

## Not many students at classes in 1810

Education, with its cost, is not something that is limited to the concern of today's parents and taxpayers. Although the York School Board brought down a budget of more than \$78 million this year, residents of early Richmond Hill were just as uneasy about the burden to the public.

William Harrison, a local historian and Richmond Hill's second reeve, took a candid look at the history of education in the town at the opening of the third high school in the area in December, 1897.

From 1810 to 1820, the first school in Richmond Hill was held in Settlement House on Yonge Street. There weren't many students.

The first actual school building was made from hewn logs and measured about 20' x 40' and was 10' high. The logs were sealed with mud and the building had two or three windows.

It was located less than 100 feet from where McConaghy Public School is today.

The school's teacher (they were called schoolmasters then) was Benjamin Barnard.

For a salary of \$50 per year (federations take note), he would teach all day, look after the boys who played hockey and act as "moral guardian" during evening hours.

Mr. Barnard would stay with families in the area for three weeks at a time.

### BRICK SCHOOL

In 1849, the first brick schoolhouse was built and its predecessor was sold to a Mr. Dalby. He was the owner of a tavern called The Lass of Richmond Hill, later renamed the Dominion Hotel and eventually converted into a piggery.

The public was in an uproar over what they felt was the trustees' extravagance in building the one-room school. It slowly grew short of space, however, and another one of equal dimensions was built at the west end of it.

When the school population increased again, some classes were held at the "Old Grammar School".

Mr. Harrison recalled that at the time of Confederation, the old rate bill system of paying for education was still being used.

Pupils were required to bring 25 cents at the first of the month to ensure they got a seat in the classroom. For many families, it meant the eldest child went to school until he could be put to work and then his spot would be taken by a younger brother or sister.

Few parents were able to send all their children at once while many could not or would not send any.

If you were a widow your children could be educated for free, as long as endorsement from trustees was obtained.

Psychologically, it was not always wise to send a child to school under these conditions — ignorant pupils would insult and malign the unfortunate child.

By 1866, the outcry for free

education hit Richmond Hill. It was a daily topic of conversation. Those who opposed the idea said it was unjust since all properties would be mortgaged for all time to come, for the sake of educating other people's children.

### ONE OF THE FIRST

In 1867, the town of Richmond Hill was among the first to approve free education. Four years later, all schools in Ontario were declared free.

M. L. McConaghy School opened on March 5, 1915. Former pupils of the older schools were called together for a reunion to the place where they spent their childhood.

The new, two-storey building cost \$30,000 and had a capacity of 300 students. That year, there were 200 on the roll.

Architect for the new structure was John Innes and the principal was T.E. Lehman. William Harrison, the only surviving pupil from the first log cabin school, was honored at the opening ceremonies.

For several years two rooms, in what are now part of the municipal offices, were used for public school pupils.

In 1948 an addition of four classrooms, a kindergarten and gymnasium was made to the former high school.

As the number of students increased, the municipal buildings were again used for extra classes and some were also held at the Orange Home, north of town.

The town size was always increasing and in a short space of time, O. M. MacKillop, Walter Scott, Beverley Acres, Crosby Heights and Pleasantville Schools were built. An addition was made to Crosby in 1966.

M. L. McConaghy Public School was named in honor of Mary Lillian McConaghy, a descendant of Abner Miles, who was born in Richmond Hill and taught in the town for 40 years.

O. M. MacKillop was named after the school inspector who died while it was under construction.

Walter Scott public School was named for the man who served as principal for many years prior to his retirement.

The other schools derive their names from the districts in which they are located.

