

Battle of Ridgeway MEMORIAL SCHOOL

S. S. NO. 10, BERTIE / RIDGEWAY, ONTARIO

BATTLE OF RIDGEWAY SCHOOL - FORMERLY SCHOOL SECTION #10

Researched and written by Margaret E. Teal

First records of this school are dated 1887. Miss M. Disher was the first teacher in 1880 - 1881, Ed Burgoyne taught in 1885 and Miss Graham was one of the first teachers in 1887. First trustees were E. H. Ellsworth and Isaac Pound. The first Auditor was Michael Miller.

Receipts for taxes	-	\$652.00
Legislative Grant		16.53
Expenditures		363.00 including \$5.00

for repairs to the roof

Evidently the damage came about due to blasting from the quarry, when a large rock care through. This rather startling, and frightening event occurred again between 1917 and 1922. That occasion is vividly recollected by at least one pupil of the day - who felt the enormity of the situation, for, as she remarked - had someone been standing up at the front reciting, it could have been far more serious than just a big hole in the roof.

The record book for these earliest days in the life of the school has been mislaid. It is hoped it may be found before the celebration of the 110th Anniversary of the old red brick schoolhouse, and the present day modern structure, on Saturday, June 6th, 1981, in the schoolhouse.

Fortunately notes were taken by this writer of this article in 1967 or 1968 during a class in the Bertie Senior Elementary School in Ridgeway, where she taught a class on Bertie Township History. The guest speaker on one occasion was James Sibbald, and he quoted from this old record book.

The earliest record books other than this are dated 1901. In 1903 we find that Charles Reinhart had tried for three years to have a wooden fence erected as a barrier between the boys and girls outhouses, and he finally succeeded.

In 1923 Percy Teal repaired the fence, the outhouses, and the woodshed to which it was joined, at a charge of \$28.00 plus \$25.00, both including materials and labour.

The teachers salary in 1904 was \$300.00 for the year. In 1904 the salary was \$340.00 for the year. In 1908 we find the signatures of Jesse Finch and A. W. Athoe who were the Auditors. In this same year we find a motion by H. Lee & E. Doan that we drop the idea of the bus question, which had to do with paying the High School bus for the Entrance Class. Auditors in 1914 were Ruben Winger and Clarence Weaver. It was customary to meet just once a year for an annual meeting of the School Board, unless something very important came up during the year. Such as the question of the School bus. The Annual Meetings consisted of electing a chairman and secretary, adopting trustees and auditors reports, and electing new trustees, and new auditors for the next year. In 1921 we find a motion by C. Roadhouse, seconded by M. Miller that H. Benner be Sections Auditor. Also moved by R. Winger and seconded by F. Fretz that M. Athoe ct as auditor. A vote was taken and H. Benner was elected It was motioned that F. Fretz be trustee, motioned by R. Winger and H. Benner. B. Sherk and B. Weaver motioned that

E. Johnston be trustee. E. Johnston and J. Litchenberger motioned that B. Sherk be trustee. A vote was taken and F. Fretz was elected. At this meeting it was decided to repair the old floor for the present time, and Mr. C.M. Teal gave an interesting report of his visit to the Trustees Convention held in Toronto. At this meeting Clarence Weaver signed as Chairman and C.M. Teal as Secretary, the latter having acted as Secretary for several years. In the early years Jake Reinhart was Secretary for many years, and reading the reports one can understand why, as his penmanship was excellent. Morley Athoe and Wilson Teal were trustees for many years. In 1903 \$1.52 was paid for scrubbing the floor and approximately \$5.00 a month for bringing the wood, probably delivering it to the attached woodshed - as usually the boys would have to carry it into the school. The old one room schools were heated by a large wood burning stove in the centre of the room. It was also used for the hot lunch in wintertime; usually consisting of a very large kettle of soup. If the fire burned too high it meant burned or scorched soup for lunch. Some pupils stoically drank the stuff to please the teacher and others, at least where I attended school quietly opened a window and poured it outside. Actually the idea of a hot lunch at noon was a great blessing to students who had to walk several miles each day to school through very cold weather, snow and rain.

In 1891 we find a report by School Inspector, Isaac Ball on December 3rd: school is in a fair way progressing, pupils seem to be interested in lessons of the day. Arbor Day in May was a real occasion, according to teacher, M. Disher.

Family names mentioned in the early records as serving on the school board are Hanes, Litchenberger, Reinhart, Teal, Sherk, Weaver, Athoes, House, Johnston, Lee, Andrews, Tom Baxter, Sam Baxter, Doan, Learn, House, Burse Roadhouse, Fretz, Benner, Miller, White, Shisler, Huffman, Finch.

