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GOING TO SCHOOL IN RURAL ONTARIO

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Introduction

For the vast majority of Ontario residents during the 19th century, formal education involved a sometimes unwilling trek to the local one-room schoolhouse. Indeed, until the school consolidation movement of the 1950s and 1960s, this architecturally unpretentious structure was the bulwark of the province's educational system. It emerged during the pioneer period, developed its central place in the educational system in the crucial years of growth between 1850 and 1875, and held sway with few changes until large-scale busing, the shift of population to the province's cities and towns, and radical changes in the primary-level curriculum combined to force its closure. Even now, more than a quarter of a century after it was superseded by rural consolidated schools, the simple one-room schoolhouse remains a potent symbol of the values and experiences central to rural life.

Though the buildings themselves have changed little over time, the place of the school as an institution underwent substantial modification in the long period between pioneer settlement and the close of our survey of school buildings, 1930. Initially the rigours of first settlement forced the pioneer to relegate formal education to the status of a luxury item. Many authors have expressed the romantic but inaccurate portrait of the earnest settler clearing his land and quickly erecting those pillars of rural life, permanent homes, churches and schools. In fact, the immense difficulties of those first years of farming, a widespread disdain for education outside of the family, the lack of qualified teachers, and the absence of government support all worked against the development of education in rural schools. Yet by 1850 much had been accomplished: the provincial authorities had established a central educational bureaucracy, headed by a dynamic advocate of free compulsory primary-level education, the Chief Superintendent of Education, the Reverend Egerton Ryerson. The principle of state support for the salaries of teachers in both public and separate schools had been accepted, and over 3,000 schools had been built. In addition, an important idea had begun to take hold in the public mind -- that formal education outside of the home was a necessary part of childhood development. This comparatively new idea was the foundation of the development of Ontario's educational system. Indeed, by the 1870s, education had so taken hold of the public mind that it ranked with the family and the church as the chief supports of rural Victorian society.¹

Alas, this was all to change over time. By the 1930s, educationists agreed that the rural school had become a disgrace to the educational system it had once symbolized. To residents of rural areas, it remained at the centre of their lives, but bureaucrats and academics alike were convinced that the rural school system, and the buildings which housed it, embodied all that was unsatisfactory in rural Ontario life,



and the campaign to obliterate it had begun. By the 1950s and 1960s this process had achieved its goal, and the one-room school was a fast-disappearing aspect of the rural provincial landscape.

In the midst of all of this change and controversy, one aspect of rural education remained reasonably constant: the design and appearance of the schools themselves. Indeed, structures erected as early as the 1850s and 1860s continued in use, virtually without major modifications, until their closure nearly a century later. Nor did their closure remove these important buildings from the heart of the communities they had served. Some, demolished because of the importance of their site or the deterioration of their fabric, became much-treasured memories, relived at some length in the local histories or books or reminiscences produced for Canada's centennial celebrations. But many more continued to play an active role in community life, converted to use as community halls, meeting places for groups as varied as the boy scouts or the women's institute, or as museums or town halls. Others remained prominent in the local landscape as neatly tended homes. However they have survived, these buildings clearly recall fond memories of days which have passed and are not to be seen again.

The Development of Early School's Legislation

Formal government involvement in primary-level (or, as it was known through most of the 19th century, common school) education commenced with the passage of the Common School Act of 1816. Primary schools did, of course, exist before this time, but they were either private, fee-paying institutions or community projects informally organized and financed by residents of a locale. The first legislation on the subject, the Common School Act of 1816, established two principles which were to underlie the great bulk of educational legislation passed before 1930: first, that education ought to be a matter of primarily local initiative and control; and second, that the whole society, as represented by the provincial government, had some financial responsibility to support these local initiatives. The 1816 legislation permitted any group of residents to organize to establish a school, under the control of three elected school trustees whose duties included virtually all aspects of school management. Society's interest in an educated populace was represented by the legislature's offer of a salary subsidy of £25 per annum to any school where 20 scholars were in attendance. Furthermore, decisions of the trustees were subject to the approval of the government's appointed representatives in educational matters, the District Board of Education. The central authority, however, did not provide funding for the building or maintenance of schools, offering only the subsidy for a salary, nor did it intervene actively in local educational matters. Residents were expected to raise sufficient funds to erect suitable buildings, and to pay the bulk of the teachers' salaries through fees, levies and voluntary donations.²

Given the legislature's parsimony and the inability of many sections to raise funds, early rural common schools were rude and rough affairs -- though, one hastens to add, they often compared favourably with early housing in their quality. Often, a church, private home or other building would be purchased for school use; if a formal school was erected, "it followed the same design as the simplest pioneer homes. Made of rough-hewn logs, it usually measured about fourteen by sixteen feet with a low ceiling. A fire-place would assume a prominent place in the building."³

Common school education was managed in this fashion for nearly forty years. Attempts at increasing centralized control -- for example, the establishment in 1823 of a General Board of Education -- were very largely failures, and local initiatives seem to have yielded disappointing results. By 1826, complained the colony's leading Anglican cleric, John Strachan, only 350 common schools teaching 7,000 pupils had been established for a population of nearly 150,000.⁴

Intense political controversy during the 1830s made educational reform a matter of partisan debate and therefore prevented the solution of this problem. It was not until 1841 that meaningful action took place. The Common School Act of that year introduced two additional principles to the educational system as it evolved: the need for centralized control, in the establishment of the office of chief superintendent of education for Canada, and the acceptance of publicly supported separate schools on religious or national grounds. Initial efforts under the act were tentative, and in some respects it was superseded by another bill in 1843. With the appointment in 1844 of the province's most distinguished Methodist cleric, Egerton Ryerson, as assistant (after 1846, chief) superintendent of education, however, educational matters were clearly in the hands of a strong-minded individual whose mission it was to advance its interests across the province. Until his retirement in 1876, Ryerson was the province's chief propagandist in favour of educational advancement. "Education is a public good, ignorance is a public evil," Ryerson stated in a report to the legislature in 1846, and he was tireless in his attempts to upgrade education, not only in Ontario but across British North America. To many he became "the founder of the public school system in English-speaking Canada."⁵

Under Ryerson's direction, education in rural areas became an intrinsic part of the life of every child. The system of primary school blossomed, as thousands of one-room, and a few larger, schools were constructed. Several notable objectives were met: the abolition of fees for the common schools and the substitution of local property taxes for the rate bill as the major source of funding for schools (1850); the compulsory attendance of children between the ages of six and 12 for at least a part of the school year (1871); the mandatory inspection of schools, both in teaching and in condition of buildings, by personnel appointed by the central government (1850), and the establishment of minimum standards, enforceable by the refusal to pay grants, in the quality of school buildings and equipment (1871).

Together these developments had a profound impact upon the school buildings. Though laws, of necessity, bent in the face of local conditions, over time successive school legislation resulted in more children of all ages going to school in buildings which were increasingly designed to standards established by the office of the superintendent of education.

The Pre-1850 Rural Schoolhouse

In his first annual report on the condition of the schools in Upper Canada, the chief superintendent summarized the state of school buildings as deplorable: "... with a few exceptions, the School houses are deficient in almost every essential quality as places adapted for Elementary instruction." They lacked appropriate desks and seats, teaching aids, playgrounds, a water supply or even privies. Lack of interest locally in education was clearly a problem, for municipal priorities rarely placed great emphasis on education. As one politician noted, before 1850, " 'Roads, roads, roads,' was the popular cry, and 'Keep down taxes!' the popular sentiment."⁶ But Ryerson refused to believe that the public could not be made to see the importance of education for to him, the fault was clear: trustees lacked guidance on how to design and erect buildings of the proper type. "What has been done in this respect -- and much certainly has been done in this respect," Ryerson noted, "has been devised and accomplished by the people themselves, without plans, or instructions, or suggestions from any higher quarter." Though the process was to take more time than Ryerson ever expected, the upgrading of school buildings became one of his first -- and indeed one of his enduring -- priorities during his term in office.

A statistical survey of the province's schools, carried out by Ryerson in 1850, supported his judgement of four years before.⁷ The "average" rural school in that year was a log (52%) or more rarely frame (44%) structure one room in size (90%).

Though they varied widely in scale, over half of the buildings reported were less than 20 by 24 feet; 14% were smaller than 18 by 20 feet. Such buildings accommodated classes averaging 50 pupils, but several astonishing exceptions were reported by inspectors over the years: S.S. No 9 Flamborough West, near Hamilton, attempted to educate 122 children in a room measuring 24 by 18 feet⁸ while S.S. No. 7 Warwick, near Sarnia, employed "a miserable, smoky shanty, scarcely fit for a piggery," measuring only 16 by 18 feet for its 86 pupils.⁹ Sixty per cent of the buildings in 1850 were considered to be in "good" repair, but less than 40% made any provision for ventilation (that is, had windows which could be opened, roof vents or flues), two-thirds had no playground area, and a remarkable 90% had no sanitary facilities. On the positive side, over 95% possessed "proper" schoolroom equipment, in the form of desks and seats of some kind.

Statistics, however, give only an inadequate, homogenized picture of the condition of the schools before 1850. Few buildings of this early type survive intact (see Figures 1 to 4 for examples); those that have continued in use are, by and large, exceptional because of their brick or stone construction. Many descriptions of pre-1850 buildings, however, do survive, and a few may be cited to flesh out the statistical portrait. In Kitley Township, a former teacher, John MacKay, remembered his first school as follows:

The building was a very poor one, 20 feet by 20 feet. The walls, about 7 feet in height, were of rough logs. There were 3 windows, one in each of three sides, and the door on the fourth side. The floor and ceiling were composed of rough boards. The building was without ventilation, except from the door or windows.

The fittings would compare favorably with the building. Instead of desks, on each of two sides of the house was a pine board, say 14 feet long, 16 or 18 inches wide, planed on [the] upper side, and nailed to the wall. For seats we had rough benches hewed from cedar or basswood logs. In each end were two auger holes, in which to set the feet, which were of undressed pieces of wood.¹⁰

Rather more primitive but by no means exceptional was the earliest school in Emily Township, anonymously reported to the Department of Education early in the 20th century:

The School House, or building used as such, was an old log shanty about 20 by 12 feet, covered with Elm Bark, a flat roof, it had neither window, floor or fireplace, or stove, consequently [it] could only be used in summer[;] there was an opening in the roof [to let out the smoke from an open fire].... The School was opened in June, 1834.... The School furniture consisted of rough boards, resting on long pins, or stakes, driven into two inch auger holes, bored into the side logs of the building, -- no trouble in sweeping floor, as it was Mother Earth. The Books and Equipment consisted of the Bible; Carpenter's and Mavor's Spelling Books, and such old Arithmetics as the parents of the children had brought from the Old Country. We had very little paper, some slates....¹¹

Further to the west, in Waterloo and Norwich townships, similar conditions prevailed: small log schools, supplied with only benches and shelf desks, were the norm. "Such School Houses could be built cheap in the early days," noted one teacher, "and that was the reason they were so built."

Even before the changeover, in 1850, to support by section-wide property taxation, however, newer and more modern buildings were increasingly being constructed. Oliver Olmstead's experience between 1838 and 1842 provides an early

example of this transition:

The condition of the [first school] Building was that of a dilapidated frame house without a stove. There was an open-jam fire-place in one end of the building.... The fittings in the School Room were loose benches, and a row of writing desks on three sides of the School Room, suspended by hinges, which were let down during religious services. There were no Maps in the School. My second School ... was in the Township of London ... and the condition of the building was an old frame one, with a stove in the centre. Fittings were loose benches, writing desks on hinges, a pulpit in one end.... My third School was in Southwold which I opened in 1842. The Building was a new frame one, very respectable.... The fittings in the School Room were good. The seating was after the ancient model.¹²

A number of buildings of this primitive sort were reported to the CIHB during its survey of surviving pre-1930 schools, and a selection of these is illustrated (see Figures 1 and 2). Most of these, as one would expect, have undergone a considerable degree of alteration, and none provides any idea of interior conditions. A contemporary drawing, designated simply "School in Adelaide visited Dec'r 1845" (Figure 5) provides some idea of the state of the interior of a reasonably typical pre-1850 log school; it illustrates a low-ceilinged room, unplastered room with plank floors, ill-lighted by small, fixed windows and heated by an open fireplace, without ventilation of any kind. The somewhat out-of-scale teacher has no desk or apparatus to assist in the presentation of his lessons, while the pupils are seated on benches attached to the walls. In general terms, this reflects the simplicity of very many pre-1850 schools.

Towards a Better School Building: Developments after 1850

The condition of the schools was an irritant to the superintendent of education, who argued that education could not take place effectively in such primitive surroundings. Ryerson's first solution was to establish, in 1848, the Journal of Education for Upper Canada, a monthly collection of articles, reports, addresses and illustrations covering topics as widely varied as choosing a school site, selection of appropriate textbooks, how to make blackboards from plaster and lampblack, and how to set up a stove in a schoolroom. During the Journal's first years, Ryerson concentrated on the topic of school architecture, publishing extensive (and often uncredited) selections from North America's most important study on the topic, Henry Barnard's School Architecture, which had been published in Boston in 1848. The Journal was sent, without charge, to any school trustee who asked for it, and to all school inspectors as a matter of course. Until its demise in 1876, as a cost-cutting measure, the Journal of Education for Upper Canada was the most important vehicle in transmitting to school trustees the importance of upgrading their schools, and the means they should employ to do so. To reinforce the lesson, Ryerson sought, and obtained, a special legislative grant of £200 in 1849 to improve school architecture. This sum was used to purchase four hundred copies of Barnard's book for distribution to every municipal body, from township council to county warden, in the province. In his annual report for 1850 the chief superintendent -- not always the most objective reporter of the fate of his initiatives -- remarked that "from the terms in which the reception of this work has been generally acknowledged, and the information and illustrations it contains, I doubt not but its influence will be very beneficial." Local inspectors were suitably encouraging -- they were, after all, Ryerson appointees -- but expected only slow progress. As one inspector noted, it was an article of faith among educationists that

there is nothing which so truly and so eloquently conveys to

the mind of the stranger the moral and social condition of the people amongst whom he is sojourning as the appearance and character of those houses devoted to the intellectual training of their youth. [On these can] be based a people's social happiness, or a nation's prosperity.