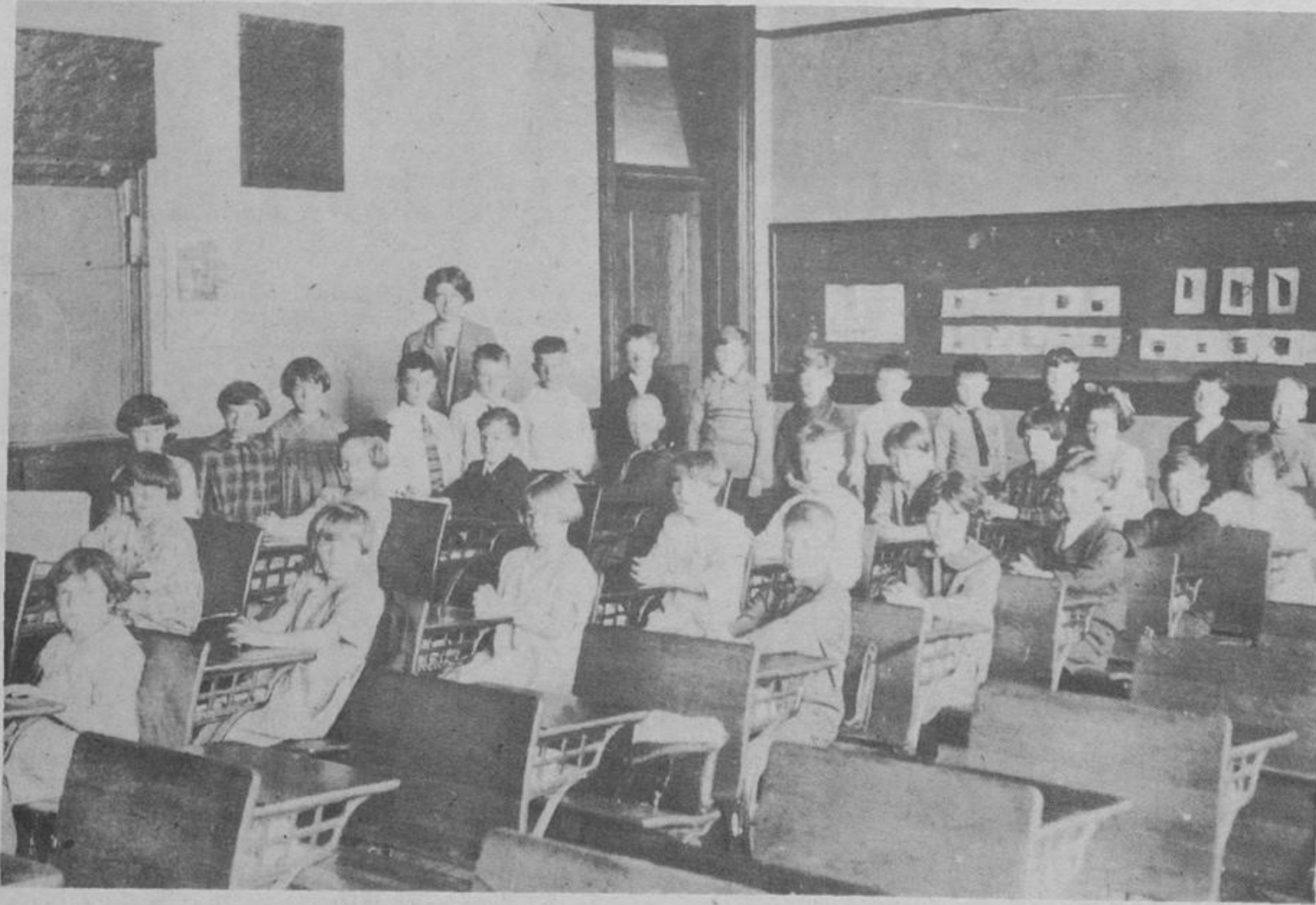
### Radial mishap

David M. Boyle and his son, Herbert, of Langstaff, were seriously injured on Monday, when their motor, while crossing the track opposite their gate, was struck by a southbound Metropolitan car.

Both men were rushed to the Western Hospital.

The condition of the father was considered the more serious, but the latest report indicated he would recover.

— The Liberal Sept. 18, 1919.



## CLASS OF 1924

A classroom at Oak Ridges Public School in 1924 wasn't too different to those of today. The teacher is Miss Ruth Thornburn. The students are from the back row and left to right: Olive Boyle, Flossie Stuart, Celestine Loundes, Clifford Case, Ken Brown, George Zeigler, Gord Boyle, Lyle McNertney, unknown, Tom Case, John Loundes, Alf Dolan, Mike Sawchuck and Jack Blyth. Row 2 — Marguerite Carlisle, Jean Boyle, Fred Hulme and Tom Loundes. Row 3 — unknown, Norma Carlisle, Nedra Maxwell, Dorothy Cosgrove, Jack Zeigler, John Sawchuck, Marjorie Stuart, and Nellie Leggett. Row 4 — Frank Chapman, Helen Wall, unknown, Willis Thompson and Rose Wall.

# Richmond Hill High was not simple decision

Ratepayers, reflecting on the past, often wonder if there was ever a time in the history of education and its administration when the proficiency was high and the spending was low.

