



INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THE GUELPH COLLEGIATE-VOCATIONAL INSTITUTE

1854 – 1959

- The 1854 limestone building was built by a well-known tradesman from Guelph.
- There was no plumbing and electricity. Outhouses called a “Privy” and outdoor well water pumps were used as well as oil lamps for lighting and oil heating. (These oil drums are still buried underneath the Japanese Gardens under the cement pad area.)
- Classrooms were said to be “drafty” and student desks were screwed down to the wooden floors which “creaked a lot.” The stairs were very narrow and very steep.
- In 1906 a new large wing was added to the side of the bell tower, adding “6 much more needed classrooms.” The school was so overcrowded in 1905 that some classes were held in the Principal’s office and some students even walked to the city hall for a few classes each day.
- 1866 was the first year that girls were able to attend high school and the first commencement was in the 1890’s.
- In the earlier years there were around 40 students in each class with a student population of 500-600 with only twelve teachers. Boys and girls were in separate classes, including gym class.
- Students had to start the grade over if they failed one class.
- There were no curriculum choices. Some of the requirements were Algebra, French, Latin, Arithmetic, Physical Education, Spelling, Reading and Writing. There were 8 subjects and the requirement to pass was 60%. There were no student clubs.
- If a student was late to class they stayed 10 minutes after school for a detention.
- Gym classes were in the Drill Shed, built in 1886. It was a wooden, non-insulated building which was built behind the 1854 building. It was also used by the Cadet Corp and as an auditorium. When it was demolished in 1959 it was taken apart carefully and set up in a farmer’s field outside of Guelph.
- While Edward Johnson was a student from 1894 to 1898, he was captain of both the soccer and hockey teams. One of the oldest silver cup trophies we have in the GCVI Archives was presented to him for his Club Swinging in 1895. We also have some wooden clubs in the Archives that were used in Physical Education classes and for competition.
- There was a cafeteria at the bottom of the building, said to be the only one in the province at the time. Boys and girls had separate areas to eat in the cafeteria. Lunch was an hour and a half because many students and some staff went home for lunch, if within walking distance. Many students came by horse and buggy to school, or rail for those who came from Erin or Rockwood area, or some walked miles one way and could not go home at lunch.
- The building was not used from 1930 to 1945 but after the war it was used again because many soldiers returned from the war and went back to school. Mainly grade 9 and 10 classes were held in the old building if they had to use it because of the growing student population.
- All the buildings that were on the side of the 1923 building were demolished in 1959.

Notes from:
1984 Alumni Interviews
GCVI Acta Nostra’s
GCVI Alumni

WAR AND THE MILITARY AT GCVI

- The Second World War broke out in September 1939 and initially only a few students dropped out of school to serve and students said there wasn't a sense of the school being affected that first year.
- In Form 12C, "out of the 17 boys in class, 4 students were lost in the war."
- The Acta Nostra's include the names, and photos, of our staff and students who served in the Boer War and World War I and II.
- Some of our students were captured and tortured in the war, some never made it back to school again, the most famous (Canadians) being McCrae and Macalister.
- After the Second World War was over many soldiers returned to school which meant the student population increased so they began to use the 1854 building again for some of the grade 9 and 10 classes. At that time there was no walkway between the buildings.
- The school had a Rifle Club and competitions were held often in London, Ontario. We have many of the silver cups in the archives that they won. The Acta Nostra has wonderful stories written by the Rifle Club members. One specific memory of interest was about "the fair maidens" who looked after them and gave them meals.
- Practice took place in the rifle range which was on the side of the pool (now the library.) The outside back campus was also used for rifle practice.
- Some families from England sent their children to Canada to safely escape the war and continue their education. Several came to GCVI and after the war was over they had to say goodbye to their friends which they said was very hard because some of them were good friends having lived here for several years with the families who took them in.
- In 1884 the cadet corps known as The Highland Cadets first began at the Guelph Grammar School under Captain Walter Clark. In 2017 the marching band named themselves *The Highland Band*.
- From 1942 to 1948 the City of Guelph Corps was called "Guelph Collegiate and Vocational Institute Cadet Corps."
- Captain Clark also formed a locally sponsored girls' corps known as *The Daughters of the Regiment*. There is a large picture on the main floor hallway of the Captain and his Regiment.
- Captain Clark was also responsible for raising the funds and taking the initiative to have the Drill Shed built for school gym practices (and other events held in there.)
- One period a week of Cadets was optional for grade's 9 and 10 before The GCVI Cadet Corp ended. In the 60's, with no military staff member and the changing attitude of war itself, as well as the anti-war movement rising, Cadets became less popular at school. After 1964 it was not provided at GCVI and Cadets could only take part through the Guelph Armoury which still exists today.

Notes from:

1984 Alumni Interviews
1943 and 1945 GCVI Acta Nostra's
www.1882armycadets.guelph.org

SPORTS AND DANCES

- For about four generations at GC sports and dances were very connected. The teams played their sport (the most popular being Hockey, Rugby or Football) and then a dance often followed. They were very well attended because there was little other social life. Students who lived out of town or worked on farms did not attend many dances or play many sports.
- From the 30's to the 50's football games were played on Saturdays between Kitchener, Galt and Brantford. These were the closest high schools in the area with GC at the time being the only public school in Guelph.
- Football competition was out of town in the 40's and when John F. Ross opened they were the "arch rivalry." When Centennial opened in 1967 they were included in the competition.
- From the 40's through to the 70's students would march to Exhibition Park in rows to watch football games. (The students didn't seem to mind this but the teacher comments about this were from a different perspective. They wanted to make sure all the students got there and they could see them easily walking in rows.) Tickets went from .35¢ and .50¢. There were always cheerleaders and a lot of school spirit. 95% of the class had to purchase tickets for the whole class to be dismissed and hundreds of students would march in rows to the park. For those driving the cars they often had balloons flying out the windows, horns would be honking, confetti flying and trumpets blasting. The comments about football games were so cheerful and positive.
- In the 1970's there were basketball games on Friday nights at 7 o'clock followed by a "sock hop dance." The bleachers were full of students to watch the game and attend the dance. The music was played on record players but before this it was live music by the school band.
- Once a year there were Sadie Hawkins dances. A girl could invite a boy. She would make or purchase, at a local flower shop, a "goofy" corsage for the boy. It was made to go with the dance theme.
- Bachman Turner Overdrive came and set up for a day in the 70's.
- Live orchestras played into the 70's for the formal dances. Until the school had access to record players and records the school band and orchestra played live music for the dances.
- In the 40's dances were on Friday nights as well as special dances for Christmas and the Fall dance. There were not many other social events for students in the school or in the community.

CLUBS

- There were no clubs at school in the 1854 building and basically no social life at all until the 1940's.
- In the 40's school council was started and clubs such as chess, photography, debating, Christian fellowship and the Gaels Club (under the Head Caretaker initially) were all created.
- The Outers Club was big in the 70's with many weekend field trips, particularly for Geography and Science and Physical Education classes.

Notes from:
1984 Alumni Interviews

CLASSES, COURSES AND EXAMS

- The first music courses began under the direction of Mr. Peachell in the 40's.
- Students were divided into three different streams.
 - General: students were headed to University
 - Technology: students went into the trades
 - Commercial: for typing, secretarial and office/business work in the future
- During the 30's and 40's most students took the same courses for the first three years of school: English, French, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Latin, but Latin wasn't compulsory. Algebra and Geometry were also options in the first 2 years. In the last few years Greek and German and Trigonometry were offered.
- From the 30's to the mid-70's if students achieved 75% they would pass the subject without further exams. If they failed the exam they took the course over and if they failed the course they took the whole year over.
- Students had to write "entrance exams" before entering high school.
- Departmental Exams (Provincial Exams) had to be written every year until 1967 when they were abolished. There were four sets of exams to write in the 60's and a fifth set in June that they could get out of, depending on their marks.
- Grade 13 Departmental exams were 2 ½ hours long but students could leave after 1 ½ hours. They were provincial exams and marked in Toronto. 66% in marks could exempt a student from writing the exam but only if the teacher also felt their attendance and behavior was good.
- Grade 13 students took 9 classes a day until 1984 when the requirement changed to 6 classes.
- In the 40's and 50's some classes had as many as 55 students in a single class.
- In 1945 there were only 40 up to 50 teachers in the school so when the population rose to 1,300, five more teachers were hired.
- For just two years in the 40's boys and girls were in separate classes. It was said that one female teacher had 50 grade 10 boys in 1 class!
- In the 30's and 40's students' stayed in 1 room all day and the teachers would rotate classes.
- Spelling was a regular part of the English courses. Spelling contests were regularly held, competing among other schools. Our Archives has some of the silver Spelling cup trophies.
- During the time of Principal John F. Ross, 1923-1945, the student population fluctuated between less than 500 and as high as 1,715.
- Every student in Guelph and the surrounding area attended GCVI except for some Catholic girls who went to Loretto Academy. In 1953 a few boys left to attend the new Catholic school in Guelph for boys. J.F. Ross CVI opened its doors in 1956 to 460 students, all who had to "reluctantly leave GCVI." Then in 1967 Centennial CVI opened and more students left because of school boundaries.

Notes from:
1984 Alumni Interviews

DISCIPLINE AND THE DRESS CODE

- Detentions were served after 4 pm and some alumni remember it lasted half an hour after school and another remembers that it was 10 minutes after class. (This specific time was related to being late to school, not behavior.)
- Students in the 50's and 60's would walk in single file rows from class to class. Detentions could be given for not keeping in your row or for walking up or down the staircase "in the wrong manner," such as not ascending the staircase on the right side and descending on the left side.
- In the 60's boys could not wear jeans to school and girls could not wear slacks or shorts, and boys could not have long hair. Depending on the era, skirts and dresses had to be a certain length below the knees and then it was aloud a specific number of inches above the knees.
- The dress-code for special assemblies was dark pants and white shirts for boys and a white tunic and skirt for the girls. Otherwise, girls wore black tunics and black stockings to school. There are pictures in the 40's and 50's Acta Nostra's.
- In the mid-70's the entire male staff still wore a tie and suit coat and the female staff wore dresses and suits, no gym clothes or casual clothes could be worn by the staff members.
- In the mid-60's students began to rebel against the dress code. It was said that some of them wore leather jackets to commencement and some students rebelled against the system and would not accept their diplomas.
- The administration began to have a losing battle with the dress code, as well as with the length of hair for boys and the dress length for girls.
- One story was about a Vice-Principal who took a male student to the washroom and cut his hair off because he came back from the summer holiday with his hair too long.
- By the late 70's even teachers started to change how they dressed and some staff would smoke in the building, eventually permitted only in a staff room until smoking was finally banned inside buildings in 2006.
- The 60's was a time of "experimentation with chemical substances." It was said that "you could get higher than a kite with the smell of smoke going down the halls."
- In the 60's the school heater broke down for months in the middle of winter. The administration had to agree to break the dress code and permit girls to wear slacks to school. After this it became optional for the girls to dress in slacks.

Notes from:

1984 Alumni Interviews
Compiled by Joy Schwindt, 2018