



Lemberg School part of province's Catholic school history

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

SASKATOON - Efforts are underway to ensure preservation of the oldest standing Catholic school building in Saskatchewan, built even before the province itself came into existence.

A heritage site that is listed in provincial guidebooks and directories, the Lemberg school building is a unique stone structure with more than 100 years of history pertinent to Catholic education in Saskatchewan, says Annette Stebner, a former Lemberg-area resident who now lives in Saskatoon, where she is active in a local heritage advisory committee. With declining rural population in the Lemberg area, Stebner hopes former residents and the broader Catholic education community might consider contributing to the preservation of the structure.

“This is not just a local heartstring story ... it’s got a broader base in our provincial history and this building could perhaps be a focus in preserving this part of the history of Catholic education in our province.”

The small stone structure, one half mile east of Lemberg, Sask. on Highway 22, was constructed from field stone in 1900 as “Weissenberg Roman Catholic Public School #49” to serve an area settled by German-speaking Catholic settlers from Galacia, Austria. After Saskatchewan became a province in 1905, the school was operated by the Weissenberg Roman Catholic Separate School District until it was replaced by a larger wooden one-room school structure in 1922. At that time the stone building was converted into a teacherage, used until declining enrolment caused the school to be closed in 1964.

The unique stone structure shares its site with St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church, also constructed from fieldstone in 1900 by Wilhelm Sebastian Hankowski and his assistant Peter Reiger.

Large stones hauled to the site were split and placed so that the flat surface formed the exterior wall. Limestones were hauled to the site and heated in a hole in the ground. The limestone was then crushed and mixed with sand and water to be used as mortar. The stone part of the school is a single story building of 27.5 ft by 21.5 ft. A wooden front porch served as a kitchen. The building has a wood shingled roof and has three windows placed along both the north and south sides.

The history which surrounds the school is a reflection of separate school creation in communities throughout the province, notes Stebner.

After Saskatchewan became a province in 1905, the small school became a site of local controversy between the newly-created Lemberg Public School District #1752 and the Weissenberg Roman Catholic Separate School District #17 formed in May 1907.

The public school district wanted the furniture and building from Weissenberg school, which the newly-created separate school district wanted to continue operating as a Catholic school. Finally in the fall of 1907 the two school boards agreed that the Catholic ratepayers would pay their taxes for that year to the Lemberg public school district in return for separate school ownership of the stone school.

Later the area became a focus for ongoing debate about religion in schools in July 1929 when Premier James G. Gardiner (who was from Lemberg) debated J.H. Hawkins, a lecturer and Ku Klux Klan leader who was speaking against the existence of Catholic schools in the province. The debate held at the Lemberg rink attracted a large crowd and focused attention on some of the issues surrounding religious education rights in the province.

The wooden school built in 1922 was moved off the property, but the old stone structure built in 1900 still stands today and is worth preserving, says Stebner.

“This is one of the last remaining school buildings of that era, it is not a large building ... but it is becoming critical that something be done before it is lost forever,” she said. “I think it is a valuable part of our heritage and preserving it would be a worthwhile project.”

Stebner said anyone interested in the project can contact Bob Mann at (306) 335-2535 or by email at <madmann@sasktel.net>