

# Early School Days

Having a school would not have been a new experience for the people of the community. Prior to the American Revolution there was a school in Mohawk Valley at Fort Hunter. Education continued to be a priority to the Community even before we came to the Bay of Quinte as a school was one of the first requests made by Captain John Deserontyon. There is very little documentation about "school learning" in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The following is a brief summary of what we know, based on the information we have now.

In 1784 and just prior to arrival at the Bay of Quinte, Captain John Deserontyon had written to the governor with several requests, one of which was the desire for a schoolmaster that could speak Mohawk. During July 1784, Reverend John Stuart visited the Bay of Quinte settlement and related that the Mohawks were "busy in building houses and that the schoolhouse was almost finished, and must ere now be ready for the reception of the Masters and scholars." In 1785 Mr. Lewis Vincent, a young Huron-Wendat Indian who understood Mohawk language was appointed as schoolmaster by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. The school was fully completed in 1795. [Extracts from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel]

In 1812 Rev. Stuart, before his death, appointed a discreet young Mohawk who could read his own language well, and would act as schoolmaster until better means of instruction could be afforded, there were 20 scholars at that time.

In a report of 1829, Mr. William Portt, the school teacher, stated that 23 boys and 20 girls enrolled. The school was built in 1822 probably replacing the original school. [LAC RG10 Volume 57 pp 59084-5 Reel C-11019]

In 1847 Reverend Saltern Givens, Missionary to the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, reported, "the day schools are very inefficient for the purposes of education.....the only plan, therefore, to secure a systematical education is to establish a boarding school among them. The children should be removed to it at an early period, from the injurious influence of their homes and carefully and thoroughly reared in industrious and religious habits". This plan never came to fruition. The Territory maintained the day schools. [Canadian Parliamentary Proceedings & Sessional Papers, Set I-A, Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada, Session 1847]

In the 1850's children of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte attended one of two schools. One school was attended by both children of the Territory as well as children of the surrounding area. This teacher, Frederick Warwick, was paid by the New England Company. The other school was attended by only Mohawk children of the community. The teacher, Joseph Claus, who took charge of the school in April of 1850, was paid by MBQ. Joseph Claus was the great - grandfather of Leslie Claus.

In a report of the attendance of scholars at one of the Mohawk schools, for the three months ending September 30th, 1852 there are a total of 44 students the Research Department named on the list. The books used in the school covered, spelling, arithmetic, Christian education. This document was signed by Joseph Claus, and he stated in reference to the children, "as they labor under one particular disadvantage which is English not being their mother tongue. It is very difficult for them in their commencement of learning English to obtain and distinguish the various sounds, likewise is the pronunciation of English words as there is such a vast contrast between the two tongues." A note signed by Frederick Warwick, he stated, "a teacher may be a very efficient instructor of white children and yet fail altogether in conducting an Indian School as it requires so different a system of teaching". [LAC RG 10 Vol. 410 pp. 639-649 Reel C-9616]

G. A. Anderson, Missionary to the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, wrote in November 1852, "the chief obstacle in the way of advancement of the children I think has been the frequent changing of the teachers..." He further stated there is one teacher paid by the New England Company and one teacher paid by the Nation, who is self-taught and keeps his school in excellent order. [LAC RG 10 Vol. 410 pp. 639-649 Reel C-9616]

In 1859, the Mohawk Councillors told Bartlett, the Visiting Superintendent, that a young woman of the community, Catherine Loft, daughter of John Loft Jr. and Catherine Crowe "was endeavouring to qualify herself for a school teacher, and that she intended going before the Board of Examiners, with the view of obtaining a certificate." [LAC RG 10 Vol. 544 p.443 Reel C-13358] In 1860 Catherine Loft had been granted a certificate from the County Board of Public Instruction.

At this time, MBQ had three school trustees, Seth W. Hill, Nelson Martin and G. A. Anderson, the Missionary. G. A. Anderson was in full support of Catherine. He thought that she would be able to "teach very well" [LAC RG 10 Vol. 414 p. 310 Reel C-9618].

The other trustees, Seth W. Hill and Nelson Martin, would not approve of this proposal. They gathered their supporters in the community and threatened that if she were hired they would make their children turn her out of the school. [LAC RG10 Vol. 414 p. 317 Reel C-9618]. In February 1860 all the Mohawk Councillors but one were in support of giving Catherine a short try [LAC RG10 Vol. 544 p. 471 Reel C-13358]. However, by June 1860 letters indicate there was a strong opposition to employing her. By the summer of 1860, "It was decided not to employ a female teacher" [LAC RG10 Vol. 545 p.82 Reel C-13,358].

In the Spring of 1870, the first female teacher on the Territory was hired. She was Lydia Hill, daughter for John W. and Catherine (Brant) Hill. [LAC RG10 Volume 553 p. 327 Reel C-13361]

By 1900 there were four one-room day schools on the Territory: Eastern School, Central School, Western School and Mission School, located as their names indicate, in different areas of the community. Please stay tuned for more articles of the four Day Schools.

The Research Department