



## Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

1593 Four Mile Creek Road  
P.O. Box 100, Virgil, ON L0S 1T0  
905-468-3266      www.notl.com

**SUBJECT:** 1655 Four Mile Creek Road – Heritage Designation Report (File No. HER-29-2024)

### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1665 Four Mile Creek Road (the “Subject Property”), known as Virgil Public School, is a listed property on the Niagara-on-the-Lake Municipal Heritage Register of Properties of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest (the “Heritage Register”). The Subject Property contains strong architectural, historical, and contextual merit for designation, and was shortlisted by Town Staff as a priority for a heritage designation study.

Research and analysis of the Subject Property indicates that it meets several of the *Ontario Heritage Act* (the “OHA”) criteria for designation (as set out in Ontario Regulation or “O. Reg.” 9/06). The Subject Property contains heritage value for its longstanding history as a site of education between 1872 and 2011. Originally constructed as a one-room stone schoolhouse, it is estimated that the original stone section of Virgil Public School is the oldest extant building in Virgil. The Subject Property displays architectural or design value as a representative example of a late 19<sup>th</sup> century one-room stone schoolhouse, constructed in a vernacular one-room rural schoolhouse style popularized in the mid- to late-19<sup>th</sup> century. Additions to the school in 1922, 1939, 1947, 1967, and 1983 enlarged the building to meet the needs of a growing community, creating significant contextual value as part of the historic institutional fabric of the village of Virgil, maintaining its original functionality for 139 years.

Based on this evaluation, the Subject Property is recommended for designation under Part IV, section 29 of the OHA.

### 2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide a draft Designation Report, which is required for any property that is considered for heritage designation under Part IV of the OHA. The Subject Property was identified within the Town’s work plan for priority designations in response to Bill 23 amendments to remove listed non-designated properties from local Heritage Registers after January 1, 2025. Note that, although this deadline has since been extended by Bill 200 to January 1, 2027, designating the Town’s listed properties under Part IV of the OHA remains a priority.

### 3. BACKGROUND

### **3.1 Method**

This report examines the Subject Property in terms of its architectural design, history, and context, with the purpose of evaluating it against the criteria set out by O.Reg.9/06 (as amended by 569/22).

#### **3.1.1 Field Survey**

A field survey was conducted from the public right-of-way to gain a better understanding of the property and the context. The field survey was conducted on June 28, 2024 by Candice Bogdanski, Senior Heritage Planner.

Property owner permission to enter onto the private property was provided to past members of the MHC to gain a more fulsome understanding of potential interior heritage attributes, which included wainscoting, moulded tin roof tiles, and a bell that has since been relocated to Crossroads School. It should be noted that investigation into the interior 19th century remnant features has not occurred since 2011, and as such, their extant condition is unknown at the time of writing this report.

#### **3.1.2 Research**

Background research and information was obtained from the archives of Niagara-on-the-Lake, research prepared by Rosie J. Zirger for the Town (2011), Peter John Stokes' book *Old Niagara-on-the-Lake* (1971), the Commemorative Edition of *Early Architecture of the Town & Township of Niagara* (The Niagara Foundation, 2012), Carlos Wiens' book *Virgil: 125 Years of Memories (1872-1997)*, [OntarioArchitecture.ca/School.htm](http://OntarioArchitecture.ca/School.htm), the NOTL Museum, Brock University Map Library, local newspaper coverage, and research by local historians.

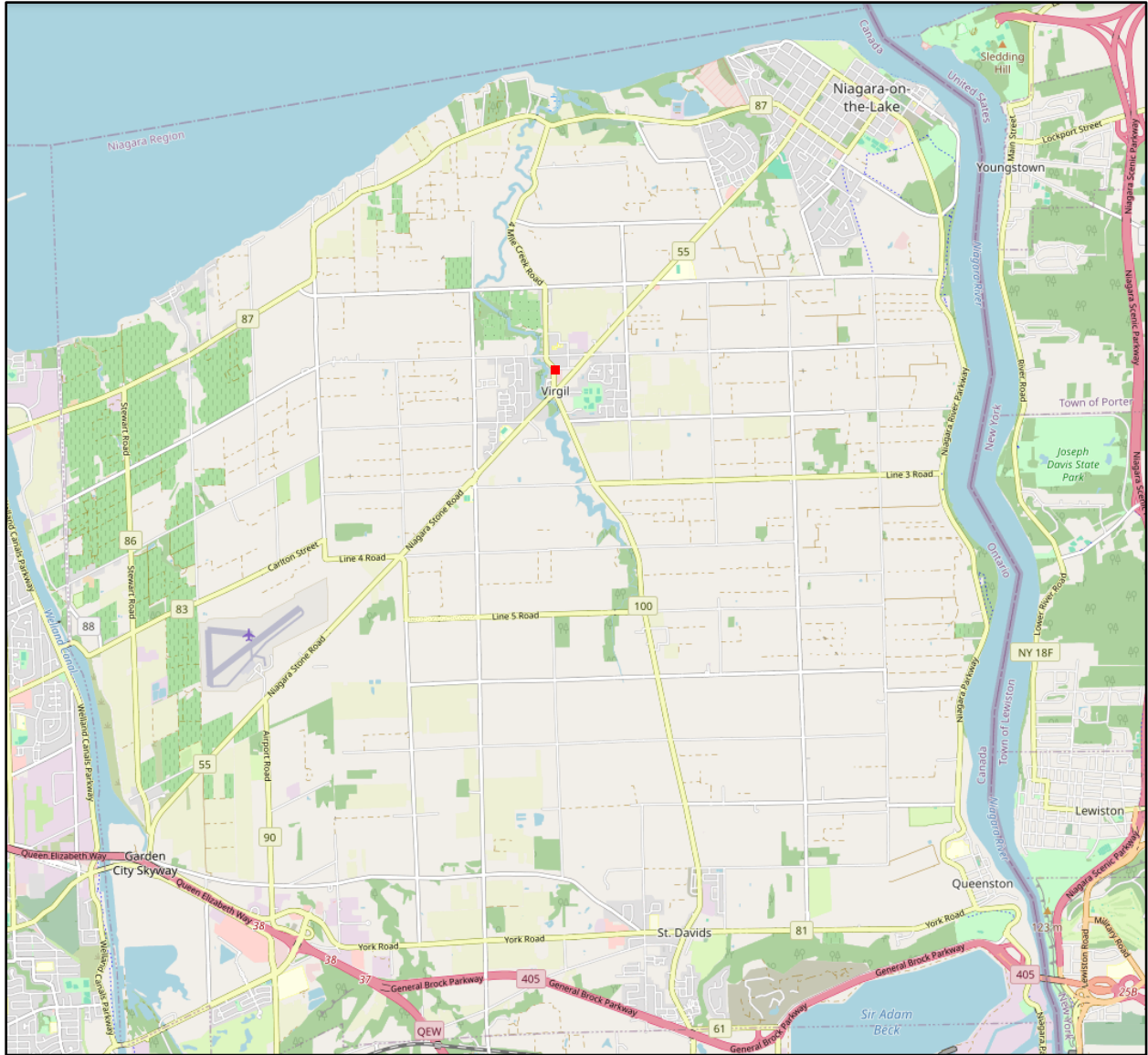
#### **3.1.3 Consultation**

Town Staff initiated this report, in consultation with the Municipal Heritage Committee, to address the deadline for all the listed properties on the Municipal Heritage Register. Properties listed on the Register as of January 1, 2023 must be designated or removed from the Register prior to January 1, 2027.

### **3.2 Property Information**

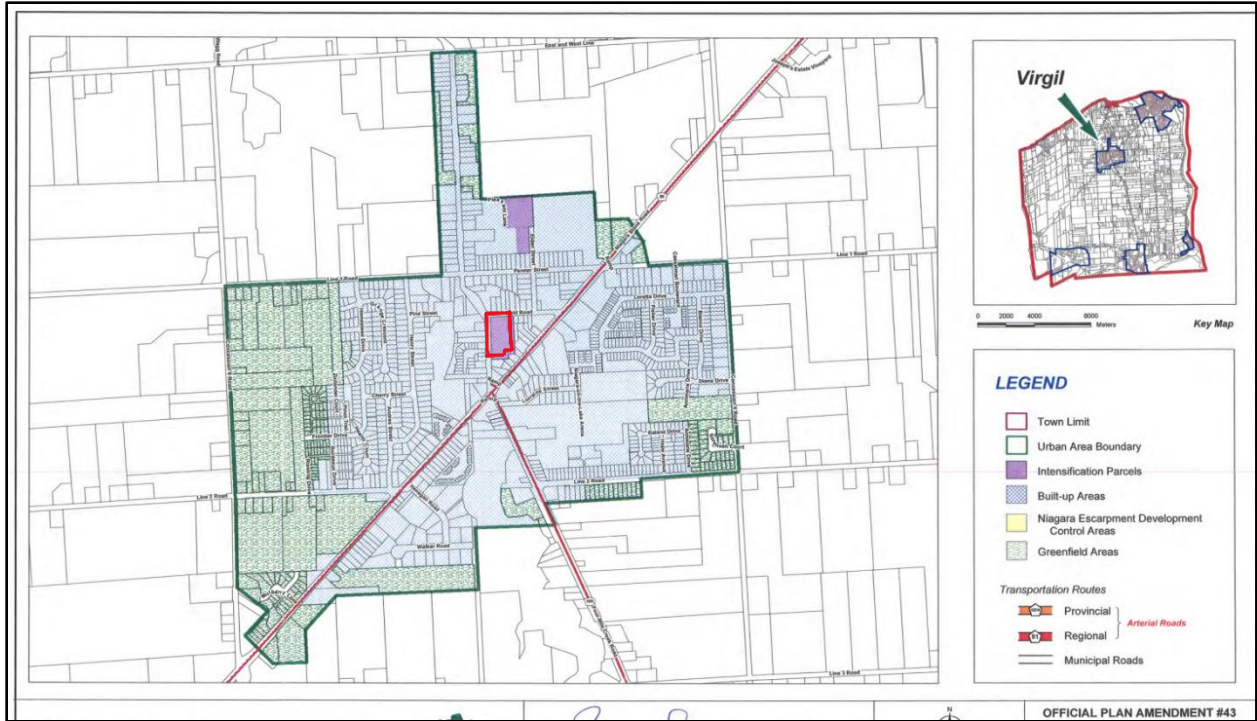
Civic Address: 1665 Four Mile Creek Road, Virgil, Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON

