

The Magnet



Toronto Grammar School
Centennial Souvenir Number
1807=1907.

Published by the Students of Jarvis Street Collegiate Institute,
Toronto, Canada.



Cricket
Boots,

Tennis
Boots,

Baseball Boots,

Sweaters,

Gymnasium Jerseys,

Knickers,

School Pendants, etc.

J. Brotherton

550 Yonge St.

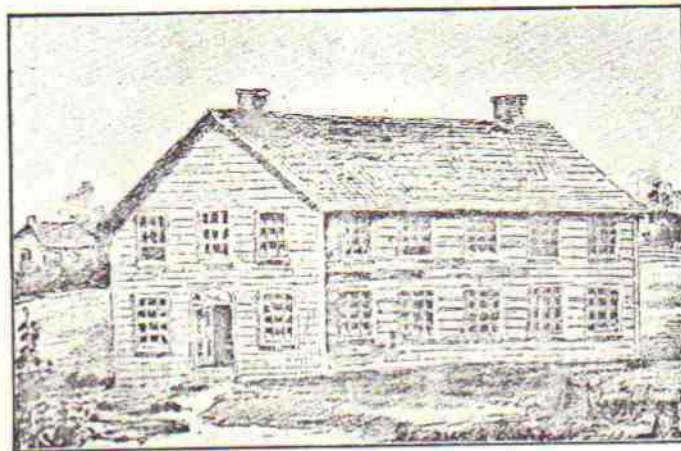
Phone North 2092.

The Changes of a Century.

By W. H. ROBERTSON, B.A.

THE Centennial of the Old Grammar School is an event which should interest not only its legion of pupils past and present, but the citizens of Toronto generally, for this school is practically the first public institution of the city to pass the century mark. At its inception it was the sole fountain of learning in the district of which "Muddy York" was the chief place, and it has lived through a hundred years and witnessed the growth of its village parent into one of the great cities of the world.

During all these years the school has changed both its name and site many times, yet its history may be traced back in an unbroken line to the



"THE OLD BLUE SCHOOL," 1816.

time of its founding in the reign of King George III. In the year 1807 an Act was passed by the Legislature of Upper Canada providing for the establishment of Public or Grammar Schools. Upper Canada at that early period was divided into eight districts, and at the most important centres of each the schools were established. Toronto, or the town of York, as it was then called, received one of the schools, to which the name of "Home District School" was given. The school was opened on the 16th of April, 1807, being situated on King Street, near George Street. The building was small and made of rough-hewn stone drawn from the near-by quarries. In fact, it resembled very much the older type of school now found in many of the earliest settled districts of Ontario. For six years this building was occupied by the Home District School. In the year 1813, the attendance having greatly increased, the accommodation proved inadequate for the scholars; so

we find the school being next held in a large barn, which was of course somewhat remodelled to suit its new purpose and was located at the corner of King and Yonge Streets. At this time Dr. Strachan, who had but recently come over from Scotland, upon the invitation of the Government of Upper Canada, took charge of the school.

The first year of the Grammar School in its new home was a very eventful one. General Dearborne, Commander-in-Chief of the United States Army, had taken the town in April, and for a time it was filled with American troops.

