

Remember the Village school? by Joan Payzant

Little School house demolished 18 years ago

Until January 1906, all forts in Canada were under the control of the British army, but that month they were turned over to the Canadian Department of Militia and Defence. Except for summer militia exercises the forts were pretty well abandoned - either locked up entirely or left in care of one or two military caretakers.

When the first world war broke out in 1914, some of the forts were put back into commission, but Fort Clarence on the eastern side of the harbour was not one of these. In the midst of war, in 1916, the property was purchased by Imperial Oil and construction was begun on a refinery.

Three years earlier the Sugar Refinery had come into being, only about a quarter of a mile north of the new oil refinery, so suddenly houses sprang up all around their outskirts. Imperial Oil constructed its own village to house employees who were interested in living close to their work at a very nominal rent.

The small model village was named Imperoyal, and although it has now disappeared to allow for industrial expansion, the entire area surrounding the oil refinery is still also known as Imperoyal.

Children of today would find it a difficult to imagine the attractive little company village as I do imagine Fort Clarence, for both have given way to the oil industry.

There were only two streets in the village, running from the main road at the south end of the refinery to the cliff overlooking the eastern passage into the harbour between McNab's Island and the mainland. The streets were called Avenue A and Avenue B, and were joined by a cross street that as far as I can recall had no name at all. The Avenues had one way traffic - up Avenue B, on to the cross street and back out Avenue A. A number of houses were long, low bungalows, but as in most company housing developments, they became larger and grander as one progressed along Avenue B, ending in the manger's attractive dwelling there. This house had a view of the harbour and Halifax, and was well-known to members of

various clubs and organizations for managers and their wives were gracious in lending the spacious rooms for meetings and parties.

People who lived in Imperoyal Village speak with affection of their lives there, for it was a close knit and cooperative little community.

In front of the manager's house was an open area where there were sports facilities - a well equipped playground with swings and slides for the children of the village; a quoit pitch for the men; an asphalt tennis court for enthusiasts of that sport and a clubhouse which was used as a little community hall. Both the playground and asphalt tennis court were the envy of Dartmouthians who had neither, and some lucky people had friends in the village who invited them to use these coveted facilities.

Another fine feature of Imperoyal Village (often referred to simply as THE Village) was the well constructed, three department schoolhouse, just off the main road, fronting on Avenue B. It replaced a temporary construction camp school hastily put to use when workers first flocked to the area. The teacher in that school was Miss V. E. Lowndes and she had 96 pupils.

The three department school opened in May, 1920, and classes went up to grade nine. The primary room went as far as grade three, the intermediate to grade six, and the remaining classes were housed in the senior department, with the principal of the school as their teacher.

I was lucky on finishing my teacher training course to get my first job in the intermediate department at Imperoyal School, and although I only taught there for one year, I really enjoyed the atmosphere. It was a cosy school, and staff and children were as one large family. Having gone straight through Dartmouth schools I didn't have much experience teaching in a room with more than one grade, but Miss Margaret King, the Principal, and Miss Hope Corkum of the primary department were both exceedingly patient and helpful.

Each morning the partition between the primary and intermediate classrooms was opened up for morning exercises - a good start to each school day, with songs - patriotic, religious, and semi-popular -, the Lord's Prayer, a short scriptural reading and announcements. When all pupils can meet on a regular basis like this in one auditorium the family feeling is furthered. Then the work of the day began as each teacher directed her classes in their various assignments.

The school was maintained by Imperial Oil, and teachers were paid partly by the company and partly by the province, according to an agreement between the two. Teachers tended to stay at the school because of the pleasant working conditions, and over the years this built up a feeling of tradition and stability. Many adults have wonderful memories of their pre-high school days at Imperoyal School.

Teachers up to 1927 were Miss Pineo, Miss O'Brien, Miss J. Dunlop, Miss Jessie Creighton, Miss Gladys Lewis, Miss Harriet Kempton, Miss Mackenzie, and Miss Hilda Simms.

In the summer of 1962 Imperoyal School was demolished. The company had made the decision sometime before to expand industrially, and needed the whole village site to accommodate the new equipment. Some of the houses were sold and moved to the Caldwell Road district, and some were torn down. The school was sold to the City of Dartmouth for the token sum of \$1, but after one year of operation it made more economic sense to bus pupils to the larger schools in the city than to heat and maintain the small school.

It was with great sadness that pupils and teachers who had been associated with Imperoyal School saw it disappear, gradually, that summer. Like little red school houses throughout North America, it fell prey to modern educational theories, but lives on in many people's memories of happy school days.