

SHARING CLASSROOM MEMORIES

by Kaye Lister

Today we are confronted with a crisis like no other! COVID-19 has disrupted our social and economic order at lightning speed and on a scale that we have not seen in living memory. For weeks on end some businesses were closed as well as churches and schools. And sadly, the decision was made to not open the School Days Museum for its usual summer visitation schedule. So instead let's read about a few of the stories that the tour guides will share with us when once again the museum doors will open. Let's take a glimpse into the past history of education in New Brunswick.

The First Female P.N.S. Student:

Women were not always permitted to attend the teacher training program at the Provincial Normal School. The first female student, the late Martha Hamm Lewis, born in Saint John in 1831, was at first denied admission but was admitted in 1849 following the intervention of the Lieutenant-Governor. However, she had to follow particular rules:

~ to arrive before the male students

~ to remain seated at the back of the classroom

~ to wear a mask and a dark veil to conceal her face

~ to leave the room at the end of the day only after the male students had been dismissed

Since that time women educators have contributed to our lives in so many ways, all because of the determination of Martha Hamm Lewis.

The Junior Red Cross:

From 1919 until the 1980s, millions of Canadian children were exposed to the work and ideals of the Red Cross through the school-based Junior Red Cross. Each junior member received a pin indicating his/her membership. The program revolved around three central principles: good health, service to others, and good citizenship.

Children and youth participated in Canadian Red Cross work as early as the Boer War (1899-1902), but the Junior Red Cross as an organized program emerged after the First World War (1914-18) showing the potential of children's energy and enthusiasm. Although the Canadian Red Cross initiated the Junior Red Cross program, the idea spread around the world in the 1920s, making Canadian Juniors part of an international youth movement. By 1951 there were 33,367 Canadian branches with a total membership of 961, 540 children.

Teachers who chose to adopt the Junior Red Cross program usually devoted one or more Friday afternoon classes per month to its activities. This special time often saw students perform skits and recite poems for the enjoyment of all. The students elected officers and followed parliamentary procedure, directing their own work with light guidance from their teacher. Many of these young people sewed and knitted Red Cross comforts and hospital supplies which went into the general senior Red Cross pool.

The Times Tables:

We all remember the repetition and drill of the times tables, whether as a child or as a teacher. We soon discovered that if a student did not know his/her times tables, the concept of multiplying numbers was a big problem. Drill usually began in the classroom and continued as

homework but often was vice versa. Charts and fun games made the drill less of a chore.

In 1890 Anna Maria Pratt, a teacher in Ohio, USA, published a poem about an embarrassing multiplication blunder, proving to future students that times tables problems were nothing new.

A Mortifying Mistake

I studied my tables over and over, and backward and forward too;
But I couldn't remember six times nine, and I didn't know what to do,
Till sister said, "Go play with your doll; don't bother your head;
If you call her 'Fifty-four' for a while, you'll learn it by heart," she said.
So I took my favorite Mary Ann (though I thought it a dreadful shame
To give such a perfectly lovely child such a perfectly horrid name),
But I called her my dear little 'Fifty-four' until I thought I knew
The answer of six times nine as well as the answer of two times two.
The next day Elizabeth Wigglesworth, who always acts so proud,
Said, "Six times nine is fifty-two," and I nearly laughed aloud!
But I wished I hadn't when the teacher said, "Now, Susie, tell if you can."
So I thought of my doll and—sakes alive!—I answered, "Mary Ann!"

Cursive Writing:

The MacLean Method of Writing, developed and popularized by PEI born H. B. MacLean, had been the standard method taught across the country from the early 1920's to the 1960's. However times have changed. Schools across Canada today are removing cursive from the curriculum. Is it outdated or still a valuable life skill?

We retired teachers ask, "If you can't write it, how could you possibly read it? What about wedding invitations? What about old letters you find in the attic from your grandfather or useful old documents found in genealogy research? This is surely going to result in an entire generation of cursive illiterates."

Up until recently teachers believed that cursive writing enhanced fine-motor skills and that composing on paper assisted with memory and recall, developed thinking strategies, expanded vocabulary and boosted creativity. However, it seems that many of today's educators believe that initiative and problem solving are more important than learning to write in cursive.

The Atlantic School Radio Broadcast:

According to information on file at the museum, the Maritime Provinces first experimented with radio elementary school broadcasts in 1948. It was stressed that a school broadcast was not a substitute for classroom teaching but was intended to supplement what the teacher was doing in class.

Broadcasts guide books from 1949 to 1961 are on file at the museum. In each we find the daily schedules naming the radio stations for each area and the appropriate grade level for the variety of topics being covered. Examples follow:

~ Young students followed the instruction of Pauline Cunningham while enjoying physical education activities.

~ 'Parlez-vous Francais' offered conversational French lessons for beginners, the main purpose being ear-training and pronunciation drill.

~ High School students learned more about great writers including Sir Walter Scott, William Wordsworth and Robert Browning.

~ History lessons featured notable persons and events in Canadian history, from John Cabot's voyage to Newfoundland in 1497 to the 'Flight of the Silver Dart' in 1909.

~ Elementary students increased their musical experience through a varied selection of suitable songs as they sang along with the radio broadcast.

~ Many a young student became interested in astronomy during the lessons about the constellations, the sun and the moon.

And so the students learned not only from their dedicated teachers, but also through the world of radio, offering an experience to stimulate their imagination and to increase their desire to study.

Want to learn more about the 'School Days Museum'? Visit the website: <http://museum.nbta.ca> and take a virtual tour of the premises. You will not be disappointed.