

Street and Eliza or Rosebery Place as it is now, and whose sidewalks still have "Eliza" imprinted in the cement at the corners. Only poor Sarah White was left out. The Davis farm was an open common where horse races were run and games played.

So the new brick building to contain four rooms was started and called Central School because the village was now spreading Eastwards. The contractor was slow with the job and the school trustees came under such strong criticism that they were forced to meet secretly in homes or the occasional bar so the newspaper of Nov. 1855 reported " Our present school houses, far better adapted for pig sties than for places in which the tastes and habits of our young people are being formed, will likely have to be tenanted another winter to certain discomfort and demoralization of the children." Anyway the new school was finished and in 1856 the Village Council advertized for tenders to build a board walk, six feet wide on the East side of Elgin Street. This must have been a blessing to mothers whose children had come home with muddy feet. Later the School Board complained to the village council of the dangerous condition of the Wellington St. bridge at Crocker Ave. a span that most of the children were forced to use coming and going to the new school.

At the end of the first year, on June 30th the pupils had their examinations in the elegant and commodious school building. The rooms were festooned with decorations and a bower of flowers. Parents, relatives and city officials crowded the rooms for the exams were oral and covered the subjects of reading, geography, grammar, history, arithmetic and natural philosophy. The girls, dressed in their best, were also tested in drawing but it was not uncommon for a guest or a member of the Council to throw in a few questions of his own that might not only test the students' learning ability but also in a subtle way the teachers' teaching ability. The students were lined up on the stage and those who were unable to answer a question went to the end of the line, a terrible fate and so the old saying was true, " go to the foot of the class". Prizes of books were given as rewards.

Equipment for the class rooms consisted simply of blackboards and maybe a map on a curtain roller that was quickly pulled up out of the

way. The teacher's desk, according to Dr. Coyne who attended both the old Common School and the new one on Wellington St., was an open packing case with the open end for the teacher's knees and when the youngest student was sleepy would crawl in to have forty winks. The windows were frosted and each room heated by its own wood stove. Tenders for dry and green wood were submitted to the School Board each Fall and the price included splitting and stacking. At first the ashes were dumped in one end of the yard but about 1860 a brick shed was built to store the ashes to be sold later. The student sat on benches of split logs at first but some time in that decade double desks were provided with seats.

One of the early teachers was Mr. William Beggs who demonstrated science and physics, and he could produce such wonderful things as a current that would make the boy's hair stand on end when they touched something. He put on a science show, selling tickets for 25 cents around the township and in this way raised enough money to provide maps and astronomy equipment plus geological samples for the class rooms.

In 1866 the old Grammar School was moved from Port Stanley Street to join the Central School and it was then the County and Village School Boards were combined calling the new system the United School. This building was used for the primary classes so the senior students could have more room. The old Common School frame building was used as the living quarters for the janitor, his wood for heat and \$1.00 per week as remuneration for his services.

There were six teachers for 366 pupils.

The school board met sporadically in the Town Hall or at the Hutchinson House with Judge David J. Hughes in the chair and the bills to be paid were mainly for repairs, green and dried wood, crayons from Archie McLachlin's book, stationery, music, fancy goods and wall paper store or to build a fence around the school property to keep the pigs and cows out of the school play grounds. A teacher's salary was \$250.00 per annum plus or minus depending on their education. There were no education taxes added to property taxes as we have now for schooling was not free. Students bought their tickets at 25¢ at Kents Drug Store or at Morgan's grocery store. At that time the Province of Upper Canada gave grants for high School education, Grammar School, but they didn't

consider girls capable of advanced studies and so refused any grants for them ---- they were considered only capable of mastering the gentle arts of sewing, music, deportment (how to be a lady) and French. However they were welcome to enroll in St. Thomas Grammar School.

In 1868 a "Select School for Ladies " was opened by Miss Mahar and Mrs. M. Morphy on Elgin St. and promised to teach their charges plain and fancy needlework, music and conversational French. The school didn't operate long and I wonder if St. Thomas girls preferred to be tom-boys.

By 1872 pupils numbered 878 reflecting the fact that St. Thomas was busting at the seams so at a cost of \$4500 a new addition was made and in the newspaper an item appeared stating that with these new accommodations there were two teachers exclusively for High School. St. Thomas was becoming a railroad hub and in a few years even these accommodations were overcrowded and with the city spreading Eastward the parents in St. David's Ward demanded a school of their own. Balaclava had its start as a small school then expanding into a 8 room one. In 1877 at the foot of Perril St. a separate High School was built with Mr. John Millar its first Principal and my Grandfather, John W. Cook, the Math Master. This was the first Collegiate Institute.

Myrtle St. School, a four room white brick was built in 1881 with Miss M. Smythe its head teacher and four years later, in 1885, Manitoba St. School was added to the educational facilities.