Alas, the inspector lamented, these ideas were not widely accepted locally: "I find in many sections of this country little or no attention whatever is paid to the appearance or comfort of the school-houses."¹³

Even so, some advancement was being seen in some areas of the province, both in terms of public attitudes towards the value of education, and towards the buildings constructed. As the Reverend William Ormiston of Clarke Township put it in 1853, "the school of 1843 would not be tolerated in 1853. A new set of ideas have got possession of the public mind, as to the position, character, claims and objects of the common schools; and hence the increasing desire and effort to procure larger and more commodious houses, superior books and apparatus, and teachers of higher qualifications." Other inspectors disagreed; William Jones of Rainham Township noted that "I am often surprised at the stingy disposition of the people. If you talk about building a new school-house, or repairing the old one, they exclaim that it is good enough, no need of going to so much expense." Wesley Freeman of Windham Township was even more blunt: local interest in education was minimal and "there is an entire disregard to the comforts and conveniences of school-houses and premises."¹⁴

In spite of Ryerson's first efforts, then, criticism of the state of the province's schools continued, usually with the chief superintendent himself leading the critique. Annual report after annual report catalogued the improvements in school design in the newly constructed schools, but these minor advances paled in contrast to the abysmal condition of the majority of buildings. In this Ryerson had time on his side; the earlier log structures could not last long without upkeep. As the Reverend Daniel Wait of Haldimand Township remarked, "it is an indisputable fact, that a great majority of the [school] houses are in a state of rapid decay, and cannot last many years longer."¹⁵ What was needed, central authorities knew, was unrelenting pressure on trustees from both the chief superintendent and local inspectors coupled with access by trustees to the latest information on school design.

In response to the latter requirement, Ryerson reinforced his early efforts at improving the quality of school design. In 1853 he commissioned a set of plans for rural and urban schools from the prestigious Toronto architects Cumberland and Ridout, who had designed the province's two leading educational buildings, Hamilton Central School and the Toronto Normal and Model School. Though no plans were presented, Ryerson continued to publish articles from various sources in the Journal, occasionally replacing American illustrations with the work of Canadian architects.¹⁶ Finally, in 1857, Ryerson authorized the publication of the province's first manual of school design, The School House: Its Architecture, External and Internal Arrangements. Its author, John George Hodgins, was Ryerson's assistant, and the 212-page volume consisted largely of material already published in the Journal of Education for Upper Canada. Nor was the material specifically oriented to the unique problems posed by Canadian weather; much of the architectural sections of the book were drawn from Barnard's School Architecture, and from the reports of school authorities in Pennsylvania and Connecticut.¹⁷ Even so, the book proved influential in changing the direction of school design across the province, and indeed throughout British North America. It provided the most up-to-date information available on every facet of school architecture to a group of people who had access to little else on the subject. The School House, in fact, was two books: a construction manual for school trustees, with its discussion on topics such as site selection, the principles of heating, ventilation and lighting, the building of school furniture, and the preparation of appropriate plans and specifications, and a training manual for teachers, with its

essays on school discipline, the duties of teachers, and the use of relevant literary selections for class recitations.

In contrast to the typical pre-1850 buildings cited earlier, the "new" schools advocated by provincial authorities were larger in scale, more elegant in their external appearance, better sited and equipped, and superior in terms of lighting, heating and ventilation (see Figures 6 to 9 for examples). Bigger buildings were required because increasingly more children were attending schools for a longer period of time, and because earlier structures were often impossibly cramped. These more advanced buildings provided a minimum of ten square feet and 150 cubic feet for each student on the roll. To achieve the objective of satisfactory ventilation, windows which could be opened, ventilation flues and more efficient stoves were all recommended. To improve lighting, buildings were to be oriented in a north-south alignment, with large windows -- examples showed from two to four along the east and west walls of the school -- placed high to minimize external distraction and provide the best angle of light for working. Manufactured double desks and seats (or locally made products of similar design) were to replace the rudely made benches of the early schools; these ought to be placed, if possible, on a gradually sloping floor or pupils should be seated according to their height so that all students could see the blackboards. All classrooms were expected to be equipped with at least some of the latest mechanical aids to assist the teacher in his lessons: blackboards, clocks, thermometres, drawings, building blocks, geometric forms, globes, maps, an abacus and apparatus for experiments in electricity, pneumatics, physiology and optics. Of particular importance was the magic lantern, a forerunner of the slide projector, and the school library, both of which were considered indispensable to a well-run rural school. To assist in spreading the use of these items, Ryerson established a central sales office, the Educational Depository, which tested, purchased and marketed goods approved for use in Ontario schools at better than wholesale prices. Abolished, in the face of industrial pressure, in 1879, the Educational Depository provided a wide range of goods to rural schools at a governmentally subsidized price 50% below cost (see Figure 10).

Equal attention was paid to the outside of the school. Elevations were provided of professionally designed schools of brick, stone or frame construction, all aimed at making the rural school "what it ought ever to be -- the most attractive spot in the neighbourhood."¹⁸ Elevated, dry and well-treed sites were advocated; extensive fenced playgrounds were expected, and ornamental shrubs and flowers were to decorate the façades. A well was to be dug, lawns planted and a woodshed and privies built discretely to the rear of the lot.

Hodgin's The School House was not, of course, a description of schools as they were; it placed before school trustees and the public a view of schools as they ought to be. There were, naturally, many who felt that the book, and its standards, made impossible demands on local officials. It was, they felt, relatively easy for Toronto-based bureaucrats, who steadfastly refused to provide grants towards the cost of new buildings, to advise large increases in local taxes to pay for newer and more elegant schools. "The Pamphlet on School Architecture," noted John Lawton of North Plantagenet Township, "will serve no useful purpose here so long as we are so plentifully supplied with pine logs for building purposes and materials." James Clapperton of Augusta Township was equally sanguine; while he welcomed the publication of so comprehensive a volume, "the opinion of the trustees and others is, that they are not able to erect such School houses as the pamphlet describes." Other inspectors were more hopeful; Allan Ruttan of the townships of Camden East and Sheffield agreed that immediate improvement was unlikely considering current fiscal arrangements. Yet the book "is the admiration of everyone, and as soon as the financial condition of the country will admit of it," he prophesied that "the erection of school-houses will be much facilitated and improved by consulting its pages." Such works were valuable, he added, because through them, "trustees are made clearly to

understand what is and what is not suitable architecture for the school-house."¹⁹

While it may be invidious to focus on a few school buildings, among the many reported to the CIHB, two might be cited to illustrate the changeover between the "old-fashioned" and Ryersonian school. One of the best reported cases are the surviving schools in the eastern Ontario township of Oxford-on-Rideau. Records survive for 12 schools built between 1846 and 1905, and two of these may be used to illustrate the difference between these two types of 19th-century school. Representative of the early stage of school design is the former S.S. No. 11 at Bishop's Mills (Fig. 11). Built of stone, it was constructed in 1862. It measures 22 by 30 feet, is gable roofed and simply decorated. Three small windows, double hung, are set symmetrically along each side of the building; the centre door is decorated above by a wooden half-wheel set in the stucco. The interior is similarly simple in treatment; a wooden platform at the end of the room, for the teacher's desk, and a whitewashed plaster finish relieved the inside; a chimney, for the box stove, was set along the end wall.

Within a decade this highly simplified approach was considered passé by local trustees and central officials alike. S.S. No. 8 in Oxford Mills, constructed in 1875, shows the influence of Ryerson's call for a more advanced form of school design. Located on a river-front site beside the equally fine town hall of the same date, the Oxford Mills school is a two room, architect-designed building of pleasing aspect (Fig. 12). John Steacey, a Brockville architect noted for his work on several local public buildings, prepared the plans for both structures. Like the Bishop's Mills school, S.S. No. 8 was constructed of stone, but the similarity between the two schools ends with that fact. While the Bishop's Mills school was plain and simple in design, the Oxford Mills school is elegant in appearance. The exterior stone is rough-dressed and laid with heavy mortar in irregular courses, offering a highly picturesque effect. A small entry porch, lighted by two tall, narrow windows, is topped by a gay bell-cote and a gilt weather vane; the elaborate woodwork, or bargeboard, is repeated over the porch door and along the end gable. The two rooms are large, and well-lit by six windows; each of the latter is decorated with smooth hammer-dressed limestone sills, and capped by stone semi-circular arches. The overall effect of S.S. No. 8 is strikingly different from that of S.S. No. 5, the former being more picturesque and attractive; more important to educators, the larger windows, improved ventilation, larger rooms, greater attention to detail and the provision of such facilities as an entrance hall and bell-cote all mark advances in school design which contributed significantly to the enhancement of the educational experience for rural pupils. While little is known about equipment in either school, records suggest that the later school was better equipped, with slate rather than plaster blackboards and such educational aids as globes, maps, etc. In less than a generation, the schools of Oxford-on-Rideau Township -- as elsewhere -- had passed from a severe, inexpensive, quasi-pioneer stage of development to a high level of architectural and educational sophistication.

Few areas could reach the quality of design of the Oxford Mills school, but the pattern of development, from simple to more elaborate, was repeated over time across the province as finer buildings of brick and stone, built to the specifications of the Department of Education, replaced earlier and simpler buildings of log and frame construction. A selection of these is illustrated in Figures 13 to 38.

It is impossible to determine the precise influence of both the Journal of Education for Upper Canada and Hodgins' The School House on school design in Ontario, but clearly the character of the pre- and post-1850 buildings shown is very different, and these differences derive in large part from the impact of these publications. During the 1850s and 1860s -- and especially during the building boom of the 1870s -- the rural school buildings show at least some concern with the standards advocated by Ryerson. Yet without substantial external funding, which was rarely forthcoming,²⁰ many school sections were either unable, or unwilling, to build schools which approached the ideal that the superintendent's office had set. When

Ryerson retired in 1876, 15% of the province's schools were still of log construction, and fewer than half of the province's 5042 rural schools were housed in buildings which showed clear signs of the effects of Ryerson's policy of up-grading school architecture.²¹ On a local level, inspectors could still report a remarkable persistence of low-grade buildings. In 1872, for example, Frederick Burrowes of Napanee examined 100 schools in the long-settled areas of Lennox and Addington counties. He reported that 76 of these still had no privies, 93 possessed no playgrounds or fenced yards, 53 were destitute of all teaching apparatus, while 24 buildings were judged to be "utterly unfit for school purposes." In one building - recently happily replaced -- Burrowes noted that 97 children were being taught in a single room measuring 18 feet square, with 6-1/2-foot ceilings, little natural light and no desks or privy.²² Many schools did, of course, purchase libraries, globes and scientific apparatus; certainly many new schools were better lighted, more spacious, better ventilated and better equipped than their predecessors. Additionally, provincial authorities obtained a major concession from the legislature in 1871 when the new school law authorized the withholding of legislative grants for teachers' salaries if buildings were habitually found to be sub-standard. For the municipality's part, schools were particular beneficiaries from the financial windfall caused by the distribution, during the 1860s, of the proceeds of the Clergy Reserve Fund, and after 1873 of the Municipal Loan Fund. But reports continued to be submitted of schools which were a disgrace to the system, and buildings which continued to be used long after they had been condemned.²³

Post-Ryerson Rural Schools

Had Egerton Ryerson been able to tour Ontario's rural schools in 1930, he would probably have been surprised and discouraged by the lack of change away from the buildings which existed when he retired in 1876. The one room-school, built to a simplified version of the specifications laid down in Hodgins' The School House, continued to be the staple of the province's rural educational system. This fact did not please provincial officials, who had worked hard to produce change, but the resistance of local voters and trustees, and the legislature's refusal to provide financial incentives for the upgrading of facilities, doomed most of their reformist efforts. In spite of these barriers, however, three major efforts were made between 1876 and 1930 to upgrade the quality of Ontario's rural schools: the revision (in 1876, 1886, 1900 and 1907) of the Department of Education's collection of standard plans; the advocacy of programmes of school beautification, such as Arbor Day and the school garden movement, and thirdly the introduction of the idea of rural school consolidation. However well-intentioned these efforts were, none had a marked effect on the design or appearance of the vast majority of rural school buildings.

If the one room school was to be accepted as the foundation of rural education in Ontario, as many provincial officials believed it had to be, then the chief way of improving these schools was to continue Ryerson's policy of providing the most up-to-date information possible on advances in school design. Hodgins' The School House, expanded and revised, was reprinted in 1876 with the addition of a large number of plans of Canadian origin. In 1886 Hodgins produced a further study of school architecture which was widely distributed by departmental officials, School Architecture: Hints and Suggestions on School Architecture and Hygiene. The former study introduced no advances in school design beyond those presented in the 1857 version, but the 1886 book focussed on the heightening concern among medical authorities that poor sanitation in and around rural schools was the cause of much illness. Doctors had consistently expressed grave concern over the quality of rural water supplies, the condition of privies and the quality of lighting in rural schools. By 1886 these authorities had concluded that natural cross-lighting caused eye damage, and

that natural lighting falling on the pupil from the left only was preferable. Hodgins' 1886 study brought this information squarely before local school trustees. But because Hodgins tended simply to graft new ideas onto plans and specifications drafted some thirty years earlier, departmental officials proposed the preparation of new sets of standard plans as soon as he retired. In 1899 the department conducted an architectural competition, seeking more modern plans for rural schools of from one to four rooms. Four sets were chosen out of over 100 submitted. Soon afterwards the department commissioned a Toronto architectural firm, A. R. Denison and Stephenson, to prepare a collection of plans suitable for rural schools, in line with the new standards of construction outlined in departmental regulations published in 1907.

