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Board Chairman Explains Why New School is Needed

Letter Outlines Growth in Enrolment

Georgetown, Ont. March 29, 1956.

Dear Mr. Editor:
 The Georgetown Public School Board has recently presented to the Municipal Council the results of a house-to-house survey of the town with respect to the number of children of Public School age which must be accommodated within the next few years, and at the same time has requested Council to consider immediately some method of providing the necessary facilities. In the Board's view, these "necessary facilities" take the form of a six classroom school, additional to the present school but on some other site, to be ready for use by September, 1957.

Becoming alarmed at the growing overcrowding of our present Public School, last year's Board of Education made a house-to-house survey of the town, listing all children of pre-school age who could be expected to enter Public School during the next five years. The details of this survey were presented to Council and are available to any interested citizens, but only the major points brought out by it will be cited here. One of these is that in September, 1952, we will be obliged to find accommodation for 495 pupils, and in September, 1954 this number will have increased to 576. This means that, in order not to exceed the maximum number of pupils per classroom recommended by the Ontario Department of Education, we must have a total of 14 rooms in 1952 and 17 rooms in 1954. We have at present 11 classrooms and we are therefore faced with the problem of finding three more classrooms by 1952 and six more in 1954.

Some alternatives to the building of a new school have been suggested. One of these is that the present school could be added to. As a matter of fact this was considered by last year's Board but was rejected for the following reasons.

(a) A maximum of two rooms could be added to the building. These would be filled as soon as complete, necessitating further building elsewhere without delay.

(b) The present playground is already too small for the number of pupils now attending. A addition would reduce the playground area and at the same time increase the number of pupils using it, and this the Department of Education will not tolerate except as a temporary measure.

(c) It was considered poor policy to add \$50,000 worth of new building to a structure already forty years old.

Another proposal was to rent additional accommodation in existing buildings in town. Unfortunately there is only one room available which would be suitable for use as a classroom. The old Town Hall and the Public Library have been suggested, but reliable estimates indicate that it would be necessary to spend some thousands of dollars on either one of these buildings, before it would be safe enough, or warm enough, or bright enough, to permit of its use as a classroom. None of these expenditures would be subject to the provincial grant, nor would the rental paid each year, with the result that the municipality would pay the total cost of such a project.

Added to the above problems when rental is considered, is the undeniable fact that, whether we rent or not, we will in two or three years be forced to build additional rooms, for the simple reason that there is not sufficient available space in town. If it were decided that money would be spent on the old Town Hall and the Library to put them in proper condition for classroom use, we could then take care of all the pupils enrolling in 1952, but in 1953 (only one year later) we would be unable to accommodate the pupils and in the following year we would once again be looking for three more rooms. For this reason alone the Public School Board considers that renting is definitely not the solution, but there are other reasons as well. One is the fact that the total cost of renting would be borne by the taxpayer, as mentioned above. It is conceivable, is it not, that this cost would very soon equal the cost of a debenture for a new school? Other reasons are obvious, such as the difficulty of providing proper caretaking, and of administering and supervising scattered classrooms, and the inability of pupils in these rooms to take part in many of the recreational facilities normally available.

For all of these reasons the Public School Board believes that a new school, to supplement what we already have, is the only logical solution to the problem. Assuming

that a new six-classroom school is a necessity in Georgetown if our educational system is to be maintained at all, the Board has a definite reason for requesting immediate action by Council on the matter. Although September, 1952, is a little over two years away, the experience of other boards is that two years is required from the time that the initial decision is made to the time that the building is ready for use. Actual building does not require two years, but it must be remembered that each step of the planning must be approved by the Department of Education before the next step can be taken. If this procedure is not followed and local authorities make a decision which is not approved by the Department it is quite possible that at least a portion of the grant normally derived from the Department will be withheld. Under these circumstances it is not difficult to realize that we do not have any time to waste in making a decision.

One of the most important points in the minds of the taxpayers is that of cost. The Public School Board fully realizes that our town has considerable debt, and that its tax rate is now rather high. The matter of education of our children, however, is one which no right thinking person would wish to neglect, and he will agree that education should be given priority over almost all other civic responsibilities. No other service more strongly affects our present citizens, our future citizens and the growth of our town.

