

# Former Britannia School student pens timely tome

By STEVE PECAR  
Staff Reporter

Ben Madill just wants to set the record straight.

That's the least he feels he can do for an important part of this area's history.

But if at the same time the release of his book makes some people sit up and take notice of what is happening to that history, then so be it.

Britannia School and School Farm...and My School Days is Madill's no-nonsense approach to the history of the 142-year-old schoolhouse and the 198 acres of land it sits on.

Sprinkled with his recollections of growing up in the community that surrounds the farm, the book, if anything, is Madill's simple reminder that Peel was a vibrant community

long before the advent of highrises and highways.

"People tend not to realize, or at least forget, that life has been going on around here for decades," says Madill who himself has lived near to the farm and school all of his 77 years. "I think it's important to remember."

The book reaches back as far as 1830 with the first request to the Crown for a grant of the land that would become the school farm (that initial request was denied) and follows along to the building of the school on the site.

Madill then picks it up with his own firsthand knowledge of the school when he began attending classes in 1921 and works through the neglect of the site through the 1960s and 70s and up to the point in the late 1980s

when the Peel Board of Education decided to re-open the farm and schoolhouse as historical educational facilities.

Before the board took that step though, it was through the efforts of people like Madill that kept reminding the decision makers of the significance of the school and farm and why it should be preserved.

It's no coincidence then that the book was published at a time when school board trustees are reconsidering the usefulness of the property and the programs that it offers.

"Unfortunately, every few years we have to convince the trustees how important the farm is and how it is a part of our heritage," Madill says. "Maybe the book can help."

While school board discussion has turned to building a sports complex or high school

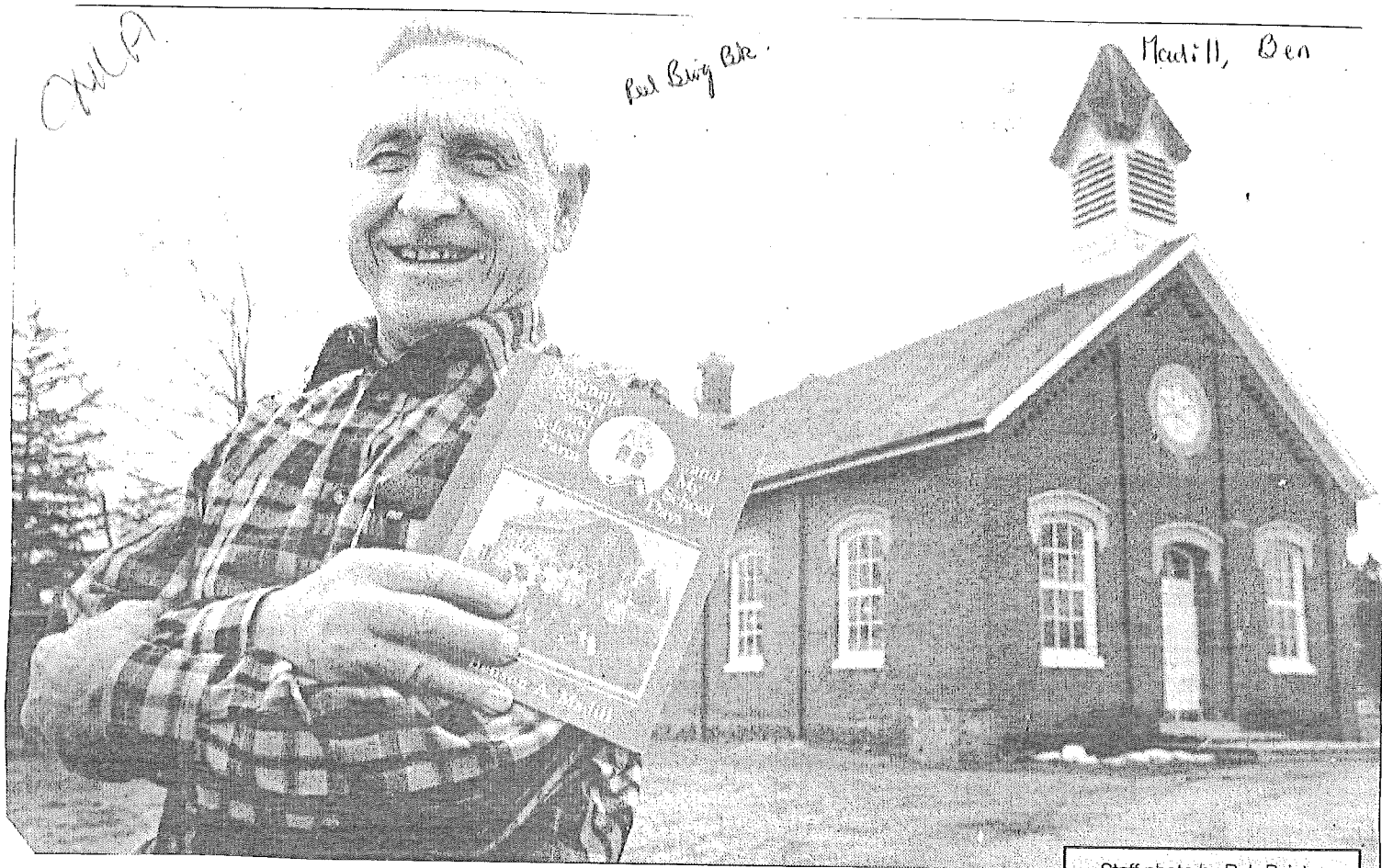
on the site, Madill hopes the property can remain exactly as it is and promises that future generations won't be sorry.

"I know the site is a prime piece of real estate plopped right in the middle of a big city, but in comparison, I don't the City of Toronto ever regrets not paving over High Park," he says. "I think we got to think along those lines as well. We have something rare and unique, we shouldn't destroy it."

As if his role is not already enough, Madill is donating proceeds from the sale of the book to the Britannia Schoolhouse in hopes the funds can help offset some of the costs involved in operating the programs there.

He will be appearing at the school open house this Sunday, from 1 to 4 p.m. to autograph copies of the book.

MADILL, Ben  
April 15th, 1992 MW  
Peel Biography Book



MADILL, Ben April 1st, 1992 MN

Staff photo by Rob Beintema

## School days

Author Ben Madill holds a copy of his book *Britannia School and School Farm...and My School Days* in front of the historic structure. Madill, 77, will be at an open house at the school on Hurontario St. this Sunday, where he will be selling autographed copies of the book. For details, see story on page 3