



**Township of Melancthon**  
**Heritage Advisory Committee**  
**One Room Schoolhouse Project**  
**S.S. #11**  
**Mills School**  
**By: Member Todd McIntosh**



## **Background**

The following has been transcribed from the Log Book.

Sections in italics have been transcribed from a scrapbook titled: Tweedsmuir History of Melancthon Institute 4th and 5th Line Compiled by Evelyn Gallagher and Beth Looby.

The first school, framed structure, was erected in this section in the year 1875, the property being leased from the late John Mills at the rate of one dollar per year and consisting of one acre of the northwest corner of Lot 10 Concession 4 Melancthon Township. Prior to this time the pupils of this section attended the Horning's Mills School.

The first teacher of S.S.No.11 was Mr. Jackson. The earliest record available shows the teacher engaged in 1884 to be Miss Annie Slack at a salary of two hundred and eighty per annum. The first school was a framed building with its site several yards northeast of where the present school stands. The seats were straight boards and the desks were narrow. Some of these seats are in use in the present school. *Mr. Vicars Bates conducted Sunday School during the summer.*

At a meeting held on December 14, 1900 it was decided to build a new schoolhouse in the coming year. The school lot was purchased from Mr. Mills for \$75. and the old school was sold to William Gallagher for \$21.50. At present it stands on Wm. Oliver's farm. The first teacher in the new school was Mr. R.J. Bailey. The cost of building the new school was \$859. *Mr. George Leitch of Horning's Mills secured the contract for building the school and Mr. Jack Taggart layed the brick.*

In the year 1923 a well was drilled on the school property *at a depth of 130 feet.* Until this was done it had been necessary to carry water from the neighbouring farm. Hot lunches were commenced in 1928 and have been carried on each year since that time having proved a great benefit, especially to the pupils coming long distances to school. Special Music in 1934 with Miss N. Gardner as Musical Instructress. Lessons were given each week on Friday morning. These

lessons were suspended at the close of the term. *In May 1934 Rev. Mr. Burgess Pastor at Horning's Mills United Church began religious knowledge one period a week. In April 1944 Dr. Zinn examined the teeth of the children and did necessary work on them, this was continued until about 1963.*

*We have a medical health unit under the supervision of Dr. Wilson and Miss Kenny and other doctors and nurses who came to the schools for vaccinations and examinations.*

*Mr. Gordon was the first inspector, some who followed were Mr. Liddy, Mr. Halbert and 1942 Mr. Lovell and Mr. Gabel. Manual training and sewing has also been taught. In 1947 it went into the school area.*

*In January 1968 the school was closed and pupils were taken by bus to the new school in Shelburne. [The school] was bought by Elgin Ferrier and made into a family residence.*

Present Chairman of the Board: - Mr. Robt. Mills, R.R.No.2, Shelburne.

Present Sec. treas. : - Mr. Richard Marshall RR1, Melancthon.

Signed: - Hilton D. Dickson

## **List of Teachers - S.S. #11 Melancthon (Mills School)**

Flossie White

Miss Marie Jelly

Miss Howie

Miss Jean Proctor (now Mrs. M. Oldfield)

Annie White (now Mrs. Elmer Madill)

Jenny Kanawan (now Mrs. Herman Madill)

Miss Bowan

Ila Fell (now Mrs. Lancashire)

Mary Marshall (now Mrs. Howard Jacobson)

Mrs. Tom Broderick

Hilton Dickson

Miss Dickson

Mrs. Jamieson

Mrs. Harry Noble supply (Edna Carlaw)

Elgin Rintoul

Florrie Norman

Marion Henry

John Patterson

Ken Patterson

Mrs. Phillips

Mrs. Phillips (Marian) was the final teacher when the school closed in 1968.

This list transcribed from a scrapbook titled: Tweedsmuir History of Melancthon Institute 4th and 5th Line Compiled by Evelyn Gallaugher and Beth Looby.

In May 2024, Dwight Turner, student at S.S. #11 during the 1960's, met with Member McIntosh of the Melancthon Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee. One week later, Dwight submitted his story, memories from his days in the one room school.