The 1899 competition and the Denison commission allowed the department to publish, in 1909, a new book of 36 plans and elevations for rural schools of from one to three rooms.²⁴ These embodied the main points of the 1907 regulations: larger sites of an acre or more; larger amounts of interior space per student (12 to 15 square feet, and the use of single rather than double desks); more attractive exteriors of brick, stone or concrete block, with interiors decorated with approved artwork; natural lighting from the left only; the provision of additional rooms for libraries, staff rooms, indoor toilets and separate cloakrooms; and improved heating and ventilation. These newer-style buildings also included basement playrooms for both boys and girls, in case of inclement weather, and a separate workroom for specialized subjects.

All of these initiatives by the department were based on the assumption that existing school sections needed and wanted larger replacement schools of greater architectural sophistication, buildings which would allow what departmental officials thought necessary, a measure of grading and some degree of teacher specialization, both of which were impossible in the rural one-room school. On pedagogical and aesthetic grounds, bureaucrats and architects alike condemned the earlier one-room schools. As early as 1898 the Canadian Architect and Builder was publishing illustrations of professionally designed rural schools with two classrooms, basement play areas, cloakrooms and elaborate exteriors. Journals continued to bring the latest examples to their readers' attention; one highly praised example was a four-room rural school, planned for Artemesia Township in 1909. Designed in a simplified but attractive interpretation of the Tudor Revival style, it was two storeys high over a basement. While it was admittedly a junior cousin of contemporary urban primary schools, it was a clear advance over other rural schools of the period in its provision of cloakrooms attached to each classroom, an office for both principal and teachers, indoor toilets and two basement playrooms.

Some buildings of this general design were actually built in response to provincial pressure, especially in rural areas close to the cities. But rural resistance to outside interference, financial barriers, and general voter satisfaction combined to frustrate departmental wishes for a more sophisticated rural school architecture, and few of these multi-room schools seem to have been built; few were reported to the CIHB.²⁵ By 1927 the province's leading school architect could report, with a touch of wishful thinking, that "the one room little red school house is giving way to the more complete building ... which makes proper provision for coats, School Library, and Teacher's Room." By advocating the construction of basements, the department invited the use of furnaces for heating rather than stoves; by insisting on larger amounts of space per student, the department was encouraging the development of a school which could double as a community centre. But in fact, these revised plans for rural schools did not supplant the earlier one-room schools to any great extent. One school trustee summed up the popular attitude in this manner: "The people are in fact fairly well satisfied with the present system and while they are not unconscious of its minor defects, they have never felt the need for any radical change."²⁶

This same response was given to another plan to upgrade the quality of rural

schools, the rural school consolidation movement. Reformers consistently blamed the one-room school for the lack of educational opportunity in rural areas, for small schools could not afford highly qualified teachers, or provide the space for the variety of subjects approved for primary-school curriculum. The answer was clear: abolish the school sections; establish township boards of education and consolidate schools. Legislatively, the way was paved by the passage of the Consolidated School Act of 1919. These schools were necessary, the department insisted, because of rural depopulation: over 60% of the one-room schools were attended by fewer than 20 pupils. Able teachers refused to stay in positions which were professionally and financially so unrewarding. Furthermore, changing social conditions required that the rural youth be given access to a much broader education than the one-room school could provide. The consolidated school appeared to give something to everyone: to the student it offered a broader and better education; for the teacher, improved professional opportunities and better supervision; and for the community, a social centre combined with an architecturally sophisticated public building. Trumpeted the department: "Here is a beauty spot, in the centre of the community where its whole spirit and aims may be visualized. This new kind of school will do much," the department averred, "to organize and develop the community's desire for progress." To encourage school sections to surrender their autonomy, the province offered, for the first time, to subsidize the construction and operation of these schools. It undertook to pay \$3,000 plus 40% of the site purchase and construction costs, to a maximum of \$9,000. It also offered to shoulder 30% of the costs of busing students to the school from outlying sections, and provided supplementary grants of up to \$1,000 for equipment such as pianos and projectors, 25% of the cost of specialized apparatus (such as would be required for auditoria, gymnasias, domestic science, shop and agriculture) to a maximum of \$200, and a salary subsidy of \$100 per teacher when salaries exceeded \$600 per year.

In spite of these efforts, however, the school consolidation movement bore little fruit before 1930; it was not until the 1950s and 1960s that rural areas could be convinced, reluctantly, to part with their one-room schools. One of the few examples actually built was the Wellington Consolidated School. Constructed in 1922, it was judged "the finest consolidated school yet built". In a real sense it was a showcase for the province's policy. Designed by the prominent school architects S.B. Coon and Son of Toronto at a cost of over \$100,000 it contained eight classrooms, was fully graded and offered a complete primary-level curriculum. Its wide range of facilities -- gymnasium, auditorium and specialized rooms for domestic science and shop -- made it a rival of contemporary schools in cities. Served by five buses, the Wellington Consolidated School brought the benefits of urban schools within the reach of rural communities. Yet very few schools of this scale or quality were erected; the one-room school designed to the specifications of the 1870s remained the centre of the rural system.²⁶

School beautification was the most successful of the department's post-1876 efforts to upgrade the quality of the schools, perhaps because it attempted so little. The first initiative in this direction was Arbor Day, introduced in 1887 and aimed at decorating the playground with trees and shrubs. From the point of view of the Department of Education, this merely revived the Ryersonian view that schools should be surrounded by a sylvan rural setting of lawns, playgrounds and trees. The school garden movement was an extension of this; initiated by the philanthropist William MacDonald in the 1890s, it was based on the belief that advanced agricultural methods could be introduced to rural areas through the schools. The locale would benefit by obtaining new kinds of seed and professional advice from the Department of Agriculture; the school would be improved in appearance by the development of flower beds and gardens; and the student would gain from outdoor work under the teacher's supervision. Under other auspices, the school garden movement was translated into the school beautification programme, which merely attempted to use

flowers, shrubs and lawns to upgrade the overall appearance of the school.²⁷

Conclusion

Though much had changed in the 150 years before 1930, in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and the nature of the student body, very few modifications had taken place in the structures which housed education in rural Ontario. Among all the sub-types of school buildings, the one-room rural school was most resistant to change. Why should this be the case?

Education in rural areas began in an atmosphere which was distinctly suspicious of the process of formal state-supported schooling. Many had serious doubts that the kind of educational experience advocated by the central authorities was necessary to the sort of rural lifestyle which prevailed. It had been the family and the church, and not the state, which ought to play the central role in the formation of character, and the teaching of morality and necessary skills. In order to engender acceptance of state-supported schools, provincial authorities placed control over the local school largely in the hands of the school sections; one of the most important aspects of Ontario's educational system before 1930 was its decentralized character.²⁸ Furthermore, support for the system was encouraged by making the school experience as much as possible like that of the family itself. The building was called a house, in part to emphasize this parallel; the teacher was an important member of the extended family that was the local community. As one historian has noted, formal education in the 19th century in rural Ontario gained gradual acceptance in part by explaining itself with reference to "the metaphor of the family."²⁹ Defenders of formal education attempted to ease the transition from a family- and church-oriented system of schooling, to a state-dominated type by emphasizing the parallels between the family and the school itself, and developing the latter as a partial, though incomplete, substitute for the former.

Once this association of home, school and locale had been made, it was very difficult indeed for provincial officials to convince rural residents that a system, which appeared to satisfy local needs, had to be changed. Suspicion of bureaucratic objectives, and the persistence of traditional forms, doomed early attempts to reform the rural school and replace its building. It was not until the 1950s that the province, in the face of fierce resistance, undertook the difficult task of changing a local school system which had endured, with only minor changes, for more than a century.

The rural Ontario one-room school is an impressive testament to the ability of a building form to maintain itself in the face both of intense outside pressure from the Department of Education, and of changing functional needs. It successfully made the transition, during the mid-19th century, from being a somewhat alien and suspect part of local life, to the status of being an intrinsic and welcome aspect of the milieu. Millions of Ontarians obtained the best part of their formal education within the walls of these architecturally simple buildings. Though they have been superseded by central schools of a much different character and atmosphere, their influence will be deep and enduring.

Endnotes

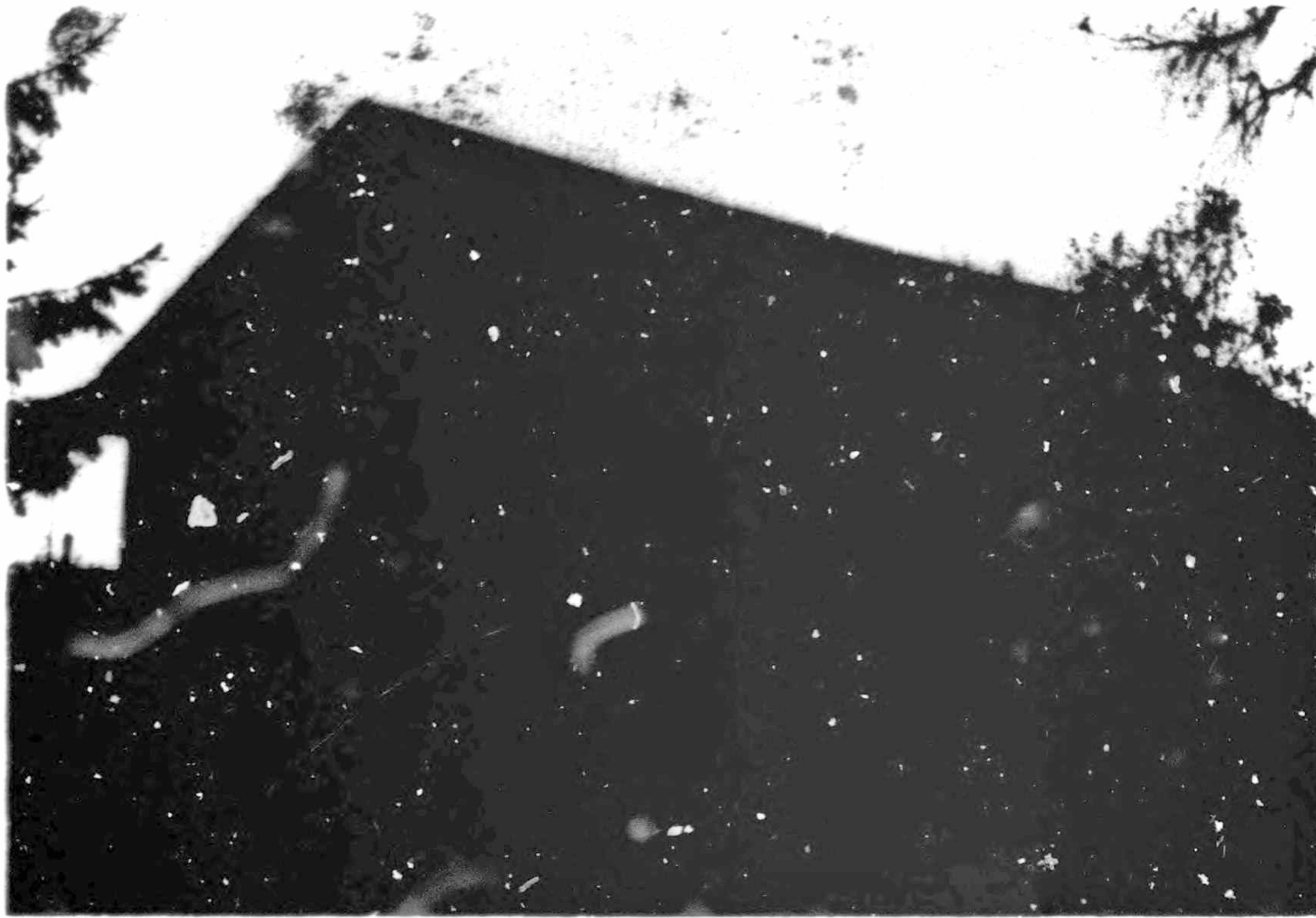
- 1 There are a number of useful studies on the development of education in Ontario and on the one-room school. On the latter topic, see especially the lively study by Jean Cochrane, The One-Room School in Canada (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1981). On the former, see J. Donald Wilson, Robert M. Stamp and Louis-Philippe Audet, eds. Canadian Education: A History (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1970) which is cited hereafter as Canadian Educa-

- tion, and Robert M. Stamp, The Schools of Ontario, 1876-1976 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982). Also of interest is a provocative study of childhood, Neil Sutherland's Children In English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth Century Consensus (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976) and Alison Prentice's The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977).
- 2 Canadian Education, pp. 200-1.
 - 3 Ibid., p. 201.
 - 4 Ibid., p. 207.
 - 5 The latest biography of Ryerson is Laura Damania's Egerton Ryerson (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1975). For his commanding role in 19th-century Ontario education, see Canadian Education, pp. 214-26; the quotation is on p. 214.
 - 6 Charles Clarke, Sixty Years in Upper Canada (Toronto: William Briggs, 1908), pp. 92-3.
 - 7 Annual Report of the Chief Superintendent of Schools for Upper Canada, from August, 1845, to August, 1846 cited in J. George Hodgins, ed. Historical and Other Papers and Documents Illustrative of the Educational System of Ontario, 1842-1861 (Toronto: L.K. Cameron, 1912), Vol. 5, p. 13 (hereafter cited as Historical and Other Papers). Statistics are cited in The Annual Report of the Chief Superintendent for Education on the Normal, Model and Common Schools in Upper Canada for the Year 1850 (Toronto, 1850), table E. (Annual reports are hereafter cited as Annual Report with year.)
 - 8 Annual Report for 1851, Extracts from the reports of superintendents, report of Richard Craddock.
 - 9 Ibid., report of Rev. John Armour of Sarnia Township.
 - 10 Cited in Glenn J. Lockwood, Montague: A Social History of an Irish Ontario Township, 1783-1980 (Kingston: Mastercraft Printing for the Township of Montague, 1980), p. 299.
 - 11 Cited in J. George Hodgins, ed. Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada (Toronto: L.K. Cameron, 1897), Vol. 4, p. 147 (hereafter cited as Documentary History).
 - 12 Ibid., Vol. 4, pp. 152-3.
 - 13 Annual Report for 1850, introduction by the chief superintendent and extracts from the reports of district inspectors, unpaginated.
 - 14 Annual Report for 1853, reports of Rev. William Ormiston of Clarke Township, William Jones of Rainham Township and Wesley Freeman of Windham Township.
 - 15 Annual Report for 1851, report of Rev. Daniel Wait of Haldimand Township.
 - 16 Annual Report for 1853 and for 1854, introduction by the Chief Superintendent of Education.
 - 17 John George Hodgins, The School House; Its Architecture, External and Internal Arrangements (Toronto: Lovell and Gibson, 1857), especially Prefatory Note.
 - 18 Ibid., Prefatory Note, p. iii.
 - 19 Annual Report for 1858, extracts from the reports of district superintendents, reports of John Lawton of North Plantagenet Township, James Clapperton of Augusta Township and Allan Ruttan of the townships of Camden East and Sheffield.
 - 20 There were two exceptions to this policy; the legislature during the 19th century offered special grants to "Poor" school districts whose assessed valuation in property was considerably below the provincial average, and who were therefore unable to afford schoolhouses; in 1919 the province also breached their non-support policy in construction by agreeing to provide grants towards the erection of consolidated schools; on the latter point, see Schools of Ontario, pp. 106-7.
 - 21 Annual Report for 1876, cited in The Schools of Ontario, p. 19.

