There are thousands of Canadians alive who had much of their education in the one room school.

The appointment of the Methodist preacher and editor, Egerton Ryerson, in 1844, as superintendent of schools for Upper Canada, brought on the basis for public education in Ontario. He said: *Education should have a religious foundation and contain studies in grammar, geography, science, arithmetic, music, drawing, history, civics, nature study, physical training and hygiene. Schools were to be free, universal, supported by taxation and open to all.*

The above aims were in place by 1871. Between 1850 and 1880 townships were cut into school sections, trustees were elected, and depending upon the resources of the people, anything from log shanties to brick and stone monuments became the local school. In later years, as the population moved west, even Timothy Eaton offered a catalogue school, “Plan 690”, in three sizes, with a kit of timber, lumber, paint, nails, hardware and building paper (insulation). The largest kit in 1917 was $829.00 complete.

At first, the parents of children attending school had to pay fees to support the cost of the building and the salary of the teacher. For a time schools were called “common” schools and townships were divided into school sections. This meant that each section had its own trustees, school, and teacher. Legislation soon introduced “free” schools. These were supported by all taxpayers in each section and fees were no longer required. Some taxpayers without school-aged children complained. Others maintained that the education of girls was a waste of money.

Each school section was governed by three trustees elected at an annual meeting. Budding young politicians often got their first taste of public service acting as a school trustee. The character of each school section took its shape from the predominant outlook of the trustees. In some school sections, the trustees hired the best teachers they could get for the salary offered. In other sections, cheap salaries were more important and the quality of education suffered considerably.

Provincial school inspectors supervised the free schools operated by the trustees and often times they were not happy about the conditions they found - unswept floors, poor discipline, no outhouses, broken window panes, etc. They did what they could to encourage the teachers to do their best.

One of the greatest improvements for teachers was the annual convention when they gathered to compare notes and found that they were not alone with their problems. Fired up with new ideas and enthusiasm they returned to their schools.

Despite all the problems, many great teachers could be found in the one-room schools and many famous Canadians got their first lessons in them.

The level of educational standards gradually improved as legislation forced regular attendance, authorized textbooks, a library shelf, qualified teachers, and aids such as slate blackboards. School fairs, June picnics and music festivals brought all the schools within townships together. The Junior Red Cross played an important role too. The annual Christmas concert became a major event of the year and often the community rated their teacher by this production.

Most townships had ten or a dozen schoolhouses which, in effect, became small community centres after hours for debating societies, wedding showers, independent Sunday schools, going-away parties, lectures, etc.

Between 1950 and 1970, towns enlarged their central schools and the smaller or more sparsely settled areas were served by the now familiar yellow school bus.

Most of the old schools still survive today, though remodeled into homes, small churches, community halls, museums, welding shops and storage barns.

The *Century Schoolhouse* reflects the more substantial brick schoolhouse built in Southern Ontario between 1860 and 1890.
Local History

(adapted from The Century Schoolhouse, East York - Teacher's Handbook prepared by W. Norman Irish, archival maps and Danforth in Pictures, Toronto Public Library Board, Local History Handbooks - No. Three, 1978)

In the 1800s, the main artery east of the Don River was Queen Street, then called Kingston Road. Lots were laid out in a north-south grid pattern between Queen Street and Danforth (then called the Don and Danforth Road) and in an east-west grid pattern north of Danforth (to make maximum use of frontage on the Don River). East of Woodbine, the lots resumed a north-south orientation.

By the 1840s, Kingston Road was a toll road; fees were used to pay for 18 miles of planked road from Toronto to the Rouge River. Villages began to develop around the various toll-gates (Norway, at the Woodbine toll-gate and Leslieville at Leslie St.). Another village, Don Mount (later called Riverside) developed at Kingston Road (Queen Street) and The Mill Road. The Mill Road or Don Mills Road (now Broadview Avenue) was the other main artery east of the Don River. It was constructed in 1799 and led to the mills in the Don Valley. (These mills were established in 1795 and grew to establish the village of Todmorden by the 1820s).

A glance at the 1878 map (see page 15) shows an area much different than the one we know today. However, some of today’s familiar roads and features stand out even then. To put a present day perspective on the 1878 map, look for Bloor St. (the name changed to Danforth Avenue east of the Don River), Don Mills Road (now Broadview Avenue) on the east side of the Don and continuing north as it followed the river, Plains Road and Dawes Road (the village of Coleman was located at the intersection of Dawes and Danforth). The Toronto and Nipissing Railway (later called the Grand Trunk) ran south of the Danforth; look for the villages of Todmorden and Doncaster north of the Danforth.

In 1878, the immediate area of the Century Schoolhouse was part of Concession II (from the Bay). No schoolhouse existed on the site of the Century Schoolhouse but look for the initials SH on the north side of Plains Road, west of Leslie; this was SS #7, the original schoolhouse serving the children of this area. (In present day terms, SS #7 was just west of Pape Avenue.) The Century Schoolhouse would have been just north of the Clergy Reserves. Note that Toronto (a City since 1834) was located to the south and west of the schoolhouse (the eastern limit of the City was the Don River and Bloor St. marked the northern boundary).