## **Memories of a One-Room School – S.S. #11 (Mills) in Melancthon Township – 1961-1967 By Dwight Turner – May 9, 2024**

This trip down memory lane is dedicated to my grandson Luke who will be starting school this coming September. Although education has changed a lot in the past six decades, the pupils remain the same; when the student is ready to learn, the teacher will appear. Luke, when you learn to read, I hope you enjoy reading this story as much as I enjoyed writing it for you.

My first recollection of hearing about of SS # 11 school, at the age of five, was when my older brother Darrell started school in Grade One at the age of six in September, 1960 and came home and told stories (some perhaps embellished) about all the new and interesting things he did at school. These stories both fascinated and intrigued me for nearly a year until I turned six and could go to school and see for myself.

I finally got that opportunity to go to school and on the first Tuesday after Labour Day in September 1961, I walked the 2/3 of a mile (one kilometre) from our farm north to school. The school was located on the south-east corner of the 4<sup>th</sup> Line and 10 Sideroad in the Old Survey of Melancthon Township in Dufferin County. The school building itself was a one-storey, single room, high ceiling brick structure that faced west with windows on the north and south walls and an attached double-entry structure on the east. The north entry was for boys and the south entry was for girls. Each entry area had a cloak-room for coats, boots and hats, some shelves for lunch pails and a toilet that was essentially just a hole in the ground.

There was a slightly raised wooden platform at the front of the school with wall-to-wall blackboards behind it and lots of chalk to write with. The student desks were all lined up in about half a dozen rows. The young children sat in little wooden desks on the left side of the room (facing the blackboards) and the

older children sat in bigger desks on the right side of the room. The teacher's desk was on the right of the room at the back strategically just behind the older kids. The library was a cupboard full of books and supplies needed to get through the school year. I recall a small sink on the left side of the room at the back but I only remember cold water coming out of the tap. There was also a hand pump just a few yards north of the school building where we would pump drinking water. I do not remember seeing any water quality testing being carried out.

I remember that first day at school and it was like nothing else I had ever seen or imagined despite what Darrell had told me. The room seemed so big and intimidating and there were so many other children there and all of them were bigger than me. My teacher was Mr. Ken Patterson, whose brother John Patterson, had taught there the year before. Mr. Patterson was an earnest, kind teacher and he directed me to my desk. Wow! My desk! I had never had my own desk and it literally was my desk for the whole school year. There was a place just underneath the desktop to store pencils and workbooks. I felt my desk was not just a place to sit but a refuge and I became quite possessive of it. It was my home away from home.

My classmates in Grade One were Terry Smith, Margaret Taggart and Bill McClelland, all born in 1955. All four of us spent every school year together until we graduated from Centre Dufferin District High School, many years later. It was great to have three classmates because some entry years there was only one new student. For example, my brother Blaine started school in 1963 and he was the only one in his class so the teacher just moved him to a grade higher. Blaine said it was because he was too smart for the lower grade.

I remember spending a lot of time at my desk writing, drawing and cutting and pasting. All students were expected to keep quiet and talk only when spoken to. Some were better at this than others. Marg was the chattiest in our grade but most of the talking and noise seemed to come from the bigger kids on the other side of the room. I was quite anxious to learn so I mostly kept my head down and my mouth shut. This seemed to endear me to the teacher because, in large part, Mr. Patterson needed to teach several lessons a day to a wide variety of students at various curriculum levels. Intuitively, I understood that quiet was good and noise was bad.

In the early grades I remember writing with gigantic pencils that looked and felt like a log in my little hand. Those writing tools were unbreakable but also unwieldy. It seems that keeping the cost down of replacement pencils was preferable to enabling young students to actually print, write and draw efficiently and effectively. I remember Mr. Patterson reading stories and teaching us how to make the letters of the alphabet. By the end of Grade one we were reading the "Dick and Jane" books. Suddenly those little black marks on the page meant something and I was off and learning. By Grade Three we were reading the "Sandy and Susan" books. I remember thinking at the time, "What happened to Dick and Jane?"