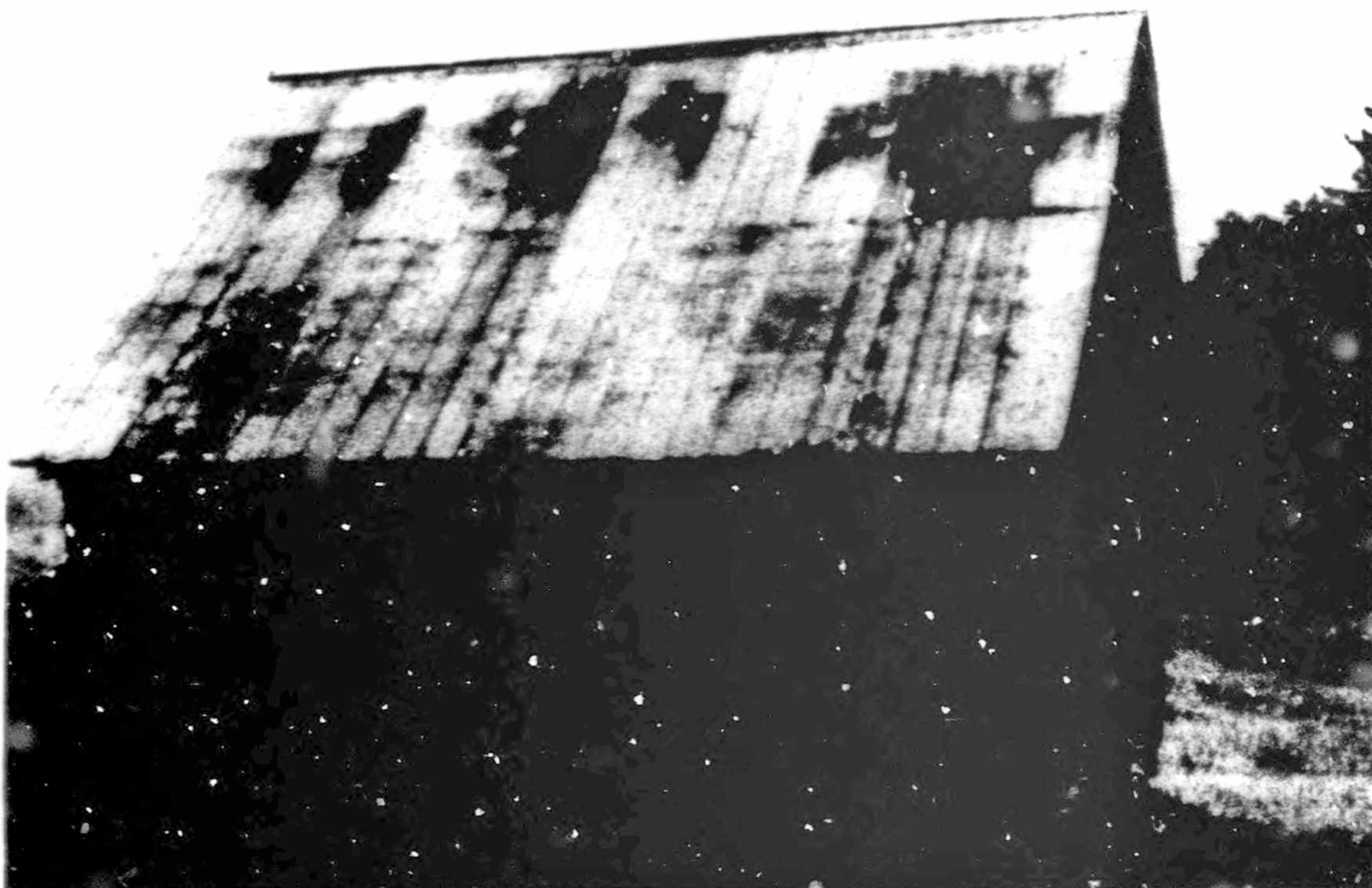
- 22 Ontario, Archives. Education Papers, RG 2, C-6-C, box 201, docket no. 10730 (1872), Burrowes to Hodgins, 31 August 1872.
- 23 The Schools of Ontario, ch. 1.
- 24 In addition to the 1857 and 1876 versions of Hodgins' The School House, see his School Architecture: Hints and Suggestions on School Architecture and Hygiene (Toronto: Ontario Department of Education, 1886) and Ontario, Department of Education, Plans for Rural School Buildings, with Estimates of Cost and Forms of Specifications and Agreements (Toronto: Warwick Brothers and Rutter, 1909). See also "Designs for One Room, Two Room, Three Room, and Four Room School Buildings, Awarded First Position in the Recent Competition by the Educational Department of Ontario," Canadian Architect and Builder, Vol. 13 (June 1900), pp. 110 ff. and C.E. Cyril Dyson, "Typical Schools of the Province of Ontario," Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, Journal, Vol. 4 (July 1927), pp. 255-62.
- 25 Dyson, *ibid.*, p. 255.
- 26 Ontario, Department of Education, The Consolidation of Rural Schools (Toronto: A.T. Wilgress, 1920), pp. 12-3 and p. 16; The Schools of Ontario, p. 126.
- 27 On Arbor Day, see Ontario, Department of Education, Arbor Day, Ontario - Suggestions and Regulations in regard to its Observance by School Trustees, Teachers and Pupils in Ontario (Toronto: Department of Education, 1887); The Schools of Ontario, pp. 61-6.



- 1 St. John School House, Fronthill, ca. 1804, restored 1973. (St. John's Outdoor Studies Centre, Niagara Board of Education.)



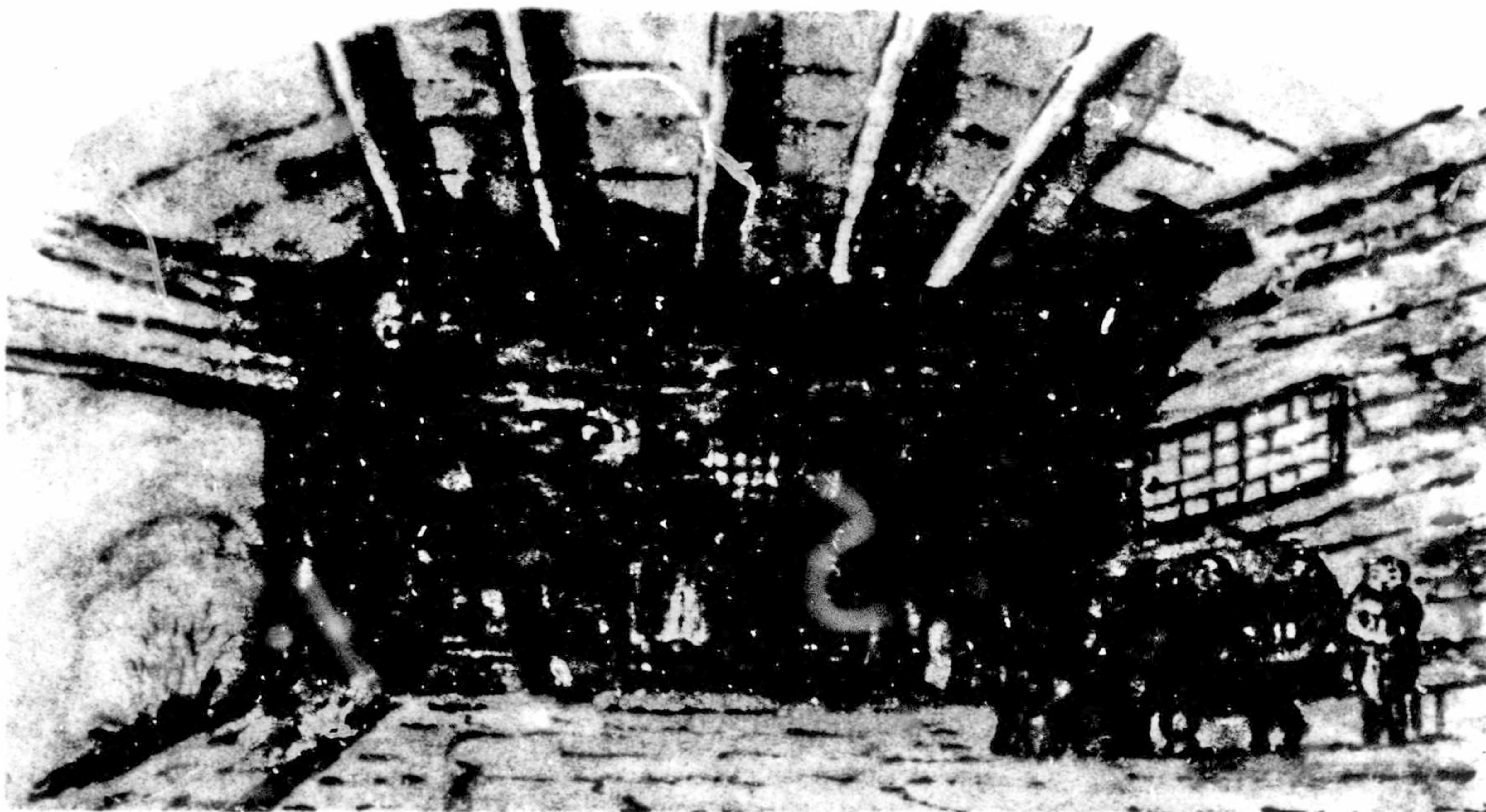
2 Maitland Public School, ca. 1816. (J.A. Morris, Prescott.)



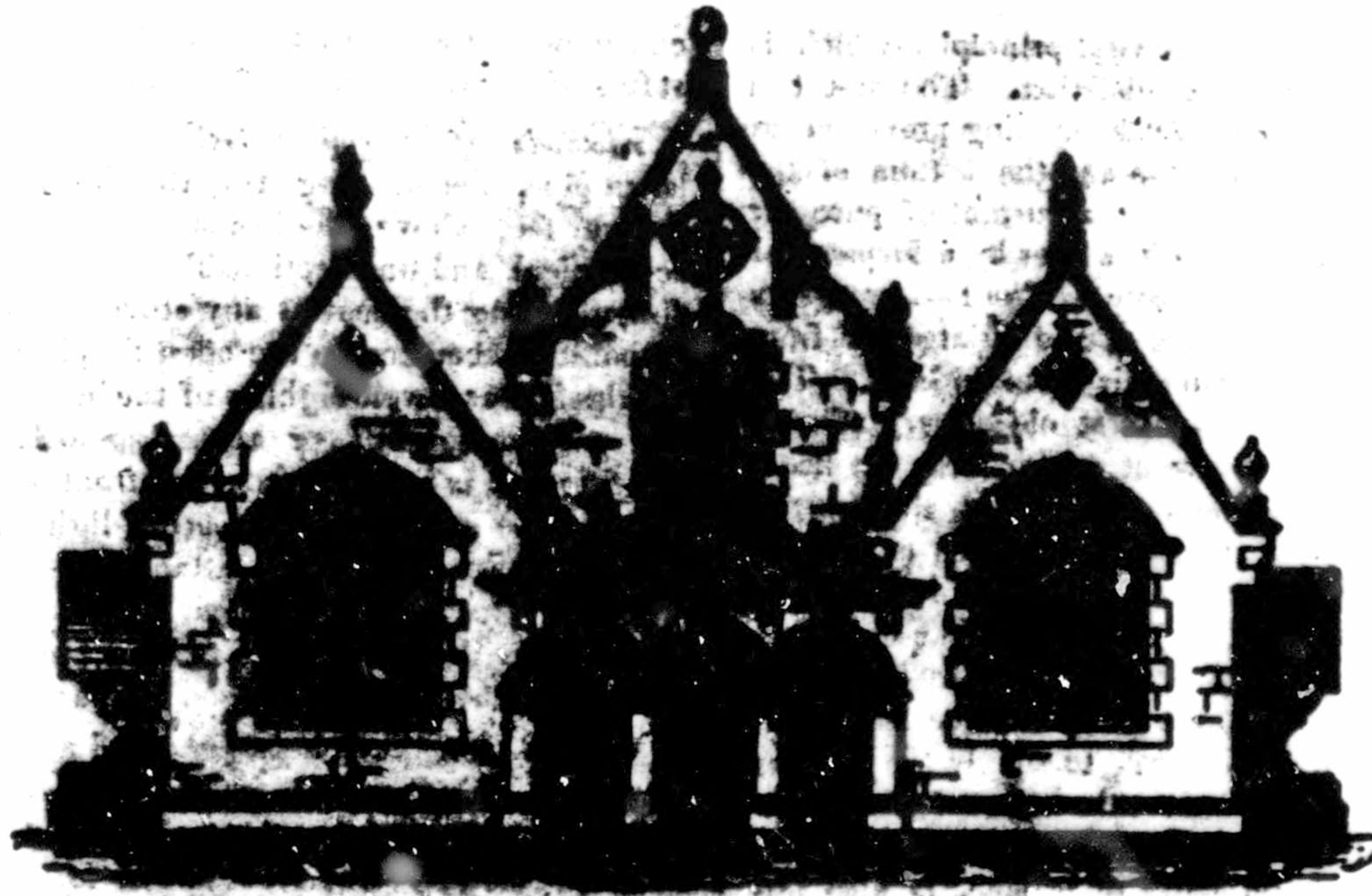
3 Goshen School, McNab Township, ca. 1880. (CIHB.)