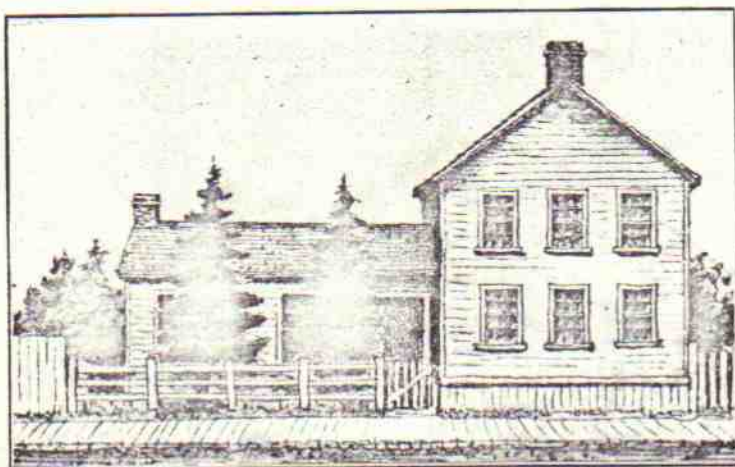
Those were indeed stirring days for the boys of the school! One can imagine the excitement there must have been when the word passed around in school, on that morning in April, just ninety-four years ago, that the Americans were coming upon the town, and that even then their fleet of sixteen vessels, with full sail set, could be plainly seen approaching the land. The school being in such close proximity to the water-front, it would be safe to say the masters lost no time in getting the boys out of harm's way. During this occupation of York, many of the public buildings in the town were destroyed by fire, but happily the school escaped the flames, owing no doubt to the intercession of the head master—Dr. Strachan.

After the war, times became better, and as a result, the school again found itself overcrowded. Accordingly in the summer of 1816 a new building was erected upon the site where our Public Library stands. The whole of this block now bounded by Church, Adelaide, Jarvis and Richmond Streets had been set aside in 1797 for educational purposes. In those early days, Toronto was but a very small town, and this college square, as it was called, was considered as being out in the suburbs, and altogether a very suitable site for an educational centre that was expected to endure for all time! The new building, on this account, was a great improvement on the two preceding schools. It was composed almost entirely of timber which had been cut down in the forest that covered all the land immediately to the north. It was now two stories high, and about sixty feet long by forty wide. This structure was painted a vivid blue, and on that account was known for many years as the "Blue School." It is estimated that the total cost amounted to something like \$3,000; in those days a very considerable sum. The appearance of the interior was characteristic of the English schools of that period. The master's desk stood in one corner of the room, while around the walls, on the north and south sides, were ranged desks and benches facing inward. The large central space was also filled with long double desks and benches running at right angles to those by the wall.

The playground in connection with this school was indeed an ample one, for it consisted of the whole school block—six acres in all. In this large field the boys of course found no difficulty in working off their superfluous energy, though the pastime by which this was accomplished is rather uncertain, for cricket and football had not then been introduced, baseball being yet unborn. It is quite likely, however, that the boys of this period were just as resourceful as those of to-day, and so their games and amusements,

though somewhat primitive, afforded them as much exercise and pleasure as any in vogue at the present time.

This immense playground was by no means level, for here and there were found miniature hills and valleys, which formed excellent sliding places in winter. When the hard frost of this season abated and the snow became soft, the boys erected huge snow forts, and in mimic warfare fought over again the battles of 1812. These forts were of such generous proportions, that they remained standing long after all the rest of the snow had disappeared. In summer a favorite amusement was to hunt in the hollows for crayfish, which were found living in holes burrowed in the soft clay. Over all the ground the stumps and undergrowth of the original forest still remained; among this the birds built their nests, which the boys took great delight in searching out and robbing of their contents. For the more adventurous spirits, the dark, forbidding forest to the north always lay open. From out



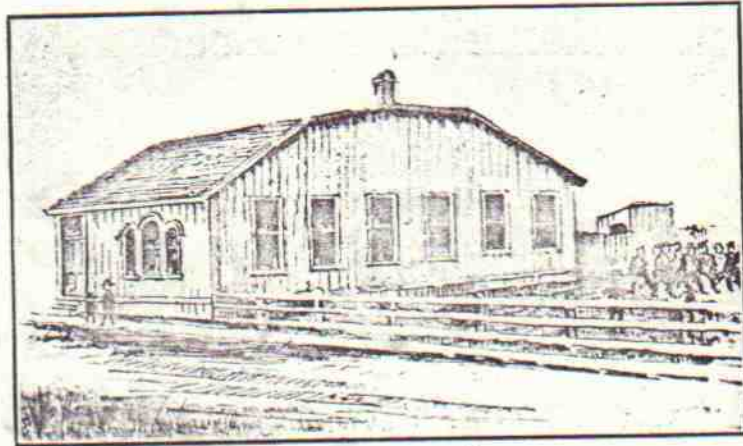
HOME DISTRICT GRAMMAR SCHOOL, NELSON AND STANLEY STREETS, 1829.

its depths came the Indians, and swarthy traders, bringing with them tales of the wild life of the woods. The effect of these stories on the impressionable minds of the boys was very great. These traders soon came to be regarded in their eyes as heroes, and the forest was looked upon as a vast unexplored region that seemed always to be inviting them to come and partake of its wild and free life.

