to build a meeting-house that would serve as both a school and a Methodist chapel. He stayed for a year during which time he learned enough Ojibway to preach in that language.

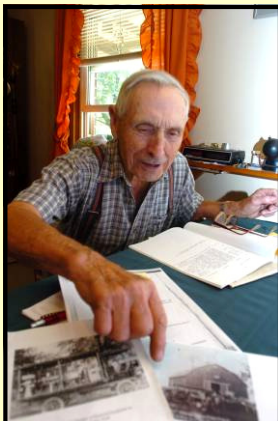
In May 1826 Peter Jones arranged for the opening of the day school. Both boys and girls learned the "3 R's" as well as the Bible and Catechism. The girls learned sewing and knitting while the boys learned the skills required for farming and fishing. Basil Hall, a visitor from England, toured the mission in 1827. He observed that most children and some adults could read English and were being taught writing and arithmetic.

James Magrath was an Anglican clergyman and a magistrate for the area as well as the leading landowner in Springfield (later Erindale). In March 1828 he wrote that out of a total population of 200 in the village there were 35 boys and 36 girls attending school. The school was free.



**Site of the Credit Indian School today.  
The Mississauga Golf and Country Club on Mississauga Road and the Queen Elizabeth Way**

*In the next few newsletters we would like to share some of Ben Madill's words of wisdom. This excerpt is from a letter he wrote after Friends sent a card for his ninety-eighth birthday.*



### *Ben's Corner*

**Life is as you make it and school is a very important part of it. Education is like building the foundation for a barn. If well done it will last for a lifetime.**



## Christmas at the Old Britannia Schoolhouse

Jean Robinson

Christmas is a special time at The Old Britannia Schoolhouse. A group of Friends started in late November to decorate The Schoolhouse with a fresh fir tree and pine and cedar swags. Unlike in the olden times when a tree would be cut down from a farmer's wood lot, ours comes from a local garden centre. Ken Robinson has developed a stand which holds the tree securely and allows water to be constantly added to the base (thanks to Schoolmistress Chapel.) The tree was decorated with Victorian style paper ornaments, popcorn and cranberry chains and small candles in tin holders. When we first began to decorate The Schoolhouse for Christmas in the 1990's taking over the task from Eva Ardiel, the Schoolmistress at the time, we used real popcorn and red wooden beads for the chains. The following day when the children came to school, the popcorn had been eaten and the wooden beads were found scattered all over the floor. The resident mice had enjoyed a special Christmas treat! Since that time we have relented and now we use plastic "popcorn". Most of the time the mice leave the chains alone!

Paper chains were a traditional decoration in early schoolrooms and many hands were employed making these out of crepe paper every year. The paper chains decorated the blackboards and anchored the swags in place, under the careful supervision of Eva Ardiel. The urns which hold a succession of annual flowers in the garden during the summer were converted into holders for evergreen boughs, dried grasses and osier branches to adorn the doorway. An evergreen wreath was added to The Schoolhouse door, completing the decorations in The Schoolhouse.

When all the decorations were in place and the boxes returned to Shirley Hoad's car to be stored in her basement, we settled down to a well earned chili dinner. Jean Robinson makes the chili every year and other "Friends" bring salads and Christmas goodies. As the saying goes, "Many hands make light work" and we are grateful for all the hard work the "Friends" do to prepare The Schoolhouse for the Christmas season for the children to enjoy and to delight the visitors who come for the Annual Christmas Open House and Sale.



**A welcoming wreath**



**Decisions, decisions, decisions!**

## Heritage Day

Jean Robinson

On Saturday, February 8, 2014, Friends of The Old Britannia Schoolhouse had a display at The Bramalea City Centre Mall to celebrate Heritage Day. Display boards outlined the history of the schools in Chinguacousy Township, with a diorama of where the One Room Schoolhouses in Peel were located. Another display showed lovely pictures of the Heritage Garden begun by the late Joan Reid and continued on by three dedicated gardeners with lots of help from student and adult volunteers.

Old wooden toys much like the ones grandparents and parents would have made in days gone by are always of great interest to the children and adults who crowded the display. Sliding Sarie, Tumbling Tom, the dancing man and the acrobats, as well as the marble games, were intriguing to children more used to their cell phones, tablets and computers than games that actually need neither electricity nor batteries to operate.

The skittles game was a very popular game and many children and adults spent a lot of time trying to outwit the spinning top.

It is always interesting to see the rest of the displays from the north area of the county and to learn of the sites, events and endeavours of other heritage groups to keep the history of Peel County alive. Dedicated volunteers in all these heritage organizations work hard to make the public aware of the unique buildings that are located in our midst.

Thanks to Ruth Taylor and Jean Robinson who organized this event for Friends of The Schoolhouse, to Eva Ardiel, Sandra Emerson, Marg Carson, Chris Chapel and Jean Robinson for setting up the display as well as many other volunteers who gave up their Saturday to make this event possible. Thanks to Eva Ardiel for renovating the display boards and for bringing the old wooden toys for all to enjoy, and to Ruth and Dennis Taylor who transported the items back to the schoolhouse at the end of the day. We can't do anything without our wonderful volunteers who make events like this possible and the Friends who support our efforts to keep the Old Britannia Schoolhouse current in the minds of the people of Peel County. Thank You!



**Battery-free toys fascinate**



**The skittles game kept everyone amused—  
and frustrated!**

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**Open Sundays**  
**A fun way to spend a Sunday afternoon**

**April 13 - Spring is in the Air!** Can you see anything in our garden yet? Do you see any insects? Make a daffodil or a lily to decorate your home!

**May 11 - Mother's Day!** Take your Mom for a tour of the Schoolhouse Garden. Then learn about the meaning of some of our flowers. Plant a seed for your Mom!

**June 8 - 2014 Father's Day!** Bring your dad to the schoolhouse for some fun. Play horse-shoes, try the stilts or any of our other Victorian games!

**Have you renewed your membership for 2014?**  
**Renewal forms are on our website.**

While the New Year is still young, please consider renewing your membership. Many thanks to those who have already renewed. Your continued support is much appreciated and enables the Friends of the Schoolhouse to carry on their valuable work in preserving and expanding the programs for the students who visit. We welcome new members. **Membership forms can be downloaded from our website:**

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

*An Invitation*

This is a special invitation for members to join the Friends of the Schoolhouse committee. We are always looking for new volunteers with new ideas to help us plan activities that will support and maintain the schoolhouse and its program. We meet on the second Tuesday of every month from 4 to 6 pm. Most of the committee members are able to attend every meeting but this is not required. Some go south for the winter or take trips so may miss a few meetings a year. We can offer you an interesting and rewarding experience along with great light refreshments at each meeting. **Please contact Shirley Hoad, [shoad@bell.net](mailto:shoad@bell.net), to volunteer.**

*E-mailed Newsletters*

If you are not already doing so, why not consider receiving your newsletters by email. This helps us save the cost of paper, printing and postage and also is kinder to the environment. Contact [dlcook@rogers.com](mailto:dlcook@rogers.com) and put "Emailed Newsletter" in the subject box to make this arrangement.

*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.

**Check our website often for the latest information.**  
**[www.britanniaschoolhousefriends.org](http://www.britanniaschoolhousefriends.org)**