Legal Description: PT TWP Lot 113 RP 30R13820 Part 1, L0S 1J0, St. Davids, Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Niagara Township, ON

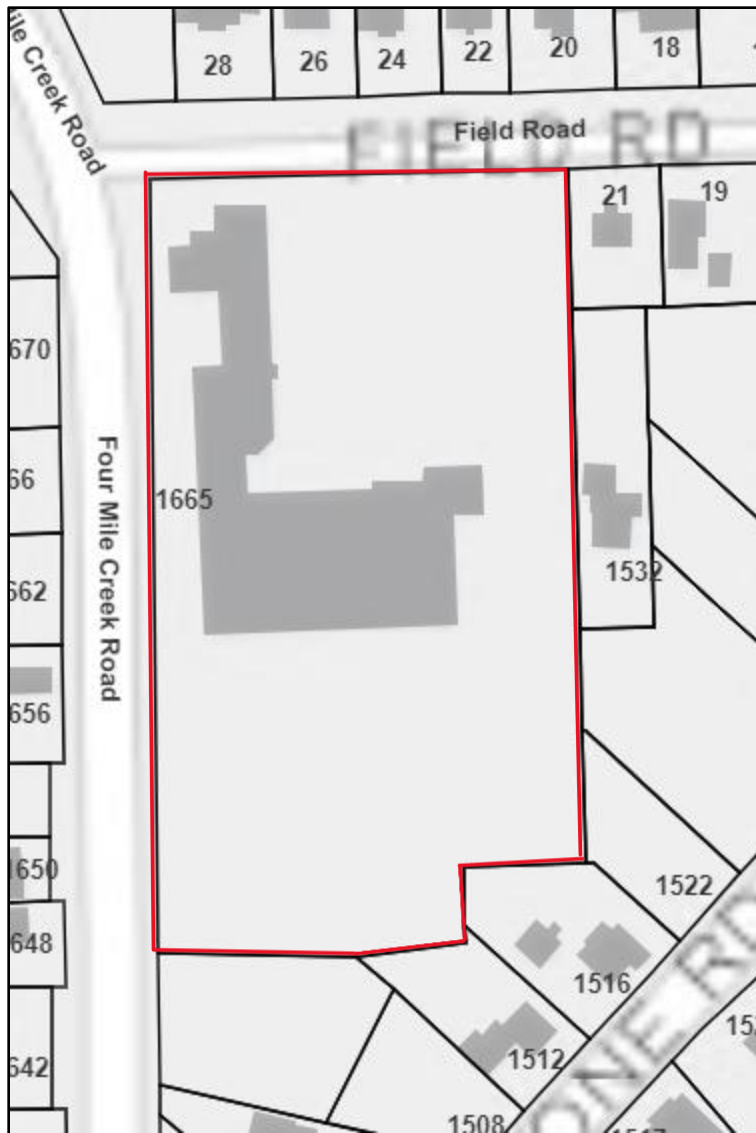


**Map 1: Subject Property, identified with a red square, located in the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake.**

(Source: Niagara-on-the-Lake)



**Map 2a: Subject Property (identified with a red outline) located within the Virgil Urban Area.**  
 (Source: Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake).



**Map 3b: Detailed view of the Subject Property (identified with a red outline) with the building footprint of Virgil Public School (identified in grey) as located within the Virgil Urban Area. (Source: Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake).**

### **3.3 Background Information**

The Town has previously expressed interest in designating the Subject Property under Part IV of the OHA, including the preparation of a draft designation by-law; however, the designation process was not completed.

Although the Board of Education agreed to consider designation of Virgil Public School following a presentation by LACAC (now MHC) committee member J. Fisher on May 10, 1994, there are no records indicating that designation was pursued further at that time.

It should be noted that, in early 2011, members of the community contacted the Town's Planning Department to recommend pursuit of designation as part of potential sale and development of the property by the Owner at that time (District School Board of Niagara, "the DSBN"). The DSBN was preparing to close Virgil Public School following the construction and opening of Crossroads Public School in September 2011. At the January 2011 meeting, Council approved that the MHC proceed with research in support of potential designation, while also initiating owner contact with the DSBN.

In response, the DSBN indicated interest in relocating some historic features from Virgil Public School to the new Crossroads Public school to "commemorate the long history of the Virgil Public School and its importance in the community" and to "provide continuity for the students." The teachers, students, and parents identified four artifacts for installation in the new school: the school bell located inside the cupola, the weathervane (the original being displayed in the school at the time), the tin ceiling (then concealed in a suspended ceiling), and the date stone located on the façade of the 1872 original stone building.

A Subcommittee of the MHC visited the Subject Property on February 24, 2011, and determined that the 1872 stone building was likely constructed of heavily parged rubble coated in roughcast, which was then incised to give the appearance of ashlar. The interior of this portion of the building contained original wainscoting and several coat hooks that also appeared original. The tin ceiling was a slightly later addition, appearing to have been installed following the closure of the main entrance to create a coat room for the students. At that time, the Subcommittee could not determine if the datestone itself was a separate piece of masonry, or rather part of the wall with detail incised into the built-up roughcast.

At the March 8, 2011 meeting of the MHC, the Committee recommended that the bell, weathervane, and coat hooks could be removed and installed in the new school; however, more information was needed to determine if the datestone could be extricated safely (if not, a replica was suggested), and consultation was needed to determine if the tin roof could be successfully installed in the new school, but was suggested to remain in situ until the designation process was completed. A letter sent to the Principal of Virgil Public School and the Superintendent of Planning & Transportation on March 23, 2011 outlined these recommendations, namely that the "MHC did not want to diminish the value of the building by removing important artifacts; however, they did not want to miss an opportunity to showcase the artifacts and honour the history of Virgil Public School at the new school." The MHC wanted the wainscoting to remain in the historic school building.

It was determined that the Virgil Public School bell was too small for the Crossroads School location; however, it was reported that the Virgil Public School bell be rung by the final graduating class in June 2011, after which it was installed in a display case at Crossroads Public School.

Designation of the Subject Property was recommended by the MHC on September 13, 2011, indicating that the focus of the designation would be the structure and attributes associated with the original one-room schoolhouse dating to 1872. Following concerns regarding land use, Council deferred the decision to designate at the September 19, 2011 meeting, with a recommendation first to produce an urban design study for the property. During the October 11, 2011 Council meeting, a terms of reference to produce an urban design study for the Subject Property was approved, while the motion to proceed with designation of the Subject Property was defeated following a discussion regarding the timing of the designation. At the October 1, 2012 meeting, Council approved the Virgil Elementary School Urban Design Guidelines to inform future development of the Subject Property. The Subject Property was sold earlier in 2012, removing the DSBN as the Owner.

Interest in revisiting the designation of the Subject Property occurred informally in 2012, and again in 2018; however, the formal designation process was not initiated.

### **3.3.1 Architecture or Design**

#### Architectural Patterns for Rural One-Room Schoolhouses

- In 1857, Reverend Egerton Ryerson authorized the publication of the province's first manual of school design, *The School House: Its Architecture, External and Internal Arrangements*, authored by J. George Hodgins, Ryerson's assistant. The book became a construction manual, complete with plans and specifications, and included topics such as site selection, the principles of heating, ventilation, and lighting, as well as school furniture and training manual for teachers,
- Schoolhouses across Ontario were being rebuilt according to Hodgins' plans.
- By 1870, many new schoolhouses had been constructed, brick or stone construction preferred, although across the province many older frame or log schoolhouses were still in use.
- In contrast to pre-1850 school buildings, the new schools were larger, more elegant in their external appearance, better sited, better equipped, and superior in terms of lighting, heating and ventilation.
- The one-room schoolhouse, built to a simplified version of the specifications laid down by Hodgins in *The School House* continued to be the staple in rural education into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- According to at least one historian, rural schools were likely preserved longer than their urban counterparts, perhaps due to poverty of the 1930's, the demands of WWII, and "the determination of rural people to maintain that personal control of the schools their children attended."

Historical records indicate a schoolhouse has occupied the Virgil Public School site since 1845, and possibly as early as 1829. By 1839, land was purchased to construct a school, identified as a "frame building" that was subsequently replaced by a "more modern stone school house" in 1872.

