

# Little Red School House More Than 100 Years Old

By MARION PHILLIPS

The little red school house at Mathers Corners, near Keene, is the only school in Otonabee Township that has withstood the rigors of pioneer days and is still in use today.

It was built of logs on McFarlane's farm more than 100 years ago. The earliest date recorded is 1843 but it is believed that it dates back earlier than this.

Mathers school, as it is known, had an enrolment in 1850 of 55 students and by 1855 there were 79. There are 30 pupils attending the school now, with Mrs. Jean Stewart as teacher.

There have been many changes at the school. The seats of wide-plank, which held two or three students, have been replaced by desks. An oil furnace replaced the old iron box stove, which reposed in the centre of the room and had a wooden railing around it, ideal for drying wet mittens.

Old teaching methods have been replaced by modern devices and, electricity has replaced oil lamps.

A list of early day teachers is a roster of well known area names. Burroughs, Wood, Campbell, Eason, Padgett, Cowan, Kerr, Bell, Nicholls, Cameron, Gillespie, Brealy, Whitfield, Hall and Stewart.

Forty-two teachers since 1880 reveals an average stay of two years, not a poor average when you consider that all but 11 of these teachers were "maiden ladies".

"This is not the first school that was built in the area", recalled Mrs. Alice Davidson, of Keene, "This was the seventh. The first school was built on our place in 1829 and later called Villiers school. It was a log building and had glass windows, quite an architectural achievement".

She added that the school had been obtained through the efforts of Cobourg people and it was from Cobourg that the first teacher came.

The story that goes with the hiring of David Houston, the first teacher in Otonabee Township involves "Uncle" Archie Nelson, one of the

earliest settlers who was chairman of the first school board.

It was the board's duty, in those days, not only to hire the teachers but to "certify" them as well. The board met the new teacher at the tavern and "Uncle Archie" produced an old speller, the only one to be found in the section.

Holding the book upside down (he could read equally well with the book either way, not being able to read at all), he asked the prospective teacher to spell "symmetrical" and "Mediterranean".

The candidate muttered some letters, but as none of the gentlemen present could spell very well no one knows whether the teacher could.

Apparently he satisfied the board because "Uncle Archie" said, "The gentleman seems to have sufficient education, so if he will treat the members of the board we will give him the position". For the price of three drinks of whiskey, which sold for 75 cents a gallon, and an attempt to spell two words the applicant was certified a teacher and hired.

When Sir Peregrine Maitland, Lieut-Governor of Upper Canada visited Keene and the new settlement in Douro in the winter of 1836 he was petitioned by the settlers to "send us clergymen to administer to us the comforts of our Holy Religion and competent schoolmasters to instruct our children".

At the same meeting W. Connel was appointed to clean the stove pipes and repair the wood shed, Jas. Shearer was appointed auditor and Mr. Wigmore was hired as school master.

The history of the 6th line school dates from 1833 when 21 pupils attended. The attendance at this frame school climbed to 93 in 1858. James Anderson taught in 1856 and John Middleton in 1857. It was noted that a salary of \$390, was paid in 1858.

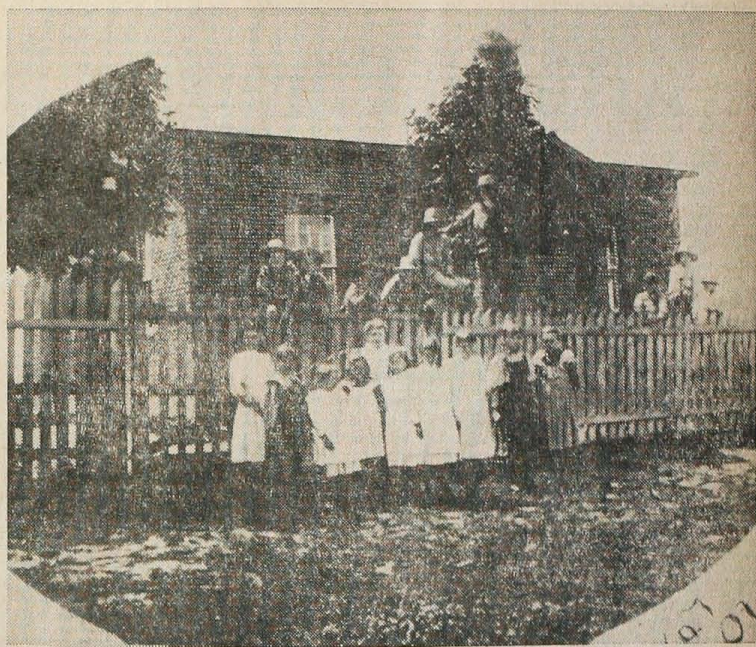
There were only nine schools in Peterborough County in 1846 and the newly appointed superintendent, Elias Burnham reported the only school books

he could find in the area were two English grammars, an occasional geography, no history, except for a few reading books and no other book in general use except the Bible. It was noted that many of the books were chained to the teacher's desk to keep them from disappearing.

The position of superintendent was arduous since it required travelling 600 to 800 miles, on horseback, each year to visit the schools.

