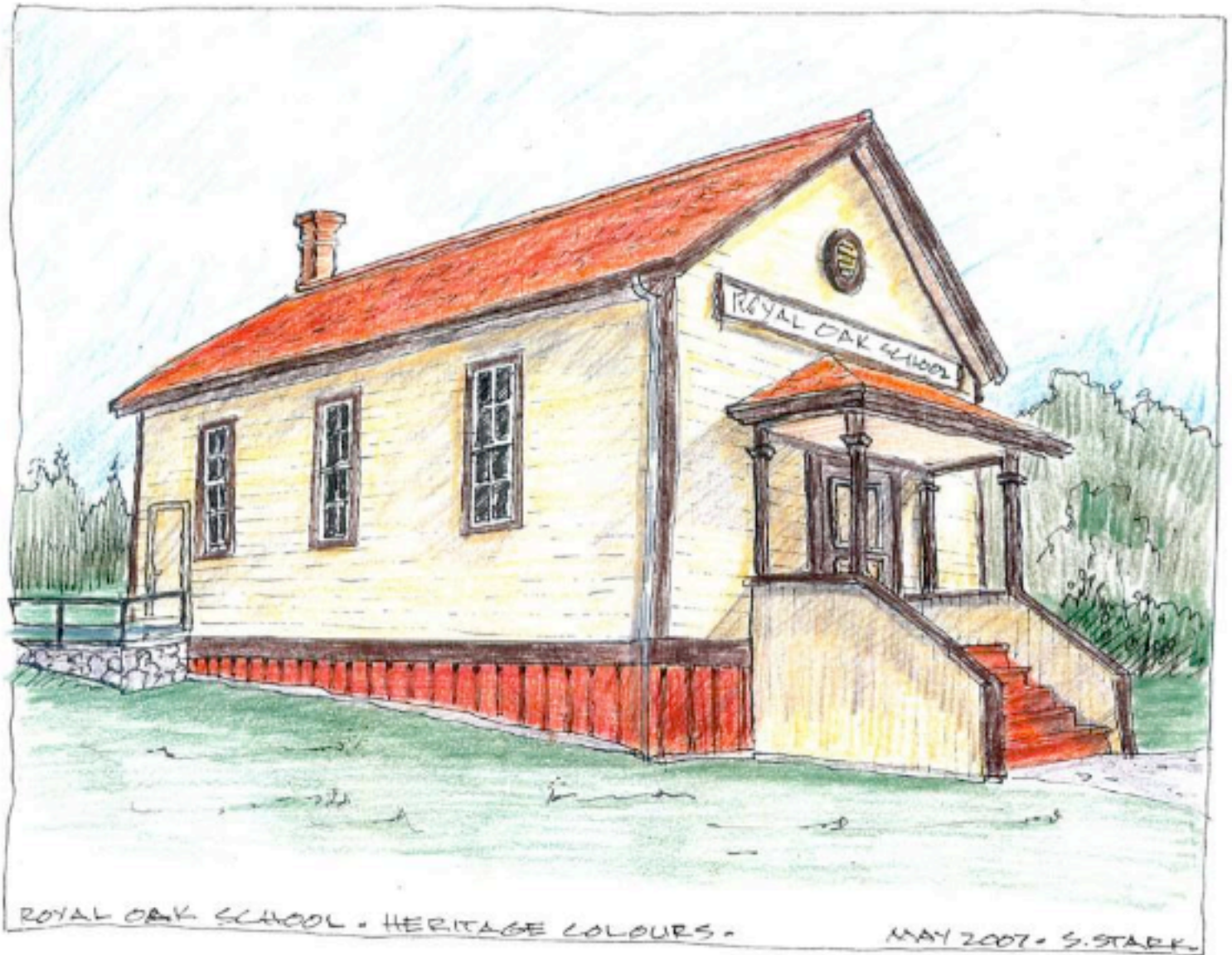


The Royal Oak School



July 8, 1865 to December 9, 2008

Lake District Schools.