- In 1866 a schoolhouse design and building notes was published in Canada Farmer newspaper. This set the standard for the gable front one room schoolhouse. School houses had existed in Ontario for at least 50 years by this

- point, but this set a pattern for many more that were built in rural communities.
- One-room schoolhouses were built as the need arose within a community. Often these schoolhouses were in use for only a decade or two, until the land use or population changed; however, the 1872 schoolhouse for Niagara School Section No. 8 in Virgil, has remained in continuous use, serving the elementary school children of the local community since its construction.
  - The 1872 schoolhouse for Niagara School Section No.8, is an excellent example of an “improved” rural Ontario school that exemplifies Ryerson’s educational reforms and Hodgins’ schoolhouse designs.
  - Despite additions to its west, north, and east sides, the 1872 schoolhouse, while minimally modified, remains in excellent condition, retaining the design features exemplified in Hodgins’ 1857 *The School House: Its Architecture, External and Internal Arrangements*, and remained in use until its closure in 2011.

The architectural description of 1665 Four Mile Creek Road is as follows:

- This schoolhouse, although still one-room, was constructed of stone, its centre door facing the Creek Road, well-lit with large windows, and topped with a bellcote.
- Rather than adhering to the common gabled roof profile, Virgil Public School’s central stone one-room schoolhouse used a jerkinhead design, potentially to afford greater visibility to the bellcote above.
- The 1872 building is constructed of heavily parged rubble coated in roughcast, which was then incised to give the appearance of ashlar.
- Similarly, despite its appearance as a separate datestone, the oval datestone indicating the 1872 construction date is rather integral to the stone and roughcast wall, as opposed to being a separately inserted stone.
- The interior of this portion of the building contains original wainscoting and several coat hooks that also appeared original.
- Over time, and as the population continued to increase, Virgil Public School expanded to accommodate the needs of the growing rural community.
- Clearly, the community or school officials opted for multiple expansions of the School, rather than replace it.
- The tin ceiling remnants found under a drop-ceiling within the 19<sup>th</sup> century portion of the building nonetheless reflects a change to the original design, appearing to have been installed following the closure of the main entrance to create a coat room for the students.
- In 1922, an additional classroom was added, and the schoolyard was enlarged. In 1939, a new classroom, teacher’s room, assembly hall, and kitchen were built. Six rooms were added in 1947.
- In 1967, a double kindergarten room was added. The gymnasium, kitchen and front entranceway were opened in April of 1983.
- The initial expansion follows the architectural style, materials, and roof profile of the 1872 portion of the building; though raised to include a basement, and with increased window openings for ventilation. The central window of the 1872 primary façade shows alteration from the sill to the ground, indicating that this was the likely entrance, per mid-19<sup>th</sup> century style guides for rural schools. This was later filled in, and an entrance added to the west side of the 1872 building.



- The addition to the east is a single-storey building with buff brick cladding, masonry sills and lintels, and large windows across all sides of the elevation for natural light and ventilation.



**Image 1: Primary Façade (south elevation) of the 1872 one-room schoolhouse. (Image taken on: June 28, 2024)**



**Image 2: Primary Façade (south elevation) and east elevation of the 1872 one-room schoolhouse.**

(Image taken on: June 28, 2024)



**Image 3a & 3b: Detail, jerkinhead roof profile of the primary façade (south elevation) of the 1872 one-room schoolhouse, and a detail of the date marker reading “S.S. No. 8. 1872”.**

(Image taken on: June 28, 2024)



**Image 4: Cupola / Bellcote of the 1872 one-room schoolhouse. The cupola is rectilinear in form, with a pyramidal/hipped roof and wooden louvers on the four sides. Note that the weathervane is a replica of the original. The original weathervane and bell have been relocated for display at Crossroads Public School in Virgil.**

(Image taken on: June 28, 2024)



**Image 5: East elevation of the 1872 one-room schoolhouse. Note that the brick chimney, and building to the rear are part of the later additions to expand the schoolhouse. A similar portal is extant on the west addition, creating entrances to separate girls and boys. These entrances replaced the central door on the south elevation.**

**(Image taken on: June 28, 2024)**



**Image 6: West elevation of the 1872 one-room schoolhouse. Note that the brick chimney, and building to the rear are part of the later additions to expand the schoolhouse. A similar portal is extant on the east addition, creating entrances to separate girls and boys. These entrances replaced the central door on the south elevation.**

**(Image taken on: June 28, 2024)**



**Image 7: West elevation of the 1872 one-room schoolhouse, showing the rectilinear addition that expanded across the rear of the 1872 building. The 20<sup>th</sup> century addition has basement windows, and models the style of its opening and roof profile, albeit on a larger scale, from the 1872 design. (Image taken on: June 28, 2024)**



**Image 8: West and north elevation of the first phases of expansion of Virgil Public School. The 20<sup>th</sup> century addition has basement windows, and models the style of its opening and roof profile, albeit on a larger scale, from the 1872 design. In the distance, a subsequent addition clad in buff brick is visible. The land surrounding the building is paved. (Image taken on: June 28, 2024)**



**Image 9: East elevation of the 1872 one-room schoolhouse, showing the rectilinear addition that expanded across the rear of the 1872 building. The 20<sup>th</sup> century addition has basement windows, and models the style of its opening and roof profile, albeit on a larger scale, from the 1872 design. (Image taken on: June 28, 2024)**



**Image 10: Rear schoolyard showing the extensive later additions to Virgil Public School, clad in buff brick and projecting north into the lot. (Image Source: Google Streetview, 2012)**



**Image 11: Rear schoolyard showing the extensive later additions to Virgil Public School, clad in buff brick and projecting north into the lot, as well as the depth of the lot with a mix of hard and soft landscaping. A chain link fence marks the perimeter of the schoolyard, and trees remain along the west perimeter, similar to the vegetative barrier that would have originally surrounded the school in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.**

**(Image Source: Google Streetview, 2012)**



**Image 12: Primary façade (south elevation) of the eastward expansion to Virgil Public School. The westernmost portion of this building projects forward, and includes a carved stone lintel over the portal that reads ‘Girls’, replacing an earlier entrance with the same functionality. Horizontal stone lintels and stringcourses emphasize the rectilinearity of the buff brick clad building. This image also illustrates the narrow depth of the setback from the sidewalk and street that was characteristic of the relationship between the original 1872 schoolhouse situated close to the public realm.**

**(Image Source: Google Streetview, 2021)**



**Image 13: East elevation illustrating the infill between earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century buff brick clad expansions, with a taller gymnasium connecting the south and north arms of the school. This image also illustrates the expansion of the schoolyard to the east of the school building into the later 20<sup>th</sup> century. A sidewalk extends along the south perimeter of the lot, and the schoolyard is demarcated by a chain link fence.**

**(Image Source: Google Streetview, 2021)**



**Image 14: View into the bellcote located on the roof of the original 1872 school building. This bell has been relocated and remains on display at Crossroads Public School.**

**(Image Date: February 24, 2011)**

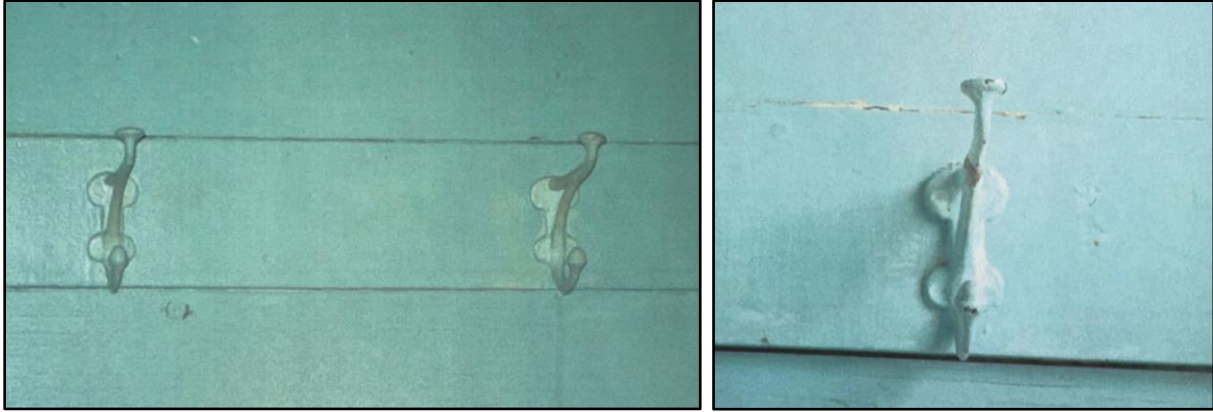


**Image 15: Interior ceiling of the 1872 one-room schoolhouse, showing moulded tin ceiling tiles and crown moulding, later obscured under a drop-ceiling.  
(Image Date: February 24, 2011)**



**Image 16: Original wainscoting located on the interior of the 1872 one-room schoolhouse created with vertical wood planks that were later painted white. A series of evenly placed brackets creates a corbel table and ledge under the chalkboard to hold chalk, erasers, and other supplies.  
(Image Date: February 24, 2011)**





**Image 17a & 17b: Iron coat hooks that were studied by members of the MHC in 2011 and deemed to be original in date to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century schoolhouse. (Image Date: February 24, 2011)**

### 3.3.2 History

Virgil Public School is a one-room rural schoolhouse dating to 1872, though the Subject Property was identified for school use on early 19<sup>th</sup> century maps, with records indicating that the first class taught on the site occurred in 1829.

Below is a brief history of the school lot, school building, and the village of Virgil:

Oral history and archaeological evidence indicate that the area now known as the Niagara Region was occupied by Indigenous peoples for 13,000 years.

