

# Rockwood Academy gives interesting look at history

by Barb Wynneck  
The founding of the Rockwood Academy this spring as a restoration continues on the school's stone gymnasium—thought to be the oldest in Canada.

The two-storey structure, an addition to the original unique stone building, was once buzzing with schoolboys' activities.

In those early days, students travelled by train, horseback, buggy or stage to the Academy—a private pioneer boarding school, well regarded for its high standards.

In 1855, a \$12 monthly fee covered board, washing and tuition. French, Latin and Greek instruction were an additional one dollar per month.

Two unusual stone arches provide entrance to the gymnasium's ground floor—once a storage area. Sleighs were parked under one arch, carriages under the other. Pupils' empty trunks lined the centre space.

The second floor is where the boys performed their daily fitness drills.

No doubt the students' early morning routine was easily tolerated on a warm day—however once the winter winds whistled the task became a shivering part of the regimen.

Up from their beds in the adjacent dormitory, the boys clambered down a short stairwell to the dressing room, tramped through the gymnasium, then climbed down another outdoor stairway to the separately located log washhouses.

Scrubbed behind the ears, they headed back to the gymnasium. Exercises on the bouncing pine floor completed, the students proceeded to the classroom.

An arm-strengthening pulley apparatus is the only equipment which has survived the years. High on the gymnasium rafters, students' names are pencilled and chalked—evidence that the boys put to use their developing muscles.

They must have formed human pyramids, balancing on schoolmates' shoulders to pen their autographs. The gymnasium doors and window frames are also inscribed with signatures.

In recent years the gymnasium was doomed to collapse. Deep frost had heaved the shallow stone foundation. The walls were badly cracked and the rotting roof leaked. Run-off water had caused considerable damage to the structure.

In 1978, Yosef Drenters, the Academy's present owner, worked out an agreement with Heritage Ontario to save the historic building.

## LACA work encouraged

Eramosa Council stepped to speed along the work of the township's Local Advisory Committee for Architectural Conservancy (LACA) when it agreed with the hiring of a student for the committee Monday.

Council, with its action, agreed to pay a percentage of the student's wage for an 18-week project. LACA member Betty Lou Clark told council the committee could in time list all the buildings which are to be considered historical. However, someone who can concentrate on an inventory of historic properties in the township could get it completed in the summer.

Such work would include taking photographs and title searches, she said. LACA is also interested in recording building interiors, she indicated.

"We want the whole of the township designated where necessary," she said.

Architects Daniel Nickastral and Herb Stouvel designed the restoration—stabilization of the structure their primary concern.

Last fall the reconstruction was underway, the first project, complete restoration of the stone foundation.

Heritage Ontario hired local Eden Mills contractor John Pries for the job. A concrete foundation four and one half feet deep, two feet thick was skillfully installed.

The rods were inserted, securing the cracked walls, and the stone work repaired.

This spring a new roof, finished with cedar shakes, as well as door and window restorations are planned.

Eventually the wide pine board gymnasium floor will be restored. Flagstone flooring will be laid on the lower level. A cast iron stove, as used in days gone by, will furnish heat.

The Rockwood Academy is a monument to the past and Canadian history.

From its doors educated men went forth to build Canada during its formative years. Men

like Adam Beck, founder of Ontario Hydro; A. S. Hardy, fourth premier of Ontario; Hugh Ferguson, founder of the Manitoba Medical College.

Graduates contributed to western Canadian and U.S.A. development. James Jerome Hill built the continental rail system. Mr. Grain, an 1870 Rockwood Academy graduate went on to be enrolled as the 51st member of the R.C.M.P.

Eggerton Ryerson, founder of the Ontario School System, visited the academy discussing the format of early provincial education with the Academy's principal. For about 40 years boys studied at the School, learning the value of education. Many became professionals in pioneering Canada.

The Rockwood Academy was established in 1850, by devoted

teacher William Wetherald, an English born Quaker. He taught the first classes in log cabins.

The present stately three-storey stone building was erected in 1854.

William Wetherald left Rockwood in 1864, renting the school to educators Donald McCaig and Alex McMillan, who later purchased the property and expanded the facilities. They added a large

classroom, extra dormitories and the stone gymnasium in 1867—Confederation year.

In 1871 McCaig sold out to McMillan who remained as principal. By 1882, free and compulsory education was made law in Ontario. Modern provincial schools were erected and many day and boarding schools, including the Rockwood Academy, were forced to close their doors.

In 1900 Mrs. Gordon of Rockwood purchased the Academy and 47 acres for \$2,500. Her son William inherited the property, living in the

Academy with his family, and farming the land.

The Gordon's chickens roosted in the stone gymnasium.

In 1969, Sculptor Yosef Drenters purchased the Academy and set about the extensive task of its restoration. Each year he accomplishes more towards his goal—the restoration of a monument to Canada's past.