In 1884, after much debate, Riverside (Don Mount) and Leslieville were annexed to Toronto. This area became the new St. Mathew’s Ward (renamed Ward 1 in 1891) and included all the land between the Don River east to Greenwood between Queen Street and Danforth Avenue. Meanwhile the area north of the Danforth remained part of the rural landscape. Farms, open fields and market gardens were the norm with the odd factory and hotel found along the way. Messrs. Pape, Logan, Leslie, Greenwood, Cosburn, Sammon and Playter all had market garden farms. To the north were sandy plains and to the east were McKay’s horse barns.

In 1883, the Grand Trunk Railway opened a large freight assorting yard south of the Danforth and west of Dawes Road. The next year the railway opened a roundhouse and the York Station. As a result, the nearby hamlet of Coleman’s Corners grew into the village of Little York. In 1889 a streetcar line opened on Broadview Avenue to take local residents south to downtown. This brought more growth to the area and some properties near Doncaster and Todmorden were subdivided. In 1894, W. Harris and Company, an animal processing company established in 1870, moved from Pape Avenue at Riverdale to the north side of Danforth at Coxwell making it a southern neighbour of the Century Schoolhouse. (At the time Coxwell only ran from Queen to Danforth.) The factory was built on land leased from the Church of England (i.e. Clergy Reserves). A sizeable industry was set up with over a dozen buildings which served as offices, storage sheds, stables, paint shop, repair shop, glue factory, drying sheds, sausage casing plant, fertilizer plant, etc. In the centre of all this was an engine house, tall chimney, and a windmill. The company generated a terrible smell which was carried far and wide, but the local residents could set their clocks to the noon and 6 p.m. whistles. William, and his younger partner John Harris, had some difficulty finding the necessary 150 to 200 men needed to work at the factory. A deal was made with the Don Gaol (jail) where a convict could be paroled if he agreed to serve the rest of his term working at the glue factory. Harris would supply living quarters, clothing and pocket money and keep the balance of his wages until the end of the agreement. (W. Harris and Co. remained a local landmark until 1922 when pressure from local residents forced the operations to relocate. The company continued on Keating Street, near the mouth of the Don River, until the early 1960s.)

At the close of the nineteenth century, a western neighbour of the Century Schoolhouse was Jennings’ Market Garden (the area was drained for farming by laying 8000 feet of tile). Their products included vegetables in the summer, and with the aid of greenhouses they produced lettuce, radishes, watercress, parsley and rhubarb in the winter. The Jennings Market employed from four to ten men depending upon the season.
The Area in 1878

[Map of the area in 1878]
What’s Cooking?

(recipe collection compiled by Diane Gallinger, Jordan Historical Museum of the Twenty; excerpt from the program, Strict but Nice: A 1908 School Day; used with permission)

Cheese Straws
Mix together two tablespoonfuls butter, four tablespoonfuls of flour and four tablespoonfuls of soft cheese grated, one egg, half a teaspoonful of salt, and a tiny pinch of cayenne. When all these ingredients are mixed smoothly together, roll them out as thin as you can, and cut out in strips about a quarter of an inch wide and three inches long. Bake about ten minutes.

source: The Early Canadian Galt Cook Book (Revised Ed.) Toronto, 1898

Honey Cake
Take one large cup of sour cream; half large cup of sugar; two large cups flour; half teaspoon soda; half teacup full of honey. First mix the cream and sugar. Add the flour by degrees, then the honey. Mix well; add the soda and beat a little longer. Bake for one-half hour. To be eaten warm.

source: The Art of Cooking Made Easy St. Catharines, 1890

Bread and Butter Pudding
Cut some slices of home-made bread, about half an inch thick, butter and lay in a pudding-dish, sprinkle with currants, put in another layer of buttered bread and currants. Beat three eggs light and stir into a pint of milk, sweeten to taste; flavour with a little grated lemon-peel or cinnamon, pour over the bread and butter and bake in a moderate oven until the custard is set. Test with a knife; if the knife comes out clean the pudding is done. If baked too long the pudding will be watery. Serve cold in the dish in which it is baked, with a simple sauce.

source: The New Cook Book by the Ladies of Toronto and Other Cities and Towns, Toronto, c. 1877

Cornmeal Muffins
Sift a liberal cup and a half of wheat flour, a cupful of yellow meal, half a teaspoonful of salt and two teaspoonfuls and a half of cream tartar together twice thoroughly to mix them. Beat to a cream a third of a cupful of butter and half a cupful of sugar, and add to them three eggs well-beaten, and finally a pint of milk into which a liberal teaspoonful of soda has been stirred. Add the dry ingredients to this mixture, stirring very thoroughly. Pour into greased muffin tins and bake half an hour in a quick oven.