The school had a large clock at the front of the room and I remember looking at it several times in the morning as it ticked away toward 10:30 and my favourite part of the morning, recess. Recess lasted for 15 minutes and it was a great time to get out of my seat and get some exercise outdoors. No one was allowed to stay inside at recess unless you were near death. Outside we usually played baseball, soccer, football, dodgeball, red rover or just ran around aimlessly. I do not ever remember staying inside school at recess or lunch. There were two baseball diamonds in the school yard. The younger kids played to the south of the school facing the windows. None of the younger ones had the strength or power to hit the ball through the windows so it worked out well. The older students had a baseball diamond on the east side of the schoolyard facing toward the back of the school where the entry doors were located and there were no windows. This was just as well because some of the bigger boys could hit the side of the school if they really hit the baseball hard.

Sometimes the girls played ball games but oftentimes they would take out their skipping ropes and play skipping games. I remember trying to skip with them once or twice but with two left feet I always felt awkward and clumsy. Not only that but I got the impression that the girls did not really appreciate any boys muscling in on their skipping games.

When recess was over the teacher would ring the handbell which signaled it was time to come in and get back to schoolwork. One time I decided to see what it was like to go back in through the girls' entrance. I had four brothers but no sisters so I wanted to know what the difference was between boys and girls and why we were separated. That experience was certainly a significant educational

experience! I remember a couple of the older girls escorting me quickly through the entry area and into the school room. That was the last time I tried that little trick.

I liked to volunteer to brush the chalkboards because I could smash the brushes together and make a whole lot of chalk dust. It was fun to watch all of that chalk dust float around the room. Even more fun was when Bill or one of the other kids also volunteered for chalkboard brushing and we could have a chalk brush fight with the chalk slapped all over everybody and just flying everywhere. The teacher usually intervened at this point. Maybe that is why I was passed over so often when I put my hand up to volunteer for the job.

The older students I remember were Veryl Horsley, Glen Squirrel, Bill Squirrel, Wendy Johnston, Evelyn McLelland, Rhonda McLelland, Cathy Wattam, Bob Wattam, Shirley Wattam, Leslie Little, Joyce Madill, Ila Madill, and Betty Oliver. Students that were closer in age to me that I remember, besides Terry, Marg and Bill were Dave Taggart, Phyllis Taggart, Audrey Collins, Charlie Johnston, Allan Little, Carol Wattam, David Wattam, Ivan Wattam, Darrell Turner, Blaine Turner, and Terry Turner.

When I started Grade Three, in the fall of 1963, Mr. Patterson was not there. Instead, the new teacher was Mrs. Marian Phillips. I did get to see Mr. Patterson about a year and a half later when he came to visit me in the Owen Sound Hospital and brought me a hockey book, a game and some candies. I was hospitalized for a week due to a blocked sinus that affected the vision in my left eye. It was a lonely time for me because I had never been away from home before and my mom and dad could not visit much because they had four other children and a farm to manage. That one act of kindness and thoughtfulness by Mr. Patterson shaped my view of him and all teachers. I will never forget his generosity.

Mrs. Phillips was a different style of teacher. She was a strict, no-nonsense teacher with a loud booming voice, when needed. When Mrs. Phillips said something, she meant it and we were wise to pay attention. This proved to be an efficient way to run the classroom because less time was wasted in discipline and more time was devoted to teaching and marking. She loved red pens for marking and the more red on the page of my assignments the more I knew I

needed to improve. It seemed that her goal was to impart knowledge to us and develop academic skills like reading, writing and arithmetic. On this front, she was not just trying hard but near zealous in her ambition. With Mr. Patterson I was quiet and attentive in class but with Mrs. Phillips I spoke only when spoken to which was perfectly fine for me because I learned a

lot by just listening, not only to the teacher's lessons, but when she was teaching the older grades. I did not usually understand their lessons but I desperately wanted to know and could hardly wait to graduate into a higher grade.

