

# Old Brucedale school destined for demolition

by Rebecca Ring  
The Rockwood Miller

*...But for former students the memories linger on.*

At their regular meeting on January 24, the Council for the Township of Guelph/Eramosa authorized the demolition of the old Brucedale school house, known as School Section Number 10. Any historically significant features, such as the year built lental (plaque), will be saved and incorporated into any future expansion of the municipal building. Council will meet at the schoolhouse to determine which items will be saved. In addition, the Manager of Property and Leisure Services will investigate the building to salvage and sell items such as window frames, doors and flooring.

The decision process officially began in July 1999 with a public meeting to discuss the future of the old schoolhouse. In February 2003, the township's LACAC (Local Architectural Conservation Committee) recommended that Council preserve the schoolhouse and a feasibility study be prepared, with the goal that the building's use be self-supporting. In March 2003, Anthony Bragg, an historical researcher, submitted a report summarizing the history and historical aspects of the building. In May 2003, the Manager of Property and Leisure Services submitted a report detailing the condition of the building and the cost of bringing it up to current building code standards.

LACAC conducted a public opinion poll at Rockwood's Pioneer Day celebrations. In June 2003, LACAC reviewed the poll and the other documentation and concluded that the building was not architecturally significant and its future be decided by Council.

Relocation of the building was considered but the \$75,000 plus refurbishing costs were deemed too high for the township. Bringing the building up to code was also considered to be too expensive. Some of the problems include a wet basement, mould growth, an unusable furnace and a defunct septic system.

The township may have declared the building architecturally insignificant but there are those that believe it is culturally significant. It is the only publicly owned one-room schoolhouse left in the municipality. It was built in 1934 to replace the original schoolhouse, which was built in 1905. It was struck by lightning and burned to the ground.

Mrs. Jean (Major) Jackson of Eramosa, was a student at School Section No. 10. She remembers the morning in 1934 when the old schoolhouse burned down. The grade 3 student watched out her window as the school fell with its bell sounding its own death toll. The community rushed to help but nothing could be done.

This happened during the depression era when money was scarce. The community pitched in and volunteered in



Brucedale school in its heyday



School as it is now

cleaning the site and building a new school. A 20-year bank loan was secured for the purpose. There was no belfry built onto the new school. Perhaps that is where the lightning struck and no one wanted to tempt fate, or perhaps there was simply not enough money.

The Old Brucedale School holds memories of a very different time. The one-room schoolhouse accommodated grades 1 through 8. There were usually three or four children per grade. The teacher started each day with The Lord's Prayer. She then assigned work to the older children and began lessons with the younger ones. After completing their own lessons, the older children often helped teach the younger ones. Reading lessons involved standing in front of the class in a specific spot marked with a chalk line that one's toes must not cross.

All the students walked to school. There were no buses or parents driving minivans. In winter, they had a hot lunch at school that the teacher and students prepared. Each child was asked to bring a potato, and those from farms with dairy cattle were asked to take turns bringing milk. The teacher supplied the canned goods and cocoa. The lunch was cooked on a coal-oil stove.

There was no running water. In warm weather, the children drank water from a shared tin cup that hung from the well pump. In winter, a student was assigned to bring in a pail of water that held a dipper from which all the children drank. There were indoor toilets, one for girls and one for boys. Two pupils, one of each sex, were assigned the dubious honour of each flushing a toilet with a pail of water at the end of

the day. The students were responsible for daily school maintenance. One child was paid 10 cents per day to light and maintain the fire in the wood furnace. Two others were each paid 8 cents per day to sweep the floors after school. This was one of Mrs. Jackson's duties. Another child was paid 5 cents per day to dust in the morning. On Arbor Day, the first Friday in May, the students spent ¾ of the day cleaning their desks, the library, and raking the yard. The end of the day was spent hiking. A hired man did the major cleaning jobs during the holidays. Mrs. Jackson

remembers being greeted in September by the clean smell of the freshly scrubbed and oiled floor.

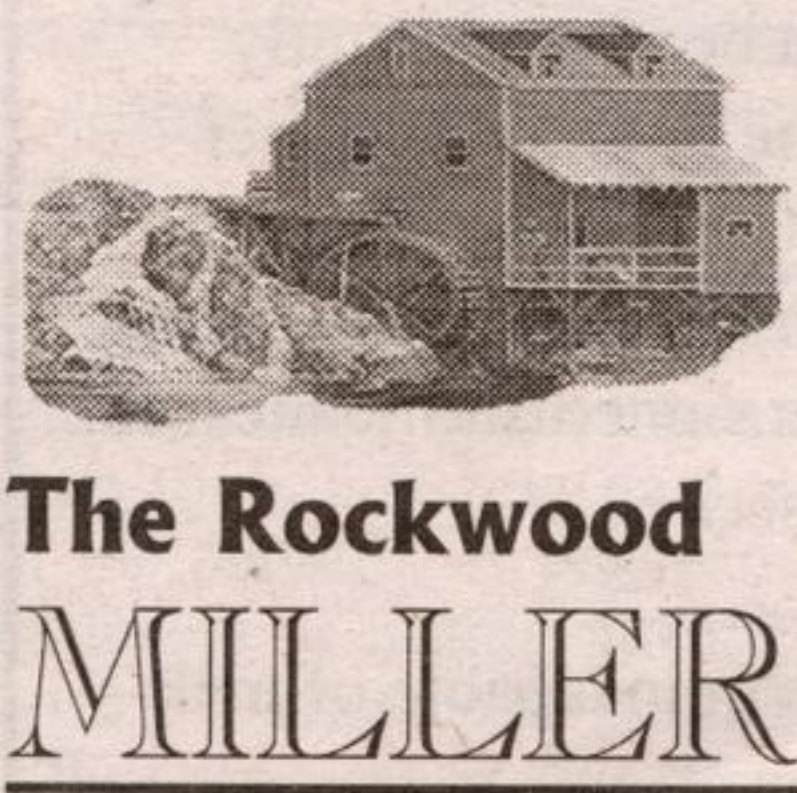
Most of the students were from farming families and agriculture was their bread and butter. Its importance was demonstrated by the fact that a course in agriculture was part of their curriculum. This was later combined with Science and eventually the farming component was phased out. Another indication of agriculture's importance was a beautiful glossy poster that the Department of Agriculture supplied. It pictured three breeds of beef cattle, three breeds of horses, and three breeds of sheep. The department also gave each student a packet of flower seeds and a packet of vegetable seeds every spring. They grew them over the summer and could enter their produce in the school fair.

The school fair was held every September at what is now Lord Dyer Park in Rockwood. The students practised marching and exercising for

the event. They formed two rows, from largest to smallest child. The children in the lead carried their school's banner. Little Jean Major could not wait until she was big enough for this honour. Other events at the fair included showing animals. Students brought calves, chickens, rabbits and other assorted creatures. There were sewing contests where girls demonstrated their skills by sewing buttonholes or hems using white cloth and black thread. There were also baking contests where boys and girls entered goodies they made from recipes chosen from a catalogue. The last school fair was held in 1939.

Mrs. Jackson remembers the Christmas concerts which were originally held during the day but were eventually held at night. As there was no electricity in the building, it was lit with gas lamps. The children put on a show depicting the story of the Christ child. She remembers one Christmas when the teacher gave each student a photo-

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