

- Written by BYRON MUNROE,

In writing the histories of our school sections we are indeed writing of the very foundation stones of the nation. There is no school section, however small, but contributes immeasurably to the national life of the country. This contribution is not in the amount of tax a section may pay. It is in the character of its people, the qualities that have been instilled in them at the hands of the old schoolmaster, the virtues, that as they go out into the world lead them to positions of great responsibilities to their country and their fellow-men.

This school section, of which I write, is but one of thousands throughout the country, having the similar characteristics of all -- the conventional school building -- the several hundred acres of land comprising the section itself -- the assessed value of such and such an amount -- if it were only of these things that we write it would be dull and uninteresting indeed. But there is more to a school section than the material things visible to the human eye. There are the intangible things that the eye cannot see and only the heart can understand -- The love that ever draws us to the old associates of our school days -- The hallowed memories that cling like a golden cloud around those far-off times. The old scenes to which we look back as a sacred memory. These are the spiritual things that are stronger than the bricks and mortar that hold the building together. These are the things that cannot be valued by the pen of any assessor.

School section No. 2 Aldborough extends from Lake Erie on the south to what is known as Hogg Street on the north, a distance of approximately four miles. The section follows the Furnival Road for these four miles, with its boundaries roughly a mile and a half on either side of this road. In some ways this section can be referred to as the parent section of the township, as it has within its area the Hamlet of Port

Glasgow and the famous Nelly's Hill, where the first immigrants from the Highlands of Scotland settled.

The first school was held at the home of Mr. George Munroe on Middle Street. Mr. Munroe who was a magistrate, surveyor, and Colonel of the army, sometimes supplied as teacher in the absence or indisposition of the regular teacher. Once while teaching on one of these occasions he had much difficulty in teaching one particular pupil to remember the letter Z. After repeated attempts which ended in failure, the old gentleman took drastic action. He made the pupil cut out a square of paper and write on it in big print the letter Z. "Now lad," he exclaimed in his broad scottish accent, "I will see to it that you will always remember this letter", then making the lad roll the paper up in a ball, he made him swallow it, Z and all, in front of all the school. Years afterward this same pupil, then an old man, told me that for the rest of his life the one letter of the alphabet that stood out indelibly in his memory was this letter Z.

Another anecdote of those early school days was once told me by the late Daniel Gray. One of his school chums was asked by the teacher to stand and repeat the alphabet. The boy proceeded as far as the letter S, but was unable to remember the letter T which followed. The teacher in order to prompt his memory thought if he could make the lad think of the word "tea" it would give him the clue to the letter. "Now" said the teacher to him, "Think deeply, what does your father drink at home." The lad's answer was immediate, "Whisky, sir." he replied.

Mr. Munroe's home served as a school until a regular building could be erected for that purpose. This was built on the east side of the Furnival Road, a short distance from his place, and was known as McBrides' School.

What was an early pioneer school like? The first ones before lumber mills were established were built of logs, dovetailed

together, and chinked with clay. The roof was covered with strips of bark. To heat this building a fireplace of stones was built with a chimney of clay and logs. On the hearth the great "back log" usually of elm smouldered away. This wide fireplace, with its roaring draught ensured good ventilation and the air, though often smoky, was not impure. The children sat in rows on rough hewn benches. Charcoal was often used as chalk and quill pens made from goose feathers were also used. Gradually as sawmills were established along the creeks these crud buildings gave way to frame structures.

For much of the history of these early schools we are indebted to the late Archibald McColl a faithful recorder of the early pioneer history of the land.

After McBrides' School was in operation for several years, the residents nearer the lake, who were increasing in numbers, decided this school was too far away from the main centre of population and so a school was erected on Lot 4, Concession 13. This school was built of clay with wood to bind the building together. The clay was sun-dried. This building came to an untimely end -- an end that is often dreamed of by school children, I suppose, in every school. The pupils of this school, who in those days, were very big boys of eighteen or nineteen years of age once got into a keg of liquor at a neighbour's house. Proceeding to get very drunk they returned to the school, began pulling out the clay, and urged on by their natural antipathy against schools in general, proceeded amid shouts of triumph to demolish it completely. Thus one school house in the country came to an end that is often dreamed of by the pupils of the land.

After the school was torn down another more substantial building was built on the same site. This was built of logs, covered by clapboard, about four feet long, split out of oak logs. In the school a large chimney of clay and wood was built, the chimney often getting on

fire. A number of teachers taught in this school, among others Mr. D. Currie who was settled close by. He was a man of more than ordinary learning, having studied for the ministry in the scottish colleges. He was a master of seven different languages. Mr. Currie was expert at making quill pens; the children would bring the quills to school, and kept him busy making pens.