Many teachers have carried on the task of educating the offspring of the families in the area. Many are remembered with great affection, and many tales can be related by teacher and pupil. One unfortunate teacher lost his position when the Inspector, Norman Whiteman caught the children playing croquinole rather than learning their lessons. Back in 1954 and 1955 bubble gum was all the rage and one poor teacher, Mr. Earl Plato, had to strap all the girls to make them stop blowing those great big bubbles. The park across the road was a favourite spot to eat lunch in the warm weather. One day, the teacher, Ernie Bowen, a very gentle, kindly person, fell asleep after lunch. The children playfully covered him with dry leaves. When he awakened at two o'clock, he was very surprised and the children were delighted to have an extra hour for playing.

The old, red brick schoolhouse was built in 1870 in the same saltbox architectural style as other one-room schools in Bertie Township, of which there were 14. This schoolhouse replaced an older log schoolhouse on the opposite side of the road. This building was located west of the present day cairn in the Ridgeway Battlefield Park, where a large maple tree now stands. Whether the log schoolhouse burned down - a common occurrence in the early days - or whether it was pulled down to erect a larger, more permanent structure is not known. Why the members of the Board decided to build on the opposite side of the road, instead of the original site, which was so much safer (away from the quarry) and more picturesque

is puzzling. In 1916, a new flag pole was put up on the location of the former school in honour of a proposed celebration on the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Ridgeway, or the Battle of the Fenian Raiders, June 2nd, 1866. Regiment 176 were camped overnight in a field, as told by Bill Athoe, a rainstorm came up and the soldiers came to his father's home on the Ridge seeking for shelter there, and in other homes nearby. Next day there was a parade and a ceremony in the park, the latter was interrupted when a second rainstorm came up and blew the new flagpole to the ground. Everyone was drenched and left for home, ending the celebration. Later on, Dycks from Welland came and blasted a hole in the rock and a new flagpole was put up and is probably still standing.

Because of its proximity to this historic site and battle the name of the school was changed in 1954, to the Battle of Ridgeway School. It does seem sad that the Niagara South Board should decide to close such an old and historic school, a place that means so much to the community and to all of the former Bertie Township.

School days were times of strict discipline, but they were happy days, and the little one-room schools produced a whole generation of good, for the most part, God-fearing citizens, ready to serve their country and their community. Those who received the strap as punishment never seemed to be bitter, knowing well that to break the rules, or be impudent, was to be punished severely.

No. 10 school always took first prize in the marching and drill parades at the Bertie Fair, held first at the Bertie Townhall grounds, then at the old brick school in Ridgeway, and later at the racetrack in Fort Erie. What an exciting time it was for all the schools in Bertie. Drilling in the schoolyard became a daily practise. Always striving for perfection, every student tried to do his or her best to win the prize. Competition was keen and excitement high as each school, after being led onto the parade ground by a brass band went through their school drill with much appreciation from the audience of proud parents and friends. Elation or bitter disappointment always followed the announcement by the judges. One school was so small in pupil numbers, that they were told they would never win against the larger schools, who made a much better showing. It is to their everlasting credit that they always kept on trying, regardless, always worked hard to win, hoping, wishing to win just once.

Many stories are related about the high jinks at school, such as the time a football was being kicked about the schoolroom one morning, prior to the teacher's arrival, and how one swift kick hit the stovepipe and knocked all thrity feet of it down and all full of soot. Another sport was riding down the steep quarry on a piece of tin, which came to a sudden end when one girl suffered a severe gash in the leg and walked all the way home so the teacher would not know.

No group of students were ever more lively nor more given to sibling rivalry than those at No. 10, but along with the fighting and fun they learned their lessons and from their wonderful teachers how to live good lives. We would like to mention all the teachers but much limit our remarks to a few whose families were kind enough to relate something of their activities while teaching at NO. 10.

Miss Anna Murphy was born in St. Catharines, of Irish descent. In her twenties she came as a teacher from 1905-1907. She boarded at Wilson Teals and it was here she met her future husband, Oscar Teal. She wore a high-necked shirtwaist with gathered sleeves and a gored ankle length tailored skirt, with a wide fabric belt with a rather ornate buckle. Suspended from her neck was a gold watch tucked into a small pocket under her belt. Her lovely red hair was worn high on her head. Petite in stature, 5'2", she nevertheless cowered before no one, least of all the large older boys who came to school only in the winter. Hidden within her shirtwaist, or belt, she carried a handmade leather strap and never failed to whack a pupil who aroused her anger. Leaving in 1908, she went to St. Catharines High School. Brilliant in mathematics, she was a wizard in algebra, trigonometry and geometry. Following her marriage she came to Fort Erie and continued her interest in education by coaching grade 13 students in math and also for those interested in elocution. She was the first woman ever elected to the Fort Erie School Board. To encourage students to go on to higher education, for many years she gave two gold medals to outstanding students. This practise will be continued on by her son Jack and his heirs in her memory. On August 24, 1959 she was given an award of merit by the Fort Erie Chamber of Commerce, the only such award ever to be given. Mentally alert and still active she passed away in 1977 at the age of 97.