- Niagara has a rich heritage and legacy of Indigenous life, culture, and community.
- These lands, which have been inhabited by Indigenous peoples for millennia, have witnessed in more recent times the presence of the Neutral Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation of the Anishinaabek people.
- In addition, many other First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people from across North America (Turtle Island) live and work in Niagara today.
- The land of the Niagara River corridor was referenced in treaties made between the Crown and First Nations in the 18th century.

The first survey of Niagara Township was undertaken in 1784 and laid out the township into 100-acre lots.

- European settlers, mostly United Empire Loyalist, occupied the area soon after.
- The first gristmill to be built on Four Mile Creek was “Palatine Hill”, built by Alexander Servos and was completed in 1785. Peter and James Secord built another mill in St. David’s.
- By 1791, Colonel Butler reported to the Government of Quebec that four or five families had already settled in the Township and some had built saw and grist mills along the banks of the Four Mile Creek.

The hamlet that developed at the junction of Four Mile Creek and Black Swamp Road, began to take on importance because farmers travelled back and forth between the mills along the Creek Road.

- The early Four Mile Creek Road, which followed the curves and turns of the creek, was likely an Indigenous Trail that predated British surveys.
- The Black Swamp Road, as it was originally known, cuts diagonally across the northern portion of the Township leading to the old Town of Niagara.
- In 1851, Black Swamp Road was stoned, and the improvements paid by tolls at tollgates established at various points including at Lawrenceville (Virgil).
- The Crossroads hamlet has been known by at least four different names over its history. It was originally known as “Four Mile Creek” due to its location on the east bank of the creek.
- An 1814 map of the area identifies the hamlet simply as “Cross Roads.”
- In 1844, the name was changed to “Lawrenceville” after George Lawrence who was granted land nearby and on whose land the hamlet development in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

- Finally, in 1862, when a post office was established there, it became known as “Virgil”. The suggestion is that some government official with a love of the classics chose the name, and that the same official likely named the nearby hamlet Homer.

Around this time, in 1829, the first teacher, John Oakley, arrived to teach at the day school, while development of the hamlet began in earnest in the 1840’s.

- In 1840, Lawrence helped establish the Methodist Meeting House, located on Black Swamp Road, and in 1842 sold the land on which it was built to the Trustees of the Methodist Church for £100 pounds.
- It is likely that Lawrence similarly provided the lot on which to build a school.
- While the church is no longer standing, its cemetery, including Lawrence’s grave, remains on Creek Road next to Virgil Public School.
- In 1844, a few years before George died, the name of the hamlet was changed to Lawrenceville.
  - Around this time, George Lawrence transferred his substantial landholdings to his son Benjamin Lawrence by two separate transactions. In 1839, George gifted the eastern 161 acres, which included the existing school and future school lands, to his son Benjamin (Inst # 2181).
- In 1845, he sold his remaining 162-acre tract to his son Benjamin (#2179). This 1845 deed makes specific reference to a schoolhouse located where Virgil Public School still stands.
- In July 1853, Benjamin Lawrence sold the eastern tract to Lawrence William Mercer (surname not legible), an esquire from the Town of Niagara (Inst #4475). Almost immediately he resold the land to Percy Hill (Inst #5108), who retained ownership of the extensive land holdings for the next twenty-five years.
- The western tract of Lawrence land was sold to Gage Miller (shown on 1876 Historical Atlas), and eventually, in 1910, become subdivided by the Land & Fruit Company.
- According to the 1865 Lincoln and Welland Directory, the Village of Virgil had a population of about 50 inhabitants and in addition to a small post office, contained one store, a hotel, “a common school with an average attendance of 35 pupils; George Elliot the teacher” and three churches (Anglican, Wesleyan Methodist and Baptist).
- Its occupant trades included blacksmiths, shoemaker, wagon-maker, and cabinet-maker, broom maker. In addition, the village comprised two gristmills situated within a mile of the place.
- In 1874, Percy Hill, a Major General in Her Majesty’s Army, then serving in India, sold a one-half acre of land to the Public School Trustees of School Section No. 8 for \$40.00.
- The date stone on the present schoolhouse was laid in 1872.
- In 1878 Hill’s landholdings, which straddled the Swamp Road (Niagara Stone Road), were surveyed, into four discrete parcels, and the entire tract was sold to The Reverend William Servos Ball, a Presbyterian clergyman from the Town of Guelph for \$7,433.35.
- In 1885 the Reverend Ball sold the 7.4-acre triangular parcel, bounded by Swamp Road (Niagara Stone Road), Four Mile Creek Road and Field Road, less

- the school and church lots, to Joseph Walker, a local wagon maker for \$620.00
- Walker immediately sold the parcel to Robert Nelson Niven for \$950.00.
- Additional property purchased by the School Section Trustees for school expansions were purchased from the Niven family, a local farming family with extensive land holdings in the area.
- In 1922 Robert Niven sold approximately 500 feet fronting on the Creek Road to the Public School Board for Section No. 8.
- Around the same time, in 1922 Robert Niven and his wife Margery sold a portion of the 7-acre triangle to their daughter Claribel Brooker (married to Thomas Theodore Brooker, another prominent local family). After Robert Niven's death, Claribel and her husband acquired the remainder of the triangle.
- The remaining two parcels of the school lands were purchased from the Brookers by Deeds registered in 1943 and 1947.
- Expansion of the school buildings and property reflects the needs of the growing community. At the end of the First World War, Virgil received an influx of German Mennonites from south Russia, who added a new vitality to the community and boosted the population.
- Later in 1937, Russian and Ukrainian Baptists from Saskatchewan, as well as Mennonites from Europe, followed. Many hallmark businesses and institutions of Virgil were established in the late 1930's including Lincoln Interiors, established by Henry Wiens, the Niagara Credit Union, and Fruit Co-op, at the junction of Niagara Stone Road and Field Road.
- Another wave of Mennonite immigrants arrived after the Second World War, boosting the local population to 1,400.
- The influx of Mennonites continued throughout the 1950's and 60's, some arriving from Manitoba and the west, while others arrived by way of Paraguay and other South American countries.
- The population growth filled the existing Virgil school to capacity.
- In 1956, a second school, Colonel John Butler Public School, was opened only a kilometre away, to serve the growing rural community.
- By 1958, Butler school also had to be expanded by adding two classrooms.
- Sources indicate that approximately 60% of the permanent residents of the Virgil area are Mennonites. Today there are four Mennonite churches in the immediate Virgil area.
- Virgil continues to be a busy service centre for the predominantly agricultural community, which specializes in tender fruit and vineyards. The labour-intensive farming practices have created an additional seasonal community of offshore migrant workers, from Jamaica, Mexico and Central America.

The development of Virgil Public School also reflects the development of government-run school policy.

- In Upper Canada formal government involvement in primary-level education began with the passage of the Common School Act in 1816 (Johnson 1983:2).
- This legislation allowed groups of residents to organize to establish a school under the control of three trustees, who were responsible for school management; however, the central authority provided only a subsidy for a teacher's salary, and did not provide funding for school building or maintenance.

- Rural schools were largely based on the extent that a trustee and parents controlled a choice bit of property that could be made available to the school that could be built within walking distance of their homes.
- Residents were expected to raise sufficient funds to build a school and pay the bulk of teacher's salaries.
- As a result, rural schools were something that involved the whole community. The community built the school, maintained it, hired its teachers, and supplied the wood for the stove. In many communities the schoolhouse also served community activities including community and political meetings, community dances on Saturday nights and worship on Sundays.
- Early schoolhouses were generally simple one-room schoolhouses that followed the same general design as the simplest pioneer homes, made of rough-hewn logs, with a low ceiling and a fireplace prominently placed.
- The idea of a state-run education got underway in Canada West during the 1840s.
- In 1844, the Reverend Egerton Ryerson (1844-1876), an advocate of compulsory primary-level education was appointed Ontario's first Chief Superintendent of Education (1844-1876). Ryerson and his assistant, J. George Hodgins, are considered to be the architects of Ontario's school and educational system, though it should be noted that contemporary research has shed light on Ryerson's role in the Residential School system and its ongoing traumatic legacy for Indigenous peoples in Canada today.
- Under Ryerson, and with the passing of the School Act in 1850, a central educational bureaucracy was established, and schools became funded by property taxes.
- By 1871, minimum standards for the quality of school buildings and equipment were established.
- In Ontario school sections were laid out so the furthest farm would be about 2 to 4 miles from school, a section generally being about three concessions wide and about nine lots deep.

### **3.3.2.1 Analysis of Maps**

The Subject Property is located on Lot 113 just east of the intersection of what is now known as Four Mile Creek Road and Niagara Stone Road. Though difficult to read due to the quality of the record available, Map 3, dating to 1814, shows the earliest indication of a settlement located at the centre of what is currently known as Virgil, then identified simply as 'Cross Roads' where 'Black Swamp Road' (later Swamp Road, then Niagara Stone Road) intersected with Four Mile Creek. For its location on the east bank of Four Mile Creek, the hamlet became known simply as Four Mile Creek before its name changed to Lawrenceville in 1844, then to Virgil in 1862.

Maps 4 and 5 indicate that, between 1787 (surveyed by Philip Fry) and 1811 (produced by W.C. Ridout, Lot 113 does not indicate a landowner.

