

Eva Ardiel closes 42-year career with one last ring

Ardiel, Eva

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Britannia schoolmarm bids adieu

Staff photo by Rob Beintema
Grade 2 Pheasant Run Public School student Shantel Friesen was a member of the final class to be instructed by Eva Ardiel at the Old Britannia Schoolhouse last week. Ardiel has been head instructor at the one-room schoolhouse for six and one-half of the nine years since it was restored. She retires this year after a teaching career that has spanned 42 years.

By STEPHANIE INNES
Staff Reporter

Eva Ardiel last Wednesday morning gave the Old Britannia Schoolhouse bell one final ring.

After six and a half years of what one former colleague called an "academy award-winning performance," as school mistress for the historical classroom, Ardiel held one final class with a group of Grade 2 students before officially retiring from her post.

"I will definitely miss this old schoolhouse," said Ardiel as she prepared to crank out a batch of ice cream with the Pheasant Run Public School students.

"There's an ownership I feel here that is different from other teaching jobs."

Ardiel, whose teaching career began in 1949 with the Hamilton Board of Education, has been employed with the Peel Board since 1975, first as a visual arts consultant and then as head instructor for the restored red brick schoolhouse.

"She (Ardiel) is ending quite a career," said Hugh McPherson, principal of field centres for the Peel Board of Education.

"Making kids understand and appreciate the past is so difficult to do. History is something most kids aren't tuned into, but Eva manages to creatively take kids back in time. The kids are mesmerized," he said.

Each day of every school week since she assumed the post, Ardiel has dressed in 19th century schoolteacher clothing — long skirts, plain white blouses, black

boots and a bonnet. Three days are spent instructing various classes in the schoolhouse. The other two days Ardiel spends touring Peel classrooms, "preparing" students for their day in the old school.

"It's important to build up trust, so that the students understand everything we do in the classroom is role-playing," said Ardiel.

Ardiel wants students to have a day at her schoolhouse that resembles a day students at the former S.S. #12 Toronto Township school would have experienced.

"I grew up in the country and I attended a one-room schoolhouse not unlike this one," said Ardiel. "Rural Canada is a part of my own heritage, and the heritage of many students who come here."

In the persona of strict school marm, Ardiel has students learn by memorization and threatens them with antique punishment instruments that hang on the wall by the blackboard. A student who doesn't memorize the assigned poem, salute the flag or learn the motto of the day could be subject to the dunce cap, the strap or the hair twister, Ardiel warns.

"I've had a lot of fun in this job," said Ardiel, doling out jacks, balls, ropes and stilts to the students. "The kids love coming here. Kids of all ages and abilities come, and it's been fascinating for me to meet all of them."

Ardiel's former assistant John Dawkes has been named headmaster of the schoolhouse for the 1991-92 year. His assistant instructor will be Marilyn Jones.

