

## Don Borrowman Remembers

*St. Mary's Separate School No. 7, in 1937 was a typical rural school located on the northeast corner of Highway 3 and Sexton Side Road. The school had two rooms with one (east) for the high school and the other for the lower grades. The high school was gradually phased out by 1945, with only two students in grade nine and two in grade ten. The chemistry laboratory fascinated me; it consisted of an ornate china cabinet in one corner with the necessary equipment including an alcohol lamp instead of a Bunsen burner. Heating the school was a traditional pot-bellied stove with wood storage in a shed outside. Older boys flexed their muscles chopping kindling and stove lengths. Pupils pumped sulphur water from a pump in the schoolyard. Until the 1940s toilet facilities were also outdoors. The students maintained the flower beds and yard while a local farmer mowed the lawn with a hay mower. Living close to the school, the Beahan family did the janitorial work.*

*The physical setup of the school was common to its time, yet this primitive system produced many honour students who scored well on the entrance exams written at Essex High School. Two Sisters of St. Joseph from the convent at Maidstone were chauffeured to school daily in a shiny black car; one young driver was Joe John. At this time Sr. Mary Fidelis was the principal and high school teacher. Religion was taught daily and prayers were recited at regular intervals, sometimes while kneeling on the wooden floor.*

*Most materials and text books were provided by the students. When I began school the straight pen had replaced the quill for some time. The straight pens which needed to be dipped in inkwells frequently were replaced by fountain pens that could be filled at intervals. Both procedures were often very messy for young children.*

*Girls were treated differently in some areas in these days. They were allowed to play baseball, but not encouraged to play with the boys. Girls wore dresses with skirts midway between ankle and knee. Don recalls one young lady who would raise her skirt so that the waistband was just under her armpits; the nun would regularly take her to the cloakroom for a discussion and a readjustment.*

*Transportation to school was not provided; depending on the weather, a student might walk, ride a bicycle or be driven by car. In winter when the road was sometimes impassable, I drove a pony and sleigh. Don recalls gratefully stabling his pony at the Emmett McCarthy farm.*

*Although by the standards of today, the environment would have been inadequate, the excellent education received in this rural farming community certainly provided the basis for each student to have a most rewarding future*

**Louis H. Collins** wrote a salute to St. Mary's School:

*Today my thoughts are turning  
To the schoolhouse I once knew;  
It seems a hundred years ago...*

*It's a special kind of feeling  
That this school of mine evokes,  
With its woodstove and its blackboards,  
And the pranksters with their jokes.*