## Councillors beef up Rockwood security

Eramosa Township Council voted more than \$2,000 worth of security equipment for Rockwood's community and medical centres, Monday.

Council also took a step to put the medical centre on par with the community centre for fire protection.

Guardian Security Systems, Kitchener, was engaged to install the equipment. Cost of equipping the community centre is \$1,068 while the medical centre is slightly more at \$1,118.

The silent alarm system adopted is monitored off a central board. If an alarm is tripped police and in

some cases fire equipment is dispatched. Council pondered the use of a sound bell to back up the silent alarm, but discussion ended with deputy-reeve Dave Masson's: "I'd like the cops to catch the thieves and prosecute."

Councillor John McLeod observed the community was fortunate with the amount of damage worked on buildings.

Reeve Bill Adsett said, in contradiction, that the medical centre doors have been damaged and once some drugs were taken.

## FARM LABOR

In 1976 five per cent of the national labor force was employed on farms.

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The restoration of the Rockwood Academy's stone gymnasium's foundation employed both heavy equipment and skillful manual labor. Two unusual stone arches lead to the area where sleighs, carriages and the students' empty trunks were once stored. The gymnasium itself is located on the second floor.

## Tennis lighting is encouraged

Rockmosa Park tennis players may play under the lights this season.

Eramosa Council received a letter from the provincial Ministry of Culture and Recreation which indicates council's application for grant assistance seems to be eligible. However, at Monday's council meeting, read reeve Bill Adsett, the Ministry has committed its funds for the year. The application

will be kept on file. Reeve Adsett said that as far as he knows the Ministry's fiscal year ends at the end of this month.

And township clerk Lloyd Hindley said that as far as he can see Wintario says OK.

"Can we go ahead with the project," asked councillor John McLeod. "I would say yes," replied the clerk.

