

Mrs. Jean Hill's History of Fairplay and
Community.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The topic of this evening's meeting is entitled "Rural Life", but it does not signify whether it is to be past or present, and after some consideration, but mostly curiosity on my part, I decided that perhaps you would be interested in some of the history of the community. Many of you are direct descendants of the original founders of this community, and those who aren't have been residents for several years.

Realizing that the schools are uppermost in our minds, I delved into history by talking to some of the descendants, and checking original records. I think I have been quite successful in securing some very interesting information.

Fairplay School or S.S. No. 2

First, this particular school was originally, School Section No. 13, Sandwich East, and was built by a Mr. Sedgewick of Kingsville, in 1881. In the year 1895, the name was changed to School Section No. 2, Sandwich South, at which time the township of Sandwich South was formed, and is practically the same today as when built.

There was a platform in the center front for the teachers desk, with two arm chairs. Original desks were bought in 1882, which were mostly double desks and these remained until the present seats were put in about ten years ago. The stove was a box type with a metal frame around the outside, installed in 1915 (I could find no record of previous stove) About 10 or 12 years ago it was replaced by a newer type, and in 1949, the present oil burner was installed. There was a board fence put up at the time the school was built, which had a stile to get into the school yard, it remained until the year 1911, when it was replaced by 40 rod of Sarnia fence, costing \$13.00.

The first secretary was Mr. Dennis Perrin, who lived where Mr. Gordon Battersby now lives. He kept this position until March, 1908, at which time Mr. Jas. Quick was appointed and he carried on until the year 1919, when Mr. Wm. Nagoreson took over.

Mr. Chas. Dixon dug the well in 1881. (An uncle of the Ure's).

In 1882 a strap was purchased for .10¢ and a visitor's book for .15¢.

Board walks were put down in 1882, made of pine plank and set on oak blocks.

In the year 1919 the school board was instructed to take out a tornado insurance policy.

In the year 1899 a post office was started, at the home of Mr. Dennis Perrin, which Mr. Robert Hurst, who was an uncle of Mrs. Ray Ure, named "Fair Play", where this school and immediate community got its name.

The mail was picked up at Tecumseh every Tuesday and Friday and taken to the post office, and delivered by Mr. Perrin, until the year 1909, when the post office was moved to Mr. Sam McKenzie's home and from there the mail was delivered by Mr. James Quick. This continued until Rural Mail Delivery was started from Maidstone, in approximately the year 1912.

So much for Fair Play or No. 2, now, we will go away back to 1862, and start with a log school built across from Nelson Ure, on No. 2 Highway in Sandwich East, where they used benches for seats with nothing for the children to write on. The girls sat at the front and the boys at the back. Mr. William Ure, grandfather of Elmer, used to tell the story of he and George Hurst being punished. The teacher would ask how they would like to be punished, by a strapping or sitting with the girls? Mr. Hurst said he would sit with the girls and Mr. Ure said he would be strapped. In as much as Mr. Hurst was quite a ladies' man, the teacher just reversed the punishment.

I haven't any more detail of this building, but on the site of the present school, No. 1, there was a frame building almost identical to No. 2 with center platform and a porch across the front of the building, built in 1877 - 74 years ago. Mr. Wm. Ure was secretary-treasurer for 40 years.

In 1905, Mrs. Fred Frith, the teacher at that time, had 69 pupils in a building this size and approximately 15% were colored. The salaries in those days ran around \$350.00 to \$400.00 per year. If you boarded out the rate was from \$1.60 to \$1.75 per week. In music the Singing Master used tuning forks, they were metal forks with two prongs.

Now, as all school children, our wish was that the school burn, and it did happen to us just before Christmas in 1919, but we still had to go to school, it was held in a hall, called "The Independent Order of Good Templars", which stood at the back of the Bethel Church. In 1920, the present brick school was built by Ebert Bros. of Windsor.

In 1946, the Junior School was moved from Belleville, Ontario, where it had been used by the army, to accommodate the increase in our rural population.

In the early 1900's and even later, the big event was the community spelling bees, and sparrow matches, which ended with an oyster supper, put on by the losing side.

The transportation in those days was something to think about, if one could call it that, you either walked or depended on horses, until the automobile and bicycle came along, but of course, there was no worry of flat tires, or running short of gasoline, and you could depend on the horse taking you home. Then this led me to wonder which was invented first, the automobile or the bicycle? By checking our Encyclopedia, I found that the bicycle was first, built in America in 1890, but in Europe, the first one powered with a gasoline engine was built in 1885. In 1895, in America, creditable gasoline engine vehicles appeared, and by 1903, the automobile industry was beginning to grow rapidly.