- Original Crown Patents for the Virgil area, granted in the 1790's, were among the earliest land grants. Bernard Frey, a captain in Butler's Rangers, received 300

- acres around the Four Mile Creek at the Crossroads.
- Frey's Patents for Lots 112 and 119 are recorded as being originally given on January 1, 1794. These patents were confirmed in October 1804, when Frey received an additional Patent to Lot 113.
  - Crown Patents of adjacent Lots included Lot 114 (north of Virgil) granted to Barnabas Cain on December 1, 1798, and Lot 115 (north of Virgil on the East & West Line) to George Lawrence, a former Butler's Ranger, on March 26, 1798.
  - Bernard Frey was captain of a regimental company in Butler's Ranger's.
    - His family had emigrated from Zurich, Switzerland to the colony in New York in 1689 and settled in the Mohawk Valley.
    - Bernard was the youngest of three brothers who, during the Revolutionary War, went to Canada to join the British. He first served with the Indian Department and was present at the Battle of Oriskany (in New York) in 1777. He was commissioned Captain in Butler's Rangers in 1780.
    - At the end of the war, Frey settled in Upper Canada, having received a grant of 3,000 acres near Whitby. He also received 300 acres in Niagara Township near the Four Mile Creek crossroads. Frey died in 1814 at Newark (Niagara-on-the-Lake), killed by an American cannonball.
    - Frey had only one daughter, Margaret, who married John C. Ball. After her father's death ownership of Niagara Township Lot 119 vested in Margaret and her husband, land which they later sold to William Servos. Mrs. Ball, a widow, was still living at the age of 86 years, at Thorold, as late as 1879.
    - George Lawrence acquired Frey's remaining Lots.
    - With Frey's Lots 112 and 113 added to own Lots 114 and 115, Lawrence substantially increased his holdings to 400 acres, which extended from Line 2 north to East & West Line.
  - The Servos, Ball and Lawrence families were the prominent landowners, and are considered to be responsible for the development of the Four Mile Creek area. George Lawrence (1757-1848), a Methodist, and church leader, is considered to have been particularly instrumental in the development of the crossroads hamlet.
  - The earliest recorded sale in the hamlet was in 1827, when Lawrence sold a half-acre parcel to a local blacksmith, Gilbert Anderson.

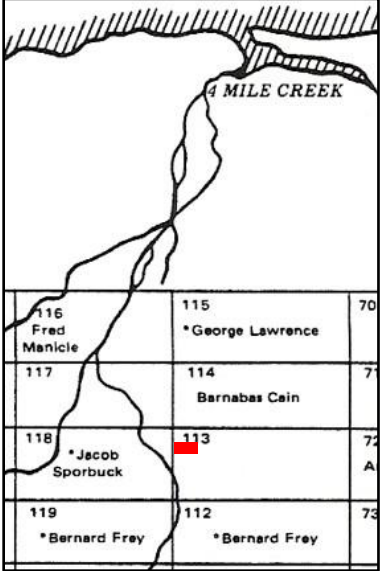
Map 6, dating to 1858, now identifying 'Cross Roads' as 'Lawrenceville' shows the establishment of a road allowance for what would become Line 1 between lots 113 and 114. On this road, a triangular parcel is identified within Lot 113, following Four Mile Creek, met by a short road identified as 'Traveller Road'. A small rectangular parcel is eked out where Traveller Road meets the road parallel to the Creek, and is identified as a 'School Lot.' Seen on Map 7, this subdivided parcel of lot 113 is marked on Tremaine's County Atlas of 1862. The new hamlet name of Virgil is identified prominently on this intersection in Map 8, which illustrates a detail from the Illustrated Atlas of 1876. More detail is provided on Map 9, with dimensions for this 'School Lot' within lot 113 in a sketched parcel map of Lots 113, 114, and 115 dating to 1878. Map 10 shows the core of the hamlet of Virgil as it appeared in 1905, at which time the Virgil Public School was still functioning as a one-room schoolhouse. The small hamlet grew with suburban sprawl along Four Mile Creek Road, north, west, and east of the Subject Property, with commercial development along Niagara Stone Road. Map 11, illustrates

a Plan of Subdivision identified as the Penner Plan, dating to 1953, shows this population growth north of Virgil Public School, necessitating the series of alterations and expansions that occurred over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the absence of archival images of Virgil Public School, aerial photographs illustrated in Maps 12 (1934), 13 (1954), 14 (1965), and 15 (2000), offer insights into the additions made to the school over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with alterations and additions made during 1922, 1939, 1947, 1967, and 1983.

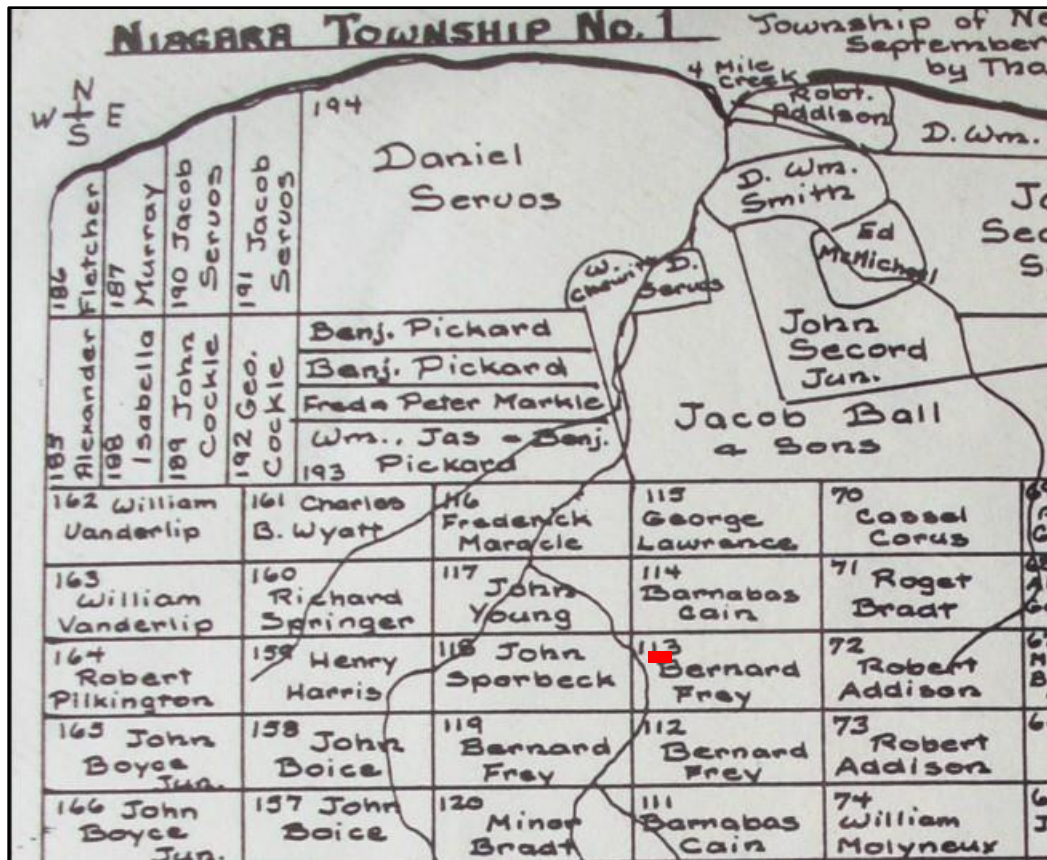


**Map 4: Detail from a survey dating to 1814, identifying the intersection of Swamp Road and Four Mile Creek as 'Cross Roads'. The approximate location of the Subject Property is identified with a red square.  
(Source: Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum)**

