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History of
SCHOOL SECTION NUMBER 5
OXFORD CENTRE
1844 - 1966

OXFORD CENTRE 1844 - 1966

From the book "Place and Stream Names of Oxford County, Ontario" by W. J. Wintenburg, we read: 'Oxford Centre was known until 1853 as the "Town Hall" for here the council met for many years. Being nearly in the centre of the Township, this place quite naturally received the designation "Oxford Centre".' Even before that time, our little community had its first school.

The first Oxford Centre School of which we have a record, was built about 1844 or 1845. At that time Oxford County constituted the District of Brock which held council meetings in Woodstock. In an 1844 report of the District Council meeting it states that a grant of 50 pounds was given for the erection of a school house in School District No. 5 East Oxford. In due time a frame building 24 feet by 30 feet was erected on the southwest portion of the Pioneer Cemetery, land which had been donated for the cemetery by Abraham Canfield, one of the first settlers of East Oxford.

By the School Act in force at that time the schools were under the supervision of Local Superintendents. Those who served in this office from 1850-1870 were: George Alexander, B. Ellison, A. Hurlburt, John Bredin, Rev. Wm. Stephenson, Rev. Wm. Lund, Rev. S. Benson Kellogg, F. D. Nesbitt, M.D., and A. J. Campbell, M.D.

Some of the teachers of this period were Alexander Robb, James Winterborn and James Dumphy.

In the report of Mr. George Alexander, the school was given a first class rating. In 1851 it had a library of 120 volumes which had increased to 215 in 1852. The annual salary ranged from 62 pounds in 1850 to \$350.00 in 1872. Pupil enrolment fluctuated from 62 to as high as 106.

Schools were supported by municipal and legislative grants. In a report of County Council (as the District Council

was now called in 1850) the school tax rate for East Oxford was set at $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in the pound.

This first school was used occasionally for church meetings and other social functions there being no church at Oxford Centre before 1860. Some of the older residents can recall stories told of them by their parents about the pupils playing in the cemetery and around the materials used in the building of the Anglican Church.

When the ratepayers decided to build a new school there was some controversy as to where it should be located. Those from the north wanted it to be at Oxford Centre, while those from the south wanted it where it now stands, as this would divide the distance more evenly. When it was put to a vote the result was a tie. Mr. N. Schooley, the local storekeeper, was called upon to cast the deciding ballot.

On April 9, 1872, an acre of land was bought from Earl and Charlotte Canfield for the sum of \$120.00. The trustees at that time were Wm. Vroman, James Park and James Lund. Mr. Adams was given the contract to build the school. Many of the old records are missing but we would presume that the cost would be approximately \$1500.00 in comparison with other buildings at that time. Double seats to accommodate about one hundred pupils were installed, and portions of the wall were painted black to be used for blackboards.

The new school was ready for use at Christmas time and the opening took the form of a social evening. One could surmise that the large new classroom was appreciated by the teacher and pupils alike, after having been so crowded in the other one. The large playground was also an improvement.

The old school was moved north of Oxford Centre to the property now owned by Harold Armstrong. For many years it stood just east of the blacksmith shop and was used as a paint shop. In 1937 it was moved to its present location on the same property and has been used as a storage shed since that time.

Many changes have taken place since the present school was built. The following are a few of the changes through the years: Slate blackboards were installed in 1901. In 1907 the bookcase, which is still in use, was bought at a cost of \$10.50. About 1913, new single desks replaced the old double ones. In 1923 a phonograph costing \$99.50 was bought. This must have been considered quite a luxury. In 1925 the present well was drilled at a cost of \$749.88. A new heating system which cost \$162.50 replaced the old box-stove in 1935, but wood was used as the only fuel until 1942 when coal was bought for the winter months. In 1937 electric lighting was installed and in 1939 the first piano was bought. When the pressure system was installed about 1949, it was then possible to have a drinking fountain and better washing facilities in the classroom.

Since 1936 Oxford Centre has had a music supervisor come weekly. The following have worked in this capacity: Miss Priscilla Shields, Mr. Karl Wittig, Mrs. Phinn and Mr. J. Inch.

Religious instructors who have assisted the teachers since 1946 include Rev. A. Thrower, Mr. D. Gorrie, Mr. Watson, and Miss Marguerite Hill.

For many years the East Oxford School Fair was held on these school grounds. Many of you will have pleasant memories of these fairs, which were carried on under the direction of the late Mr. G. R. Green, Agriculture Representative. The trophies displayed here today are reminders of the success of our pupils at that time.

In 1940 a Home and School Association was organized with Mr. Lorne Richardson elected as the first president. This group has continued to be of great service to the school and community since that time.

Late in 1944 the old school sections of East Oxford were dissolved and a Township School Area was formed, coming into force on January 1, 1945.