4 Dutch School, Humberstone Township, Port Colborne, ca. 1818. (Heather Ott, Port Colborne.)



5 Interior of School in Adelaide Township, 1845. (Dr. Donald R. Gunn, Oakville.)



FRONT ELEVATION of one of the Series of School-houses (including residence of Teachers) recommended by Her Majesty's Privy Council Committee of Education. Description and interior arrangements will be given hereafter.

- 6 Proposal for a Stone School and Teacher's Residence, 1849. (Journal of Education for Upper Canada Vol. 2 [March 1849], p. 33.)

1857.]

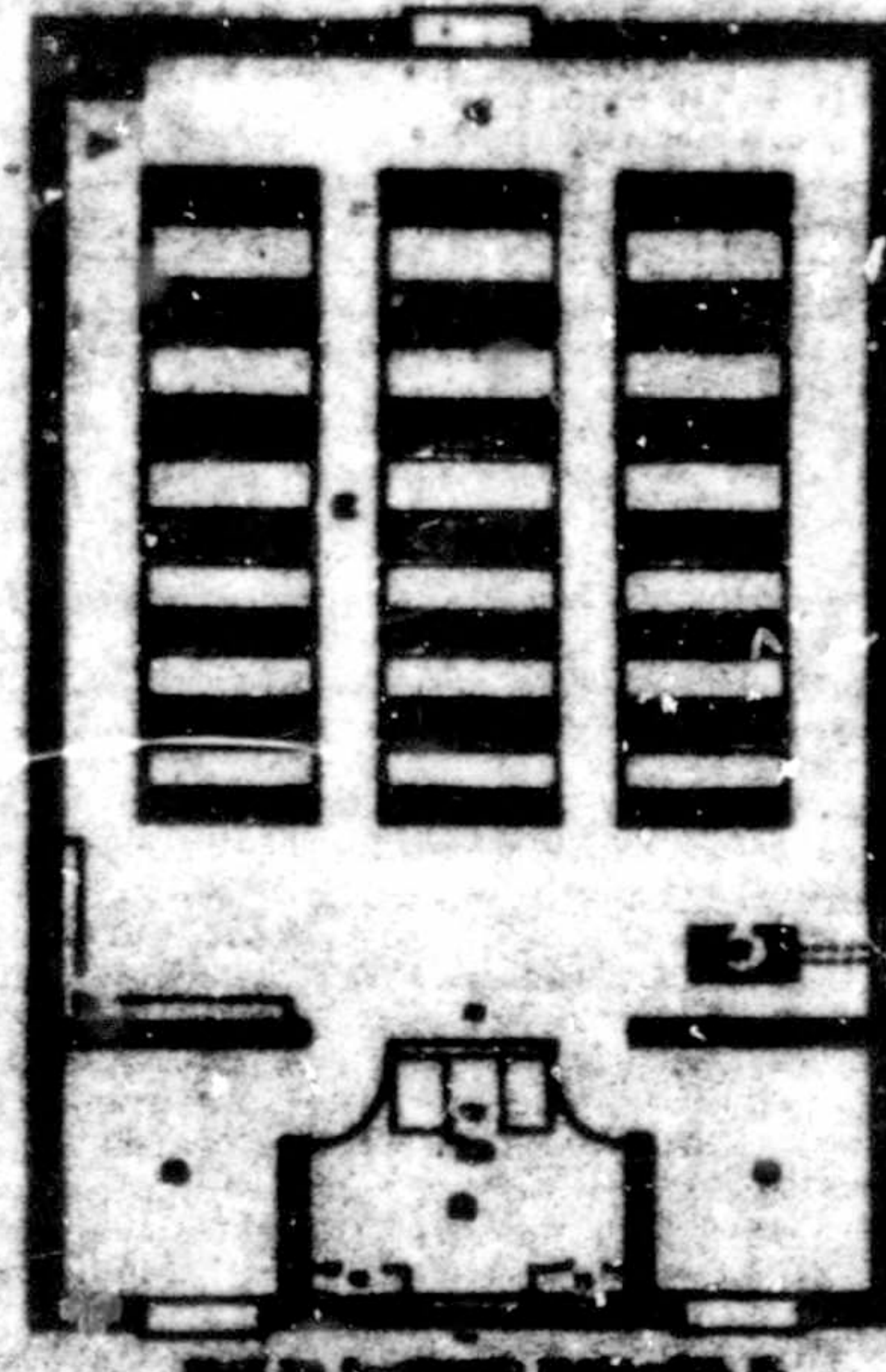
FOR UPPER CANADA.

33



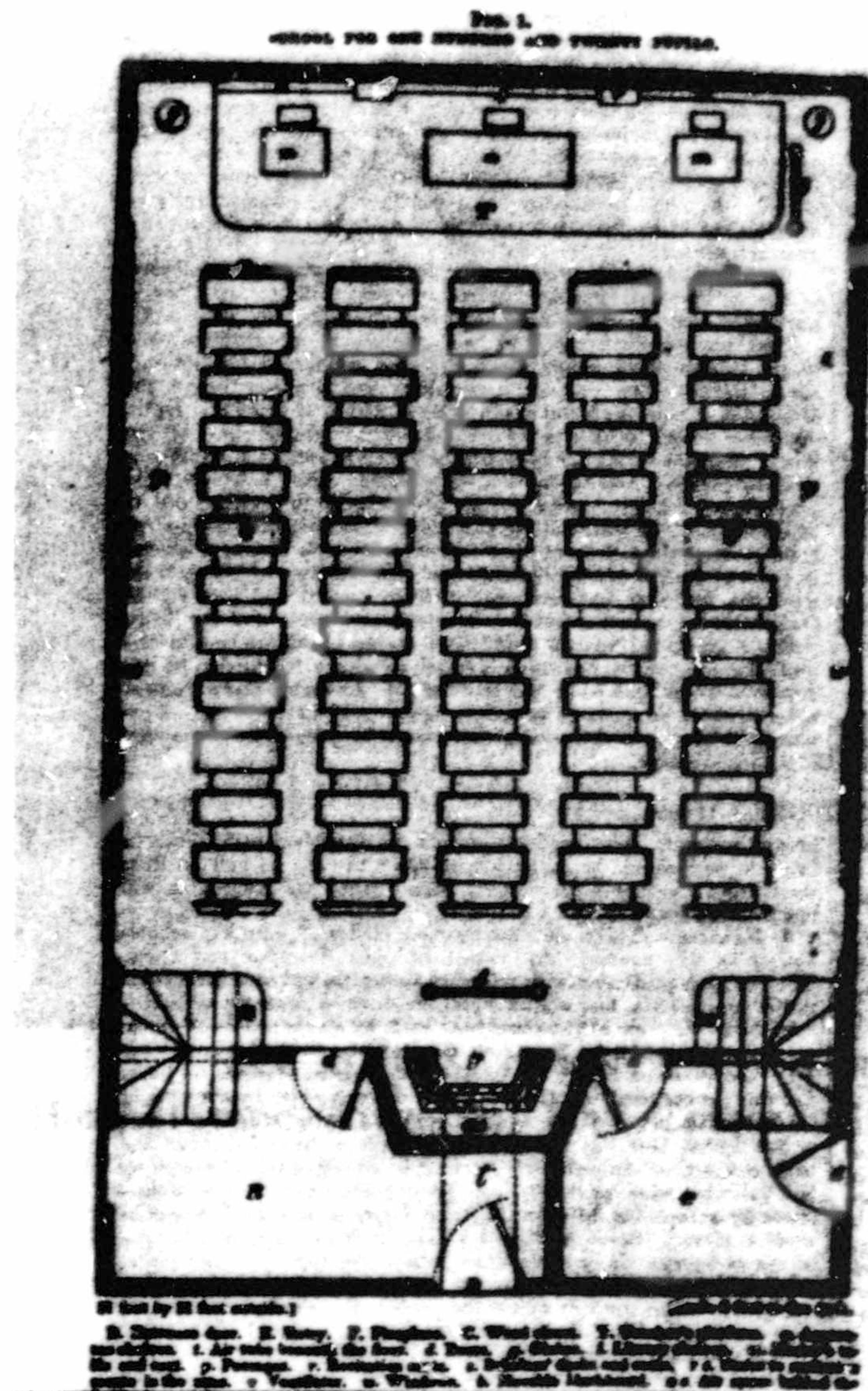
PLAN No. 1.—SCHOOL AND TEACHER'S RESIDENCE, 1857.—Vol. 1.

1. Main Hall	2. Classroom
3. Teacher's Residence	4. Kitchen
5. Bath Room	6. Store Room
7. Wash Room	8. Lavatory
9. Dressing Room	10. Bed Room
11. Porch	12. Veranda
13. Garden	14. Walk
15. Fences	16. Outbuildings
17. Water Works	18. Sewerage
19. Drainage	20. Roads
21. Bridges	22. Gates
23. Fences	24. Walls
25. Windows	26. Doors
27. Roofs	28. Chimneys
29. Stairs	30. Balconies
31. Terraces	32. Paved Areas
33. Lawns	34. Parks
35. Gardens	36. Orchards
37. Fields	38. Pastures
39. Woods	40. Forests
41. Mountains	42. Hills
43. Valleys	44. Plains
45. Rivers	46. Lakes
47. Canals	48. Harbours
49. Docks	50. Wharves
51. Bridges	52. Tunnels
53. Roads	54. Paths
55. Fences	56. Walls
57. Windows	58. Doors
59. Roofs	60. Chimneys
61. Stairs	62. Balconies
63. Terraces	64. Paved Areas
65. Lawns	66. Parks
67. Gardens	68. Orchards
69. Fields	70. Pastures
71. Woods	72. Forests
73. Mountains	74. Hills
75. Valleys	76. Plains
77. Rivers	78. Lakes
79. Canals	80. Harbours
81. Docks	82. Wharves
83. Bridges	84. Tunnels
85. Roads	86. Paths
87. Fences	88. Walls
89. Windows	90. Doors
91. Roofs	92. Chimneys
93. Stairs	94. Balconies
95. Terraces	96. Paved Areas
97. Lawns	98. Parks
99. Gardens	100. Orchards

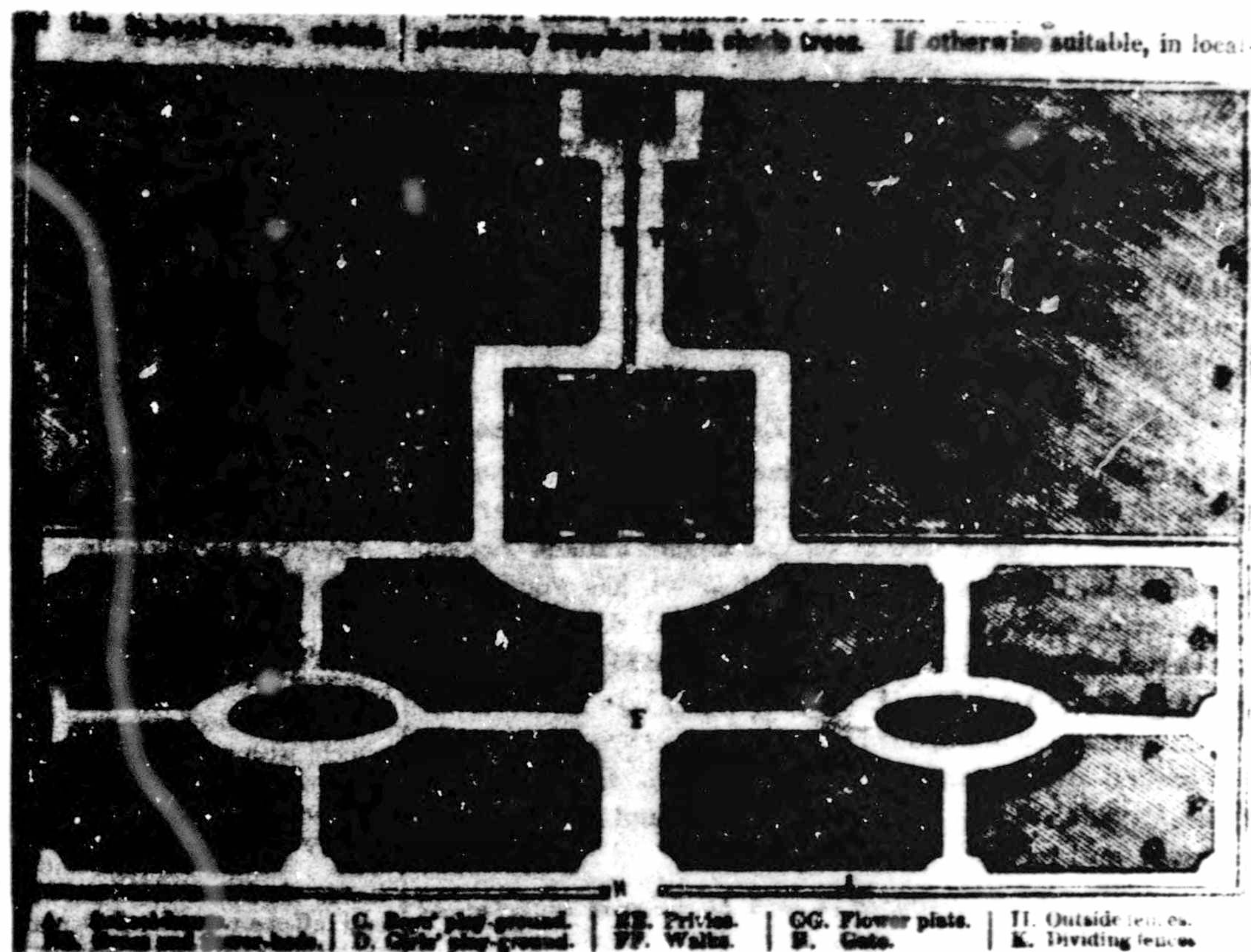


ELEVATION No. 1.—SCHOOL AND TEACHER'S RESIDENCE, 1857.—Vol. 1.