In the year 1829 the Blue School was moved to the north-east corner of the school block, and there it remained until as late as 1864. Upon its opening on the new site, the name of the school was changed to Upper Canada College, or Royal Grammar School. This college was supposed to supersede the old Blue School, and probably all the masters and boys were transferred from the old to the new school. However, it was not long before dissatisfaction arose. The new systems of education and correction which had been introduced did not find favor in the eyes of many people, so we find that in 1831

Upper Canada College vacated the building and the old school was again established. Owing to this change a dispute arose regarding the property, both schools claiming precedence over the other in regard to the lion's share of the land and its revenue. This question dragged on for twenty-five years, and not until 1859 was it finally settled in favor of the old Grammar School.

Some of the customs that prevailed at the school in those days are rather interesting. One of these was that of mutual questioning. Each lad was expected to furnish a set of questions on any given subject; and upon his turn he presented these to his fellows, who were required to consider them, the questioner, through his superior knowledge, of course, putting them right should they give a wrong answer. This custom—one now long passed away in high schools—was undoubtedly of great practical value to the scholars, for by it they were led to make real research for themselves, and the



TORONTO GRAMMAR SCHOOL, DALHOUSIE STREET, 1864.

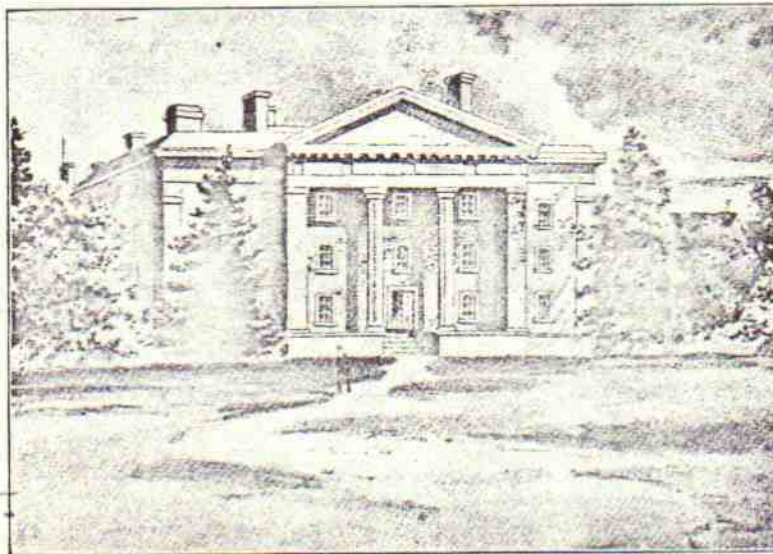
knowledge acquired in this way usually remained long after other lessons had been forgotten.

On public occasions, the elder boys of the school sometimes held debates on the questions of the day, in the long room upstairs. Here also they held choruses, and even attempted the enactment of a drama, with some success.

The text books in use at that time were highly prized, and great care was taken of them. This of course arose from the fact that they were very scarce, sometimes one copy doing duty for the whole school. The Greek translations, which are now always found in English, were in those days given in Latin; for everyone was expected to know Latin thoroughly. It is to be feared that if such a condition prevailed to-day, very few would make perceptible headway in their Greek.