Among the early settlers of Royal Oak were the Cheesemans. In ¹⁸⁶²1882 Mr. Cheeseman in the prime of life met his death in a tragic accident. He was hauling potatoes when his team ran away down a hill and he was thrown out of the wagon and killed. Thus Mrs. Cheeseman was left a widow with four daughter To attend school they had to walk to Victoria. Their mother therefore cast about for easier ways and means. She had married for a second time a Mr. ^{Bailey}Riley. The Rileys gave a quarter of an acre of land for a school site in ¹⁸⁶⁵1866 and the Vancouver Island Government built the school at an approximate cost of \$600.00. It seems a far cry from this small building to the size and amenities of schools today, but population was small. The first school roll contained about five names. The first teacher was ^{Miss G. B. B. B.}Dr. Fraser and the second ^{John Sampson, M.S.E.D.}Mr. Harrison. Their salaries were sixty dollars a month.

The Lake District school district was founded June 25th 1866. In 1876 the school trustees were Messrs. Wilson, Brown, Lindsay and J. Stevens.

On June 4th 1883 Royal Oak School burnt down to the ground after a concert at the school. Classes were held in a farmhouse until it was rebuilt. There were now twenty-five pupils with an average attendance of fifteen. The school and its grounds are still Crown property and cannot be sold.

In 1912 we find the Women's Institute giving prizes to the school children at its Annual Flower Show. This practice was discontinued when the Flower Shows ceased in 1956.

In 1940 the P.T.A. was organized and made the promotion of school competitions part of its work.

ROYAL OAK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

This school was built in 1885. In 1850 Richard Cheeseman came out to Fort Victoria as an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company. He returned to Chatham, England to marry Miss Jane Dyke from Seven Oaks, Kent in 1853. The couple left England on the Norman Morrison bound for Victoria. Royal Oak was named for Mrs. Cheeseman's home in England.

Mr. Bailey gave 1/4 acre for a school site in 1864. An additional 2 1/2 acres was purchased for the school which was built for \$500.00 under the supervision of Mr. Van Allmore and Mr. Bailey who both donated a great deal of time and labor to the project.

On July 8, 1865 the first "Lake District" school house was opened with 15 students in attendance and a Miss Beattie as the first teacher.

This building was used as a school up until 1951.

Lake District School (Royal Oak)

SAANICH ARCHIVES

(from Waddington's writings 1865-7 C AA 30 - 3M 2

1/4 acre of ground given by Mr. Bailey (worth \$1000.00 per acre) near Royal Oak Tavern. 2 1/2 acres of clear ground adjoining. The owner, Mr. Yale, asks \$150.00

The schoolhouse has cost the Government \$500.00 under the superintendence of Mr. Von Allman and Mr. Bailey. Mr. Von Allman lives 1 1/4 miles from school.

The school was opened on July 1st, 1865 with the teacher being Elizabeth Beattie. There were 5 boys and 10 girls present at the school opening. On August 3 the following year prizes, after writing exams, were given to:

Mary Cheeseman
 Albert Von Allman
 Sophia Wilkinson
 Margaret Nicholson
 Mary Von Allman
 Cedra Cheeseman
 Eliza Williams
 Thomas Lyndsay

ROYAL OAK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, 4527 West Saanich Road

The first one-room schoolhouse in this area was the Lake District School. This opened in 1865 on the site which was later used for the old Saanich Municipal Hall. The school burned down after a supper dance was held in it in 1883.

Children then had to travel to "Broadmeade", on the Rithet Farm, or to Strawberry Vale or Craigflower Schools until enough money could be raised to build the new building in 1885. This building still stands on the land donated by James Bailey. Two and one-half acres were added later.

Construction supervisor: Mr. Van Allmore, Mr. Bailey.

Cost was \$500.00. Size was 20 ft. X 30 ft. X 12 ft. high. There were no frills. It had 14 desks for 42 pupils. The school was in use for 65 years - until 1950, when new modern school was built.

NOTE: Mr. James Bailey was second husband of Jane Duval, other husbands were Cheeseman and Durrance. It was Mr. Cheeseman who named "Royal Oak" after his home in England.

PART I

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The preface poem, taken from a 1962 school annual (although the medieval illustration is inaccurate), explains in its own rhythmic way how our school, "Royal Oak" got its name.

