



*Edith Cavell Public School in 1934. photo: Jim Cornett*

## From Learning to Living

# Edith Cavell School

by Natalie Atkin, Issue #18, October 2001

On October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1915, Edith Cavell, a British nurse, was sentenced to death by German authorities. Her crime had been to provide refuge to British, French, and Belgian soldiers in her Berkendael Institute in German-occupied Belgium. The soldiers successfully escaped from the Germans.

Three years later, a school was constructed in present-day Riverside on land originally owned by Gilbert Parent and named in Edith Cavell's honour. Located on the corner of Ontario Street and Esdras, Edith Cavell Public School opened in 1919 in the Township of Sandwich East with Mrs. Gilbert Parent as its first principal.

When the town of Riverside was incorporated in 1921, the land from Tecumseh Road to the river was all farmland. Flipping through the school's 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary program from May 1984 brings one back to when streetcars paused at Stop 10 (present-day Jefferson) along Ottawa Street (now Wyandotte). There were creeks along Homedale, Ford, Glidden and Jefferson, that, once

spring rains came, some neighbourhood boys actually navigated.

Most of the housing was north of Wyandotte while construction to the south was just in its infancy. Many new residents were Ford workers who built their houses at night, lit only by hurricane lamps.

Between Prado and Villaire, there was a "Town Tap" – a community water tap that people used to do their laundry. The trees of the orchard near the corner of Glidden and Wyandotte often served as a boxing ring for spontaneous matches between neighbourhood boys.

As Riverside grew and modernized, so did the school. When it opened, Edith Cavell was just two rooms, accommodating grades one through eight. In 1924, additional classrooms were added and in 1936, a gym was built. The school continued to grow in 1958 when a whole wing was added.

In 1942, the school began accepting pupils through grade ten and in 1944 and its name was changed from Edith Cavell to Riverside Continuation School. The next decade witnessed major changes as the school dropped its elementary grades, becoming a high school with grades nine through 13 and changing its name to Riverside High School in 1956.

Once present-day Riverside High opened in 1964, Edith Cavell returned in name and the school converted to a senior public school for grade seven and eight students.

Like most neighbourhood institutions, Edith Cavell was much more than a school. In the 1920's and 1930's, the school hosted concerts, films, card parties and dances and served as the center of the community. The congregation of Riverside United Church began services at the school before construc-



### Honouring Edith Cavell

I read your article on Edith Cavell School in the October 2001 issue and thought you may like to see a scan of an old postcard I have of Edith's grave and of her (top left corner).

**Chris Gall, Walkerville**

*Ed: Thanks Chris. Edith Cavell was a British nurse who was sentenced to death by German authorities in 1915 for providing refuge to British, French and Belgian soldiers. In 1918, a school was constructed in Riverside and named in her honour.*

tion of its current building in 1929. Edith Cavell also housed Board of Education offices at one time.

Several generations of Riverside residents attended Edith Cavell throughout its sixty-eight year history. Harold Dresser, a life-long resident of Glidden Road, was a student from 1936 through 1947, and his children attended in the 1960's and 1970's. The Monaghan family raised three generations on Ford Boulevard and all three generations were sent to Edith Cavell.

Bernard Monaghan and his brother Bryce, the former Riverside Police Chief, attended in the 1920's. Bernard's son Richard Sr. was a student in the 1940's and his sons were schooled there in the 1970's.

By the 1980's, Edith Cavell was too small to serve as a high school and too large to be a grade school. This part of Riverside now had more updated elementary schools such as Princess Elizabeth. In 1987, Edith Cavell officially ceased to be a public school.

Closing ceremonies were held in June 1987, but the school remained open to house F. J. Brennan's overflow and later King Edward students during that school's reconstruction.

As Windsor is faced with additional school closures, questions arise over what to do with the old schools. Edith Cavell, along with St. Genevieve School in central Windsor, are now being converted into condominiums. While some other schools have become community centres, Cavell and St. Genevieve are the only Windsor schools to date to be turned into condominiums.

Converting schools is not without controversy. Many neighbours near Edith Cavell oppose condominium construction. Members of Riverside United Church, which stands directly across the street from the school, encouraged neighbours to voice their opposition to the development.

According to Church Secretary Nina Dresser, the Church was eyeing the lot for additional parking and for possible single-detached



*House at 957 Ford Blvd. served as the original school. photo courtesy Jim Cornett*

housing. Members were disappointed to learn that the lot was purchased by a developer who was planning to keep the building intact and redevelop for condos, all of which needed rezoning and city approval. Eventually, the Church was able to purchase part of the property and gain 57 parking spots.

Surrounding neighbours who opposed the conversion, believed that condos did not fit the fabric of the neighbourhood and they feared traffic and sewer problems associated with denser development.

When the Planning Committee and City Council sided with the neighbours the developer appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board which overturned the local decisions in June 2000 and opened up the way to condos at Edith Cavell.

Edith Cavell Place Condominiums are scheduled for an early 2002 occupancy with twenty units planned.

The condos represent a viable way to preserve by-gone architecture. The converted structure introduces a new type of housing into an established neighborhood, a trend that may become increasingly attractive to city developers and planners.



*Edith Cavell grade 8 class, 1943*

*Blue and White,  
Blue and White  
These are the colours  
for which we'll fight!  
Rab, Rab, Rab  
Ziss Boom Bab  
Edith Cavell School!  
Rab Rab Rab  
(1920's school cheer)*