source: The Early Canadian Galt Cook Book (Revised Ed.) Toronto, 1898

Chocolate Marble Cake
One and a half cupfuls sugar, half cupful butter, half cupful milk, two and a half cupfuls flour, one egg, one teaspoon cream tartar, half teaspoonful soda, flavour with vanilla. When well mixed take half of it in another dish and stir into it one square of melted chocolate, have your tins ready and put in spoonful of light and dark alternately.

source: The Early Canadian Galt Cook Book (Revised Ed.) Toronto, 1898

Spice Cake
One-half cup brown sugar, one-half cup butter, one-half cup molasses, one-half cup sweet milk, two eggs, one teaspoonful cinnamon, one-half teaspoonful cloves, two teaspoonfuls baking powder, two cups flour. This is nice for either a loaf or a layer cake.

source: The New Cook Book by the Ladies of Toronto and Other Cities and Towns, Toronto, c. 1877

Ginger Cookies
(Adapted from c. 1900 recipe)

1/4 cup molasses; 1/4 cup corn syrup; 1/2 cup butter; 2/3 cup packed brown sugar; 1 egg, lightly beaten; 3 cups all-purpose flour; 1 tbsp ginger; 1 tsp soda; 1/2 tsp cinnamon; 1/4 tsp ground cloves; 1/4 tsp salt

Heat molasses, corn syrup, butter and sugar over medium heat just until boiling; transfer to bowl and let cool to room temperature. Blend in egg. Stir together flour, ginger, baking soda, cinnamon, cloves and salt; gradually add to bowl, mixing thoroughly after each addition. Cover and refrigerate for 3 hours or until firm enough to handle. On well-floured surface, roll dough, half at a time, as thin as possible, about 1/16 inch thickness. Cut into desired shapes; place on well-greased baking sheets. Bake in 375 degree oven for 7 to 9 minutes until firm to the touch. Remove immediately to racks. Makes 60 to 70 cookies.

source: A Century of Canadian Home Cooking by Carol Ferguson, Margaret Fraser (Prentice Hall Canada)
God Save the Queen

God save our gracious Queen, long live our noble Queen:

God save the Queen. Send her victorious,

God save the Queen. Vive la Reine!
Looking Back!  Suggestions for the Teacher

Use this activity to introduce students what the area around the schoolhouse looked like in circa 1890 - when this area was more “rural”

• put the six large photos up around your classroom, have the students work with a partner, study the photos carefully, then complete their worksheets

or

• duplicate the photos, cut them into puzzle pieces, have the students work with a partner to assemble the puzzles, then complete their worksheets

• for your information, Photo Answers with comments have been included
Looking Back!

Look at each picture carefully. Put an X beside the words that describe each picture the best. Circle the correct photo number in each box.

☐ a typical family farm
☐ workers in the Don Valley quarry (brickyards)
☐ Danforth Avenue, the way it used to look
☐ harvesting vegetables (asparagus)
☐ a horse drawn streetcar
☐ a school photograph from 1890

This is Photo: 1 2 3 4 5 6

☐ a typical family farm
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This is Photo: 1 2 3 4 5 6

November, 2004
updated: February, 2006
Looking Back!

Photo 1
Looking Back!

Photo 2
Photo 3
Looking Back!

Photo 4
Looking Back!

Photo 5
Looking Back!

Photo 6
Looking Back! - Answers

Photo 1

Danforth Avenue
(between Jones Avenue & Greenwood Avenue)

The roads were not paved and extremely muddy. There was no bridge crossing the Don Valley linking Bloor St. to the Danforth Ave. so traffic was limited and transportation was challenging!

1912 City of Toronto Archives

Photo 2

Horse Drawn Streetcar

The horsedrawn streetcar was in service on Toronto’s streets from 1861 to 1891.

c. 1890  TTC Archives

Photo 3

Jennings Market Garden
(Greenwood and Sammon)

Toronto was surrounded by farms and market gardens, which supplied the city with fresh fruits and vegetables. The area surrounding the Century Schoolhouse was known for market gardening because of favourable soil conditions and available land. Until after World War II, most of Etobicoke, North York, and Scarborough were farmland.

c. 1912 Todmorden Mills
Looking Back! - Answers

Photo 4
Louisa Street Public School

Families were expected to provide firewood to heat the schoolhouse and children carried their share to school.

circa 1890
TDSB Sesquicentennial Museum and Archives

Photo 5
Typical Family Farm

Family farms such as this one were the norm in rural Ontario. East of the Don River, many families lived on farms similar to this one. They raised pigs, chickens and dairy cattle. Many had apple orchards and market gardens or grew fruits and vegetables for their own families. Notice the three chimneys and the windmill!

c. 1900-1910 original source unknown

Photo 6
Workers in Don Valley Quarry

The quarry and the brickworks in the Don Valley supplied building materials for Toronto. It is because of the deposits of red clay in the valley that Toronto has its distinctive neighbourhoods of red brick houses.

c. 1900-1910
Todmorden Mills
973.570