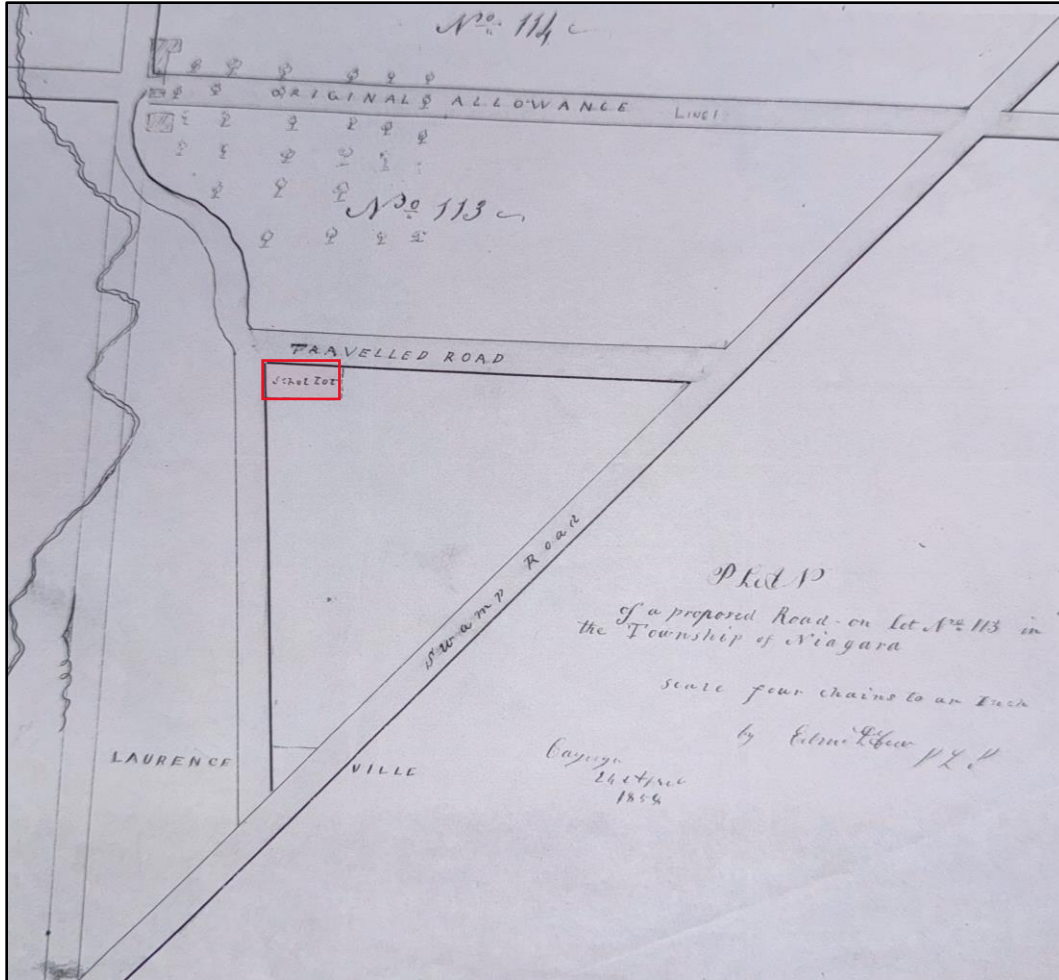


**Map 4: Lot 113, on which Virgil Public School was later constructed, identified on a Map dating to 1787, surveyed by Philip Fry. The approximate location of the Subject Property is identified with a red square.  
(Source: Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum)**

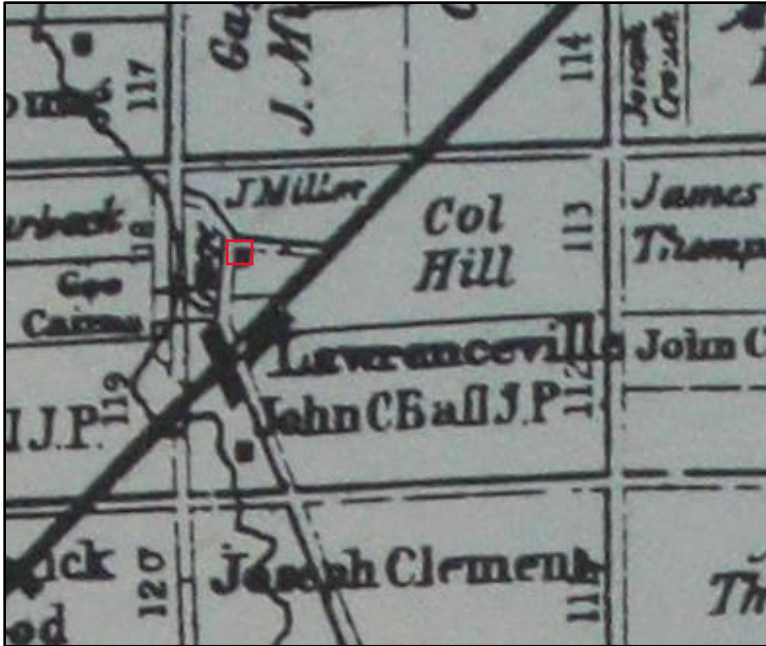




Map 5: Lot 113, on which Virgil Public School was later constructed, identified on a Map dating to 1811, surveyed prepared by W.C. Ridout. The approximate location of the Subject Property is identified with a red square. (Source: Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum)

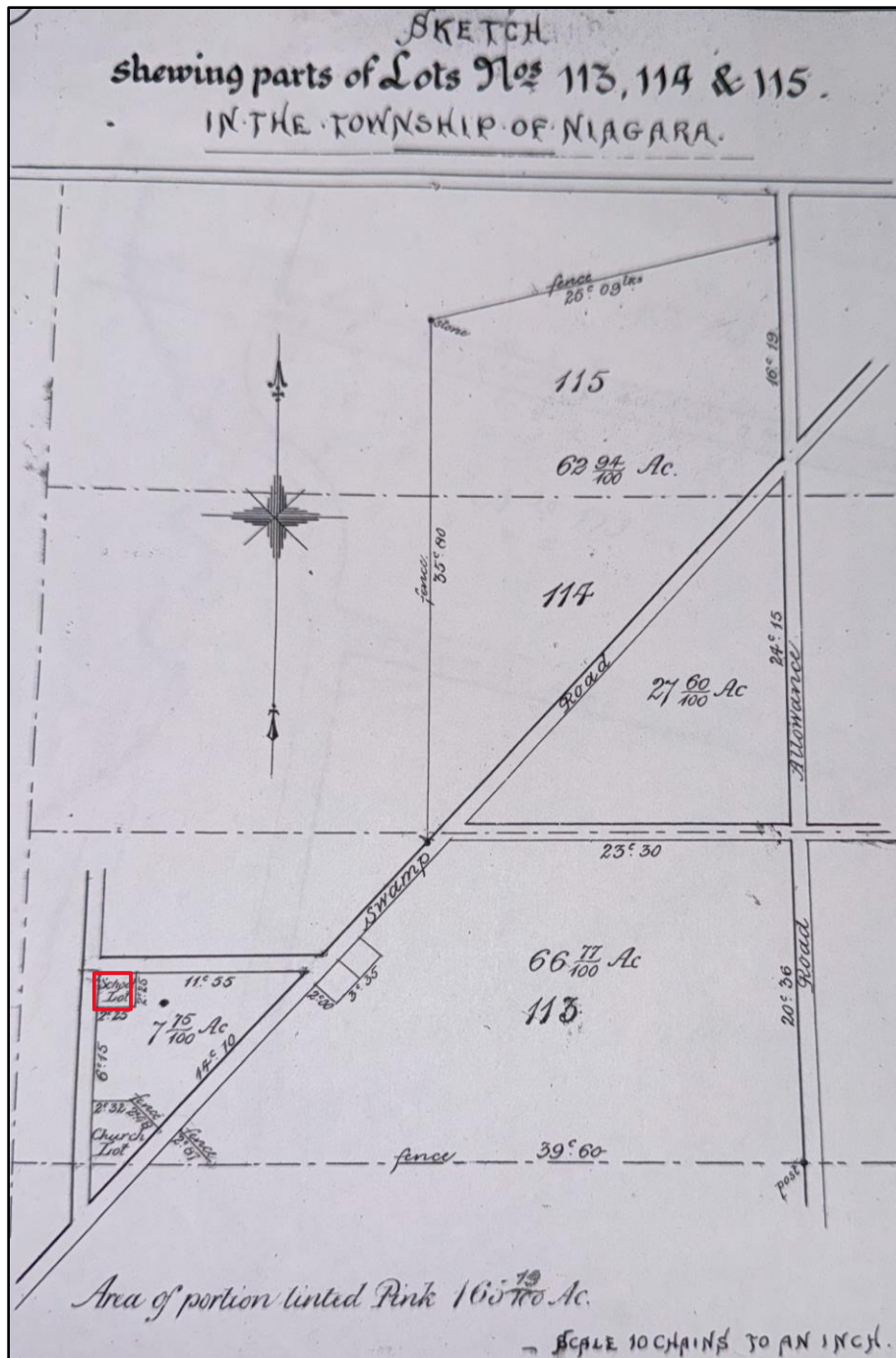


**Map 6: Lot 113 and the delineation of a small parcel for a schoolhouse, on which Virgil Public School was constructed, identified on a Map dating to 1858. On this Map, the name 'Cross Roads' has been updated to read 'Lawrence Ville'. The approximate location of the Subject Property is identified with a red outline. (Source: Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum)**

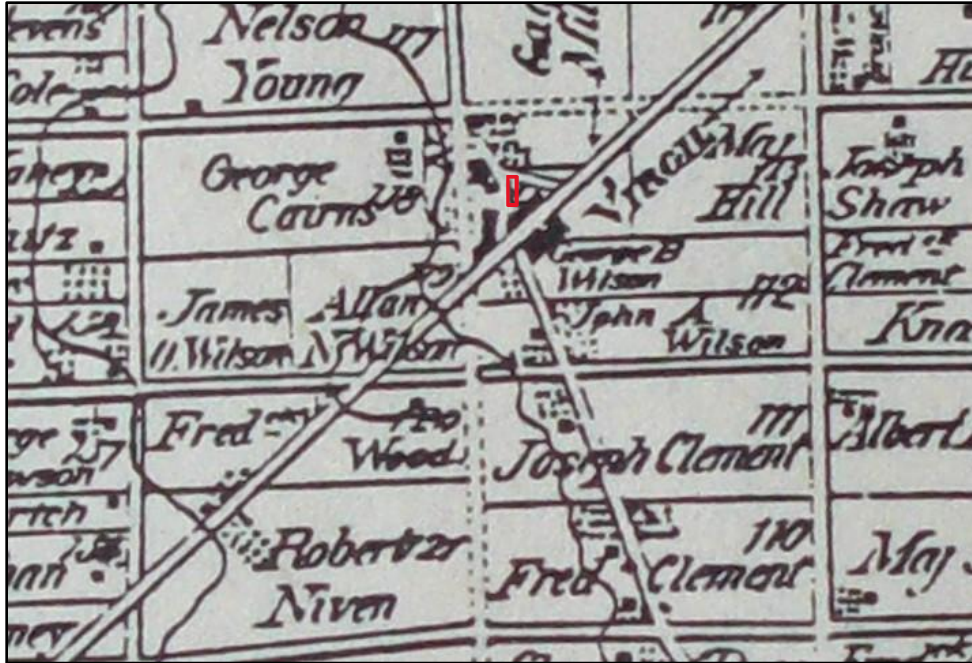


Map 7:

Lot 113 and the delineation of a small parcel for a schoolhouse, on which Virgil Public School was constructed, is identified on Tremain's County Atlas of 1862. The approximate location of the Subject Property is identified with a red outline. (Source: Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum)



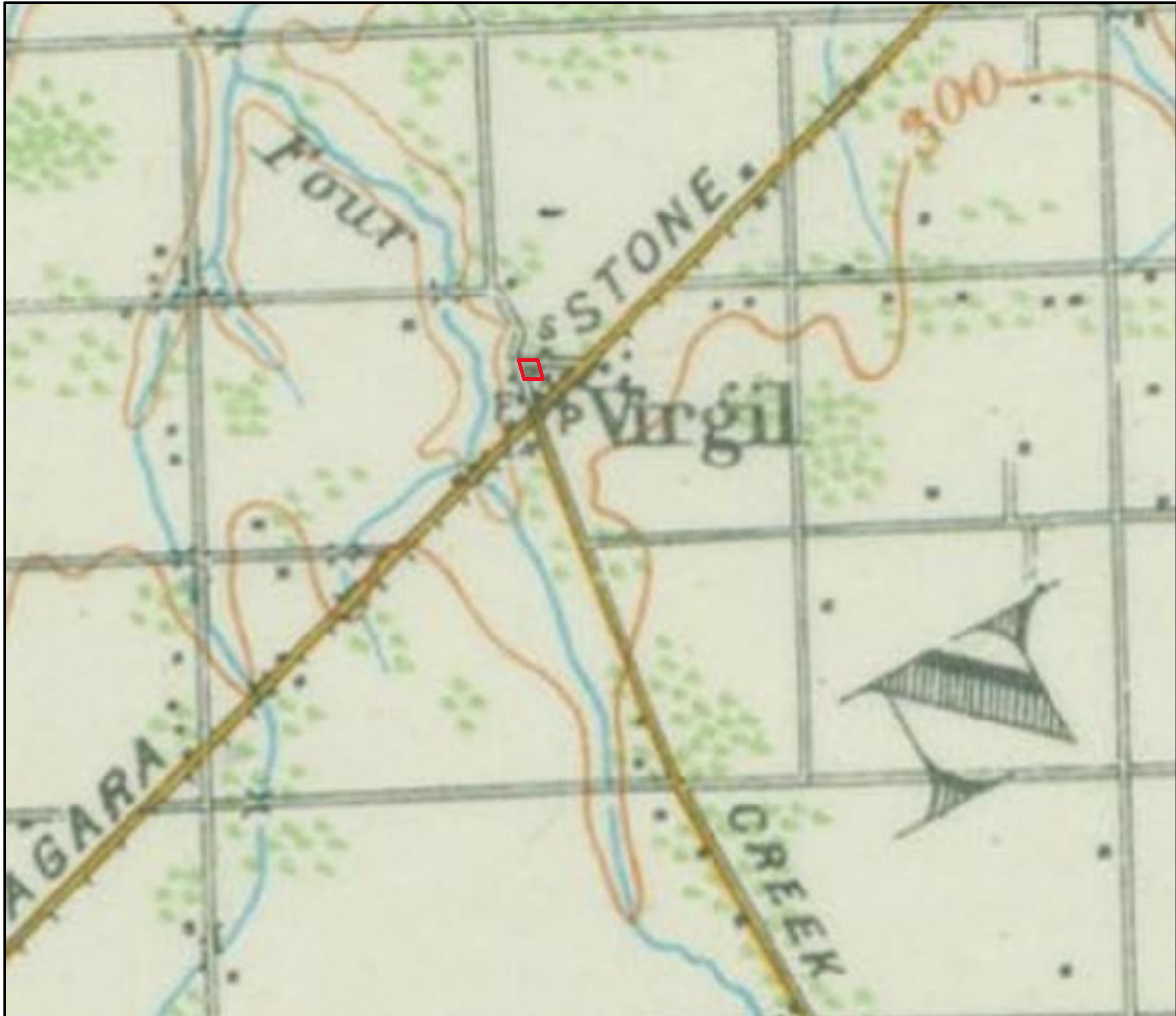
**Map 8:**  
 Lot 113 and the delineation of a small parcel for a schoolhouse, on which Virgil Public School was constructed, identified on a Map from 1878, including dimensions. The approximate location of the Subject Property is identified with a red outline.  
 (Source: Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum)



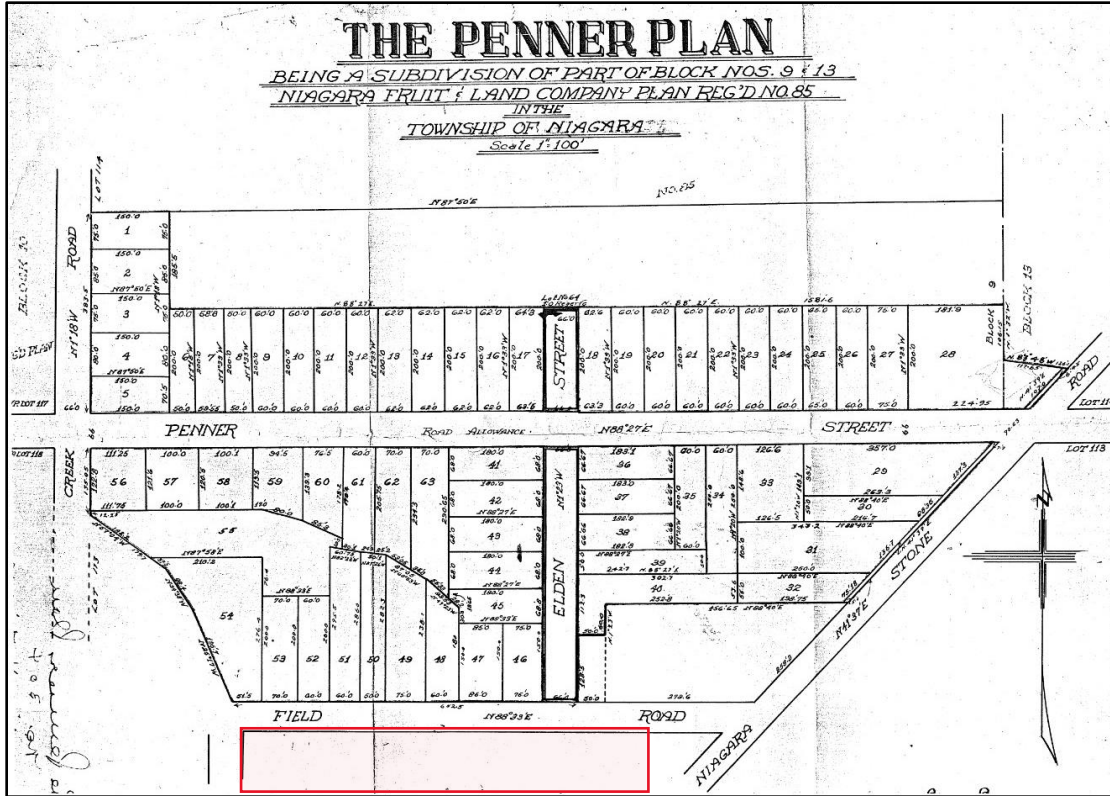
Map 9:

Lot 113 and the delineation of a small parcel for a schoolhouse, on which Virgil Public School was constructed, identified on a Map from the Illustrated Atlas of 1876. On this Map, the name 'Lawrence Ville' has been updated to read prominently as 'Virgil'. The approximate location of the Subject Property is identified with a red outline.

(Source: Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum)



**Map 10:**  
Lot 113 and the delineation of a small parcel for a schoolhouse, on which Virgil Public School was constructed, identified on a Map from dating to 1905. The approximate location of the Subject Property is identified with a red outline. (Source: Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum)



**Map 11:**  
 Plan of Subdivision, identified as the Penner Plan from 1953, shows a plan of subdivision on Lot 113 north of the triangular parcel on which Virgil Public School was constructed. The approximate location of the Subject Property is identified with a red outline.  
 (Source: Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum)



**Map 12:**  
Aerial image dating to 1934, showing Lot 113 and the triangular parcel therein, on which Virgil Public School was constructed, showing the first additions made to the building in 1922. Here, the school has a smaller footprint on a smaller, tree-lined parcel. The approximate location of the Subject Property is identified with a red outline.  
(Source: Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake)





**Map 13:**  
**Aerial image dating to 1954, showing Lot 113 and the triangular parcel therein, on which Virgil Public School was constructed, showing the first additions made to the building in 1922 and 1939. The approximate location of the Subject Property is identified with a red outline.**  
**(Source: Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake)**



**Map 14:**

**Aerial image dating to 1965, showing Lot 113 and the triangular parcel therein, on which Virgil Public School was constructed, showing the first additions made to the building in 1922, 1939, and 1947. The approximate location of the Subject Property is identified with a red outline.**

**(Source: Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake)**



**Map 15:**  
**Aerial image dating to 2000, showing Lot 113 and the triangular parcel therein, on which Virgil Public School was constructed, showing existing condition with all additions made to the building (1922, 1939, 1947, 1967, and 1983). (Source: Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake)**