Believe it or not, the name is tied into Seventeenth Century English history. September 3, 1651, was not a good day for Britain's royalty. Republican forces under the leadership of Cromwell roundly defeated the Royalists at the Battle of Worcester. The future heir to the throne, Charles Stuart, had to escape from England.

First he disguised himself as a woodsman and hid in the tall branches of a great oak tree at Boscobel. As the young King later wrote, "we saw soldiers going up and down, in the thicket of the wood, searching for persons escaped".¹ The King spent a whole day hiding in the tree, but the troops never examined the oak; that night he crept down to continue his flight. After many disguises and close calls Charles finally escaped to France on October 15, 1651.

Ten years after his escape Charles returned to England and became its beloved King. Charles II was a very popular ruler and the great oak at Boscobel was called "Royal Oak", just as the ship he escaped on was renamed the "Royal Escape" to honour England's restored monarch. The great oak at Boscobel became so famous that it was eventually destroyed by souvenir hunters, who took bits of it home with them. As the years passed the name "Royal Oak" was widely used throughout England and in the new lands, such as Canada and Australia, where English people settled.

¹ Healy, Tim, Escapes. Macdonald Educational Limited, page 14.

It was an area largely covered in forest with scattered farms cleared by pioneer sweat and toil. These were the frontier days of the Saanich Peninsula in the 1860's.

Among those early pioneers were Mr. and Mrs. Cheeseman from Kent, England, who bought 214.7 acres of land in 1852. They built their home on a site where the parking lot of Villages Restaurant (formerly the Municipal Hall) is today. The Cheesemans, no doubt because of the numerous large oak trees around and because their old home in Britain was so named, christened their new home and the area "Royal Oak".

Dora Blake (nee Young), a pioneer of the district, recalled in a "St. Michael and All Angels" Church newsletter, another version and more information about the name, "Royal Oak".

"One evening, while they were sitting on the verandah, Mr. Cheeseman remarked: 'That is a Royal Oak', and Mrs. Cheeseman said, 'A very good name for our place', so the district got its name. The old tree crashed some years later. We still have a Royal Oak tree because we were sent a seedling oak from one of the Royal residences to be planted on the day King George VI and Queen Elizabeth were crowned in 1937. That was a very big day. I was teaching at the Royal Oak School and taught the children the musical numbers required. After the ceremonies were over we adjourned to the Community Hall for tea."

The first school house built in 1865 was called the "Lake District" school. Judging by letters of application (see Appendix IV) and other sources it seems the the name "Royal Oak" did not officially apply to the school until the late 1920's.

"Royal Oak" school has enjoyed a long history. By 1965 it celebrated its 100th birthday! As the Daily Colonist reported: "Its Fall Fun Fair time again at Royal Oak Elementary School, but this year it has special meaning."² A reunion tea was held on Saturday, October 2, and many of the pioneers who attended Royal Oak in its early history were present. A podium with an elaborately carved oak-leaf relief was given to mark the occasion. This is housed in the school library, and is still used for public speaking.



Mrs. Pearce and students with the lectern presented to the school on its 100th anniversary.

² The Daily Colonist, September 26, 1965.

100 YEARS - 1965



Mrs. Rankin, pioneer graduate of "Royal Oak" visiting Betty Mae Goyette, great granddaughter of Mr. and Mrs. Cheeseman.



Right to left - Miss Rafford, Mrs. Pearce, Mrs. McLaughlin and ? admiring an essential piece of school equipment!



Photos courtesy of Mrs. Hilda Pearce.

Old timers outside the second "Royal Oak" School

As already stated, the first settlers in the Lake District were Mr. and Mrs. Richard Cheeseman. This family played an important role in Royal Oak's Educational history. Mr. Cheeseman arrived in 1850 and worked for the Hudson's Bay Company. Mrs. Cheeseman (nee Jane Dyke) came in 1853. At that time, of course, there were few people in the area, and certainly no schools.

Mr. Cheeseman tragically died in 1862. He was hauling potatoes when his team of horses bolted, and as they dashed down a hill he was thrown out of the wagon and killed. Mrs. Cheesman was left a widow with four daughters to raise and educate. In 1864 Mrs. Cheeseman married a second time, to Mr. Bailey. Her daughters were now of school age, but for them to attend school they had to go to Victoria! For a while, along with a few other children, Mrs. Cheeseman taught her daughters at home. Then in this same year governor Kennedy asked for property for a school house, and on July 9, 1864, the now Mrs. James Bailey, gave a 1/4 acre of land valued at \$1000 an acre for a school site. In addition to the land given by Mrs. Bailey, the superintendent of the Lake District School area agreed to purchase 2 1/2 acres of adjoining cleared land for \$150.00 an acre, or at a rate of \$10.00 a year.

