

by Dick McKean.

For those of us who admire old buildings the fire early in the winter at Rosseau Lake Boy's School was a tragedy. That fire, a holocaust which was out of control even before it was discovered, destroyed one of the most magnificent buildings of its kind in the country, a structure which impressed those who saw it both because of its rambling beauty in a wonderful natural setting and its noteworthy connections with the past.

The main building at the school (which came to be known as R.H. Perry House, after the headmaster) was originally built as a summer residence by Sir John and Lady Eaton. Built on a high bluff overlooking Rosseau Lake and surrounded by pines, it became the ultimate in summer homes with sufficient guest rooms and facilities for entertaining an almost unlimited number of guests in a setting which was a different world for those who came from the cities. It must have been a thrill for even the most sophisticated to drive through the gate and down the gravel laneway to a visit or reception with Lady Eaton.

Kawandag, as it was called, went through various changes after Lady Eaton gave it up; among other things, it became Fort Kawandag, with all the trappings of a pioneer outpost on the frontiers of Muskoka, complete with horses, stockades, and a chuckwagon. Later it became a boy's school, to fill a need recognized by a vigorous group of executives from Toronto and

a success again, after several years of the doldrums since the days of Lady Eaton.

Success was immediate; under Mr. Perry and his staff the boys who came to Rosseau blossomed out according to their abilities and the fatherly discipline of the school, while the academic facilities of the school were expanded, including laboratories for science courses and other broadening activities.

The spirit and atmosphere of the school was established almost at its beginning. But the loss of the main building containing classrooms, dormitory, offices, kitchen, dining hall and apartments seemed to be too much of a loss for the school to survive. ("That is the end of Rosseau Lake", one comment we heard.)

Such thoughts did not take into account the resources and drive of the Board of Directors. Just 17 days after the fire the boys and staff moved into a set of new buildings complete with all the facilities.

The fire was first noted at 4.30 p.m. on Jan. 30th. Mrs. Hendrick's, the housekeeper rushed into Mr. Perry's office to announce that the house was on fire and a quick glance around brought home to him the fact that the situation was serious. Smoke was already billowing out under the eaves, indicating that the huge attic was in flames. There followed a frantic search of the house to see that everyone was out (most of the boys were skiing), putting in calls to surrounding fire departments, saving paintings, books and other material before the heat

from the top of the building drove them away, and finally figuring out where the stunned little group would eat supper that night.

The Village of Rosseau responded to their need. The Tassies opened the general store to supply emergency rations and the boys were put on a bus for Toronto for the weekend, some of them wearing their winter tire possessions left from the fire. The boys who remained were put up in the town hall at the Redwood Inn; the Community Hall was fitted out as a dining room, and arrangements were made to receive the boys upon their return from their homes. The outlying buildings, the science lab and the classroom, served as a rendezvous for the staff as they met the next morning to plan to organize the retrieval of books, clothing and furniture cast into the snow from the main building in the few short minutes before the fire put an end to rescue attempts, and to lay out emergency proposals for the Directors.

The latter needed little urging. The Chairman, Mr. Keaveney, was in San Francisco, but the decision to carry on was almost automatic. Mr. Walter Hindle, prominent in Trans Canada Pipe Lines, a parent, was contacted; he immediately took steps to move seven huge ATCO mobile units from Montreal to Rosseau, and brought in one of his staff John Darda from Winnipeg, who was experienced in the erection of mobile units. Gerry West from Parry Sound was called in to do the plumbing; he was surprised at the speed with which everything went together. Arrangements were made to put an ATCO mobile into complete service.

Mr. Perry, in a newsletter dated March 10th., took the opportunity to thank the numerous people and organizations to which the School is indebted for its revival from the flames of Jan. 30th. He confesses that his benefactors are too numerous to mention, and he is thankful that his school was established amidst the goodwill which exists in Rosseau.

For the future: architects and consultants who have flown over the site are impressed with the possibilities, and plans for a new set of buildings are going forward. It has to be accepted, however, that Lady Eaton's home, Kawandag, is not replaceable in this day and age.