

# General Brock school down-to-earth experience for 114 from this area

By Hartley Coles

One of Canada's heroic figures, a giant among men, General Brock was fatally wounded as he scaled Queenston Heights, repulsing an American invasion.

General Brock School in Burlington, a vocational unit of the Halton county board of Education, is aptly named for the Canadian hero. It too, is scaling heights for 114 students of this area and over 400 more from the south of the county, not suited for academic courses in other schools.

The program at General Brock is geared to meet the needs of these students, some of them with high IQs or with various learning disabilities.

This writer was invited to inspect the school, meet the principal, accompanying the Acton-Nassagaweya Board member Tom Watson on the tour. Preconceived notions of General Brock school were knocked flat by the visitation.

## Not dum-dums

Somehow the idea vocational schools are the "dum-dum" schools students taunt others with, managed to seep into the unconscious. Prior impressions are all wrong.

As Principal W. G. Cass states with conviction, the first priority is to make students feel comfortable at the school. They may not have fit in with the conventional school, felt uncomfortable in a classroom.

"We gear our programs to meet their needs," Mr. Cass explained. And he thinks he is succeeding.

Next priority is to open lines of communication with students, emphasizing that everyone benefits when self discipline is exercised and ideas are freely expressed.

"No idea is a bad idea," Cass says frankly. Often slight refinements can turn it into a good idea.

Sometimes, Cass admits they fail to get through. "We can't serve every student," he admits candidly. "At the same time he has never 'kicked' anyone out of the school. Every student who drops out has the right to come back and request to return.

"When they do return most of them are much better students," he said. "More and more students are leaving at 16 and coming back at 18 or 19."

The school necessarily has periods when students learning a skill are out on work experiences. The school encourages it, knowing that they are experiencing actual conditions they'll meet in the outside world.

The work experience creates confidence as well as supplying students with pocket money. It builds up their self-esteem, often a problem with students at the school.

"A 15 year-old looks on life as hopeless, sometimes," says Cass, and the teachers are hopeless to help. "Their peers are most important at that time in life."

Although there are 585 students at General Brock only about a dozen fall by the wayside.

## Develop confidence

"Ten years ago only a small percentage would learn anything," said Cass' "and leave school with no training." An amazing number are training jobs today because of the assistance they received at the school and above all the self confidence they developed themselves.

"I can only think of one or two who didn't get jobs," says Cass. Some don't get work for graduation to get a job, he says, but notes the students are better than if they had not had the use of the school for two or three years.

General Brock tries to create a learning environment that is interesting, challenging, and rewarding. Teachers no longer teach in the old sense. The teacher to Cass is a director of the learning environment.

One of the most satisfying developments for the Brock principal is the constant use made of the resource centre at the school. In many cases reading and math levels are below what they should be. He envisions that by next year every student will be at the same reading level.

This creates some problems for the Board of Education. The library end of the resource centre is congested and will require enlargement.

Cass says he has been criticized for his liberal policy on lending books but feels the loss of a few books a year is a small price to pay for upgrading reading standards.

## "Package course"

First year students at General Brock take a "package" course in which the boys see 18 of the well-equipped shops in the school and the girls see nine. They are exposed to the different skills in the shops and in the second year each student chooses six shop skills he would like to take. The third year is spent specializing in two, three or four of the shops, depending on the individual.

"We don't teach trades," insists the principal — "we teach skills."

Getting jobs is not high on the priority.

Cass seers it "Give a man a fish and it gives him a meal for a day. Teach him how to fish and he will have enough for life."

It is up to the student to get his own job. He recommends that the student look for the position that is best suited for him —, even if it means trying a variety of things.

"We have to teach them how to fish," he declares, "to hold their heads up — and be proud of themselves."

The school tries to get away from departmentalized curriculums which might have disturbed students at other schools. Teachers try to find out a student's strong skills and assist them in developing them.

"We teach math, English, social sciences, creative arts, recreation. Every kid can sing, play musical instruments, dance, play games before he leaves. If he or she can't do that then we find something else in which the student can best express themselves."

## Absenteeism?

Cass speaks highly of attendance officer Bill Coon. "He is doing a tremendous job for us this year. He is worth his weight in gold. Because of him and the other attendance officers attendance is much better this year."