The building of the school house under the supervision of Mr. Van Allmore and Mr. Bailey, cost Governor Kennedy approximately \$600.00. The school was 20' by 30' with 12' ceilings with windows opening from above; it was well lit, but teaching and learning conditions were primitive. There was no cloak or cap room, and only fourteen desks. The back house (toilet?) was not separate, and there was no house for the teacher, no blackboards, books, maps, slates, cupboards, no stove, and above, all no water! At the start there was not even a chair for the teacher. It was also positioned near the Royal Oak Inn, which served as a hotel and tavern. Let us hope the students did not take advantage of the school's proximity to the tavern! There was no playground and no room for a dwelling or garden for the teacher.

On July 8, 1865, our first "Royal Oak" school in Saanich was opened. Its name was, however, at this time the Lake District School. Total enrollment was fifteen - five boys and ten girls. Three of the the Cheeseman/Bailey girls, the four Williams children, one Simpson child and one Nicholson boy were among "Royal Oak's" first pupils. Miss Beattie, with a salary of approximately \$60.00 per month, had the pleasure of instructing the fifteen little darlings. Miss Beattie lived with the Bailey's for the first few months until proper lodgings could be arranged. Another early teacher was Dr. L. Frazer.

The Lake District School District was founded on June 25th, 1866. Trustees in 1876 were Messrs. Wilson, Brown, Lindsay and J. Stevens.



The Royal Oak Inn. The small building to the left is probably the first "Royal Oak" school. The Inn was originally built as a home for the Cheeseman's in 1870. When the home was destroyed by fire, it was rebuilt as a hotel in 1874, and run by Louis Duval, son-in-law to the Cheeseman's. The Inn was destroyed by fire again in 1877 and 1890.

For eighteen years students and teachers toiled in this first school, which also served as a social centre for the area. According to most local history sources, "The building had served as a schoolhouse and community hall. Church services were also held there."³ Then calamity struck. Saturday, January 4, 1883, was a dark day in Saanich's early history. After a Saturday night supper dance, hungry flames, leaving nothing but ashes and ruins, greedily consumed the wooden school house. This disaster was, indeed, a set-back. The Colonist reported: "It contained a new organ worth \$150.00 on which \$50.00 had been paid, and another one belonging to Bishop Hills." Many of Royal Oak's hostesses also lost their best china and linens that they had brought for the occasion. School supplies, teaching materials, and most importantly, valuable books, were also lost.

In the two years before a new "Royal Oak" was built, children had to travel to Broadmeade ⁴ on the Rithet Farm for their education. Others traveled further afield to Strawberry Vale or Craigflower schools.



The old (second)
Royal Oak School

Sketch from 1962 School Annual

³ "Saanich Heritage Evaluation" booklet.

⁴ "Broadmeade was named for one of P. Rithet's race horses." Castle, Geoffery.
Times Colonist. Nov. 14. 1987.

By 1855, however, the second school house was built. This building has enjoyed a long history. It served as a school until the early 1950's. In the 1990's it is a heritage building that serves as a scout hall, a pre-school centre and a meeting place for the Lion's Club who are largely responsible for preserving the building. Dora Blake, a pioneer of the district, commented that "the building has been shorn of all its original filigree work, moved from its original position and raised up one storey; however, the association is there." ⁵

The second "Royal Oak" school grades 1 to 8, 1897.



"Pictured directly in front of the teacher, Miss Jenny Fraser, shown at left, back row, is Dr. William A. Lehman and to his right, in third place, is Miss Mary Walsh. Seated in front, far left, is Gertie Etheridge, now Mrs. Raymond McDonald, who is shown holding the hand of little Ethel Duval, now Mrs. William Rankin."

Times Colonist, Sept. 26, 1965.

Photo from Mrs. Stanley Goyette family album.