

Mtn Mem. # 101 Mar. 2022

EDUCATION ON MOUNT HAMILTON PART 1

By Robert Williamson

Over the past eight years this monthly column has revealed a hundred stories of the fascinating heritage of the Hamilton Mountain: its famous people, unique neighborhoods, beautiful homes and remarkable growth. Now let's disclose the amazing story of one of the oldest Mountain schools that closed in 1987.

Schools in 1860 were few and far between in rural areas where funds were limited. That was the year when the Bray family on Stone Road, now the Mountain's Concession Street, donated land to build a Union Mission as a meeting hall for protestant denominations. It served as a church, community hall and classroom until Barton Township could afford to build a public school. That story is now recorded on a City Plaque at the Concession Street library located across from the original Union Hall site. Demolished in 1952, the former classroom became a bank and now serves, ironically, as a medical office college.



Mountain Union Mission Hall courtesy HMHS archives

The building of the Wentworth Street Incline Railway in 1899 changed the entire status of Mount Hamilton. With it came a seven hundred seat live theatre complex, Cotter's Hotel, and a business / resort community with spectacular city view points. The city quickly annexed the land on the escarpment side of Concession Street providing essential services including school attendance at the city's Stinson Street School below the escarpment. It cost a penny to use the Incline but the adjoining stairs with 523 steps were free. Soon the wooden bannister became quite polished and the in-seams of the children's clothes were very worn from sliding to school.

But the Incline also gave convenient access to inexpensive unserviced rural land on the south side of Concession Street. By 1905 the Barton Township Board of Education needed a quick fix and built a small frame school house on a small plot of land on East 19th Street, known locally as Fortune Lane, south of Concession Street, just beyond the city limit. Then, dairy farmer, Adam Inch, who had become a school trustee, sold an acre of the southeast corner of his farm to the Board for \$500.00 to accommodate future growth. The site ran along Wentworth Street facing Crockett Street and adjoined the site of the small frame school house on Fortune Lane. By 1912, a solid two room brick school was opened and the combined structures were designated Barton Township School Section 3 or S.S. No. 3. Water was supplied for both buildings from a pump in the school yard. Due to a lack of sewers there was no indoor plumbing. To add to the inconvenience, the site was flooded every spring from

excess water being channeled eastward in a Mountain City Ditch built to divert drainage water away from the lower city.

Despite the health issues of that time period; epidemics of German measles, smallpox, chickenpox, scarlet fever, diphtheria, whooping cough and impending Spanish flu, the Mount Hamilton school population continued to expand. The brick school house had a second storey added in 1917. In keeping with its imposing appearance and the wartime period, it was called Lloyd George School in honour of the British Prime Minister.

By the end of the war with returning soldiers and the influx of immigrants from war torn Europe, the Mountain's population ballooned. Miss Blossom Patton, who would spend her entire teaching career of 44 years at the school, was hired in 1919 to teach the grade one class in the original wooden frame annex. She began the year in September with 45 children and ended the year in June with 102. Consequently, the Township decreed that the following year, there would be two grade one classes split between September and January start dates.

But there was no end to the flood of students and in 1920 the Trustees were forced to rent space in the Methodist Church, formerly Cotter's Hotel on the southeast corner of Upper Wentworth and Concession streets. Miss Patton recalls that there were no blackboards and the teachers had to tape large sheets of paper to the walls and write with crayons. Not intended for large student enrollment, the building had insufficient water outlets and a shared outdoor toilet for the children.



The Methodist Church on the south side of Concession Street looking east across Upper Wentworth Street. Courtesy Mount Hamilton United Church Archives.

Clearly the Barton Township School Board had to respond to the educational needs of the Mountain's children. A larger school was desperately needed. Now the farmland prudently provided by Trustee Adam Inch, proved essential to this Mountain Education story. *CONTINUED NEXT MONTH*

Mountain Memories by award winning writer Robert Williamson appears monthly for the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society. Source: 150 Years of Excellence & Jacqueline (Inch) Carson Research Paper.