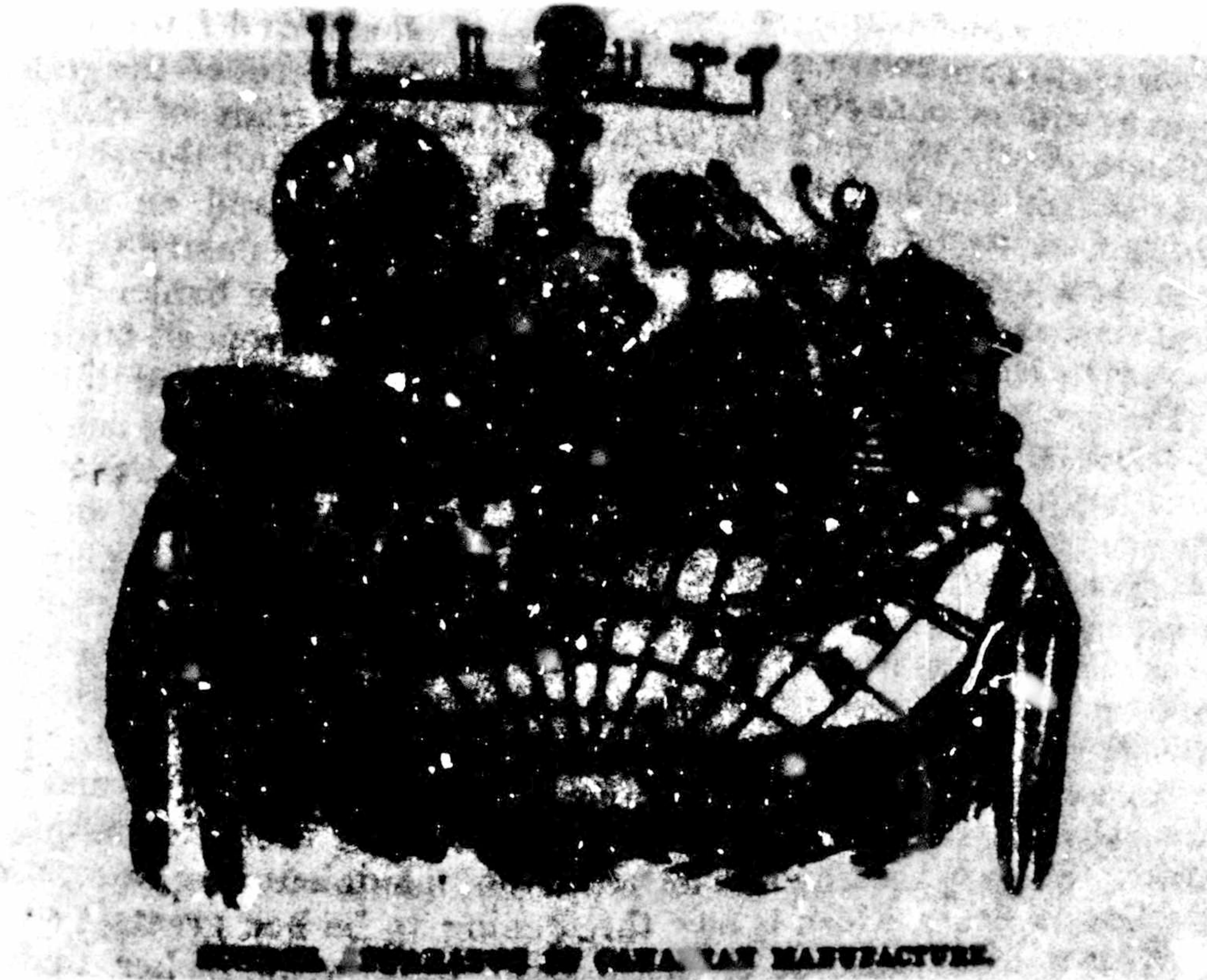
- 7 Plan and Elevation for a Board and Batten School. (Journal of Education for Upper Canada, Vol. 10 [April 1857], p. 53.)



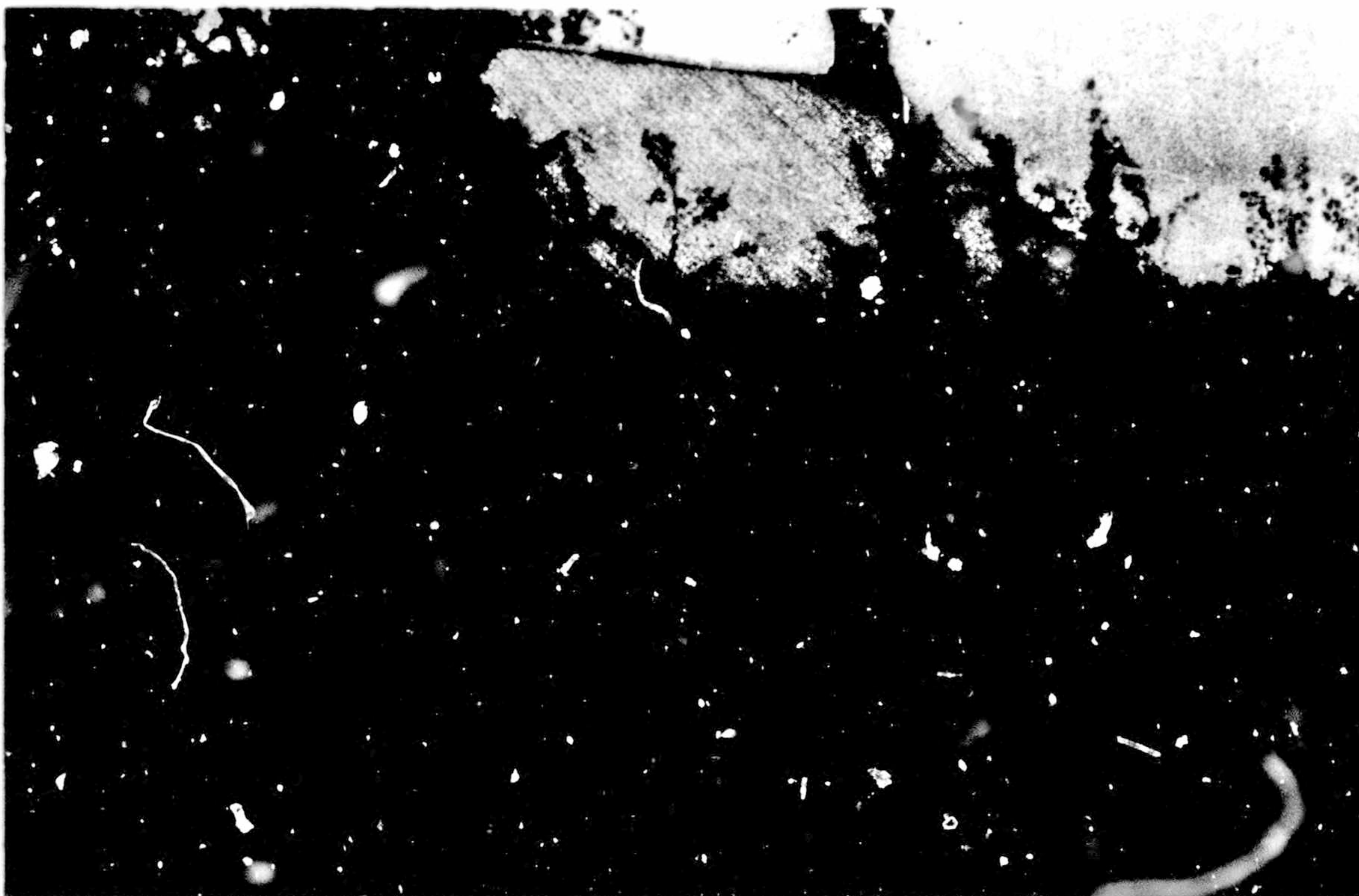
- 8 Plan for a Rural School Seating 120 Pupils. (Journal of Education for Upper Canada, Vol. 10 [May 1857], p. 68.



- 9 Siting a Rural School House. (Journal of Education for Upper Canada, Vol. 10 [April 1857], p. 55.



10 School Apparatus for Common and Grammar Schools, 1858. (Journal of Education for Upper Canada, Vol. 11 [March 1858], p. 83.)



11 Bishop's Mills School, Bishop's Mills, 1862-64. (Ron Elston, Oxford Station.)



12 S.S. No. 8, Oxford-on-Rideau Township, Oxford Mills, 1875. (Winnifred Lamrock, Oxford Mills.)



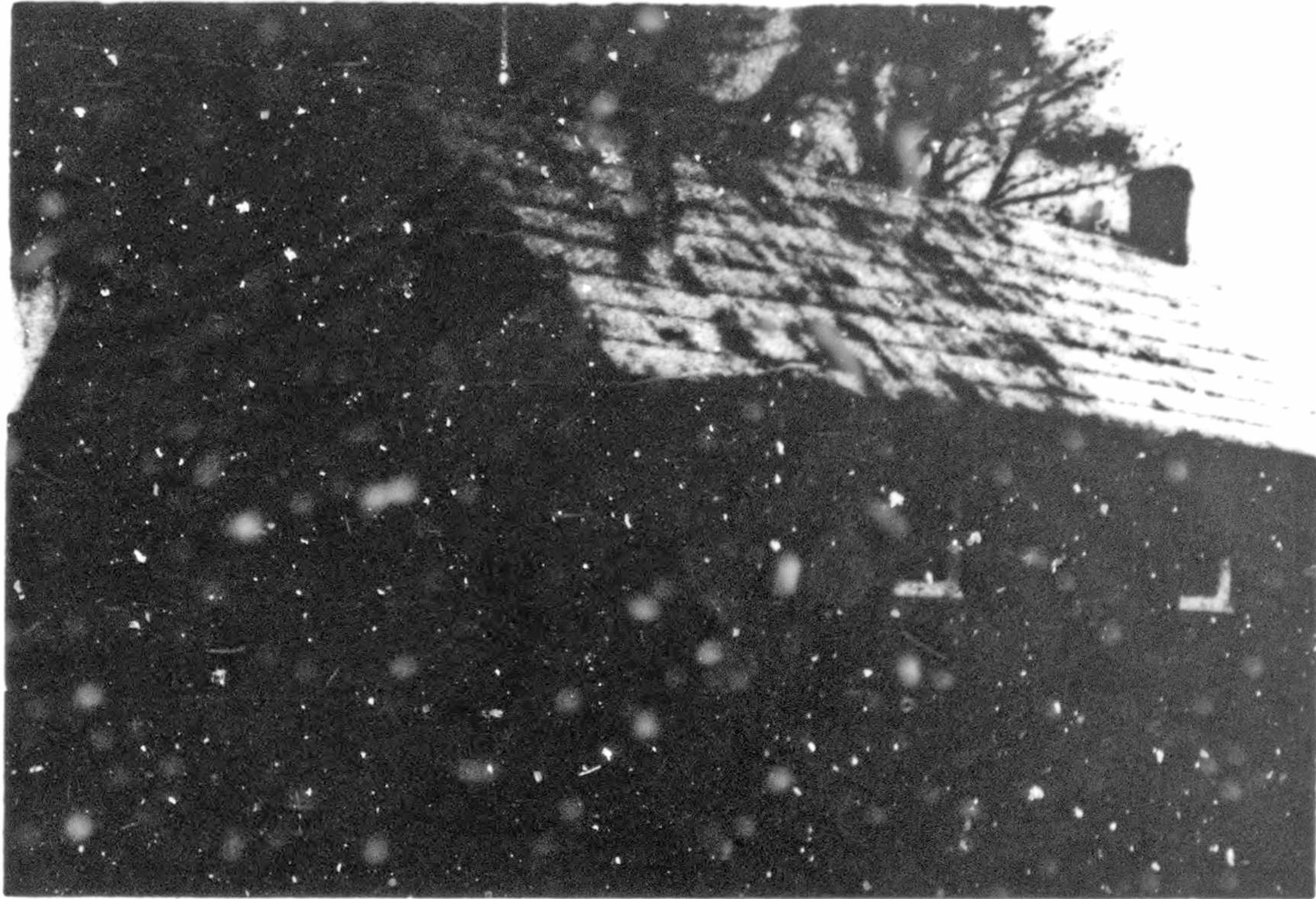
13 Brocksden School, North East-hope Township, 1853. (James Anderson, Stratford.)



