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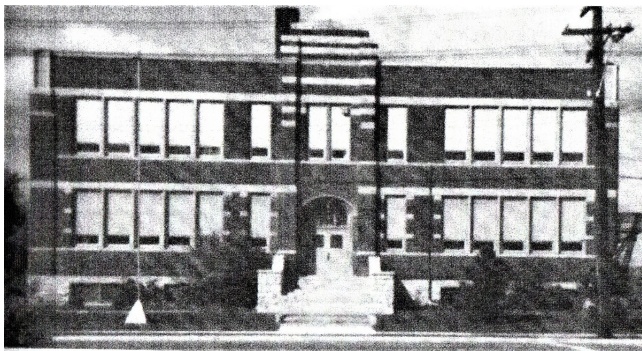
MOUNT HAMILTON'S OLDEST SCHOOL

By Robert Williamson

Last month we traced Mount Hamilton's Barton Township school development from 1860 to 1920 along the south side of Concession Street. We saw education progress from a Protestant Mission Hall classroom to a small wooden school house, S.S. # 3 followed by a two storey brick Lloyd George School on the Inch farm. The story closed with the township renting additional classroom space from the Methodist Church at Upper Wentworth and Concession. All of this growth took place a few blocks from the Wentworth Street Incline Railway.

The increase in the number of school age children on Hamilton Mountain was inevitable. In 1920 there were rumors of expropriation of Barton Township property south of Concession Street and the Province had raised the mandatory school age from 14 to 16 years. A large addition on the back of Lloyd George School on Upper Wentworth Street was required, but being outside the city, it had no sewers or water. With the bedrock being so close to the surface, dynamite had to be used to extend water and sewer lines to the school from Concession Street. To save money, the foundation of the extension was several feet shallower creating a split level to the finished building. During construction, the clay top soil being poorly drained turned to goeey mud causing less use of temporary outdoor washrooms and lost shoes.

The original 1905 wooden annex behind the brick school house had to be torn down to make room for the large addition. It opened for use in October 1922 having all the best features of a city school: electricity, city water, indoor washrooms, , domestic science, manual training, a medical room, eight classrooms, an auditorium, a large basement for a kindergarten /playroom, supply room, baby clinic and rifle range for army cadets.



Inverness School HMHS courtesy Jacqueline Inch Carson

Especially appreciated by the Mountain community was the large multi-use school auditorium desperately needed since the Summers Theatre burned down eight years earlier. According to the Hamilton Spectator, Belle Summers put her professional skills to work with the Dramatic Society from 1922-1927 producing and directing outstanding plays at Lloyd George School auditorium to raise funds to build a grand Parish Hall / theatre at St. Stephen Church on Concession Street.

In 1929 the long-expected Hamilton annexation of Barton Township from Concession Street to Fennell Avenue took place expropriating the pride of Mount Hamilton, Lloyd George School, along with two smaller S. S. No. 3 rural schools; Onteora and Brucedale. The enrollment at Lloyd George School was 590 students or an average of 50 students in each of its 12 classrooms. To relieve the overcrowding and anticipating future growth, the Board needed 16 more classrooms. A further addition to Lloyd George was not possible so the Board purchased adjoining land fronting on Concession Street. George L. Armstrong school named for a Board member who had rendered outstanding service, opened in 1930. The nearby 12-roomed Lloyd George School was renamed the Armstrong Annex since the two schools would share the existing Principal Mr. Lavelle Rouse (1923-1938) and the Board already had another school on its inventory named Lloyd George on Beach Road at Ottawa Street.

By 1952, the post-war Mountain population growth was amazing, spurred on by rapid construction of war-time housing. The combined enrollment of the Armstrong schools complex was 1,450 students. It was at this time that a new educational concept was introduced: Senior Public Schools with Rotary. The larger Armstrong school on Concession became the first Senior Public School on the Mountain in 1954. New wings were added to both sides of the building to meet senior educational requirements for students drawn from Upper James to Upper Gage. Portable classrooms (Quonset huts) began to make their appearance in most school yards. The Armstrong Annex on Upper Wentworth was reconfigured as a Junior Elementary School with its own principal and renamed Inverness School after the nearby avenue. The juggling of space requirements and grade placements had to have been an administrative nightmare.

When the city annexed all of Barton Township as far as Mohawk Road in 1955 the Mountain population had grown to 77,300. By 1974 the first sign of declining enrollment in the older areas began to show and Junior Elementary Schools like Onteora and Brucedale were impacted first. The Education Management Committee was compelled to investigate redistribution of school boundaries, school busing and school closures in 1977. Through strong community support, Inverness avoided the first closure. A "*Mountain News*" editorial on March 16, 1977 said it all. "*To close Inverness and transfer classes to portables at Armstrong School less than a city block away made as much sense as boarding up a house to live in the garage.*" But eventually in 1987, Inverness, the last of Mount Hamilton's original schools was replaced by a row of brick bungalows on the west side of Upper Wentworth. Now, driving by, remember that it was once an acre of the Adam Inch dairy farm that he set aside in 1905 to develop education in Mount Hamilton.

Mountain Memories by award winning writer Robert Williamson appears monthly for the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society. Story sources: "*150 Years of Excellence*" HBE Archives, Jacqueline (Inch) Carson -Research Paper.