

S.S. No. 4 WEST ZORRA - Harrington School

In 1850, a deed was obtained from David Demorest for the quarter acre lot on which Harrington school now stands, for the princely sum of one shilling. Harrington had originally been called Springfield.

Many pupils, who had previously gone to Bennington and Brookdale schools came to this new log school in the 1850's. Over 100 students, many of them in their late teens and early 20's attended. Seats and desks were homemade. A box stove provided heat. The teacher's desk was long and low and the teacher sat on a branch. A rail fence surrounded the school yard.

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"The Embro W. Zorra
Optimist Club's"
'The Highland
View' - June/99

Because of a lack of space, light and other requirements, the trustees gave Mr. Grant of St. Mary's the contract to build. The result was the attractive stone edifice, which catches one's eye to this day.

It was a joyous group of 112 students who in 1896 was ushered into this wonderfully improved 'hall of learning', by their teacher Norman melodrama. They enjoyed new double seats, better lighting and heating system, windows that opened from both top and bottom and rolling shades (blinds?) to guard against cross lighting and to prevent direct sunlight from falling on the desks. Painted woodwork and hardwood floors created a great contrast to what their surroundings had once been. There were not enough seats to accommodate all the children and for a while a second teacher was engaged to teach in the cloak room. In 1902 the basement was dug out and a furnace installed.

In 1878 the brick addition was built at a cost of \$725.00. Both rooms were used from 1878 to 1913; from 1913 to 1923 only the stone room was used.

Water was piped from across the road in the early 1920's. In 1924 the brick room was furnished with new seats, slate blackboards, new window blinds and was redecorated. A large cupboard to hold equipment for High School work was installed in the brick room. Hydro came to the school in 1932.

Harrington school was famous for its wonderful school concerts. Proceeds from these events were used to purchase an organ, a piano, bookcase, many books, a new school fence and other extras.

The School Fair was an annual event of great interest for many years. Harrington students brought home a goodly share of prizes for singing, parading, public speaking and school and individual exhibits. The boys won the West Zorra Junior Judging trophy three times and so it became their property and was to remain in the school. When the school. When the school fair was discontinued, township schools participated in the Embro Fair - participation which continues to this day.

Names of students and teachers who gained fame have faded in the mists of time, however one stands out - Charles Gordon - better known as Ralph Conner. Skipping ahead to the 1960's when some of the one room schools were to be auctioned off, including Harrington school, the local residents expressed a desire to retain the building as a community centre, because it was Ralph Conner's school. Contrary to popular belief Ralph Conner (Dr. Charles Gordon) one of Canada's foremost literary and theological sons, did not spend his entire boyhood in the Glengarry he made so memorable. From the age of ten to thirty, Harrington was his home. He was born in Glengarry, September 13, 1860. In 1870, his father, Reverend Donald Gordon, came to the Presbyterian Church in Harrington, where he remained until 1890. During this time young Charles attended the village school and a nearby High School, taught in rural schools in the area, and attended the University of Toronto. He did post graduate work in Edinburgh and in 1889 returned to Harrington to take over the charge during his father's illness. In 1890, when his mother died, he left for the West to begin his own career as a minister and a writer.

Hot lunches were served to the school in the early 1930's. In 1937, manual training became a part of the curriculum and equipment was purchased for this purpose. Music was also added the same year. Marguerite Murray of Maplewood was the music teacher. In 1941, 1 7/8ths acres was purchased from James Clark for \$106.00. The local school board passed out of existence and West Zorra Township school are created. The process begun 50 plus years ago (loss of our own destiny) which made sense at the time, has accelerated in recent years and many schools are desperately trying to hold on to what they once had. In 1949, new and modern conveniences were added - flush toilets and sinks in the brick room, a concrete floor in the basement to accommodate a new stoker furnace. Previously a pipe fence along the road sides of the yard had been erected, new steps and a pipe railing were added to the entrance of the stone room. A hardwood floor and desks on skids as well as cupboards below the blackboards, again raised the standard to provide a well-equipped school room. In 1957, the brick room was re-opened and redecorated because of an increased enrollment. Just as in days past the school fair was the secondary focus for the two weeks of September. (Lesson's were First.) Hallowe'en, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's day were recognized, usually in Art class. By late October the teachers were searching for Christmas concert material. Practice was incorporated into classes by early November depending on the number of recitation,

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dialogues, drills, choruses etc., that were needed to ensure every student had an opportunity to be in the spot light. Public speaking was another highlight when the ablest speaker was chosen to represent the school and compete with students from the other township schools at the town hall in Embro.

Harrington school had to be the envy of all other schools with its wonderful hill for sleighriding. Sometimes, a sled was not needed. Just sit and slide! And the Pond! Skating in the winter and swimming in warm weather. Arbor Day was 'Spring Cleaning' inside and out. When the job was finished, off on a hike along the creek. Fishing poles and hot dogs, marshmallows, occasional wet feet were the

rewards for having worked hard all morning. These days came to an end in 1996, when all the one-room schools closed their doors and were put on the auction block. It was at this point the Harrington residents collected \$1,400.00 to buy their school at the auction and had enough money left over to repair and refurbish it. It continues as a meeting place for community and family events.

Many a person, be he/she a member of parliament, a Bay Street broker or the common person could learn a valuable lesson in thrift from the descendants of the Scottish settlers of Zorra.

Written by Margaret Burrill - Teacher at S.S. # 4 1957-1963

Margaret Burrill - Teacher