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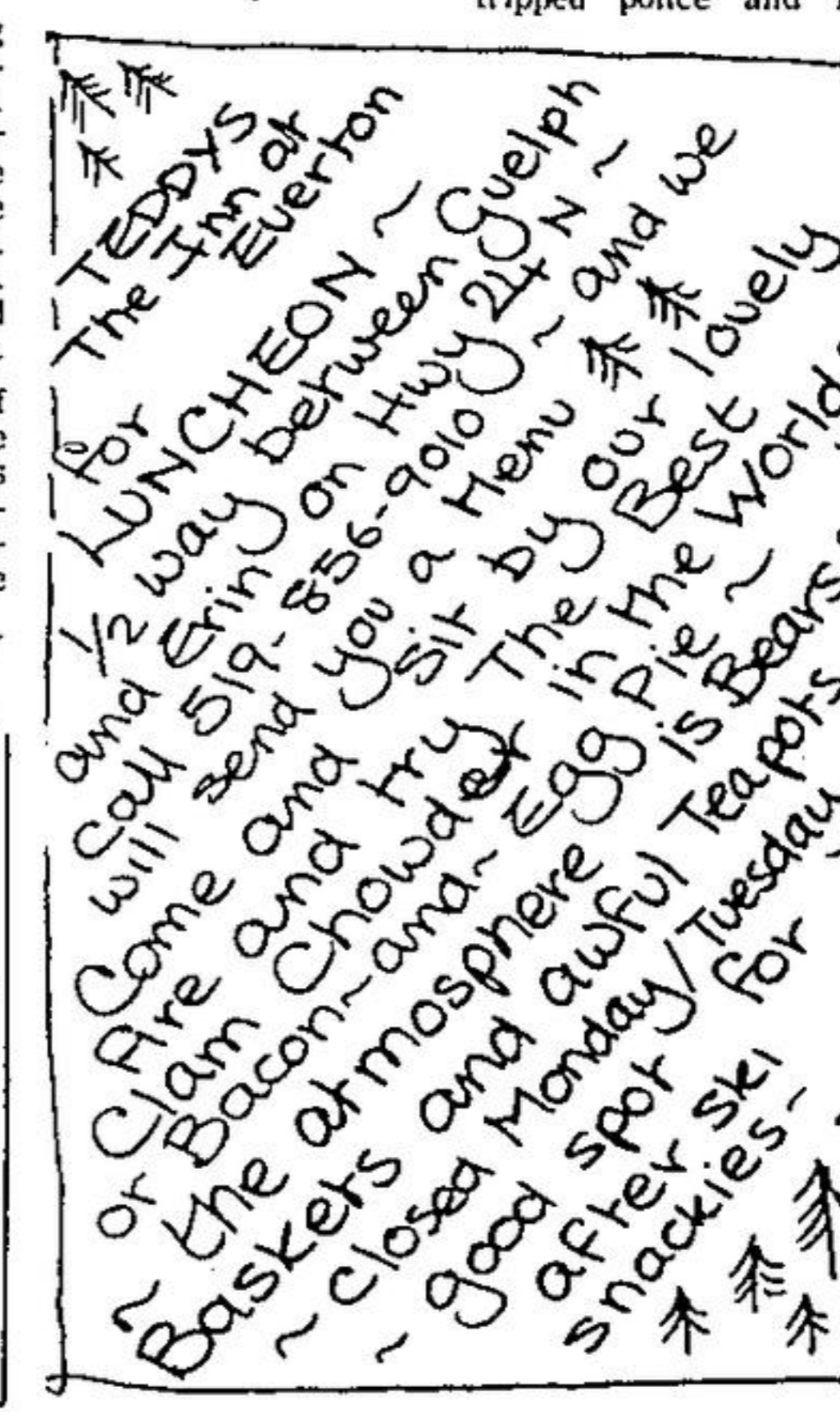
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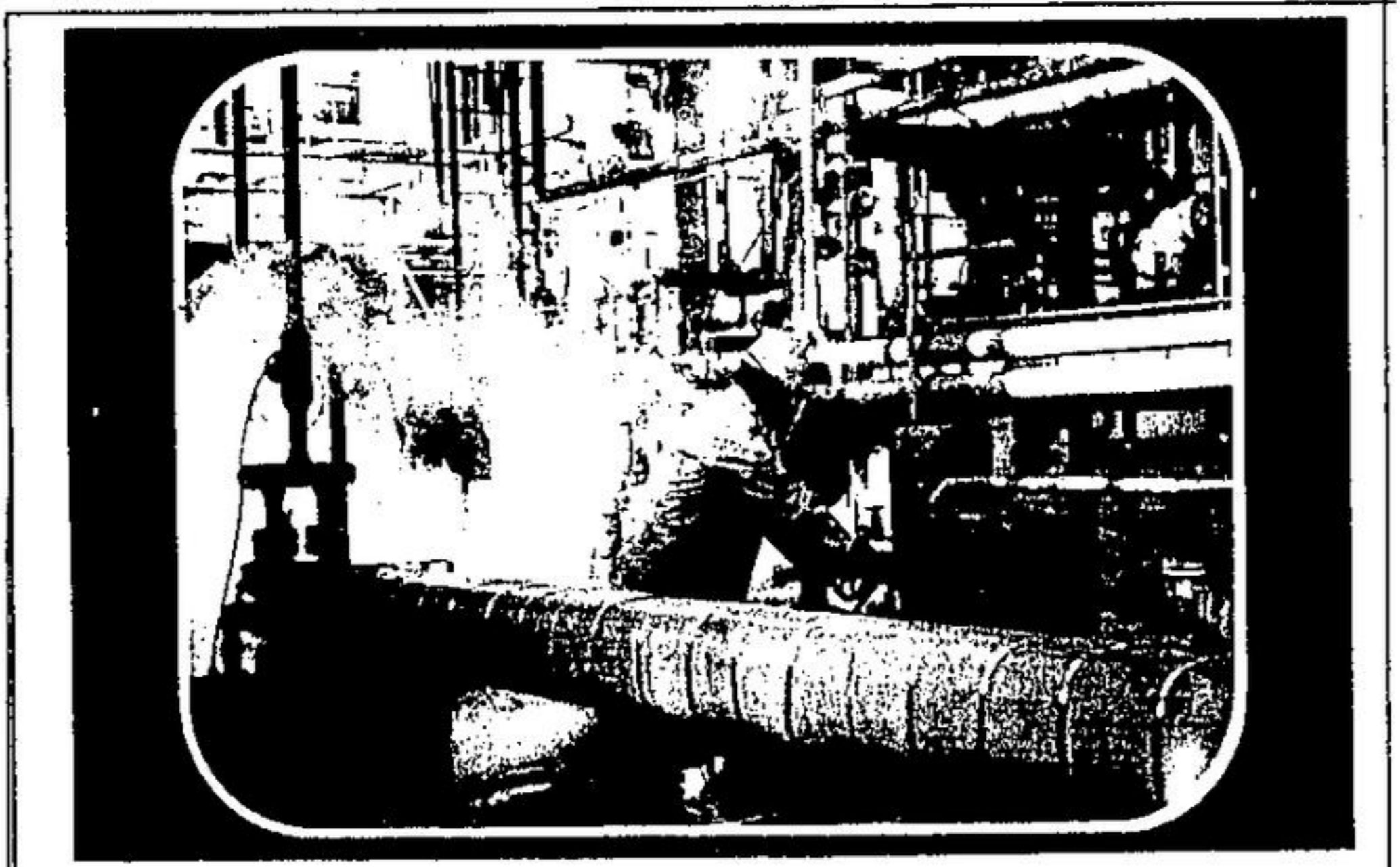
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