

SCHOOLS IN STIRLING

by Lewis Zandbergen

Even taking into account what we do know, there's plenty of mystery surrounding the institution of education between 1800 and 1850 in small villages such as Stirling. The complete story of the spread of education and facilities to educate the municipality's youngsters has been lost except in cases where accurate records were kept.

It's almost certain that scant importance was placed in the educating of village children in the largely agrarian society of the first quarter of the 19th century. There probably weren't many school age children among the village of Stirling's population of 125 prior to the 1840s. Besides, even very young children were required to pitch in and contribute on the homesteads, gathering eggs, helping feed small animals and generally doing everything suited to their size and age; there would be precious little time to spend on schooling. What education was imparted most likely came from community mothers and study of the Bible.

Local records are scant as well. There are allusions to the Weese School the location of which has been variously attributed to either 48 Old Marmora Road or 324 West Front Street. The possibility is that both locations were used at different times. John Weese was the owner of the southeast quarter of Lot 13 which encompassed all the property bounded by West Front Street on the south and the Old Marmora Road on the east, to a halfway point between the concession north (roughly where the Old Marmora Road used to curve west just south of the present Carlisle farm) and west to about the junction of West Front Street and the Fairground Road. That would put the building at 48 Old Marmora Road on the Weese property which makes it a logical setting for a school with the Weese name attached. Also there was a cattle show or fair of sorts at the Weese place in 1851. It's fairly certain the house at 324 West Front Street was built later than 1840 and perhaps as late as the 1850s when Carpenter and Victorian Gothic styles enjoyed their hey day. Perhaps another building occupied the site before the present home was built.

There was also the Fidler school named no doubt for its benefactor Edward Fidler. Its location remains a mystery although the name is connected with the structure at 48 Old Marmora Road.

Then there is the building at 64 West Front Street which has long been reputed to be the site of a "grammar school." It enjoyed the distinction of being the only school building surviving from the mid 1800s—until its demolition in March of 2008. The 1860-1861 Directory of the County of Hastings does make mention of such a school. A Mr. James Haggertee (sic)

was a teacher at the Stirling Grammar School. He resigned December 31, 1862. He was reeve of Hastings Township and became an MP in 1894.

An excerpt from the Directory of 1858 says this: "Grammar school, G. E. Bull, chairman of board; G. H. Boulter, M.D., J. MacLean, M.D., W. Judd, J.P., D.B. Johns, J. P., and W. R. Parker, J. P. trustees."

By May of 1853 a school section named Rawdon did exist; at that time the village and the township were still one entity. A meeting held on May 10 of that year laid the first concrete plans for the provision of a school house. It is reprinted here as found in a copy of the Stirling News-Argus of June 25, 1980. (Misspellings and punctuation are left as in the original.)

"May 10, 1853, School Section No. 10, Rawdon

"Pursuant to a resolution passed at a special School Meeting held on the 4th day of April last, the trustees of the above written School Section purchased of Edward Lidlar Esq., Lot 23, on the north side of Charlotte St., in the village of Stirling and Township of Rawdon adjoining and being on the east side of the Wesleyan Chapel for the sum of thirty pounds currency for which sum the Trustees gave their joint notes to be paid on the 24th of December next and obtained the deed of said school site.

"Specifications of a School House to be built in School Section No. 10 in the Township of Rawdon, in the Village of Stirling, on Lot 23, north side of Charlotte Street.

"Size of the said School House to be 24 by 36 feet. The posts to be 10 feet high. To be sheeted and clapboarded outside. Clapboards to be plained and to have a suitable cornice, and a stone foundation to be laid with lime and sand to be 8 inches above the ground, to have a brick chimney from the collar become up to be 3 feet above the roof. To have 3 windows in each side and 2 in the front, each to be 20 lights 8 x 10. To have one panel door 3 feet wide and 7 feet high. To have the floor laid with inch and a half plank plained and matched. To be sheeted up to the windows with inch stuff plained and matched. The ceiling to be similar to that of the church on the next lot. To be lathed and plastered, all to be done with suitable stuff and in a proper manner. The said building to be completed by the 20th day of September next.

"I Joseph White do agree with the Trustees of the said School Section No. 10, to build the House according to the plan above mentioned for and in consideration of the sum of one hundred pounds, fifty to be paid on the first day of October, 1853, and the other fifty pounds to be paid on the first day of April