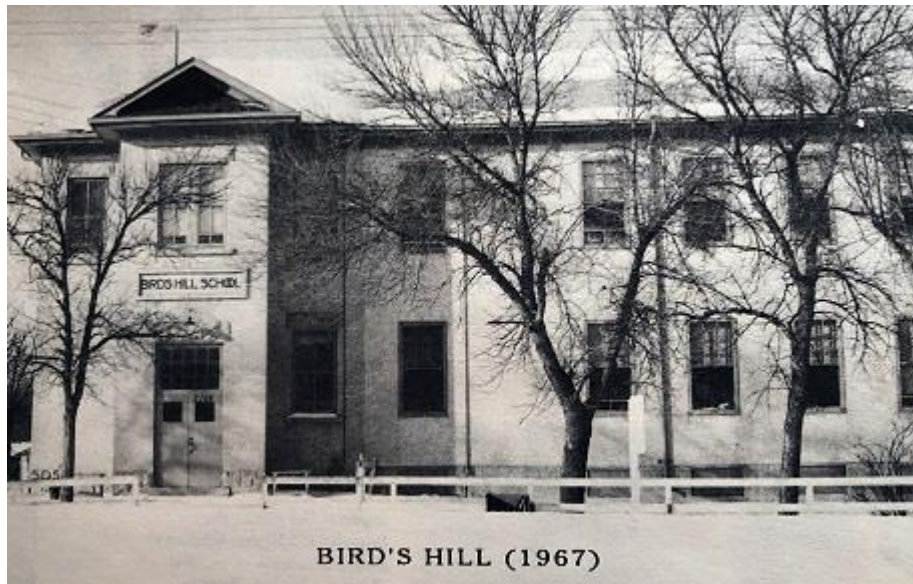


Birds Hill School's fire escape slide had students longing for fire drills!

Jackie Waddell (nee Keedian) is a true East St. Paul "lifer." Her first home was a lot number on Birds Hill Road near Roseneath Avenue. Her father Roy Keedian owned and operated Roy's Garage on Birds Hill at Hoddinott Road and she lived in her family home until she married Douglas Waddell in 1956. The newly married couple moved to a home less than a mile north of her family home where they raised two sons and moved once more - to the house next door where Jackie still resides. Jackie was the Birds Hill School secretary from 1973 - 2000.



As told by Birds Hill resident author Jackie Waddell



To say Jackie Waddell knew a lot of the families in East St. Paul (ESP) would be an understatement. All of her formal education was spent at Birds Hill schools and she then became the school secretary for 27 years - she knew generations of ESP families. This hadn't been her plan from the outset but she loved working at the school. "I love people," she says. "There was never a day I woke up and didn't want to go to work. Working at a school was a very happy place."

In 1973, after Jackie's sons were a few grades into elementary school, school Trustee Bill Routly asked her if she would consider working as a secretary at Birds Hill School a couple of afternoons each week. She agreed and eventually the position became full time.

Birds Hill School stood at the corner of Birds Hill and Hoddinott Roads where Sobeys stands today. Built in 1914, the two-storey building educated the students of ESP until 1987 when the new Birds Hill School was opened.

When you talk with someone familiar with the grand old school, one of the most loved memories they share is the second floor fire escape slide.

Jackie has a program booklet from Birds Hill School's 65th anniversary tea where school memories were collected. One submission by Mrs. Blanche Coxsworth (nee Martin) provides a window into what the students thought of the fire escape.

"A great thing happened one day -- believe it or not -- the construction of the most famous fire escape," Coxsworth wrote. "It was built on the back of the school, an open galvanized slide and a small iron balcony outside our second floor classroom window. Oh, the excitement of the first drill! We climbed through the window -- the big ones having real problems -- and slid down. Mr. Haight, being a great teacher, said nothing about staying away from the fire escape. We had many happy evenings pulling ourselves up the slide and then sliding down again."

Every school year, Jackie said the school caretaker, Mr. Sulkers, would hold several fire drills. When the second floor students came down the slide, Mr. Sulkers would be there to catch them. Jackie's office was on the main floor of the school so she never had to use the slide during the fire drill and her curiosity never got the better of her. "But now I wish I would have, just to say I did," she says.

Another poignant memory of the old school was the daily tradition of the opening and closing exercises. Every day, winter and summer, students and teachers would gather around the flagpole outside the school. The flag would be raised to the singing of O'Canada and after school it was lowered to God Save the Queen.

Jackie's father Roy Keedian was the first of three generations of her family to attend the old Birds Hill School. It is a cornerstone of their family history in East St. Paul.