

A Visit to the Portland School House

Still sits the Portland Public School in all its splendor on greenhill overlooking Big Rideau Lake in the small village of Portland, Ontario.

This magnificent structure, now known as the Portland School House, dates back to 1874. Partially destroyed by fire in 1888, it was reconstructed by the Dowsetts - a family that became recognised in later years as boat builders.

Its present owner, Joanne Dubois, who purchased the abandoned school in 1988 immediately ventured into restoring this unique building. The privately-funded project was undertaken by Roger A. Moore, Architectural Associate, who was involved in every aspect of the school restoration. The concentrated attention to detail, with the addition of modern amenities, was no easy task and resulted in a more time-consuming project than initially anticipated. I agree with the owner that although restorations of this magnitude are rarely completed without a lot of difficulty, it is all worthwhile when one can finally appreciate the historical value.

Set back only meters from Highway 15, the two storey red brick school house has attracted visitors from near and far who have observed its restoration progress with both delight and fascination. As a result of this vast interest, the school was opened to the public in June 1992.

On my recent visit to the Portland School House, I was overcome by its beauty, simplicity and calmness. One can almost hear the laughter of children in the school yard, the bells ringing and the voices of the teachers who brought education and prominence to the small community of Portland. When crossing the threshold to the generous entrance and large staircase, one is surrounded by a great sense of history and is brought back in time when I am sure visitors hold so many fond memories. The lower classroom has been adapted to accommodate a lunchroom, a small gift shop, a children's play area with restored school desks and slate blackboards.

The Portland School House will entertain both adults and children alike and is a "must-see" for the travellers of Highway 15. The peak summer hours are from 10 to 5 daily.

Rebecca Swallow

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