After the "Blue School" was moved to the north-east corner of the block, a public school then called the "Central School" was established on the south-east corner. Naturally with two boys' schools in such proximity, everything did not remain quiet and peaceful. Friction soon arose, and many

were the feats of daring performed by the youthful heroes of the rival schools, in the battles that were of frequent occurrence. Just across the road—then called New Street, now Jarvis Street—stood at this time a collection of dilapidated huts, occupied by an idle, shiftless class of people. This part was given the name of "Irish town" by the boys, and one of their favorite diversions, when things became a trifle dull, was to "raise Irish town." This feat was easily accomplished by a well-directed snow-ball or any other convenient missile, accompanied by certain taunts calculated to rouse the wrath and indignation of its inhabitants. Such an attitude on the part of the boys, produced much the same results as one observes when a hornets' nest is stirred up, for the whole available fighting force of the town would usually turn out to seek revenge. In the face of this common enemy



KING'S COLLEGE, HOME OF THE SCHOOL IN 1870.

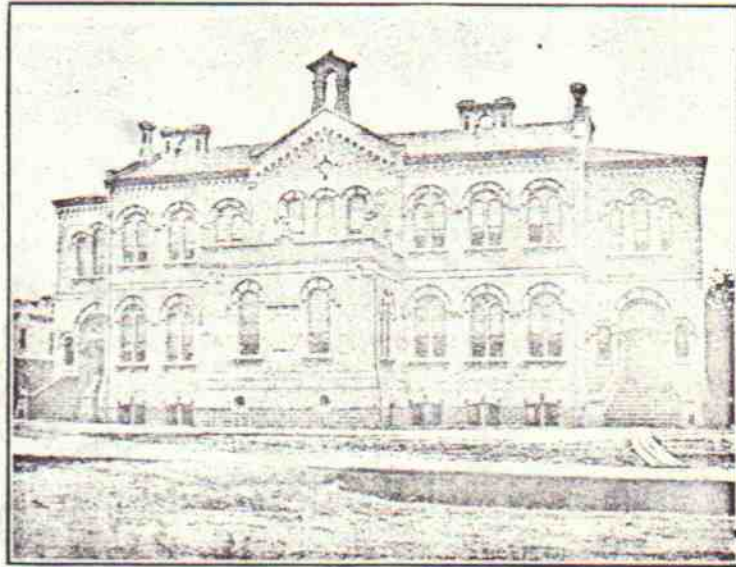
the two schools united, and as a result a very lively and exciting time generally ensued, until the authorities happened upon the scene, thus putting an abrupt termination to the proceedings.

Nothing now remains of this old school, where so many of the great men of Canada received their early training. After it was finally abandoned, it stood for many years, a dilapidated old wooden structure used as a storehouse, but eventually it was torn down to make way for more modern brick structures.

It was early in the year of 1864 that the building at the corner of Jarvis and Richmond Streets, which had for nearly half a century been the home of the old Grammar School, was finally abandoned. A newer building, situated farther north in the city, next became the home of the school.

This building was very little improvement over the old in size or appearance, but on account of the increased growth of the city northward, it was found much more convenient for the majority of the pupils. The location of the school, the fourth since the founding in 1807, was on Dalhousie Street, just north of Gould Street, and at the rear of the residence of the Principal, Dr. Wickson. In this building the Grammar School was held until 1869, six years in all. In that year the trustees at last were able to dispose of the old school-site, and with the money received from the sale—about four thousand dollars—the present grounds on Jarvis Street were purchased.

During the year that intervened between this purchase and the erection of the new school, the classes were not held in the Dalhousie Street School, but away at the extreme north-western end of the city, in old King's College,