Some students were not particularly responsive to Mrs. Phillips' approach to teaching. One of the older boys stopped coming to school once he turned 16 years of age. He had started school back in the mid-1950's but by the time I entered Grade Three in 1963 he was still in Grade Four. He was a big boy by this time and he sat at the back of the class squeezed into a tiny fourth grade sized desk. He had failed more years than he passed – yes, the education system used that term. It was pass or fail every year. One day he just stopped coming to school. He went on to be a truck driver and I remember him dropping in to see my mom and dad at our farm from time to time. He would regale them with stories of life on the road and I listened with awe and fascination. He eventually went on to run his own highly successful trucking business. *C'est la vie* – it shows you never can tell. He was no failure; he was a model of perseverance.

I only remember Mrs. Phillips bringing out the strap once. Just seeing this academic learning persuader was enough to shock my nervous system to the core. It was about 12 inches long and about three inches wide, made of very thick leather and meant to inflict maximum pain when wielded by a skilled teacher. Mrs. Phillips rarely used the strap because just the threat of it was enough to scare the living bejeezus out of us. Some teachers in one-room schools, I am told, also employed ear-pulling as a persuader.

Sure Mrs. Phillips was a strict disciplinarian, but I could see right through her. She was a kind and empathetic person who was only trying to improve our lives and make the world a better place for all of us. For example, one day at noon I went to get my lunch and began eating my peanut butter and jam sandwich. Everything was unfolding as it should until I got to my favourite part, where my

mom packed one of her tasty pastries, usually a butter tart or cookie. When I opened up the packaging I immediately noticed a giant bite out of the butter tart. I think I was more astonished than upset so I went to Mrs. Phillips and explained the situation. I thought for sure she would find out who did it and the little culprit would get the strap and she would make the kid's mom bake a butter tart for me. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Mrs. Phillips never spoke again to me about the incident. Only as time went on did I realize what a truly wonderful person Mrs. Phillips was. It dawned on me slowly, as usual, that one of the students was coming to school hungry every day and she knew they could not learn properly if they were not nourished. I do not know how she solved this problem but obviously she swung into action and took care of the situation without me or anyone else at school knowing there was any kind of a problem and not embarrassing the malnourished student.

Many years later in 1981, I invited Mrs. Phillips to my wedding because I felt she was a very influential person in my life. I greeted her in the reception line with: "Hello Mrs. Phillips, thank you for coming today." She looked me straight in the eye and with a deep, stern voice that I well remember from years ago in the old schoolhouse and said: "CALL ME MARIAN!" I did not make that mistake again.

Every year we had a Christmas concert where our parents would come and watch us put on a Christmas themed musical and not-so-musical skits that were both religious and non-religious in nature. We would spend the better part of early December planning, designing and rehearsing for the big day. I remember one year playing the part of one of the Three Wise Men, which was definitely a misnomer if there ever was one. I could not hold a tune so they kept me away from singing Jingle Bells and the like. The highlight was always the end when a father of one of the students rushed in, dressed in a badly fitted Santa Claus suit with a bag of presents and candies. It was spoiled for me one year, when one of the kids yelled out, "that's not Santa, that's my dad!". The parents loved the concerts but I am sure the teacher was ready for a Christmas break right after it was over.

Every few weeks we would get a visit from Mr. Ray Swalm, the itinerant music teacher. Some students loved music but for me I was tone deaf. Mr. Swalm had

one of those round pitch pipes where he would blow into it and say okay everybody, let's sing in the key of C or whatever. I never got the hang of it. I had difficulty even drawing a treble clef. Nicky Cucunato on the other hand was a master at music. I really admired how he could hear notes and sounds and replicate them. No wonder he went on to be a successful musician and band leader.

Periodically, every two or three months, as I recall we would have movie film day. We never seemed to know in advance what day it would be so a good reason not to miss school. We would arrive in the morning to find a movie projector and a big box of movie film reels. This projector and movie reels were passed from school to school. The reels varied in length from a few minutes to an hour or more. Each school could keep them for just one day. Can you imagine our excitement when we got to school to find out that it was movie day and there would be no grammar or math assignments that day? We all loved it. The teacher not so much. I can still see Mrs. Phillips struggling to splice together a film reel that had been broken and taped many times and then to find out the projector bulb had burned out at the other school from the day before. I could swear that we saw the same film multiple times a year and that the film duration was shorter each time. No popcorn was allowed because the teacher had to clean up at the end of the day.