After 1872 the enrolment continued to be quite high until about 1910. Then for many years it varied from 20 to 40. In the 1940's the enrolment started to rise again and at times due to crowded conditions it became necessary to take some of the pupils to other schools in the township. During the years 1948-1950 they were taken by bus to Curries and from 1953-1955 they were taken to Eastwood. In 1955 an addition to the school was built by Wallace Brothers of Embro. Besides a new classroom, this addition provided washrooms, a kitchen and a furnace room. Since that time Oxford Centre has had two teachers.

Since the time of the first school, few of the old times remain, but for a number of years there have been enrolled here, pupils who represent the fourth generation of their families; namely: Linda, Philip and Jimmie Parking, whose father Aubrey, grandfather Russell and great-grandfather Philip Parking were former pupils; Blair and Susan Kelner, whose father Orland, grandmother Mrs. Julia Kelner, and great-grandfather Wm. Chambers attended school here; the last two mentioned together with Mrs. Kelner's daughter, Mrs. Ruby Jeffery and granddaughter Carolyn form a third group.

And now, with the change that is about to be made, let us not be unmindful for the many pupils who have gone forth with a foundation of learning gained here, to make their mark in the world, and let us be confident that Oxford Centre pupils will continue to go forth to become worthwhile citizens where ever they may be.

TEACHERS

Teachers who have taught in this school since it was built in 1872 include:

R. D. Cowan	
Mr. Murphy	
Mr. Laycock	
A. J. McKay	
Wm. Kalbfleisch	
David Hume	
U. V. Christie	
Fred Minns	1900 - 1903
Margaret Best	1903 - 1905
Morley Smith (Absent some months in 1907)	1905 - 1910
Norman Cook (August - December)	1907
W. H. Martin (August - September)	1910
Mr. McKinnon (October - December)	1910
E. Milliken (January - June)	1911
Ida Patterson	1911 - 1914
Marion Hughes (September and December)	1914
John Geddes (January - June)	1915
George Smith	1915 - 1916
Pearl Frizelle	1916 - 1918
Rosa Herron	1918 - 1919
Olive Cole	1919 - 1920
Gladys Ficht	1920 - 1935
Mary Caley	1935 - 1938
Alice George	1938 - 1942
Mrs. Isabel Townsend	1942 - 1944
Doris Brinn	1944 - 1945
Mrs. Reba Logan (September - April)	1945 - 1946
Mrs. Enid Easton (April - December)	1946 - 1947
Mrs. Margaret Thornton (January - June)	1948
Verna McComb	1948 - 1951
Morris McMillan	1951 - 1953
Mary(Caley) Armstrong	1953 - 1961
Shirley Appleton	1955 - 1957
Mrs. Margaret Palmer	1957 - 1958
Mrs. Lila McMillan	1958 - 1959

Mrs. Marion Plumb	1959 - 1960
Mrs. Alice LeRiche	1960 - 1965
Stuart Little	1961 - 1964
Harvey Simmons	1964 - 1966
Betty Stroud	1965 - 1966

Mrs. Gladys Rutherford, the former Gladys Ficht, taught for the longest period having served the section faithfully for fifteen years (1920 - 1935).

TRUSTEES

The following served as trustees prior to 1945: James Lund, Wm. Vroman, James Park, R. Hoggard, Wm. Lemon, Daniel Adams, Geo. Green, John Richardson, W. Chambers, James Langdon, Harry Hampson, Henry Greenly, D. C. Armstrong, Gordon Kelner, Mrs. M. McDowell, Frank Kennedy, John Riach, Wm. Lovelace, Roy Richardson, Russel Parking, Edward Kennedy, and James McDowell.

Of these trustees Gordon Kelner served the longest, having been a trustee for twenty-two years and during nineteen of these years he was the secretary-treasurer.

Mrs. M. McDowell was the first lady trustee and was also the first delegate from Oxford Centre to attend the Trustees and Ratepayers' Convention in Toronto.

After the formation of the Township School Area the following have served on the School Board: Elton Townsend, Edward Kennedy, John Longworth, Frank Manson, Russel Kerr, Elmer Hall, Stanley Schultz, John Pike, Cecil Richardson, Harold Shaw, Cyril Depper, Francis Taylor, Mrs. Rhoda Parkin, Mrs. Eileen Moyer, Wm. E. Talbot, Frank Scott, Murray Armstrong, Mrs. Verna Logan and Earl Start.

Mr. F. G. Jackson was secretary-treasurer from 1945 to 1950 and since that time that position has been held by Mr. N. M. Holdsworth.

INSPECTORS

In 1870 the office of Local Superintendent was abolished and County Inspectors took over the supervision of the schools. Inspectors since that time are:

Mr. W. Carlyle
Mr. R. A. Paterson
Mr. Geo. Mather
Mr. J. W. Hagan
Mr. L. B. Hyde
Mr. T. J. Thompson
Mr. N. E. Ward
Mr. A. P. Silcox
Mr. W. G. Anderson

Among those from this school who gave their lives in active service were:

World War I - Mr. Milliken and Mr. Geddes, former teachers, and James Langdon, a former pupil.

World War II - Norman Evans and Jeffery Chalk, former pupils.