Back in the late 1890's school spending was marginal compared with today's standards. In 1897, total assessment for Richmond Hill and area amounted to \$160,000 and nowhere near that amount was spent on education. Figures for Richmond Hill and the whole of the Region easily surpass that by more than a hundredfold and this year's education budget hit \$78 million.

One aspect of the school system at the turn of the century that compares with the current administration, is productivity.

Take, for example, the old high school of Richmond Hill which stood behind what is now McConaghy School.

It burned down on December 23, 1896. It took more than nine months to erect another building at the corner of Wright and Yonge Street, now a part of the municipal offices.

The following is a short account of the dilemma the board of education found itself in until it decided where the new building would go, how much it should cost and who should do the construction.

Richmond Hill High School eventually replaced the new building in 1924 at a cost of \$95,000. It still stands at Wright and Hall Streets and has received three additions since then, making it capable to instruct Grades 9-13).

December 31, 1896: The board of education was commended for its zeal in setting up a makeshift school until a new one could be built. Temperance Hall was used and 60 desks and seats at \$2.95 each were ordered from Newmarket Novelty Works. The hall was rented at a cost of \$6 per month.

January 21, 1897: The first letter to the editor of The Liberal, T. F. McMahon, voicing concern over the location and style of the new high school.

"It is simply intolerable that any school should now exist in this country without being fully provided with the necessary accommodation in the way of school grounds. . . It is beyond question that communities are to a large extent judged by the mere appearance of their churches and schools. . . The school grounds are quite as necessary in the production of satisfactory educational results as a classroom or any other part of the school property."

February 4, 1897: An education committee met at the Village Council and discussed the possibilities of three alternative sites for the new high school.

One was the old site, the Village Park was another and the final one under consideration was the Richardson estate at the north end of town.

No vote was taken but it appeared the majority of the members favoured the Village Park location.

February 11: At a public meeting of ratepayers called by the

reeve, it was decided the construction of a high school should be completed with as little delay as possible. Mr. Harrison and Mr. McNair spoke in favor of building on the Hopkins property. Mr. Storey liked the Park and Messrs. Pugsley, Nicholls, McConaghy and McMahon thought the original site was the best location.

A decision was postponed until the board of education could meet the following day.

February 18: After two meetings of the board, a site still had not been confirmed. A committee was struck to study the purchase of the half acre from the Powell property for \$800. It was also moved and carried to buy the Hopkins property. The board decided to apply to village council for \$3,000 for the school.

It appeared the Powell property would not be used.

February 25: Another meeting of the board failed to break the deadlock in the school location decision. The board refused to sanction the purchase of the Powell property and a delegation expressed support of the land owned by the Richardson's north of town.

March 4: The board voted to rescind all motions concerning the high school, including the \$3,000 acquisition from the Village. They approved the new location for the school on the former site, asked for \$1,500 for the costs and planned to await preliminary designs from John Harris.

March 25: Messrs. Newton and Naughton were appointed as a committee to determine the cost of

ordinary and pressed bricks; Messrs. Lynett and Boyle the price of sand and Messrs. McNair and Storey, the price for foundation stone.

Several plans were studied at this meeting but others were expected to be submitted.

April 8: Several letters were received by The Liberal from readers distraught over length of time the board was taking to get construction of the high school started. The editor realized there was enough interest in the subject remaining, to warrant a regular column from readers allowing them to voice their dissatisfaction.

Some wrote in with a full list of the shenanigans of the board from the time the school first burned down.

April 15: The Liberal learned a petition was being circulated claiming the board made a mistake in its selection of the site; those named in the petition favored the Hopkins property site.

April 22: The board decided to take its plans to the Minister of Education. Approval was given to buy materials and the Hopkins petition was disallowed. If the site was approved, the old grammar school was to be torn down.

April 29: In a report, the minister recommended the Hopkins property over the old site. In its discussion, the board rescinded a decision to build on the old school property and that a final selection would be made by the next meeting.

Plans were approved to make adjustments for a three-master school. It should be noted that during these months of debate on the new school site, education was being carried on in the temporary school most satisfactorily, in the opinion of the trustees and the Inspector.

May 6: The board met and considered a half-dozen different locations. It was again suggested that the Hopkins property at Yonge and Wright Streets be purchased.

