

A history lesson for our youngsters

This correspondent was invited to speak Tuesday afternoon to history students at Percy W. Merry School and their teachers Brenda Dolling and Judy Eberspaecher.

The speaker explained the many changes in rural living during her lifetime and had many articles from the early 1900s that are now antiques.

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with ELLA PATTERSON

Items included a moustache cup and saucer, shaving mug, curling irons, hat pin, salt cup, individual butter plate, wooden potato masher, slate, 1890 autograph book, Crown deed dated 1831 — Province of Upper Canada, candle mold, 1935 silver dollar, tie pin, brooches, and old magazines and photographs.

A brief history lesson was given on S.S. No. 7 School, which was a white wood building located on Derry Road, east of Sixth Line.

Teachers back in 1917 were Laura Joyce, Amy Howes, Mary Sutton, Muriel Smith, Miss McKee, Carmen Cantelon, Lou Bradley, and Jean Rae.

Children started school at Easter, usually at six and seven years of age. There were junior and senior classes in first, second, third and fourth grades, and usually 23 to 30 children attended.

Water for drinking or for washing hands was secured from a pump outside. The water pail and dipper were on the back shelf. Classes were held from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Arbour Day in early May was clean-up day when students washed windows, raked the grounds and later walked to a nearby bush to see nature in beautiful flowers and buds.

There was always a Christmas concert, Valentine's parties and a picnic the last day of school in June. In the winter months, old families in the sector met at the school for a euchre party on Friday evening.

Everyone supplied lunch and a different family each time brought the prizes. It was a happy way to get to know your neighbours and really was the only social event for many.

A large wooden telephone from about 1918 was displayed and the history of Halton Telephone Co. was explained. Bell Telephone had many subscribers in Milton, usually doctors and businesses.

But several farms east of Milton didn't have phones. Several good men formed a company, sold shares, and secured the necessary equipment — tons of wire, poles, etc. — to give farmers telephone service.

There were eight or nine customers on one line. Each had a number such as 32 — designated by three long rings and two short ones. All heard rings come in and answered theirs. They called others on the same line by turning a crank.

The phones were heavy and were hung high on the wall so children couldn't play with them. A long continuous ring meant a call for help and everyone answered that call.

Bell telephone had a central exchange in Milton. An operator worked all night. It was necessary to go through this office if someone called on lines other than their own.

Maintenance men in Halton were W.E. Ford and Cecil Patterson. The students of Percy W. Merry School enjoyed the thrill of ringing the old phone.

Comment was made on Credit Valley railway, which was completed in 1876 — a single track from Toronto to Guelph.

It was on this rail line that Beaty station was built with the influence of W.C. Beaty. This was a flag station where the train would stop and pick up farm produce, apples, milk, and people travelling.

Beaty station burned down in 1916, presumably when a tramp, seeking shelter, started a fire for warmth.

Early in 1900 the Credit Valley railway had a second track added and was sold to the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Many customs have changed in the last 50 years. Then weddings were held at the bride's home and a wedding feast followed. Now most wedding ceremonies are in a church with a catered meal at a hall.

Funerals were held from the home of the deceased. Black crepes were put on the door to advise passersby that a death had occurred. Also as a sign of mourning, men would wear narrow black ribbons on the left sleeves of their jackets.

Students did a fine job trying an old apple peeler. In closing, the speaker commented that the one-room schools were closed in 1959 and children were taken by bus to Percy W. Merry. It was the end of an era.

There really is no definite community anymore. Private telephone lines, hydro, and many other conveniences have changed rural living and often times we don't know our neighbours.

Now we live independently. In former years, we needed our neighbour's help and friendship.



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