Arbor Day was a very important day in the school calendar and usually occurred sometime in May as I recall. It was a day to get outside and clean up the schoolyard and plant at least one tree. It didn't dawn on me at the time but while we were planting a tree and doing good deeds for the environment the neighbouring landowners were pumping vast amounts of DDT and other toxic pesticides and herbicides all over the countryside. Some of those planted trees from Arbor Days gone past may still be alive but I am not sure. One tree I remember is the hawthornberry tree which was located along the centre of the boundary fence on the south side of the schoolyard. I remember breaking the big thorns off and using them to poke the other kids and especially the girls. It is a miracle that nobody lost an eye or suffered any other permanent physical damage.

At least once a year, we would get a visit from the health nurse who would check us all over for rashes, head lice, general nutrition and give us any

vaccinations that were warranted. I do not remember my parents ever signing a consent form. The nurse showed up and said roll up your sleeve then jabbed the needle in my arm and that was that. In the early years we received a dental check-up from Dr. Zinn.

One day every year Mr. Charles (Charlie) Gabel, the School Inspector, would visit the school. He would stop beside each student's desk and take a few minutes to talk to them about

their schoolwork. He seemed like a friendly fellow who was genuinely interested in how my studies were progressing. I proudly showed him my printing and writing. He was always interested in how many lines of poetry I had memorized. In the older grades, each student was expected to memorize and recite 200 lines of poetry throughout the school year. I tried to spread the work out over the whole year while some students left it to the last weeks or days of the year. Their poetry experience usually ended very badly. Mrs. Phillips always gave us a "heads up" that the Inspector would be coming the next day. I noticed that Mrs. Phillips was always on her best behaviour and her most accommodating to the students on the day Mr. Gabel visited. She always seemed a little nervous on those days, which was unusual for her.

We always walked to and from school. My mom and dad never gave us a ride to school. It was quicker walking to school than walking home. In the autumn my brothers and I would dilly daddle on the way home, often stopping by the crabapple tree on Clifford Little's farm and starting an apple throwing fight. The fight almost always ended badly and my parents would have to sort out who was to blame and what the consequences would be. In the wintertime we often arrived home in near record time, especially if it was below zero degrees Fahrenheit. Mom never seemed too concerned about when we arrived home; I got the impression that later was better for her.

June 29, 1966 was the last day of school for Grade 5. A week before this date, I began getting the word out that I would like to have a birthday party. Word spread like wildfire across the school and before I knew it the idea had morphed into Dwight inviting everybody over to his place for a birthday party on the last day of school. Now, I was in a real pickle because how was I going to tell my mom and dad that the whole school would be dropping in after school for a party

on June 29<sup>th</sup>. My solution was to just not tell them anything. This proved to not be a very bright idea.

Mom must have been aghast when she saw 20-plus students come over the hill en masse and walk up the driveway. Mom immediately zeroed in on the culprit and called me aside for a good talking to. Mom could have called it off and sent everybody home but instead she sent Dad into Shelburne to buy a very large birthday cake and several bricks of ice cream.

The party went well and everybody went home fed and happy. This was another learning experience. I learned to never ever try a stunt like that again.

In 1965 the Melancthon Township school area, the northern school area in Amaranth Township and the Shelburne school joined together to form the Melancthon-Amaranth Shelburne Township School Area. The first order of business was to find some efficiencies in educating the youth of the area. Enrolment was declining in the one-room schools and so by September, 1966 when I started Grade 6, consolidation was the order of the day. In our area of Melancthon, SS #1 (Silk's) and SS #18 (Maple Leaf) were closed and all Grades 1-4 were bussed to SS #9 (Catholic) and all Grades 5-8 were bussed to SS #11 (Mills). At the same time planning was underway to design and build a new modern central school. This was one of the biggest changes in my entire school life. For the first time, I got a ride to school instead of walking. Murray McLelland (Bill's dad) was our bus driver. The bus route seemed long in the morning because Mr. McLelland would start picking up students on the 4<sup>th</sup> line and work his way over to Highway 24 before doing a drop off at Mills school and then the Catholic school. One good thing about it is that it essentially cut out after-school detentions because the students had to get on the bus, otherwise they could not get home.