Another teacher was Mr. Stewart who was studying medicine. He taught a short time. The reason for his short tenure in this school was as follows: "The knoll on which the school house stood was known as Squaw Hill and was once used as an Indian Burial Ground. Mr. Stewart, always interested in his medical studies, one day dug up the skeleton of a squaw, which he hung in the school house to be used for the study of physiology. The Indians, hearing of the desecration of the grave, threatened to take the life of the man who had done the deed. Mr. Stewart heard of the threat and in the words of the historian, Mr. McColl, suddenly discovered he had business in another section of the globe, and the place that once knew him, knew him no more forever." The neighbours buried the skeleton and no more was heard of the matter.

In a few years the bounds of the school section was changed again and the next school was built east of New Glasgow cemetery. This school was only used for a short time, as the people of Port Glasgow which was then becoming quite a centre demanded a school there. This was built. The first lady teacher here was Miss Catherine MacDiarmid. She received a salary of from 12 to 14 dollars a month, with as Mr. McColl relates, "The privilege of paying board."

The next move was to build a school house at New Glasgow, where the school was kept going for a number of years. A number of excellent teachers taught in this school, which was declared by inspector Butler to be the best run school in the county. Mr. Butler would visit the school in the afternoon and stay in the village overnight. In the

evening he would hold a meeting in the school house to which the parents and the pupils were invited. He was interesting to listen to. Among the teachers who taught here were Mr. Ebenezer McColl, afterwards superintendent of Indian agencies in the north west, Mr. F. McIntyre afterward principal of one of the colleges in Toronto, Mr. A. McDonald afterward teacher at Merrickville, Mr. A. Gordon who walked from Wardsville a distance of 12 or 13 miles but would break the monotony of the journey by stopping at the hotel in Rodney to refresh himself. One pleasant recollection the pupils had of him was when he gathered mushrooms and made ketchup in the school. Apparently music could not have been much encouraged in those early schools by the parents as Mr. McColl in his history relates that one of these teachers in this school a Mr. Finney was "fonder of teaching music than the things that should be taught."

Another teacher in the school was Miss Annie Campbell, who was a faithful teacher. This school stood adjacent to the Presbyterian Church. The ladies of the church often held "Tea-meetings", but these "Tea-meetings" consisted of a big supper of all kinds of food. Next morning the ladies would gather the surplus food in baskets and invite the school children across to the church lawn, where they were given as much food as they could possibly eat.

This New Glasgow school house served as a Community Hall. All public meetings, political and social were held here. It was also used as a meeting house for a lodge known as the Sons of Templars.

Gradually as the population became more spread out a new school house was built a mile north of New Glasgow on the corner of Silver Street and the Furnival Road. This is the school house used by the section today.

The life of the pioneers of this section along with the other sections was primitive and harsh. The country on their arrival was

an unbroken forest. The families arrived by boat and landed on Nelly's Hill at the mouth of the Sixteen Creek, so called because it was 16 miles west of Port Talbot. Here the families camped, while the men went into the forests to mark out their allotments of land. Each man was given a free grant of 50 acres of land by Colonel Talbot on condition that he clear 10 acres of this land, build a house of prescribed dimensions, and open a road along half of his property, all this to be done in a 3 year period. He was then privileged to buy the other 150 acres of his allotment at a price of \$3.00 per acre.

The first task of course was building the houses. These were built of logs with roofs of elm bark. The beds were made of poles cut from the forest with strips of basswood bark used as thongs and the mattress a big sack stuffed with straw or leaves. The babies were rocked to sleep in a sap trough, a small short log of basswood, hollowed out in the centre, to which crude rockers were added. The mothers clothed the families with wool garments, the wool being spun on the spinning wheel in the home.

The first work of the men was to clear enough land to grow wheat to provide flour for the families. The trees were felled, cut into logs, and burned as there was, at that early date, no sawmills established to cut lumber. Neither were there grist-mills and the wheat was crushed by stones in a hollowed out stump to provide the flour. Colonel Talbot had established a grist-mill at an earlier date at Tyrconnel but this had been burned in 1813 by the invading Americans. In 1819 the Colonel gave the grinding stones to Mr. McKellar who established a mill on the Sixteen Creek. This mill then ground the flour for the community. A dock was then built at Port Glasgow, at the mouth of the Sixteen Creek, under the shelter of Nelly's Hill. Here came the old Sailing Vessels. The settlers first commodity they sold to these vessels was charcoal as there was a market for it abroad at the time.