

Admirals Rd.



Craigflower school

Barry F. King

LANDMARKS

Little school taught pioneer children three R's

Craigflower School is reputedly the first west of the Great Lakes. The Puget's Sound Agricultural Company, a subsidiary of the Hudson's Bay Company, brought out Kenneth McKenzie, a native of Rosshire, Scotland, to organize and build up a farming community to supply Fort Victoria and visiting British naval ships.

McKenzie arrived Jan. 16, 1853, aboard the Norman Morison, on its third and last voyage to Victoria. He brought with him 73 potential settlers including a variety of artisans and their families. The Craigflower (Maple Point) farm included a manor house, sawmill, brickyard, bakery, store and homes on the 1,000-acre site.

The schoolhouse took the form of a basic Provincial Georgian style, with whitewashed clapboard siding and chimneys at each end of the rectangular plan. The cost of the building and land was the equivalent of \$4,300. The two-storey building contained a schoolroom, living quarters for the teacher and his family, and space for boarders from Langford and Colwood.

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Duncan Lidgate, who later built St. Stephen's Church, assisted with the construction, using sawn lumber rafted from the mill across the Gorge. Virtually everything except the locks and hinges was produced locally.

The initial enrolment in March, 1855, consisted of eight boys and six girls, although classes had been held earlier. Meantime, Robert Barr, the schoolmaster intended for Craigflower, was teaching 33 children at the Colonial school which appears to have been constructed after work began on the Craigflower school. Charles Clark was the first schoolmaster at Craigflower.

For a time, Rev. Edward Cridge, who arrived from England in April of that year, held church services in Craigflower school. It was Mrs. Cridge who opened the first Sunday school in the colony. The following year, Cridge became the first school inspector for Vancouver Island. Classes were held in the old school house until

1911 when the new school was completed. At that time the building was deteriorating. No major work had been done since 1873 when the government spent \$1,125 on the school. In 1927, thanks to the efforts of the Native Sons and Daughters of British Columbia, the schoolhouse was saved from demolition and in 1931 it was made a National Historic site.

During recent renovations, some old wall maps were discovered and the small porch was removed since it was a later addition to the building.

The school bell is the oldest in the province. It was obtained from the wreck of the Major Tompkins, a steamer that ran aground trying to enter Esquimalt harbor late one night in February, 1855. This important building, which represented a significant step in the permanent colonization of Vancouver Island, is open to the public throughout the year.

Geoffrey Castle is a council member of the Victoria section of the B.C. Historical Federation.