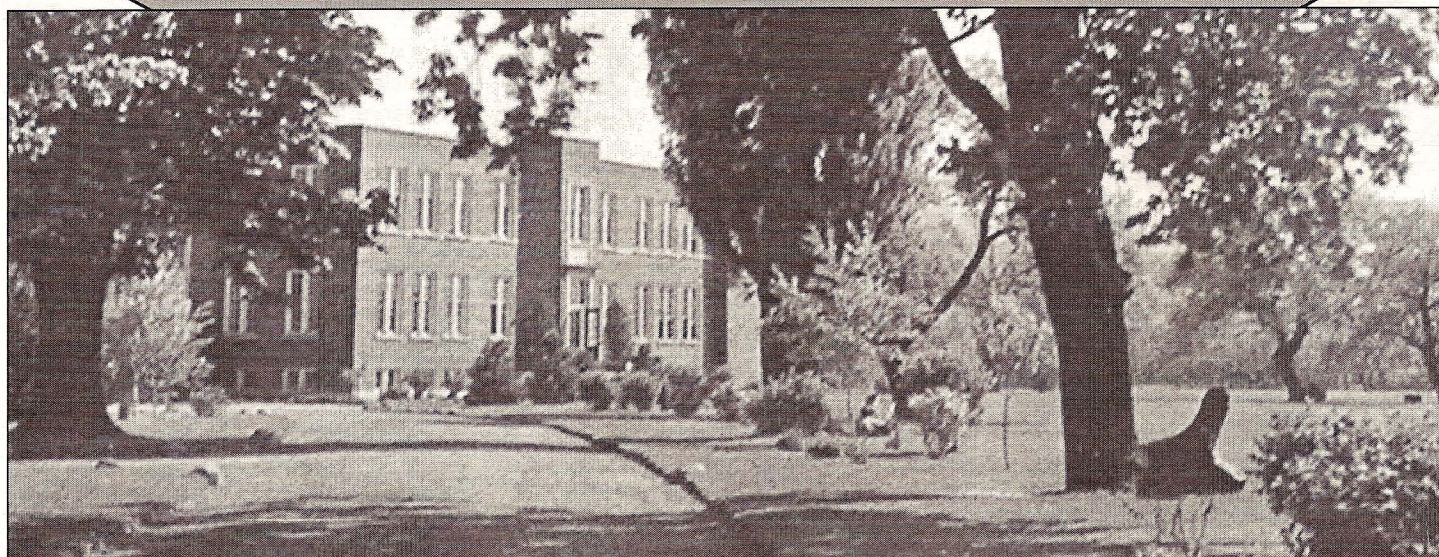


# The Way We Were

## Hillfield School



Hillfield School circa 1934.

Photo: Hillfield Strathallan Archives

### LOREEN JEROME

Hillfield Strathallan College on Hamilton mountain was situated in our neighbourhood between 1930 and 1962, when it was Hillfield School, a private school for boys. Hillfield was part of a 60-acre farm owned by Colonel Robert C. Ainslie, who inherited it from his father, George H. Ainslie. Eventually ownership of the farm passed to Sir John Gibson. After he passed away, Lady Gibson deeded 15 acres of the land south of Main Street West near Paisley Avenue South to Hillfield School in memory of Sir John and her three sons. Lady Gibson also donated approximately 38 acres to the Hamilton Parks Board. After being modernized, Colonel Ainslie's square stone farmhouse became the residence of Hillfield's headmaster.

Hillfield's name was chosen to emphasize the fact it was the successor to Highfield School (1901-19) and Hillcrest School (1920-29). The new school, opened Jan. 14, 1930, was situated in the centre of the property. It had a naturally wooded ravine in the back, and far down the ravine Chedoke Creek meandered on its way to Cootes Paradise.

The school was built in the Georgian style, its brickwork ornamented with stone. It had massive solid oak doors and pine trim throughout. There was a large gymnasium, basketball court, two outdoor hockey rinks, and a great playing field. It operated like an English country day school for boys seven to 15 years old, who were bused to and from the city.

In 1959 Hillfield School's name was changed to Hillfield College. In 1962 Strathallan amalgamated with Hillfield to become Hillfield Strathallan College. This year Hillfield Strathallan College celebrates 105 years of education in Hamilton.

*The Hamilton Spectator* Nov. 4, 1959, reported: "The construction of the Chedoke Expressway may force the relocation of Hillfield College." In 1961 the City of Hamilton sold 38.23 acres of Ainslie's Woods (as it was then known) to build the Chedoke Expressway, now Highway 403. Hillfield, therefore, decided to consider other sites. Eventually, land around the Mountain Sanatorium in the Garth Street—Fennel Avenue area was purchased.

The City of Hamilton was asked to rezone the 15-acre Hillfield site as commercial

property so the school could obtain top dollar for relocation costs. Angry Westdale residents, fearful of a shopping plaza, fought a verbal battle but lost. After 60 years of valued service in the area, Hillfield School moved to the mountain in 1963. Hillfield sold its part of the Ainslie property to the developers of the Camelot Towers Apartments and the Board of Education for the Ainslie Wood Vocational School, which operated from 1970 to 1994.

Hillfield Strathallan College continues to be one of Canada's leading independent schools. Its mandate is to "prepare young people for higher learning and life."

Sources: *Echoes That Remain, Hillfield Strathallan*, Barry Wansbrough, 2001; Elaine Jenkins, Archivist, Hillfield Strathallan College; Westdale Scrapbook, Volume 1, Westdale Library.