This new school arrangement meant that I suddenly had many new schoolmates and potential friends that were either in my grade or close to it. Some of them I remember were Linda Berry, Don Berry, Gail Turner (no relation), Danny Betz, Jean Betz, Barry Solomon, David Robinson, Hans Gerdes, Georg Gerdes, Doug Jackson, Thierry Herve, Nicky Cucunato and Franca Cucunato. Nicky and Franca's dad worked for Jim Taggart at the new central school Centennial

Hylands Elementary School starting in late 1967. Their older sister Carmela attended Centre Dufferin District High School in Shelburne and worked part-time with her dad at the school. Rosie Cucunato, the youngest, went to SS 9 school, along with my youngest brother Kevin.

In the autumn of 1967 we were told that we would be moving out of the one-room school into a large, modern central school that was being built just south of Wigglesworth in Amaranth Township. The Melancthon-Amaranth-Shelburne Township School Area Board needed a name for the new school so they put out a naming contest for all the students. A

prize would be awarded to the student who proposed the winning name. I well remember the morning at home when name submissions were due. There were more than 100 different names submitted to the School Board. In our house we bandied about a few names. Darrell, because he was the oldest, wanted the name Vincent Massey Public School. I was next in line and I wanted to call it Prince of Wales School, I think because it had an air of royalty to it. This left my brother Blaine with the last and least desirable name, Centennial Hylands Elementary School. Blaine was crying and howling about how unfair it was that just because he was the third oldest, he had to take third best name pick. As he said: "Who in their right mind would pick Centennial Hylands Elementary School as a name for anything?" Blaine, as it turned out, was not upset; he was not even angry when he was handed the box of coloured chalk that was the prize for him as the winner of the school naming contest. Also to note, David Robinson, my classmate at Mills, designed the Centennial Hylands Elementary School crest the very next year.

After the last day of school in December, 1967 we never returned to SS #11. There was no farewell gala; we simply left after the school day was finished and boarded the bus to take us home. I do not even remember looking back to bid the school a fond farewell. The school, along with all the other one-room schools, was sold in 1968-69 to private owners. Mr. and Mrs. Elgin Ferrier bought SS #11 and turned it into their family home. I believe the price they paid for the school was about \$4,000.00 which was similar to the other schools. The price paid may have been measured in dollars but to me the old one-room schoolhouse was priceless.



**This photo, dated 1966-1967, would have been the last full school year the school was in operation. The school was for Grades 4-8 by this time, with younger students attending S.S.#9.**

Back row: Wayne Hunter, Gail Turner, Marg Taggart, Susan Wheeler, Ann Broderick, Nancy Shier, Andrea Metz, Mary McCue, Linda Berry, Carolyn Shields.

Third Row: Terry Smith, Unknown, Ena Courts, Dwight Turner, Mrs. Armstrong, Bill McClelland, Harold Arnold, Thierre Herve, Kevin T., Darrel Turner.

Second Row: Dennis Jordan, Anne Zuk, Joyce Madill, Dave Taggart, Dan Betz, Don Berry, Harvey Jamieson, Fred Mason, Walter Benato, Hans Gerdes.

First Row: Larry Bell, Philip Mc., George Gerdes, Allan Little, Blaine Turner, Janet Lyon, Franca Cucanato, Doug Jackson, John Lyon, Nick Cucanato.



**This photo is dated November 1956. Thank you to Grant Oliver for supplying the photo.**

Front row: Wendy Johnston, Evelyn McClellan, Betty Oliver, Ila Madill, Glen Squirrell, Clinton Smith, Bobby Wattam.

Second row: Grant Oliver, Blaine Horsley, Roddy McNeil, Catherine Wattam.

Third row: Reg Madill, Ken Madill, Hazel Little, George Johnston.

Back row: Ian Ferguson, Joe Stinson, Beth Little, Linda McClelland, Russell Smith, Jack Hunter, Margaret Reid.

Teacher: Marion Henry