At this stage costs can be estimated only approximately, and we draw on the experience of other Boards for our figures. At the present time a new school of the size we propose to build, costs about \$20,000 per classroom, including furnishings, heating, lighting and plumbing. For the proposed six classrooms the cost would therefore be about \$120,000. There are, however, additional facilities, which must be provided in a new school. These are, a Teacher's Room, a Health Room, a Principal's Office, and an Assembly Room. These together are estimated to cost about \$80,000, bringing the total to \$180,000. There remains only the site, which may cost any amount up to \$10,000. The Public School Board has accordingly advised Council that an estimated \$190,000 will be required to finance the new school.

Under the system of providing Provincial grants inaugurated this year, a municipality of the size of Georgetown receives from the Province 36 per cent of capital expenditures, such as the purchase of a new school. This is somewhat lower than that formerly obtainable under the previous system, which would have given us about 45 per cent of the cost, but the decrease is offset by a flat grant of \$16 per pupil of average attendance. By this means our grant increases as our school population increases, and it is expected that over the 20 year life of the debenture the loss would be more than made up.

The municipal Council at this time appears to favour putting the question of a new school to a vote of the ratepayers. We cannot quarrel with this view, since it is the democratic way. If the question were voted down, it would be only for the reason that the majority of ratepayers do not fully understand the situation or the consequences of neglecting to plan now.

It may be of some interest to mention some of these consequences, bearing in mind the fact that they are offered not as threats, but as distinct possibilities, should the erection of a new school be delayed. For instance, suppose that in September, 1952, no school is available. There will be 63 children for whom there is no accommodation, and it is likely that the Public School Board of that year will decide, however reluctantly, that Kindergarten Primary children be discontinued. In that year 105 Kindergarten Primary children are expected to ask for admittance and this will be refused to them, leaving sufficient rooms for all Grade pupils. In the next year, however, this group of 105 children will be of age to enter Grade 1, and the Public School population will be 494, requiring three more rooms than can be provided. It is inconceivable that any School Board or any municipality would allow a situation to develop where it would be necessary to turn away 100 children of school age, and deny to them their fundamental rights, but that certainly could happen here. Now, if through the necessity, it were possible to find three classrooms this group of children could be accommodated in 1953, but in 1954 and in 1955 there will be additional groups looking for accommodation, with none available. It is seen that even

with the strictest curtailment, the will day cannot be put off, but only postponed.

It should be pointed out that it is extremely unlikely that the Ontario Department of Education will permit the situation to develop to the proportions depicted above, without exercising its right. It does not dictate to school boards, telling them what they must and must not do, but merely withholds its grant to a municipality if the educational facilities provided by the municipality do not meet a prescribed standard. The loss of the grant would be a blow to this municipality which would be ruinous. It behooves every citizen to give some thought to the subject, does it not? We urge all ratepayers to make it their duty to study the matter thoroughly before making a decision. Doubtless many questions will arise which it is impossible to cover in letters such as these. If any person has an unanswered question he is urged to ask it either through the press or of any member of the Public School Board. We will gladly discuss the subject, and will welcome any show of interest by the public.

With the public and the Council all well informed on the subject, and working with the Public School Board in the interests of the town, it should be possible to reach an equitable solution. Time should not be wasted, however. The Public School Board has stated its views to the Council, and now to the public. It is to be hoped that the public itself, as well as the Council who will serve and lead it will take a definite stand on the matter without delay.

Thank you, Mr. Editor, for allowing us this space in your valuable paper.

Yours very truly,
 W. E. Wilson, Chairman,
 Georgetown Public School Board

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

IN THE ESTATE OF
JOHN McBEAN, Merchant,
 Deceased

All persons having claims against the estate of John McBean, late of the Town of Georgetown, Merchant, who died on or about the 31st day of December, A.D. 1949, are hereby notified to send particulars of same to the undersigned on or before the 22nd day of April, A.D. 1950, after which date the estate will be distributed with regard only to the claims of which the undersigned shall then have notice, and the undersigned will not be liable to any person of whose claim they shall then have notice.

DATED at Georgetown, this 21st day of March, A.D. 1950.

Le Roy Dale, K.C., and James Melville McBean, executors of the estate of John McBean, by their Solicitors, Dale and Bennett, Georgetown, Ont. 4-5

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