

Kath Towsley recalls school days at the Northern Academy

Written by Bryne Hall

They had to work very hard that first year!

To prepare the former Experimental Farm in Monteith for the first and only boarding school for those students in the north-eastern region who didn't have their own high school, meant that the first students had to complete their first year from January to June. That was in 1921.

But Kathleen Ginn Towsley did it.

Kath, as she is known to so many in the Iroquois Falls district recalled her experiences at the "Northern Academy in Monteith" at the March 5, 1987 meeting of the Historical Society of Iroquois Falls.

Prior to becoming the only boarding school in this area, in 1921, the premises had been an Experimental Farm run by the Department of Agriculture of Ontario. It had been built in 1913, and Kath remembers the day it opened. They held 'visitors' Day' in July, and she and her family went by train from Matheson. There was her father, Frank Ginn, who was the Matheson town clerk, registrar and crown land agent, her mother, her gran, her sister Joan and herself. The family was originally from Woodford Green in England.

After the First World War, in 1918, the centre became known as the Veterans' Retraining Centre and many ex-servicemen came to train in agriculture. But northern Farming didn't prove popular. Therefore it opened as a resident high school in January of 1921. It was known as The Northern Academy of Monteith and pupils came from an area that reached from Hearst to Lindsay. Kath was one of those first students.

Hydro Power for the school and town was supplied by a small dam on the Driftwood River adjacent to the Hawk Lake Lumber Co. mill.

The school's tuition fees sound low to us today - under \$200 - but it was high enough in the Twenties! Kath remembers that she received a weekly allowance per week of fifty cents. A BIG thing!