OXFORD CENTRE HOME AND SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

1940 - 1966

On Thursday evening, October 24, 1940, a meeting of the ratepayers of this School Section was held at the school with an attendance of forty-five. Gordon Kelner, chairman, introduced the guest speaker, Mrs. J. R. Sullivan, Oxford County organizer of Home and School Associations and who was assisted by Mrs. Fred Fairs, Woodstock. It was moved by R. H. Buchanan and seconded by Mrs. Lorne Richardson that a Home and School Association be organized in this community, the first officers being:

President - Mrs. L. Richardson
1st. Vice-Pres. - Mrs. S. Lawrence
2nd. Vice-Pres. - Mrs. R. Parking

Recording Sec'y.-Miss A. George
Corr. Sec'y. and Treas.- R. H. Smith
Programme - Mrs. E. Wilsdon
Social - Mrs. S. Hird and Mrs. R. H. Buchanan
Membership - Mr. W. Jeffery

Gordon Kelner and Frank Jackson were appointed Honorary Presidents and in 1945 the names of A. Thrower and Mrs. Lorne Richardson were added.

One of the first projects of the newly formed Association was making layettes for British babies. The first delegate to the Home and School Convention was Miss Alice George. In 1941 a School Beautification Committee was appointed, namely Mr. E. Schultz, E. Wilsdon, Mrs. E. Kennedy, and Mrs. E. Wilsdon. Through this effort the school received a folding table as a prize. A quilt was made by the Jr. Red Cross girls and tickets were sold by members of Home and School with Mrs. W. Montgomery the winner, and all proceeds going to the Junior Red Cross War Fund.

On Jan. 17, 1946, Walter Wood unveiled an Honour Roll placed in the school with the following names inscribed by Mrs. W. G. Lazenby:

Harold Armstrong	Murray Riach
James Bursee	Donald Riley
Janice Chalk	Stanley Smith
Jeffery Chalk	Arthur Stewart
John Clifford	Carl Stewart
Norman Evans	Arthur Streng
Ray Givens	John Stewart
Peter Palubiski	Mark Travers
Leslie Pellow	

Killed in action: Jeffery Chalk, Norman Evans

On May 28, 1946 a Well Baby Clinic was sponsored by Home and School and held in Oxford Centre Hall. The first helpers were Mrs. C. Dougherty, Mrs. G. Parkin, Mrs. E.

Wilsdon and later all Home and Schools in East Oxford were asked to help.

Cook books were compiled by members and sold. Money was sent to Toronto in 1947 to help reestablish schools in war torn countries in Europe under the UNESCO plan. In 1948 Home and School catered to a Grassland Day along with Blows and Curries and from the proceeds a record player was purchased for the school children's use.

In 1950 a Tenth Anniversary party was held when each president received a remembrance. A Seventeenth Anniversary was also celebrated at which time Mrs. S. Lawrence presented Mrs. W. Jeffery with a gift for regular attendance. On the Twentieth Anniversary it was noted that one present member, Aubrey Parking, was also present at the first meeting in 1940. In 1962 the group sponsored a meeting of the Historical Society held in Oxford Centre Hall and was considered a huge success. In that year the first Graduation pins were presented to the Grade 8 class and awards given for printing and writing. This practice has been carried on each year including additional awards donated by individual members.

Our final two years have been busy and interesting ones. Two of the highlights were first, the presenting of a picture of the Oxford Centre School to the east Oxford Township School Area Board, which will be placed in the new Central School along with a similar one from each of the other schools in the township. Secondly, one of our former members, Mrs. George Parkin was presented with a Life Membership from the Ontario Federation of Home and Schools Association, the first for Oxford to receive this award from the Ontario level. Mrs. Charles Riach read the citation. This event took place April 6, 1966 at the Inn on the Park in Toronto during the Home and School Convention.

Through the years the guest speakers have been varied with ministers, music instructors, new editors, horticulturists, public health nurses, public school inspectors, judges,

dentist, Member of Parliament, librarian, representatives from, Dept. of Agriculture, YMCA, Children's Aid Society, Retarded Children's School, School for the Blind, Ontario Hospital, Dept. of Highways, Bell Telephone and others as well as capable speakers in and around our own community.

The music provided at our meetings has been mainly our local talent which has been excellent down through the years.

The following is a list of Presidents of the Oxford Centre Home and School Association.

Mrs. L. Richardson	1940 - 1941
Walter Wood	1941 - 1943
Mrs. C. Townsend	1943 - 1944
Mrs. E. Wilsdon	1944 - 1946
Mrs. G. Parkin	1946 - 1948
Mrs. T. W. Lazenby	1948 - 1950
Mrs. H. McCready	1950 - 1952
Mrs. W. Hampson	1952 - 1954
Mrs. J. Huggins	1954 - 1955
Mrs. G. Parkin	1955 - 1956
Mrs. Colin Riach	1956 - 1958
Mr. Kenneth Sherman	1958 - 1960
Mrs. A. Martin	1960 - 1962
Mrs. E. Hird	1962 - 1964
Mrs. F. Maloney	1964 - 1966
