

East Chester Recreational Association meets the needs of the community

By Janice Rafuse

In 1877 the trustees of East Chester School Section Number Two purchased a certain parcel of land in East Chester from David Hume and Mary Hume by deed dated December 21, 1877, for the purpose of erecting a schoolhouse in 1878. The school had only one room for many years, and Primary to Grade 12 attended classes with only one teacher.

In 1938 Audrey Hirtle was the teacher. She had 85 students and they sat three in a seat. This was her first job out of Teacher's College, and she taught at East Chester School for three years.

In the early 1900s there was no well, and water for drinking was from a nearby brook, which ran beside the school property. When a well was dug years later, the students carried the water to the classroom for drinking and washing hands before classes began.

In early years a large iron Glenwood stove stood in the centre of the room. Wood was stored in the boys' lobby, and each morning the students carried enough wood to stoke the stove for the day. In later years a second stove was added. The two large stoves heated the classroom. They were in the middle of the classroom and sat back to back.

Each day after classes a janitor swept the floors, but in addition to their cleaning job they had to arrive at the school early the next morning to start the fire and have the school warm for the students. At that time the dusting was done. There were no washrooms to clean since there were outside toilets to use, which were very cold in the winter. The janitor was paid \$42 per year for his service. Some of the names who held this job were Graves, Stevens and Rafuse.

As years went by the enrolment increased and another room was built on the school, with folding doors separating the classes. Two teachers were needed. One teacher taught Primary to Grade 6. The other taught Grades 7 to 10. Grades 11 and 12 then attended high school in Chester.

Until 1951 the taxes were collected in East Chester by Reuben Rafuse for the administration of the school. In 1951 the East Chester School was taken over by the Chester Municipal School Board. There were no longer outside toilets — new chemical toilets were installed.

In 1980 the Chester Municipal School Board announced the East Chester School would be closing, due to decreased enrolment and upkeep of the building. Some students from the school were taken to the new Chester Elementary School which had the official opening in October 1980, some to the old high school (which was a large grey building with two storeys that stood where the Chester municipal office now stands) or to Chester Basin Elementary School, and Grades 7 to 12 went to Chester High School which is now Chester Area Middle School.

Now the old school building stood empty.

The first meeting of the East Chester Recreational Association was held at the home of Bernice and John Corkum in East Chester on November 14, 1975, with 11 members present. The purpose of the organization was to provide and organize various projects, activities and facilities for all residents of East Chester. Some of the first projects were preteen instruction in hockey and figure skating, broomball, swimming and baseball for youth.

The East Chester Recreational Association was incorporated on January 7, 1976. It is a non-profit organiza-



KEITH CORCORAN PHOTO

East Chester Recreational Association is known for the Mackerel Snappers Picnic, which the group hosted for 28 years. Five years ago the Chester volunteer fire department joined the effort which still attracts a large crowd as is evidenced by this photo from this year's event held on July 9.

tion registered with the Registry of Joint Stocks.

A request was made to the municipal school board to use the school to have meetings. This request was granted and the building was used by the recreation department, but the school was going to be turned over to the Chester Municipal Council.

On August 1, 1982, a committee was formed who went before the Chester Municipal Council and requested the building for a community hall, to be used by the residents of East Chester. After much discussion and many meetings the committee received the deed to the building on February 7, 1983. Since then the building has been operated as a community hall.

The East Chester Recreational Association is a very active organization. It has nine directors on the board. The hall is used weekly for bingo on Saturday nights and card parties every Monday afternoon as well as the Tops meetings every Thursday at 6 p.m.

The hall is rented for events such as meetings, wedding receptions, showers and birthday parties, to name a few.

The hall is free to the 4-H club, Brownies and Guides, as well as any other non-profit groups. It is also free to all seniors 80 and over for birthday parties, or celebrating a 50-year or over wedding anniversary. During the summer yard sales are sometimes held in the yard, and recently the hall has been donated to the Rod & Gun Club for their meetings and card parties on Thursday evenings at 7:30 p.m. after their building burned down last summer.

Last year the association made donations to over 25 organizations and groups including Christmas Daddies, IWK, Terry Fox Run, Shoreham Village bingo, Chester Municipal Crime Prevention, CVFD curling team, Salvation Army, Chester school penny parade, Breakfast Club at Chester District Elementary School, Chester volunteer fire department children's committee, Remembrance Day wreath, Butterbox Baby re-

union and each year in April we sponsor the Shoreham Village birthday party. We also sponsored two girls' curling teams, team MacDonald and team Doucet. For several years we participated in Canada Day celebrations on Graves Island.

In 2005 the East Chester Recreation members wanted a logo for their organization. It was decided to have a contest, and invite the Chester Area Middle School students to submit a drawing. Several entries were received. The one chosen was submitted by Tiffany Ottaway, a Grade 7 student.

Each year we award two \$500 bursaries, to a boy and a girl from East Chester who will graduate from Forest Heights Community School and who will be attending a community college the following year. This year an amendment was made to this bursary. It will now be awarded to any East Chester student who graduates from FHCS regardless of where they choose to further their education.

We also administer the Lila Zinck awards to a boy and girl in Grade 8 with the highest average from East Chester who attends the Chester Area Middle School.

East Chester Recreational Association is known for the Mackerel Snappers Picnic, which we hosted for 28 years. Five years ago the Chester volunteer fire department joined us and it is now a joint effort between us. This was our 33rd year.

The picnic is held on Graves Island in East Chester every year on the second Saturday of July. A superb meal of fried mackerel, potatoes, cucumber salad, roll and your choice of pie, and tea, coffee or Kool-Aid is served from noon to 6 p.m.

There is local entertainment all day, bingo, games of chance, hot dogs, fries and a canteen. This year the picnic was held on July 9.

Some of the programs we have sponsored over the years include a junior library weekly, Rod & Gun Club target practice, the Chester rink (one-hour skate), craft classes, Young at Heart (visiting seniors on their birthday), teen dances, adult dances and several others.

Last year we added two wheelchair-accessible bathrooms and a new wheelchair ramp and doorstep at the hall. This year we are working toward a new roof, our floors being refinished and some of the floor joists being replaced.

As you can see, we have a lot of history and we are a very busy organization. The association is operated by volunteers. Everyone is invited to join us at our regular meetings at 7 p.m. on the second Monday of every month.

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Good Luck to all Sailors during CHESTER RACE WEEK

Fri., Aug. 19 - Dr. Weird Beard's Blues Revue
8-11 pm No Cover

Sat., Aug. 20 - The Klunkers
8-11 pm No Cover

Thurs., Aug. 25 - Load of Fish
8-close No Cover

Thank you to all volunteers who helped make the Mahone Bay Pirate Festival & Regatta a great success.

Two 10 oz. Certified Angus Steak Dinners
for \$25 Every Friday 5 - 9:30 pm

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Thank You

On Saturday, July 16th, we held "Little Red School Day" in Canaan at our community centre. We had a very successful day.

Thank-you goes out to those who donated cash, items, food, and to all volunteers who participated on that day. Many people were involved in various ways, including donations of Chinese auction items, flea market items, food, cash donations, plus set-up, and also working on that day.

Special thank-you to all the musicians who entertained us all day on our outdoor stage.

Also, special thank-you to Scotiabank in Chester, who partnered with us in their matching funds program. With the funds from Scotiabank and the revenues from our event, we raised over \$9000.

Once again, many, many thanks to everyone involved.

Sincerely,
Canaan and District Hall Association