

A Historical Event in Our Community

The Cyclone at Castleford in June 1893

The little log schoolhouse on the River Road at Castleford was known as S.S. 3, meaning the third school section in Horton Township, that being in Renfrew County, Ontario. Its situation was ideal in that the distances to be walked were divided fairly; the farthest in any direction being about 2 1/2 miles.

A rail fence enclosed the schoolyard. A gravel road went by at the front or north side, meeting one on the west side. To the east was the Johnson farm and across the road in front was the McConneghy farm. It backed on to the Ottawa River where it was wide enough to be a lake, Chats Lake.

There was ample playground for ball and tag but it was more fun to hop over the rail fence behind the school and play hide-and-go-seek in the woods there. Through the woods, atop a hill was the O'Brey farm.

The children had had a happy noon hour running barefooted and free on that lovely summer day. The teacher, Miss Sterling, had had a quiet lunchtime inside as the children had chosen to eat outside, mostly on the run. She had rung the big brass hand bell and they settled quickly into their double seats. Work had begun. Everyone was quietly busy.

The sunshine disappeared. A gloomy light filled the room. The teacher, working with fourth class, stepped to a west window and peered out. "There may be a storm coming," she said. "You wouldn't have time to get home before it comes, so we'll just continue as well as we can. The coal-oil lamps wouldn't help enough to bother lighting them."

The first and second year children slid closer to each other on their wide benches. The middle classes nervously continued to work on their slates frequently looking up under furrowed brows toward the west windows.

Suddenly Queen Victoria's portrait fell from the front wall, the glass shattering. Children screamed. There came a loud cracking and plaster fell from the ceiling, crashing onto the teacher's desk.