## Usual tricks

The students are not stupid, Cass says, and try the usual tricks to avoid the classrooms. The school's job is to build their confidence until they are relaxed, willing to go ahead, and not afraid to make mistakes. When there is a build-up of confidence the change in attitude is easily seen and attendance climbs.

Progress of the student is not evaluated in the traditional way, rather on an independent analysis of their worth.

Is the school worth the \$1,400 a year it costs for each student?

Cass answers that with another query. It costs double that to keep a member of society in prison plus the missing producer. Which is more important? he enquires.

Cass also admits some parents resist enrolling their children in General Brock — that is until he invites them there to see the school at work. Like this writer, most of them were impressed. Biggest boosters are parents who see the change in their children after they enrol at the school.

## Plenty of problems

There are plenty of problems and Cass says one of the big ones for he and the teachers is to resist becoming social workers. He feels the social services of the county are gradually offering integrated services which also assists the schools in its task.

Rural students? How do they fit into the picture at General Brock?

Rural students are more independent and can spend their time advantageously. "They don't have time to hang around the plaza," he said.

General Brock is suited for its role in the county system but only a visit will clear up misconceptions.

Principal Cass says he wishes more parents from North Halton could spare the time to see what they are trying to do there. He feels they have come a long way in county vocational education but there is still much to be done.

Classroom inspections revealed students immersed in the refinements of operating a restaurant, baking, preparing food, doing upholstery, auto body work, printing, art, beauty culture, painting and decorating and several other skills.

Food in the cafeteria is prepared and served by the students who also handle the finances.

General Brock may be part experiment — part experience but it obviously is blazing new trails for county educators.

## What students take

First year students at General Brock high school study in the art of communications, mathematics, science, social service, creative arts, art, music, and theatre arts.

All courses except those of a remedial nature are credit courses towards a graduation diploma.

The business and technical program includes study of auto body work, auto maintenance, building construction, business machines, chef training, commercial art, dry cleaning, electrical repairs, floraculture, home management, horticulture, merchandising, metal trades, painting and decorating, printing, restaurant services, sewing, trowel trades, typing, upholstery and welding.



PRINCIPAL W. G. CASS clears a path with Acton-Nassagaweya board of education member Tom Watson.

## Ward boundaries

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boundaries. No changes will be made at this time.

### Gordon pleased

Councillor Gordon said he was pleased with the way the issue turned out. "Council realized there was a difference between the rural and urban areas of the town and voted to retain the rural area. It should be retained," he said.

Gordon said that Joe Willmott and Fred Carter appeared as spokesmen for a delegation from ward one. Many of the rural

people attending the Monday meeting, Gordon said.

A variety of opinions were considered to boundary changes by the committee but none were felt to be acceptable. The committee was formed after a group of West Oakville ratepayers protested and circulated a petition asking for representation by population.

Ratepayers told council they would carry their complaints to the Ontario Municipal Board if action wasn't taken locally. Council studied the matter and recommended no change.



GENERAL BROCK HIGH SCHOOL in Burlington is the home for 114 students from Acton, Milton, Nassagaweya and Esquesing for the school year. Students from North Halton are bussed every school day.

## ESQUESING Township Council BRIEFS

(Continued from Page Two) solicitor to begin proceedings against Russell Chessum for maintaining used cars on his property—contravening the Esquesing wrecking yard by-law.

—Voted to ask the OPP to investigate complaints of unauthorised dragstrip racing in the vicinity of the Toronto International Dragstrip. Councillors say racing takes place on Wednesday nights just before the opening of the racetrack. Council

also thought it would be a good idea if the operators of the racetrack were informed of this action.

—Agreed to have a

## GOOD ADVICE

Tomorrow was to be the day of Joe's wedding, and he and his father were enjoying a night-cap together before they retired to gather strength for the next day's event. Lifting his glass in a toast to his father, Joe asked: "Any advice before I take the big step, Dad?" "Yes," the father said. "Two things. First: insist on having one night out a week with the boys." "Makes sense," said Joe. "And the second?" "Second: don't waste it on the boys."

representative of the township's insurance agents—Zurich Insurance Co. appear before the council. Reeve Tom Hill said he was "not too pleased" with the insurance adjuster to come to the township being asked to pay. Township Clerk Delmar French was asked to write the company requesting the insurance adjuster to come to the council.

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