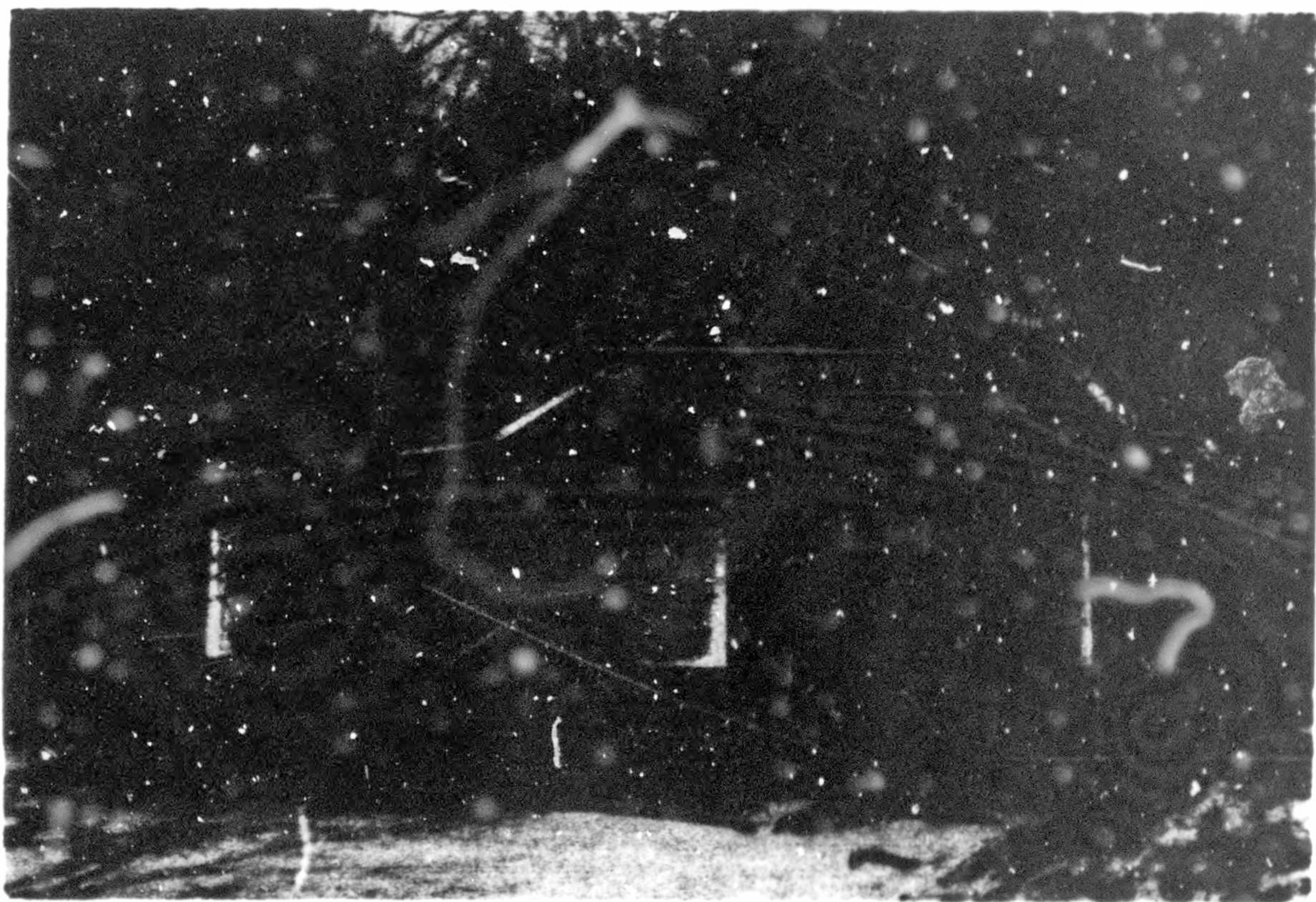
14 Britannia School, 1864. (H. Elizabeth Braun, Georgetown.)



15 Greenwood School, Pickering Township, 1860. (Norah Stoner, Greenwood.)



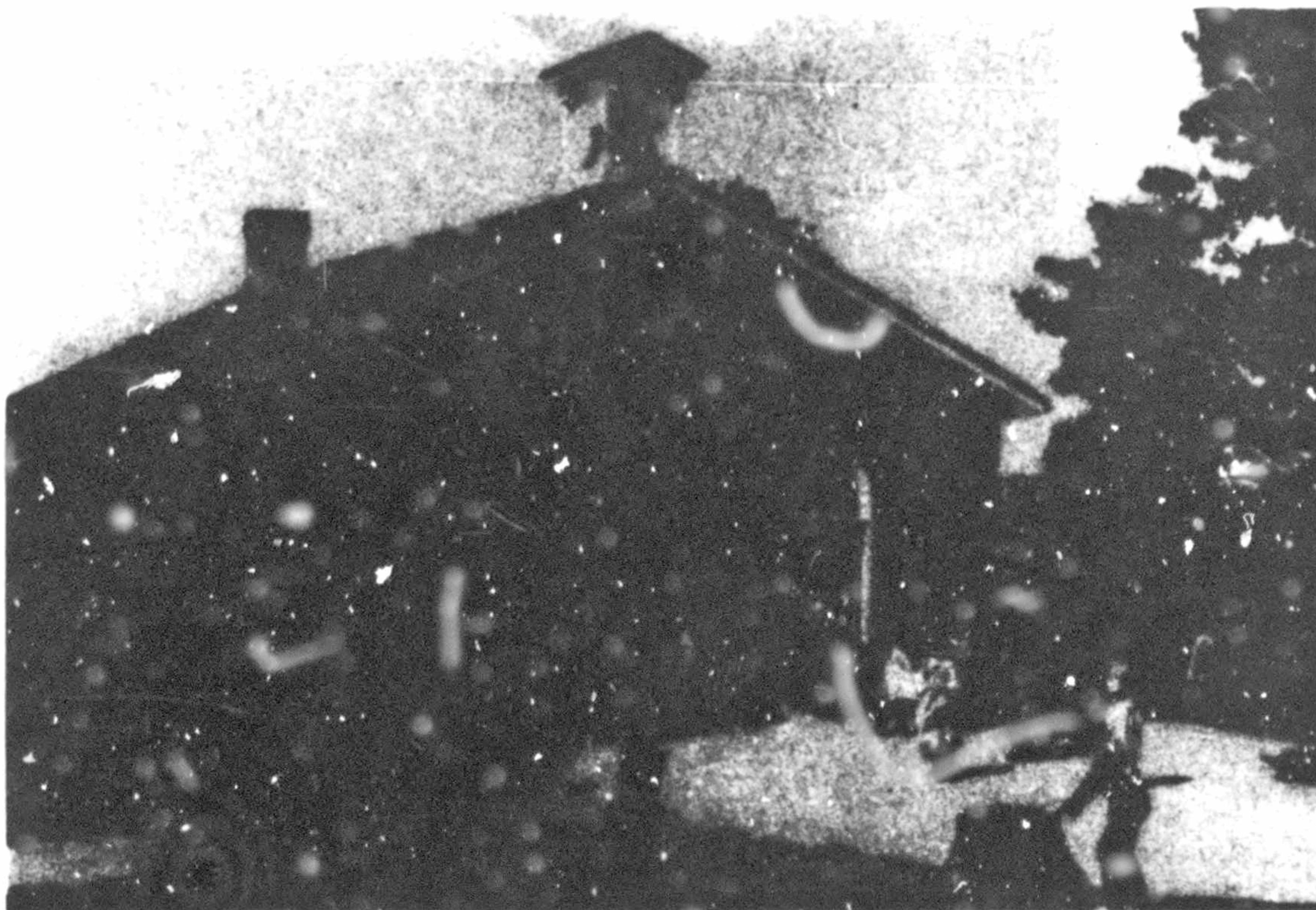
16 S.S. No. 3, Augusta Township, Maitland, 1865. (J.A. Morris, Prescott.)



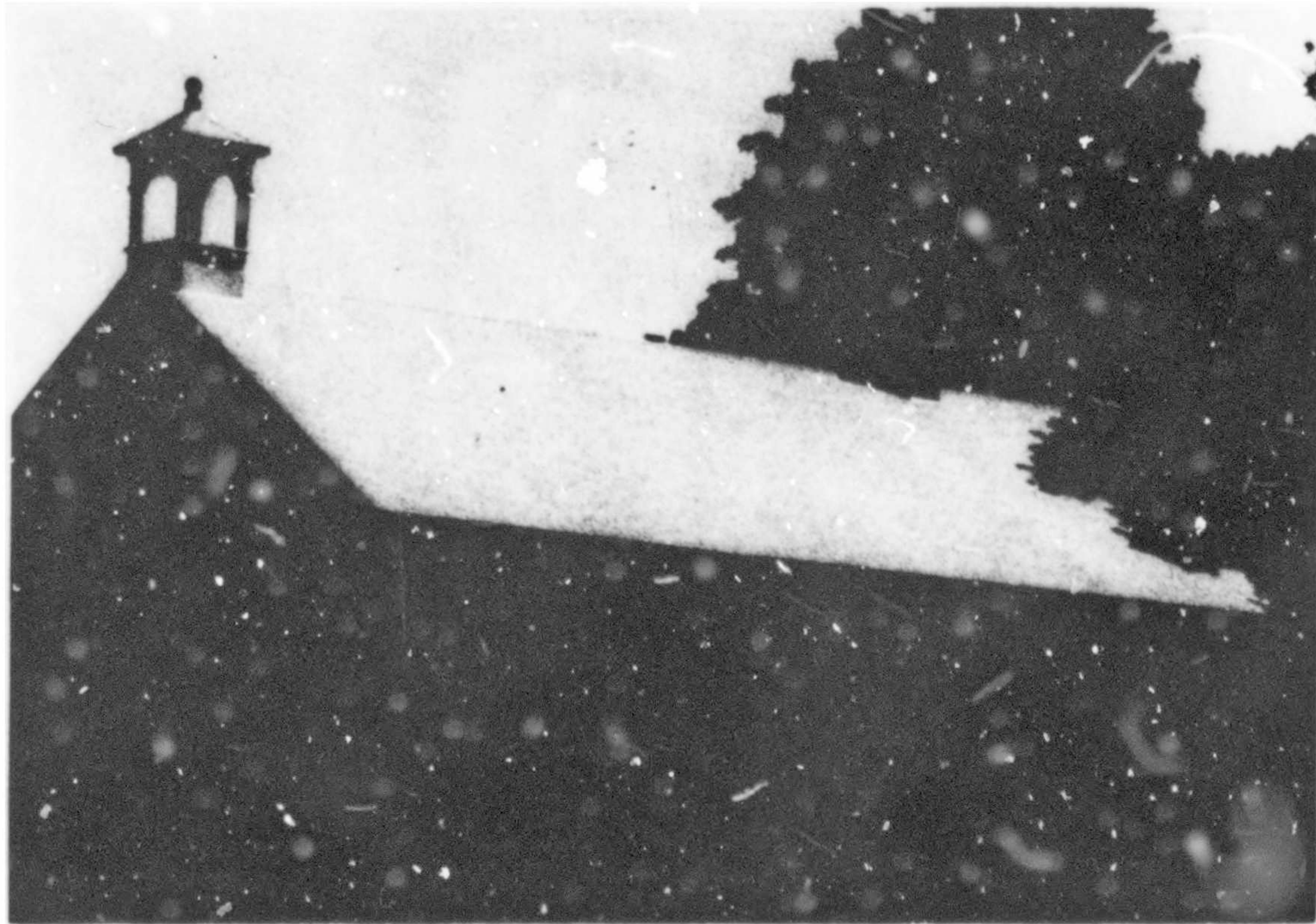
17 Stone School, Jordan, 1859. (H. Crowfoot, Campden.)



18 Stone School, Huntley Township, ca. 1860. (National Capital Commission, Ottawa.)



19 Dickson Hill School, Black Creek Village, Toronto, 1861. (David de Verteuil, Downsview.)



20 Richmond School, Milton, 1886. (W.L. McNeil, Milton.)



21 S.S. No. 11, Carluke School, Ancaster, 1885. (Mike Failes, Dundas.)



22 German Mills School, Markham, ca. 1874. (Heritage Markham.)



23 Read's School, Augusta Township, 1880. (Goldie Connell, Prescott.)



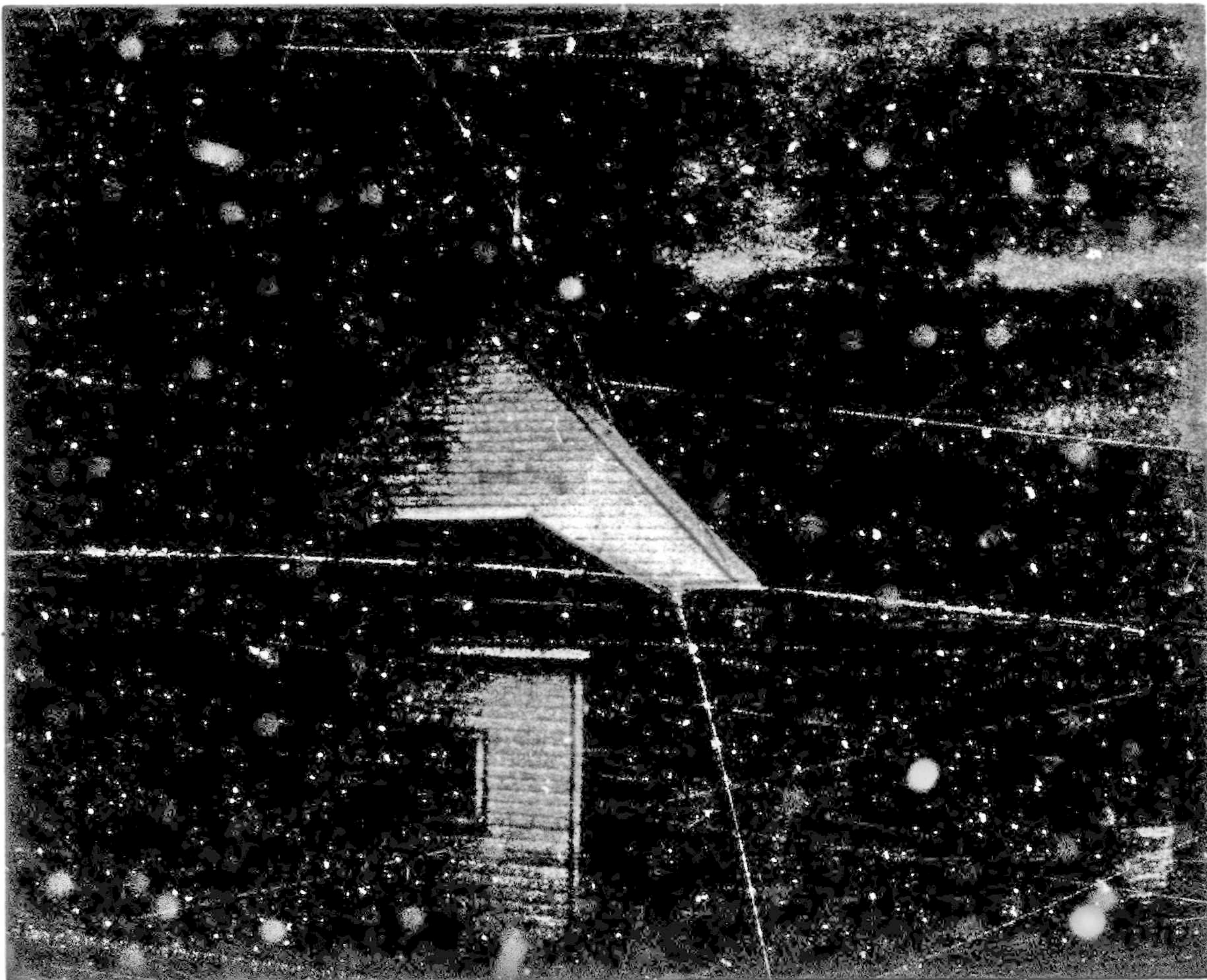
24 Campbell's Mills School, Edwardsburgh Township, 1876. (Miller Condell, Chicago, Ill.)



