

The Old Schoolhouse by Shelley Holloway

It is often considered that the land we purchase is a part of our story, as are the dwellings that sit on that land. I prefer to think of it in the reverse - we are a part of the land's story. The land and often the buildings were here long before us and we are but a mere chapter in that \ history. Often both will remain long after we are gone. Such is the story of the old converted schoolhouse, down that dusty old road, somewhere between Tweed and Flinton, where my grandparents once lived.

The schoolhouse my grandpa renovated was not the first one to be located on lot 16 in Concession 7, down what would become Elzevir Road. The first one was a small log cabin, built in 1861. It was built by Mr. Johnston, a new resident of the area, who saw the need for a school to serve this rural community, as there was nothing at the time. He gathered a crew of local men and they set to work. The tiny schoolhouse was built from white pine logs that were dragged to the property by oxen, the school had only dirt floors and no ceiling, just the white cedar roof. The logs were squared with broad axes and all of the desks were crafted by hand. Like all of the old pioneer schools, it was heated by a wood stove. The school served the community for close to 25 years, but a growing community called for a larger school. The little cabin became a wood shed and in 1966 was donated to the O'Hara Mills homestead property, open now for the public to see. Very few pioneer schoolhouses still exist, and this is a lovely example of the craftsmanship of the time.



The new schoolhouse, also known as S.S. #7 (school section 7) was built in 1887. It was built from wood planks, not logs, but in many ways was no more modern than its little predecessor. It had floors and a ceiling, but for its entire duration, into the 1960's would never have plumbing or electricity. Once again, it was the job of the wood stove to keep it warm on those long winter days. Back then, children walked to school. Nels Duquette would become a good neighbour to my grandpa. As a child, he was given the job of arriving first and starting the fire. He lived

close to two kilometres away. I can only imagine a young child walking that distance in the winter, arriving in the dark, getting things ready for the teacher's arrival. My how things have changed.

By the 1950's and the early 1960's a small yellow bus would bring in some of the children from the area, but by 1965 it was decided that the school was in need of too much care and the children were better off being bused to Flinton. The school only went as far as grade 8, so it also made sense for the

students to be in the village, where they could attend until grade 12 or 13. From the 1930's to the end of its service, the school taught a who's who of children from families who had been in the area for generations. Many are still in that area. Names like Wood, Duquette, Lessard and Bovard have shaped that little community. The Duquette's still live across the road from what was the schoolhouse. Caroline and Melvin attended as children,

married, raised a family. Caroline still lives in the same house. Their's is a love story and legacy that goes back to the 1940's, with both family lines going back much farther. Entire lifetimes on one dirt road.



In 1966, on a trip back to visit his friend Mac Wood, my grandpa learned that the school and the property were to be sold. He jumped at the opportunity, paying \$100.00. He had been recently forced to retire due to health reasons, and saw a new life for him and my grandma. I doubt she saw the same potential he did. She had a network of friends and family in Trenton. She didn't drive and they would be in the middle of nowhere. I suppose back then women didn't have as much say, and so they began preparing for the arduous task of converting a one room schoolhouse into a family home.

The one room was divided up just enough to add a main floor bedroom for my grandparents, and a pantry at the back of the house. A couple of years before, my grandpa's mom had passed and he agreed to care for his intellectually disabled brother Clifford. My grandmother made it clear that if they were to look after Clifford, then they would also look after her sister Dorothy, who also had a delay. They both slept on day beds in the main room until a second story could be added. An oil stove kept them warm, electricity went in, and eventually indoor plumbing. The upstairs would have three bedrooms, and a bathroom. Clifford had one bedroom, and the other two were for visiting family. As we were a larger family, beds needed to be maximized so each room had a double bed, a twin bed and eventually each had a crib. An old corrugated tin garage was put on the front. One of my greatest joys was waking on a rainy morning and hearing the pattering of the drops on the tin. The house was wrapped in faux brick tar paper. It was a modest home, but it kept us warm and cozy, offering everything that a house needed to offer.

For us kids though, the magic was on the outside, spread out over acres and acres of woods, fields and ponds. The Duquette's lived up the hill and the Bovard's down the hill, but there was no one directly across or behind. I'm not sure how far the land went behind the house. There were no doubt miles and miles that separated us from anything back there. My grandpa added



gardens, a pigeon coop, a tire swing to the big old maple in the front yard. The old yellow school bus had been parked out in the field and provided hours of amusement. A barbed wire fence ran the perimeter except for a large gate in the back corner that allowed us to get out

with the dune buggy and the snowmobiles. Often, when we were little, we would simply crawl under the barbed wire instead of walking to the opening, ready to go off and explore. We picked berries, built forts, played games that used our imagination, and had the freedom to be kids.