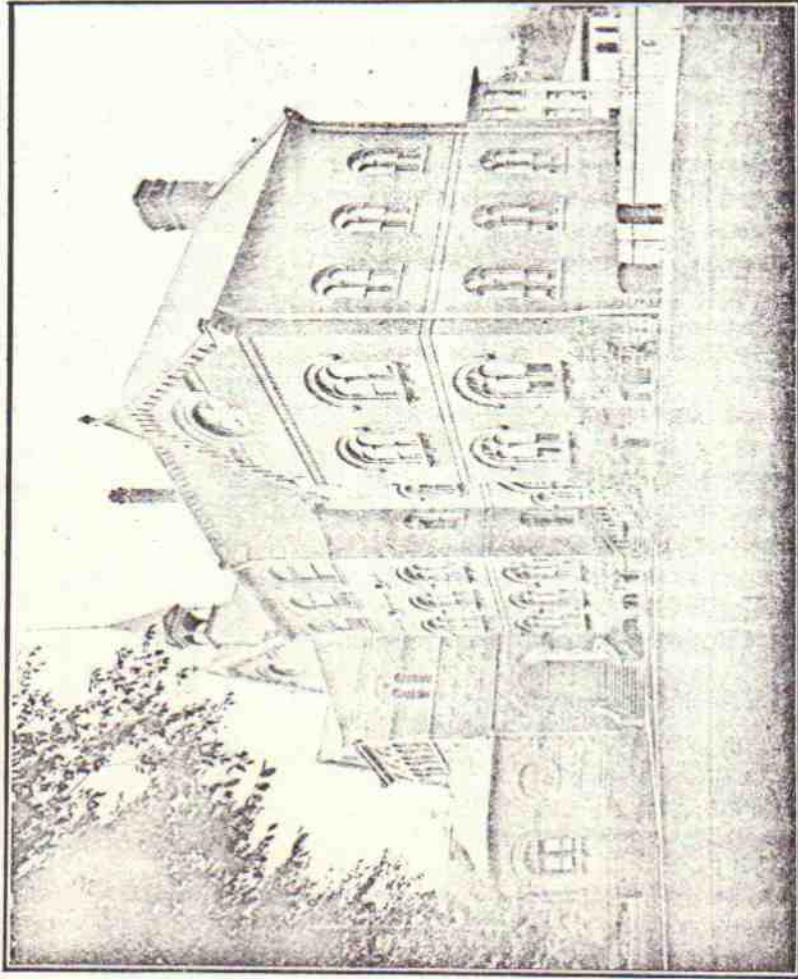
TORONTO HIGH SCHOOL, JARVIS STREET, 1871.

Queen's Park. This college, at first intended for a university, was erected in 1842, and stood on the site of the eastern wing of the present Parliamentary Buildings.

Of course this location was very inconvenient for a great many of the scholars, as in those days there were no bicycles or electric cars.

However, September of 1871 found the new school complete, the formal opening being on the 15th of that month. The school now had its name changed from that of Grammar School to High School, according to an Act of Parliament just then passed, and, as a result of this change, girls as well as boys, were enrolled as pupils.

The new building was at first a very plain and unpretentious one, but gradually, as the need arose, new wings, and even stories, were added.



JARVIS STREET COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE, 1907.

Although the present structure has grown directly from the original one, there is but very little evidence of this to-day. To get an adequate idea of the appearance of the school in 1871, one must imagine the third story, the north and south rooms of the present building, the eastern wing, and the Principal's office, removed. If one succeeds in performing this mental feat the result is the school as it appeared when the parents of the present generation were in attendance, some thirty years ago. Still further additions are now contemplated and will no doubt shortly be made.

With all the changes which the system of modern civic education entails, one is apt to wonder whether the spirit of the older days remains—do the present scholars feel bound to uphold the traditions of the past or are they oblivious of them?

A visit to the school at the time of the centennial re-union will show the nature and extent of the changes which time has made both in it and in companions of by-gone days, how "the old order changeth yielding place to the new." There will be seen, too, the great strength of the school to-day, as it stands upon the threshold of its second century of existence, looking forward confidently to a future of increased activity and greater usefulness.

[Since the above article was written, a movement has been started among "old boys" of the school tending towards the erection of an entirely new building. In view of the condition of the present edifice, erected, in the main, at a time when the standard of architecture and appointments was not what it now is, this plan would be greatly superior to any further additions which might be made. The present site is an excellent one, and merits a building thoroughly up-to-date in appearance and equipment, a fit habitation for the premier school of the Province with its ever-increasing enrollment of scholars.—EDITOR.]