25 S.S. No. 3, Oxford Township, 1881. (Winifred Lamrock, Oxford Mills.)



26 S.S. No. 2, March Township, 1892. (National Capital Commission, Ottawa.)



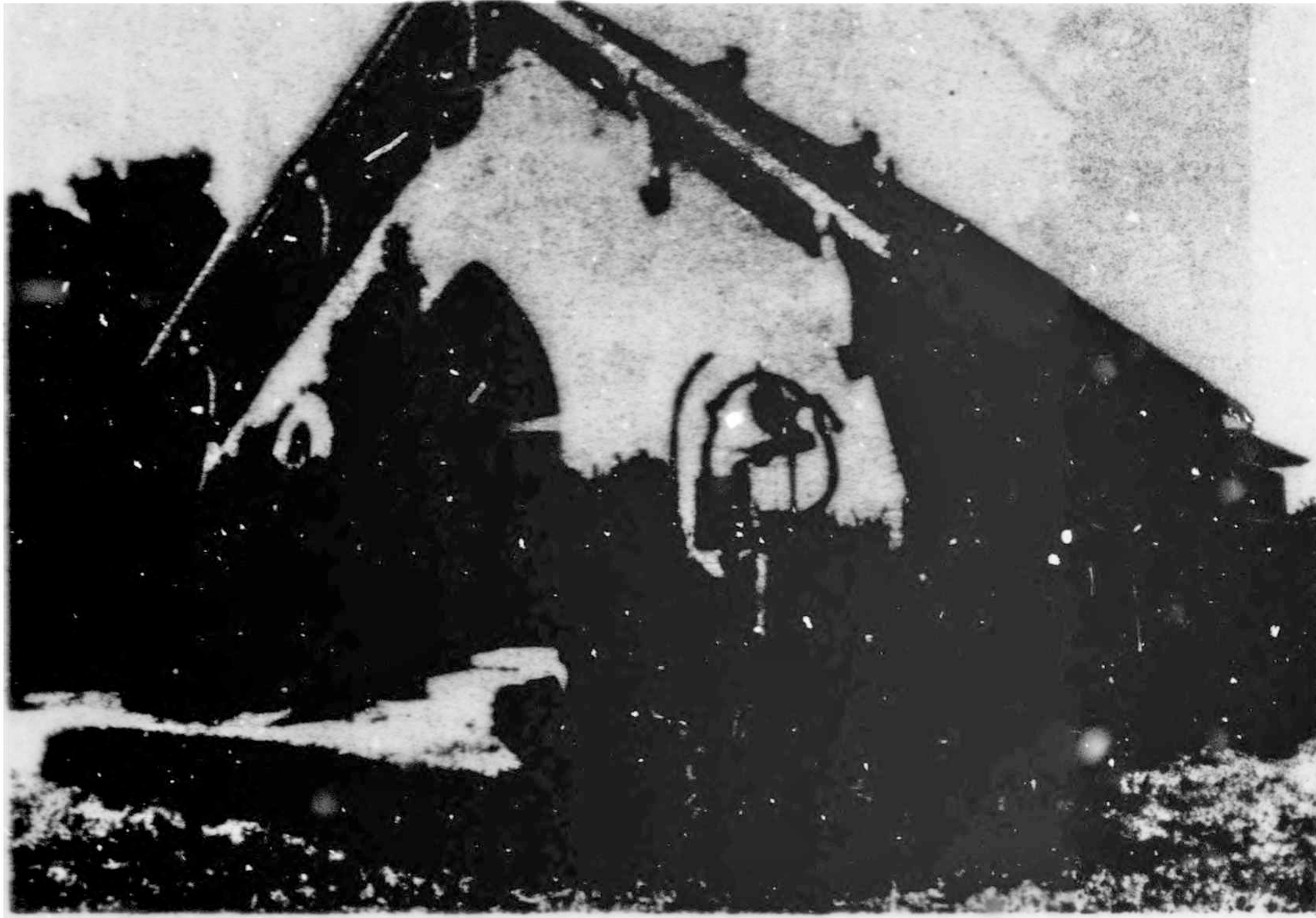
27 S.S. No. 13, Lanark Township, Hopetown, 1875. (Dennis Schroeder, Lanark.)



28 S.S. No. 1, Gosfield South Township, Harrow, 1907. (Warren Parr, Windsor.)



29 Union S.S. No. 13, Ancaster Township, and S.S. No. 2, Beverley Township, Ancaster, 1880. (Mike Failes, Dundas.)



30 Clayton School, Markham, 1874. (Heritage Markham.)



31 Hockley Schoolhouse, Hockley, 1899. (Max C. Coutts, Thornhill.)



32 S.S. No. 4, Melancthon Township, 1884. (Miss Helen Howes, Don Mills.)



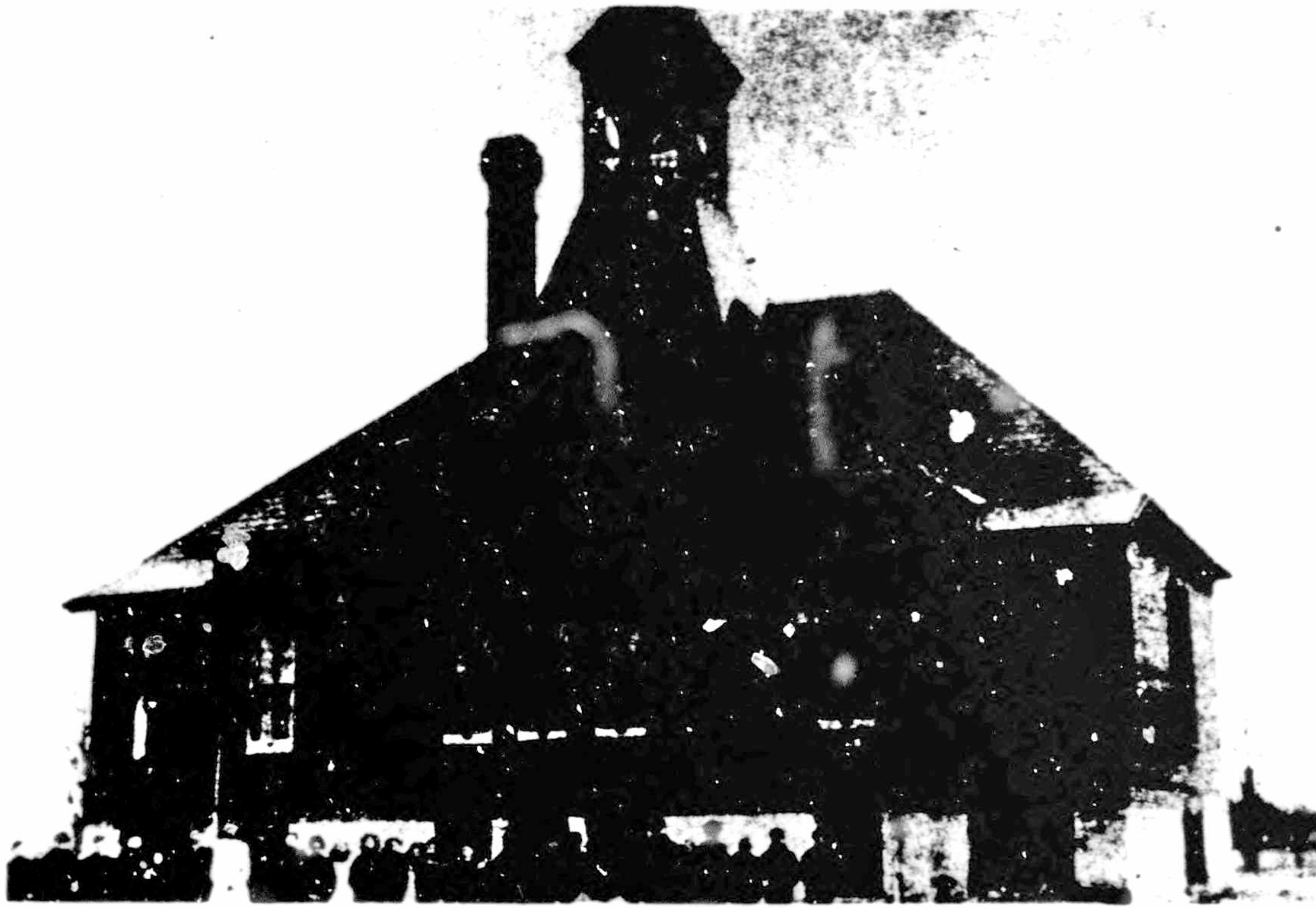
33 S.S. No. 30, Howard Township, ca. 1870 (demolished). (Francis P. Vink, Ridgetown.)



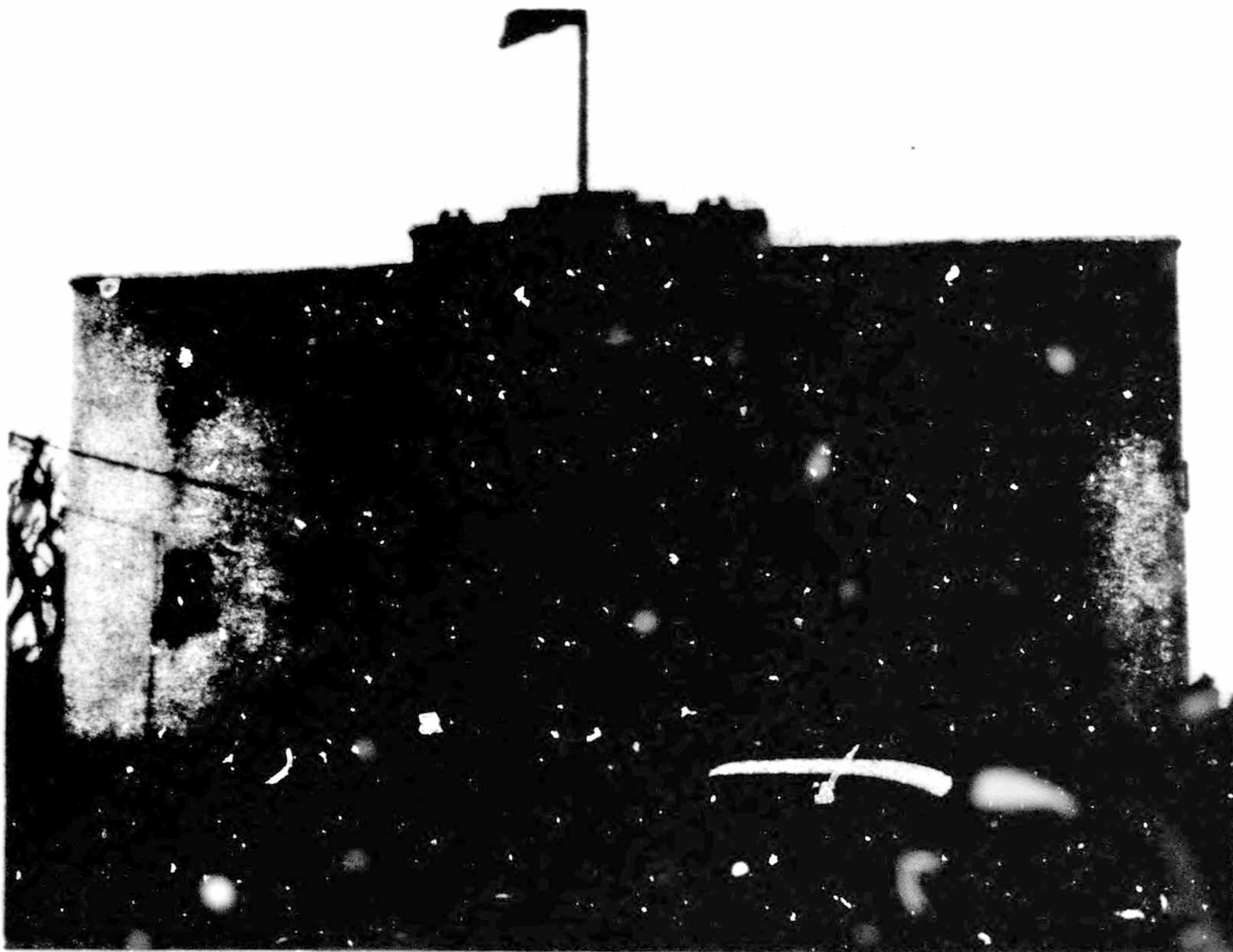
34 Hagerman Schoolhouse, Markham, 1889. (Heritage Markham.)



35 Green's School, Wilmot Township, 1907. (Katharine Lamb, Kitchener.)



36 S.S. No. 9, Howard Township, 1903. (Francis P. Vink, Ridgetown.)



37 S.S. No. 17, North Augusta Township, 1914. (J.A. Morris, Prescott.)



38 Kirkfield Public School, Kirkfield, 1907. (Norm Lilley, Victoria County Board of Education.)