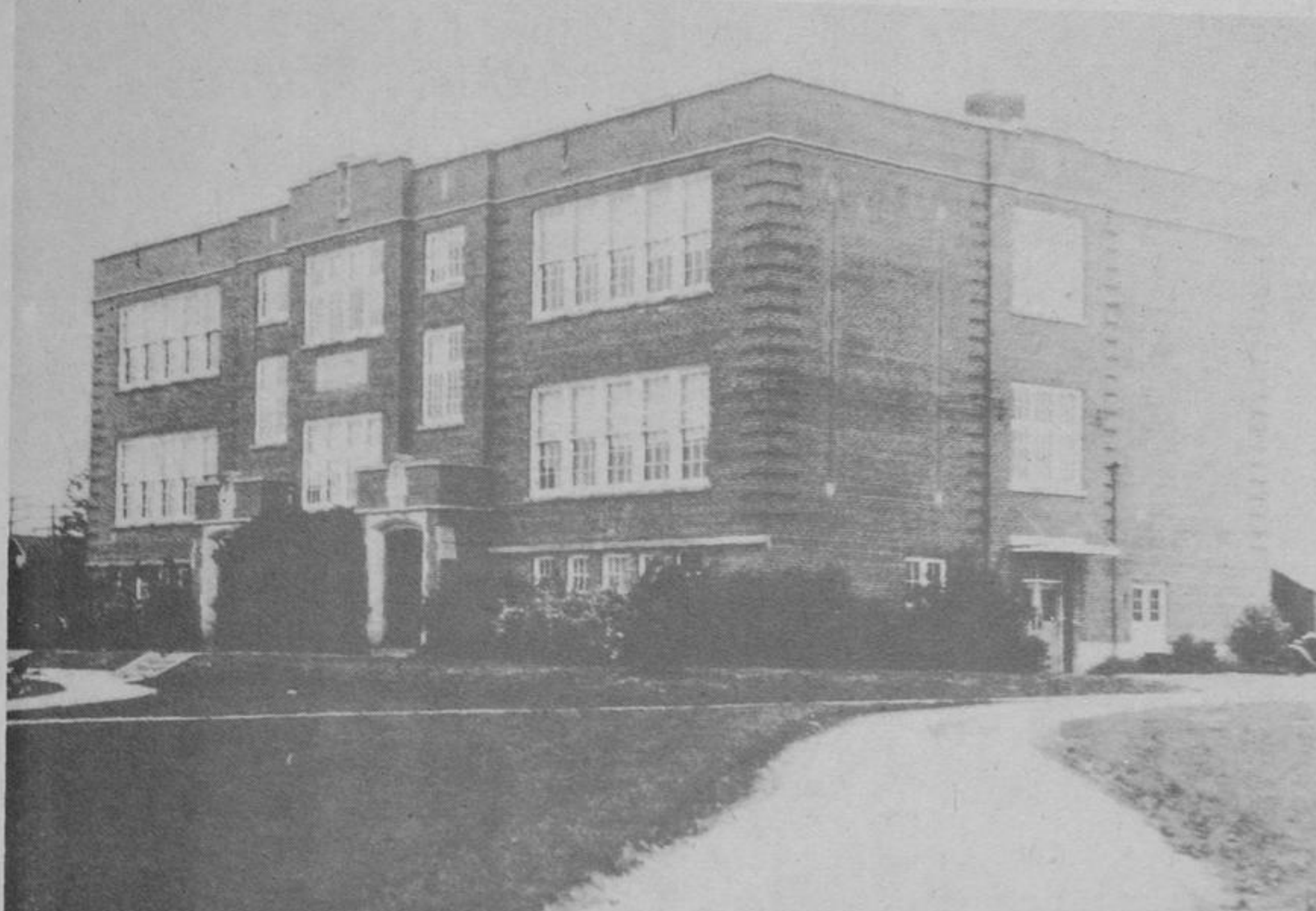
Mr. McConaghy pointed out to the board that chapter 57 of Section 46 of the High School Act precluded Mr. McNair from selling the Hopkins property to the board since he was the executor.

Further, he was not even allowed to vote on the question.

Mr. Harrison moved that the chairman and the secretary act as a committee and buy the Hopkins lot. That was carried and the one-and-a-quarter acre site would be sold to the board for \$1,000, less the materials on the land and incidental costs, which amounted to \$415.

Construction finally started on the school in June, 1897, but its location was a topic of conversation for months to come.

The workings of the board of education were truly amazing.



Richmond Hill High - In the beginning

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