St. Thomas kept growing and every room was so over crowded that irate parents became dissatisfied that their children were only allowed half day instruction and demanded larger schools. Thus it was in 1898 that Central, now called Wellington St. School and Balaclava were replaced with the present fine twelve room brick buildings. I wonder how many pairs of feet have helped to wear away the stair treads in the last 75 years. One of the arguments used for the necessity for new schools was the poor ventilation and unsanitary conditions of the old schools that contributed to high absentee rate of both pupils and teachers due to illness. No wonder for there was no running water in the buildings a tin cup on a chain attached to the well pump was provided for quenching the thirst and a wee " 4 holer" hoosied on Erie St. (Gladstone Ave.) side of the yard and out behind the wood shed was the comfort station.

In the hot summer months residents complained of the strong aroma drifting their way so it was decided to have them cleaned out more often.

Students will be students even in the old days and the School Board had to deal with such problems as broken windows, Halloween pranks and boys smolking behind the wood house. Notes were sent to parents charging them with responsibility when their child had done it. Dicipline was more severe then, too, for liberal use of the pointer, ruler or tawse was a fact of life for the boys and a little matter of pride and boasting as to how many strokes they had received. The girls were not excused from such punishment for early in the 1860s a father complained to the Board that his daughter had been too harshly whipped. On investigation it was found she had been insubordinate and deserved it. Frequently a pupil was expelled as reported to the Board by his teacher and only reinstated by application by the parent with the child appearing before his class with an apology and promise to conduct himself in a more acceptable manner. Do you remember the stool in the corner and a dunce cap?

Other schools were added to the educational system ---- Scott in 1882 with Miss Lizzie Hall as the first principal of the eight rooms and it too has been rebuilt to its present building. There are still others built in our own time. St. Thomas was one of the first centres in the Province to have a Model School when they were established by the Province. These were the beginnings of the Normal Schools to prepare young men and women for the teaching profession. Mr. N.M. Campbell was the Principal and classes were held in Central School when there was room and in any other when it was crowded. The first class held in 1877 had 24 budding teachers enrolled.

Arthur Voaden Secondary School was opened in 1926 as a technical school to train the many young people whose talents lay in their hands such as woodworking, tinsmithing, carshops and mechanical drawing etc. and for the girls sewing and home economics. This school was named for Dr. Arthur Voaden who started to teach at the old Collegiate in 1891 at the grand salary of \$150.00 a year. It provided a modern gymnasium and the Collegiate students took their Physical Ed. there for at that time Collegiate had a barn on the West side of the property that did for gymn classes. In winter the girls froze as they changed into their

bloomers. A stove in the corner did little to warm the place. The "Barn" had replaced a greenhouse that in earlier days had supplied all the schools with flowers and shrubs and the Collegiate Custodian was also the nurseryman.

When Wellington and Balaclava Schools were built in 1899 expensive central heating systems were installed but they were unsatisfactory and inefficient so the rooms were as cold as barns in the Winter. Until they were fixed the School Board issued orders that no windows were to be open and any teacher guilty of leaving her door open would be suspended.

Our schools are modern and well equiped to-day and a far cry from some that I attended. How many of you went to a one room country school with a large pot-bellied stove in the middle of the room ? The teacher did her very best for her pupils and turned out some pretty solid citizens*. Those schools were the centre of the farm community where dances, plays, meetings and box-socials were held. No buses toted the children to and fro and to walk a mile was nothing through the rain, snow and heat. They are fond memories now for they have passed into history.

Lessons were done on slates with a slate pencil attached by a string as books were few and given as prizes at exam time for high marks. In 1866 the School Board ordered \$30.00 worth for just such a purpose. By 1880 each school had developed a collection of books that the Trustees had approved about \$75.00 a year for.

Just before my time school readers were bought from Eatons the price being 2cents, three cents etc. depending on the grade and the stories contained lessons in history, geography and didn't forget morals. We all remember poems we learned in the early grades.

Have I given you a little look into the past? Someone has said "never look back " but there is much in our history that is worth looking back at to treasure and remember.

Catherine J. Lemmon

1968
REUNION



S.S. OF
NO. 12

A few teachers who helped
to make S.S. #12 what it was



Left to Right : (front row) Norma Rooney
(Mrs. Miller), Miss Myrtle Paddon, Lois Paddon,
May Fitch (Mrs. Hull), Ethel Agar, Madeline McCormick
(Mrs. McLaughlin), and Bessie Dancey (Mrs. Cook)
(back row) Helen Glahn (Mrs. Harris), Nola Mitchell
(Mrs. Storms) and Marjorie Watson.

THE PROGRAM CONSISTED OF

. A pot-luck dinner topped by a piece of cake. It was decorated by Mrs. Donna Axford and showed a picture of the school.



Mrs. Bessie Cook cutting the cake.