In 1979 my grandpa (Amos Hutchison) died of a massive heart attack and the home was bought by my oldest cousin, Kim and her then husband. We had a large family reunion back there when her daughter turned one. That was in 1983. Kim and Brian did several renovations, once more changing the look of the house and bringing it into the modern world. They sold it a couple of years later. It has changed hands a few times, always to locals, most of whom are related to children who once attended that school. So many generations have been a piece of the story that land has told.



What an incredible story it has been. 1861. Canada is not yet a country. A school is built on a piece of land in God's country. One hundred years later, we became a chapter in that story. We became more rounded characters because of the setting. We built connections and became a part of the next chapter. How lucky is that.

Note: When Shelley posted her story on Facebook in early 2025, many comments were received. Here are some of the comments and additional information about the school.

Shelley said her grandfather was named Amos Hutchinson - he went by Buck though. Her grandmother was Mildred.

Becky Bryden-Cassidy

Also called Johnson corners schoolhouse. The original school house that was there was donated to O'Hara mill conservation. Some info from their site below:

"The log schoolhouse is one of the few remaining in Ontario. On August 9, 1965, the Elzevir Township Council passed a motion to donate it to the Moira River Conservation Authority. Built in 1861, It was the first school in school section #7 and was constructed on Lot 16, Con, 9, Elzevir Township, about two miles north of Johnston's Corners. In 1887, a new school was built and this log building was used for a woodshed until 1965. In 1966 the Moira River Conservation Authority moved the log school to the O'Hara Mill property and erected it on the current site.

Mr. Albert Johnston of Belleville, a former pupil, provided most of the information that has been obtained concerning the school, pupils and some of the teachers. The government record section of the Department of Public Records and Archives provided the year when the school was built and the names of some of the teachers who taught in it between 1861 and 1870.

Mr. Johnston's grandfather, Charles Johnston, moved in 1860 with his father from St. Gabriel, Quebec to what is known as the French Settlement Road, later called Johnston's Corners. As there was no school in the settlement, Charles Johnston and other settlers decided to build one. They cut white pine logs and hauled them to the building site with oxen. The logs were squared with broad axes. The shingles for the roof were handmade from local white cedar. There was an earthen floor and no ceiling for a few years but later rough lumber was obtained for both floor and ceiling. The school was heated with a large cast iron box stove. "

Lucy Frehner

Yes it just up the road. Not a log House though. My sisters and brother went to that school.

Phyllis Johnson

Last Johnson at Johnson's Corners. Albert Johnson was my uncle. The building you speak of was the "new" school. The original was used as the woodshed and was the one that was moved. Even the new school had no plumbing or electricity. It had a woodstove in the middle of the ONE room. When I attended there were 18 students. In the winter, Nelson Duquette would arrive early and start the fire. Surnames of students I attended with (that I recall) included Duquette, Quick, Kot, Lalonde, Bovard and Brough. The teachers names I remember were Mrs. Cassidy, T.E. Emmons and Dennis Fleming.

Christine Duquette Moore

I grew up next door to the school house. As far back as I know Millie and Buck Hutchison lived there through the 60 & 70's

My mother and father went to school there. My mother might remember some info on the building.

Also Clifford Hutchison lived there with Buck and Millie

Dawn HBrowne

visited my MIL today and she had this picture of the schoolhouse, approx 1946. L to R Charles McNulty, Marie Loveless(Duquette), Donny Brough, Muriel Wood.

https://www.oharamill.ca/heritage-buildings-1/the-school-house?fbclid=IwY2xjawlSE9ZleHRuA2FlbQlXMAABHUiV1Ub3--quwnHqRqc2U5lkeIz4ZYkYFwKGELUosPdShs2FkKTDchz33w_aem_klcORO05CEpu_w7mqal4Gg

Built in 1861, and known as S.S. #7, this pioneer log building is one of few remaining in Ontario. It was donated to the Moira River Conservation Authority in 1965 and moved to its O'Hara Mill site in 1966 from its original home at Johnson's Corners in neighbouring Elezevir township.

This pioneer school is a fine tribute to the O'Hara family, among the earliest settlers in Madoc township (1823) who promoted the establishment of the first school in the township. Like many other families at the time, the O'Hara children walked to school. Thankfully for them, it was just down the road to what was known as the O'Hara School S.S. #2, which was situated on the corner of O'Hara Road and Mill Road.

A number of renovations have been made to the building over the years to preserve its integrity including new shingles, the addition of a belfry, repainting, restructuring the foundation and building a new floor. All completed thanks to our dedicated volunteers, the one-room school house will continue to educate families for years to come.

For a history of one-room Schoolhouses, [click here](#).

For information on the origins of the Schoolhouse, [click here](#).

To take a Virtual Tour of the School House, [click here](#).

Dawn HBrowne

Shelley Holloway i think 405 Elzevir rd, you won't recognize it as a schoolhouse now, renovations have been made.