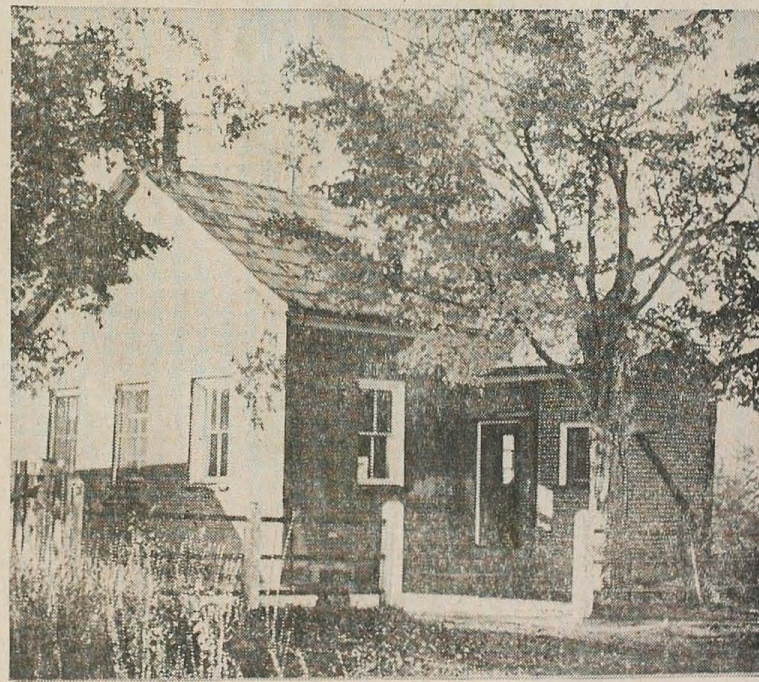
The Keene area appears to be the education centre of the 1800s. In 1844 there were 13 school sections and four union school sections in the country with the largest being in Keene. The log hut was gradually being replaced by "handsome brick buildings".

The first school opened in Keene in 1832 and Thomas J. Denhy taught 20 children. He was a deputy-surveyor and a member of the militia. He contributed to the area by making the first reliable maps of the Hastings district. Some of these maps are still in use.



MATHERS SCHOOL IN THE 1880's

Among those sitting on the fence is Sam Comrie, a nonagenarian still living in the area and the late Stuart McIntyre whose sons and grandsons still live in Otonabee Township.



THE SCHOOL AS IT LOOKS TODAY  
Fifty-Five Students in 1850

## WIs Display Quilts Of Interest

The Women's Institute 1964 Fair exhibit has the theme "The Quilting Bee" and a collection of six hand-sewn quilt blocks is entered by each for competition.

However, they have been invited to display interesting quilts belonging to institute members, though not necessarily made by them.

One of these was made 80 years ago by Mrs. Thomas Davidson of Birdsall, and another was made by Miss Sarah Shearer of Keene about 1889.

Many visitors to the exhibit are pressing forward to read names on an autograph quilt made by Mrs. Wm. Davis of Warsaw prior to her marriage in 1894.

The Provincial flower emblems of Canada's ten provinces decorate the blocks of a display quilt that would surely serve as an attractive bed-spread.

Patchwork patterns are numerous and they carry some very descriptive names — such as "pieced drunkard's path", "broken dishes", "wagon tracks", "starry path", "hands all round", "robbing Peter to pay Paul." — that tell the story of pioneer life in Canada.

And the technique of quilting is being demonstrated for the younger generation during the fair.

A quilt top just completed by an institute member is set up on a frame in the women's building and members from the 11 institutes entered in competition will take turns at the hand-sewing.

Prize-winners in the quilt block competition are: 1. Trent River; 2. Havelock; 3. Keene; 4. Buckhorn; 5. South Smith.

## More Activity Urged Of WI Women 1964

GUELPH (CP) — Canadian women, among the most privileged in the world, should broaden their interests, 500 delegates to the annual conference of the Federated Women's Institute of Ontario were told Wednesday.

President Mrs. L. R. Trivers of Thessalon challenged them to expand their activities by taking extension courses and an active interest in the nation's affairs.

Ontario Agriculture Minister Stewart, who attended the opening ceremonies, congratulated the federation on its achievements.

Among these were work with handicapped children, a scholarship program and a \$50,000 project to train home economists to assist underdeveloped countries.

## Westwood Takes Crown In Final OASA Playoff

SEPT. 26, 1964

WESTWOOD (ENS) — Westwood won the Ontario Amateur Softball Association junior D championship Saturday when they defeated Clavering 5-1 in Brampton.

Murray Payne was the winning hurler as he pitched a two-hitter. He struckout eight and

walked two. Bill Perkins was the loser. He fanned 10, walked three and allowed 11 hits.

Bob Middlebrook of Westwood, slammed the only homer in the game.

Westwood scored once in the third, fifth and seventh innings and twice in the fourth. Clavering got one in the sixth.

## Federated WI Of Canada Elects President

WOLFVILLE, N.S. (CP) — Mrs. Philip Matheson of Oyster Bed Bridge, P.E.I. was elected national president of the Federated Women's Institute of Canada Thursday at the convention.

Mrs. Matheson, wife of the Prince Edward Island minister of highways and public works, succeeds Mrs. James Haggerty of Nananee, Ont. JUNE 1964