

## Dundas Central Public School- A Boomer's Memories

When my elder brother accompanied me to my first day of kindergarten, I felt a little fearful, maybe overwhelmed. After all, I was only five years old, and I was facing this massive sprawling two-storey brick structure that loomed over Melville Street. Fire escapes clung to the outside walls. It was surrounded by a paved play ground. It had separate entrances for boys and girls, with another single door reserved for the little ones in kindergarten . Possibly this entrance was meant to prevent us from being trampled by our more senior fellow pupils in the hallways.

Beside the main building stood a smaller structure with dormers called the "annex". It housed more class rooms and the principal's office. My first and second grade classes were held there.

This was September of 1953. I was a product of the post-war "baby boom", and we boomers were certainly having our effect as we all reached school age. New schools were being built in our town to accommodate all these new pupils. Temporary classrooms were set up in nearby church basements and other spaces to help handle the influx. By this time, at least one new school- Dundana- had been constructed on land that had formerly been part of Ancaster township, before Dundas expanded its urban boundary. More were to come.

The kindergarten classroom was located on the first floor of the main building. It was painted in that light green institutional hue that seemed to be popular then, and was furnished with several rectangular tables , (no desks yet) low chairs, and a piano. The piano would play a major role in our daily lessons. Mounted on the wall at one end were the portraits of Queen Elizabeth and her consort, Prince Philip. Elizabeth had just been crowned earlier that year. Both smiled down on us benevolently each day. We knew by then that they had a child about our age, as well as a daughter.

Our teachers were Mrs. Greenham and Mrs. Lang. The older Mrs Greenham seemed to take the lead in conducting the many group activities, while Mrs Lang was our pianist for sing-songs.

Among the other staff was Mr Swain, the care taker, who lived in a small brick cottage just across the street. One of his many duties was to ring the morning and afternoon bells by hand. The distinctive belfry was gone by the time I started, but the bell remained mounted in the attic, and Mr Swain would pull on a rope in the upstairs hallway. It was anchored just out of reach of any precocious student.

Our principal was a very distinguished looking man, named Mr. Wiley. He would soon become supervising principal of all the elementary schools in the town.

Mr Wylie conveyed authority, but he did it in a gentle way. When a public address system was installed in about 1954, it connected his office with both buildings, and his voice was able to reach out to all class rooms at the same time. He would call us "little people". He drove a silvery blue Buick sedan that would sit prominently by the annex on Elgin Street. For me, at least, that car added to the aura of our principal.

We were told by our teachers to take good care of the school supplies issued to us, such as pencils, erasers, and paper writing pads, because Mr Wylie had had to buy them. I thus assumed that he paid for all these items out of his own pocket. I had no concept of tax payers.

Corporal punishment was very much a part of disciplinary measures at that time. Teachers would often keep the dreaded strap visible on their desks, and sometimes would brandish it if classes got out of line. However I do not recall the strap being administered too often. Mr Wylie would be present when an errant pupil got the strap administered by the teacher. The first time I saw it was in grade 1. One of the boys was called out of the class into the hallway, where our teacher, Miss Mustard, and our principal awaited. We heard the sharp slapping sounds. Our class mate returned in tears.

Grade 1 was different from kindergarten. No groups sitting at tables. No tiny chairs, or piano accompaniment. We now sat in rows of attached desks facing the teacher's desk at the front. We were issued with "Think and Do" books. We read about "fun with Dick and Jane and their dog Spot". We had those pencils, erasers and paper. The desks had ink wells, but at that point we were not yet ready to use pens. Miss Mustard wrote on a large slate black board.

On Fridays, we would troop down to the rather dank basement of the main building to watch National Film Board documentaries. Mr Wylie seemed to be the only staff person who knew how to operate the Bell and Howell projector, so we'd wait for him to come and thread the film through the machine.

Miss Mustard was very young, and I had a crush on her. As I recall, her father, Ernie owned and operated a barber shop and billiards room on King Street. It was located right next to an alley way that we pupils traversed on our way to the school two blocks away. A pedestrian crossing, supervised by a police constable, linked the north and south side of King Street.

Boys and girls used separate entrances and stairways at the school, as well as separate playgrounds. As there was no gymnasium at the time (one would later be built), physical education activities took place outdoors.

While I went home each day for lunch, some of the students would stay at the school, because they had been bussed in from rural areas.

/3

Central School- Cont'd

P.3

For some reason, I envied them. For their lunchtime, a dairy would deliver pint bottles of milk. The empties would be lined up on a long shelf by the rear entrance to the main building. The students were asked to keep the cardboard lids, so they could be used to draw circles for our time-telling lessons.

The annex also housed an "opportunity class", led by a Miss Pangborn. This class may have been meant for students with special needs or learning disabilities.

The following year, I entered grade 2, taught by Mrs Allwell. Then in 1956, we moved to the basement of the main building for grade 3 under the supervision of Mrs. Buchanan. The new school in Central Park was by this time under construction. One day, while we were, fortunately, out at recess, the classroom ceiling collapsed. From the playground, we gaped down through the windows at smashed light fixtures and chunks of plaster, covering our desks. During repairs, we were temporarily re-located to the film room.

Finally, in the spring of 1957, our class moved over to the newly-completed Central Park School. Other schools were opening around this time, including University Gardens and Yorkview. I would attend Central Park for grades 3, 4, 5 and 6.

One day in May of 1957, the annex back at Central had been severely damaged by a massive fire. The attic area and much of the second floor had collapsed. Fire fighters from outside the town were needed to fight the blaze.

Classes at Central Park only went up to grade 6, so for my final 2 years of public school, I had to return to Central in the fall of 1960. By this time, work was proceeding on the new addition at the rear side of the main building. Clad in white brick, and with a two-storey glass foyer that looked out on Victoria Street, it was more sleek and modern than the old building. Once opened, it would house a "gymnasium", industrial arts and home economics classrooms. In the meantime, co-ed physical education classes were still held outdoors. Our "shop" class, taught by Mr. Vanoen, was held in the basement.

The provincial government at the time had designated grade 7 as the class for the teaching of "religious education". I found the weekly lessons to be similar to those taught in a regular church Sunday school. For instance, led by our teacher, Mrs. Dunsmuir, we would recite in unison the Books of the New Testament. I do not recall learning about such faiths as Islam or Judaism.

/4

I did not complete grade 7 at Central. In the fall of 1960, our family moved to Ancaster and I entered the school system there. However, I would always have fond memories for Central, that old brick structure that dominated the neighborhood; its hand rung bell, its creaky floors, and stairs, its high windows, its vast playground, the easy walk home.