Another outstanding and beloved teacher (1919-1922) was Miss Georgia Burse. She lived with her parents on the Nigh Road, just exactly south of the school. Because she had grown up in the neighbourhood the pupils used to walk to school with her and addressed her with her nickname "Toots". After a time, Lloyd Sherk arose in class one day and said he felt this was undignified, and henceforth anyone addressing her as previously would be fined a penny. The penny fine would go toward the hot lunch fund, however this scheme died aborning, as Lloyd was the first one to break the new rule and so changed his mind.

She would allow the girls to take down her beautiful long red hair and comb and arrange it in the high and elaborate style of the time. After backcombing it, the girls would arrange it in three rolls, over forms called rats, one roll on top and two in the back and a small curl at the front on either side. Her attire was an ankle length skirt, often in a fine twill in green and lavender check on white. With this she would wear a different shade of organdy shirtwaist to blend with the skirt. Every year before Christmas she would invite the whole school, sometimes as many as thirty-five to her home for a sitdown dinner. Afterward the Christmas Concert would be put on for her parents, as a dress rehearsal. A gift was also given to each pupil. One evening she and a friend, Gladys Cauthard stood in the road when young Eber Cutler was coming along in his sports roadster. He stopped and offered to take them for a spin, which they were hoping for, and thus began a romance that ended in Georgia, named for her father, becoming Eber's bride. Two of the older girls were asked to serve at the home wedding and were very excited and nervous in their new dresses and elaborate hairdos.

Ernie Bowen grew up on the family homestead in a stone house along the North Ridge at Split Rock. He was born in 1889 and died in 1961. He was a kind and understanding teacher. Leaving No. 10 he taught for awhile at No. 13 and then later returned.

Albert W. Reavley was another outstanding teacher. He was quite strict but according to Florence Reavley, Nee Teal, a pupil, he was a very nice man. She later married his son Frank, who was Chief of Police at Crystal Beach for many years. He was an authority on the Battle of Ridgeway and often told the children stories. He is the author of an article "Personal Experiences in the Fenian Raid", Welland County Records, Vol. 11, 1926. Through the years changes have come about, in 1945 this school, with No. 5, No. 6, No. 2 and No. 7 joined together to form the East Bertie School Board. In 1955 this was dissolved with the passing of bill 51 in the Ontario Legislature whereby all School Boards were dissolved and the Bertie Township School Board was formed. Jim Sibblad was chairman of this board and Frank Lejeaune was Secretary-Treasurer of the High School Board. In 1969 the Niagara South Board of Education was formed, which Board will now close this beautiful school built in 1954. In 1956 two more rooms were added. Beside Mr. Sibblad, other members of the East Bertie School Board were Joe Winger, Vic Teal and Ron Noyes. In 1967 Frank Lejeaune was asked by the Home & School to give a history of the school and was given a beautiful pair of Centennial cuff links.

With the closing of the school, will pass an era, which meant a great deal to parents, teachers and pupils who were privileged to live through it.

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BATTLE OF RIDGEWAY MEMORIAL SCHOOL, RIDGEWAY

STAFF LIST 1880 - 1981

Miss M. E. Disher	1880 and 1891
Ed Burgoyne	1885
Miss Graham	1887
Anna Murphy	1907
Elsie Greason	1908
Sol Climenhaga	1909
E. N. Phillips	1910
A. W. Reavely	1911
P. Graham	1912
Ernest Bowen	1917 - 1918, 1923, 1930 - 1937
Miss Georgia Burse	1919 - 1922
Miss Bell	1923 - 1924
Marjorie Kingdon	1925
Florence Nicholson	1926, 1927, 1929
Nancy Buchanan	1937 - 1940
Glady's McCrea	1940 - 1941
Lillian Duke	1941 - 1943
Irene Pietz	1943 - 1947
E. W. Dunning	1948
Mrs. W. Winger	1948 - 1950
Mrs. V. Baker	1950
M. Elizabeth Leitch	1950
Norma Blackwood	1950 - 1951
David Winger	1951 - 1952
Earl Plato	1953 - 1954
Ils Nigh	1954 - 1956
Claude Sauder	1955 - 1956
Joanne Winger	1956 - 1960
Roy Hardie	1957 - 1964
Wilma Booker	1958 - 1959
Ethel Woehl	1960 - 1967
Abigail (Winger) Sider	1960 - 1972
Fred Disher	1964 - 1965
Brenda Niznik	1965 - 1966
Harold Hampel	1955 - 1978
Marilyn Fretz	1966 - 1967
Frank Savage	1967
Andrea Winslow	1967 - 1969
Lois (Benner) Griffiths	1967 - 1974
Tonia Cunningham	1969 - 1975
Marlene Beach	1972 - 1981
Mary Hesser	1974 - 1975
Cathy Haslinger	1974 - 1977
Daryl Bradnam	1975 - 1976
Mrs. M. Ort	1975 - 1976
Jo Anne (Gianfrancesco) Black	1976 - 1979
Sandra (Chiki) Smelsky	1977 - 1978
Rita Thomson	1978 - 1981
Doug Taylor	1978 - 1981
Bruce Green	1979 - 1981