The first church, built in 1850, was a log building, located on what is now No.2 Highway, between the 9th and 10th concessions. Then, in 1865, a frame church, painted red, was built on the 9th concession, across from Ray Ure's home. It remained until the year 1888 when the present church was built, and in 1940-41 it was remodelled, by putting in a basement and lengthening the building to add the choir loft and kitchen. At the back of the church property there was a wooden drive shed, built when the church was built and remained until around the early twenties.

When the buildings that were built in those days are still standing, and are so substantial, it is surely proof of the quality of lumber used and the construction work that was done.

And, speaking of lumber, some years prior to 1885, Chas. Plant's grandfather started a sawmill on his property, located just north of the present barn. It was operated by Mr. Plant to the year 1896, at which time Mr. Charlie Hare rented it and continued running it until the year 1899, when Charles' father, Mr. John S. Plant took over operations, and continued until it was destroyed by fire in April of 1911.

You all know Little River, which runs along the Base Line. In the 1800's, there was a log to walk over it and people used to carry a torch at night to get across. Then there was a plank bridge built, and in 1905 a cement bridge was constructed by a Mr. McGill from Harrow, at which time he built others. They remained until just within the last three or four years, when the present ones were constructed.

Going back again to the 1800's a cheese factory was built on the corner of the Fairbairn property and the Town Line, around 60 years ago. A Mr. Wood was president and Mr. Dennis Perrin, secretary. The milk was hauled in 20 gal. cans. Imagine the weight of these cans to be handled by hand.

At Fair Play, there used to be a chartered co-operative, "The Patrons of Industry", founded by Mr. Robert Hurst, who lived on the property where Mr. Nelson Mackenzie now lives. The meetings were held at No.2 School, where orders for different merchandise was taken from a catalogue put out by the Wilkin's Company of Toronto. Then the shipments were sent to Tecumseh, perhaps in much the same way as The T. Eaton and Robert Simpson Mail Orders are handled today.

The Municipal Telephone System was installed in 1910-11, with several of the homes still having the original phones.

The lights were as you know candle, kerosene, gas, then some homes had a Delco lighting system, where a machine made a gas from carbide and water, which burnt much the same as natural gas. Then there was the Aladdin Lamp and lantern, but in 1926, the big event was the coming of hydro-power, which was installed in most of the homes, although there was the exception. One farmer would have no part of it, as he said, those who took it, would be broke in a year, which as we all know was and still is far from a fact, and after our recent sudden blackout last week, proves just how lost we would be

without one of our most valued conveniences.

In the early days the only paper was a weekly one, the "Family Herald", which is still in business, then the Windsor Record, which was also weekly, until the rural mail route started, became a daily paper, and of course the weekly Free Press (Essex) which has been in publication for over fifty years.

How many people remember Lousia Payne? Anyone who went to No. 1. School, when she was alive, will. She lived with her parents as slaves, until they were freed, when they came to live on the east side of the 9th concession, between the school and Raymond O'Keefes'. After her parent's death, she stayed on where she spent the rest of her life. She was not alone, as a relative, a man, by the name of John Wilson, stayed with her and worked the farm.

I will always remember the beautiful flowers she grew, although the house and surroundings were just ready to topple over: Oh, yes, the dogs and cats, and the big rust-coat apples. She was a big person and had a heart and voice just as big. When you are young and hear and see something like that for the first time, you always remember it. Although she lived her last years in poverty, she had some of the most beautiful things stored away. She died of pneumonia at the age of 97 in the hospital in Windsor, and was buried at the Fairbairn Cemetery, 14 years ago. 1937

It is with great pleasure that I present Mrs. Ray Ure, Mrs. John Graham and Mrs. Elmer Ure, each wearing a dress of Lousia's, that she had in her home.

At this time the ladies are going to sing for us two numbers:

"I Cannot Sing The Old Songs" and "Juanita".

Thanks very much for your assistance with this program. I'm sure everyone will enjoy looking at and examining the materials and work put into these costumes. I have a picture of Miss Payne, which is as I remember her, it can be passed around for all to see.

Written by Mrs. Jean Hill,
Jan., 1951.

With the kind assistance of Miss Jessie Ure, Mrs. Fred Frith, Mr. D. Ure, Mrs. Ray Ure, Mr. Jas. Battersby, Mr. Jos. Perrin, Mrs. John S. Plant and Mr. John McAliffe.