### 3.3.3 Context

- 1665 Four Mile Creek Road is located within the urban area of Virgil.
  - The urban area is characterized by a mix of commercial, recreational, residential, and institutional buildings.
  - The nearby intersection of Four Mile Creek Road and Niagara Stone Road remains the bustling core of Virgil, reflecting the growth that concentrated around these intersecting routes from early colonial settlement in the area.
  - Four Mile Creek is located to the west of the Subject Property.
  - Both the watercourse and thoroughfare have connections to Indigenous peoples in the area, representing long-standing travel routes that were subsequently adapted within the colonial settlement grid that still characterizes the layout of Niagara-on-the-Lake today.
- Located on the southeast corner of Four Mile Creek Road and Field Road, the Subject Property remains situated in triangular parcel identified on maps as early as 1858.
  - Topographically, the parcel is relatively flat, sitting a slightly raised elevation to Four Mile Creek Road.
  - Virgil Public School is surrounded by paved parking and recreational areas, with additional grassed fields to the south and east.
  - A cement sidewalk follows Four Mile Creek Road and Field Road.
  - Plans of subdivision have populated the areas to the north, east, and west of the Subject Property, largely characterized by single-family dwellings with moderate front yard setbacks.
  - To the east, where the parcel is closest to Niagara Stone Road, a strip of commercial structures creates a dense business district at the core of Virgil, evolved to include both freestanding businesses and strip mall commercial complexes.
- Although the Subject Property represents the earliest remnant structure located in Virgil's historic core, a few other properties appear to be connected to the historic character of the area.
  - Among these properties, are also properties listed in the Municipal Heritage Register of Niagara-on-the-Lake. These include:
    - The former Anglican Church located at 1823 Niagara Stone Road, dating to c.1890. Now the Silversmith Brewery, this building is an example of successful adaptive reuse.
    - Located south of the Subject Property and straddling either side of Four Mile Creek Road north of Niagara Stone Road, remnant cemeteries located at Lot 112, Virgil Baptist Burial Grounds (west) and Lot 113, Methodist United Church Cemetery (east).
    - The Meridian Credit Union, located at 1567 Niagara Stone Road, illustrates the evolving 20<sup>th</sup> century landscape of Virgil
- The school has a relatively narrow setback from both Four Mile Creek and Field Roads.
- Pedestrians can access the school from all sides via the paved surrounding lots, but the primary vehicular entrance can be accessed from Field Road.
- The streetscape of Four Mile Creek Road as faced by the primary elevation of

the original 1872 Virgil Public School can be described as tree-lined and single-family dwelling residential, however, this character changes as the eastern addition and schoolyard beyond create an open space leading to the intersection with Niagara Stone Road.

- The structures are comprised of one to two-storey structures.
- Narrow to moderate setbacks to the road.
- Cement sidewalk along the east side of Four Mile Creek Road.

#### 4. EVALUATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE VALUE OR INTEREST (CHVI)

The following section provides an evaluation of the significance of 1 Paxton Lane based on the O. Reg 9/06 criteria (as amended by 569/22).

**Table 1: Evaluation of CHVI of 1 Paxton Lane**

Description	✓	Value
<p>The property has design value or physical value because it is a rare, unique, representative, or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method</p>	<p>✓</p>	<p>1665 Four Mile Creek Road represents one of the oldest, both in extant fabric and in use, single-room schoolhouses in Ontario, as many were replaced to meet growing community needs. Although Virgil Public School grew with several extensions added over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its 19<sup>th</sup> century single-room form is still visible with the stone-walled building jutting prominently forward to meet Four Mile Creek Road. Though vernacular in form, Virgil Public School is representative of one-room schoolhouse designs that were circulated in the 1860s, and is considered to be an evolved and functional form of the rural one-room schoolhouse style due to its large windows. The 1872 building uniquely uses a jerkinhead roof profile, cropping the front gable to afford better views of its bellcote.</p>
<p>The property has design value or physical value because it displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic value</p>		<p>Although the 1872 core of the Virgil Public School building represents an evolved design in terms of rural one-room schoolhouses due to its large windows, and it remains a highly vernacular and functional institutional building. As such, it displays neither a high degree of craftsmanship nor significant artistic value.</p> <p>It is unique in its use of parged stone to create a masonry core, with roughcast stucco showcasing incised lines to give the appearance of ashlar, the building itself is humble in materiality.</p> <p>At the time of this designation report, the interior of the residence was not investigated, but it is believed that moulded tin roof tiles, coat hooks, and wainscoting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century remain in situ.</p>

Description	✓	Value
The property has design value or physical value because it displays a high degree of technical or scientific achievement		1665 Four Mile Creek Road does not display a high degree of technical or scientific achievement.
The property has historical value or associative value because it has direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization, or institution that is significant to a community	✓	1665 Four Mile Creek Road has historical and/or associative value as being actively used for its original function from the time of the building's construction in 1872 to its closure in 2011. It is in close proximity to the intersection of Four Mile Creek Road and Niagara Stone Road, which have comprised the crossroads of the hamlet of Virgil since its founding. Prior to the construction of the building in 1872, it is believed that Virgil Public School represents a permanent version of an earlier schoolhouse, with archival references to educational uses on the site since 1829.
The property has historical value or associative value because it yields or has the potential to yield information that contributes to the understanding of a community or culture	✓	1665 Four Mile Creek yields information that contributes to the understanding of the hamlet of Virgil and its Mennonite community core as established in the late 18 <sup>th</sup> and 19 <sup>th</sup> centuries.  Research into the 1872 schoolhouse has yielded that is connected to the Loyalist settler families that established the hamlet of Virgil and represents the value of education and community at the core and crossroads of the area from the early 18 <sup>th</sup> century onward.
The property has historical value or associative value because it demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, builder, artist, designer or theorist who is significant to a community		1665 Four Mile Creek Road does not reflect the work or ideas of an architect or a builder; although, the 1872 stone building is a representative example of the rural one-room schoolhouses as illustrated in pattern-books from the mid-19 <sup>th</sup> century onward. Research into the built form of the Subject Property has not yielded any connections to a personality significant to a community.
The property has contextual value because it is important in defining, maintaining, or supporting the character of an area	✓	1665 Four Mile Creek Road has contextual value because it is important in connecting the historical crossroads that still mark the centre of Virgil's urban core to its development in the early 19 <sup>th</sup> century onward. As the earliest stone building and

Description	✓	Value
		<p>one of few remnant 19<sup>th</sup> century structures located within Virgil, the Subject Property maintains a significant presence that transitions the commercial area of Niagara Stone Road to the surrounding suburban tracts and historically significant path of Four Mile Creek. As such, Virgil Public School acts as a character supporting resource for Virgil.</p>
<p>The property has contextual value because it is physically, functionally, visually, or historically linked to its surroundings</p>	✓	<p>1665 Four Mile Creek Road has contextual value because it is historically linked to its surroundings. Historically, the routes that became Four Mile Creek Road and Niagara Stone Road were long-established by Indigenous peoples in the area. Following settlement in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the intersection of these routes became the anchor of a hamlet that would later be known as Virgil. Archival textual evidence indicates that a school was located near this intersection as early as 1829, and the school is marked on archival maps as early as 1858. From its construction in 1872 to its closure in 2011, Virgil Public School functioned per its intended institutional and educational use.</p>
<p>The property has contextual value because it is a landmark</p>		<p>Situated in its original location, with open schoolyard surrounding its north and east sides, Virgil Public School was significantly altered and expanded over time. Although it is possible to identify the initial 1872 portion of the building, it is in a highly evolved state with a sprawling built-form footprint and expansive surrounding lot. The relationship between the building and its vastly transformed dense residential and adjacent commercial infill has minimized the contextual value of the property. As such, Virgil Public School is not considered to be a landmark.</p>



## 5. STATEMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE VALUE OR INTEREST

This section provides the statement of CHVI for 1655 Four Mile Creek Road which is located in the Virgil urban area. It consists of a one-storey single-room schoolhouse, constructed in stone, with a jerkinhead roof profile, embedded date stone, and bellcote, with significant additions creating expanded wings to its west, north, and east over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Virgil Public School is an 1872 one storey stone structure with a series of additions constructed between 1922 and 1983. The original building exhibits the classic characteristics of the improved rural Ontario school as exemplified by Egerton Ryerson's educational reforms and the school house designs of J. George Hodgins, Ryerson's assistant.

The property is located on the southeast corner of Four Mile Creek Road and Field Road on an approximately 3.75 acre lot in the Village of Virgil, Town of the Niagara-on-the-Lake.

*Note that the Statement of CHVI and Attributes have been adapted from the designation by-law for 1665 Four Mile Creek Road as proposed in 2011.*

### **Statement of CHVI**

The cultural heritage value of Virgil Public School consists of the fact that there has been a school on this site since at least 1845 and possibly as early as 1829. The property was continuously used as a school site until the spring of 2011, when it was finally closed, a period of 166 years. The original stone building was probably, at the time of its closing, one of the oldest school buildings in continuous use in Ontario. The property and the stone one room school are of long-standing importance to the community and reflect the long history and value of education and public educational institutions to the citizens Virgil and the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Documentary evidence indicates that there has been a school in Virgil since 1829 when the first teacher, John Oakley, arrived to teach at a day school. The 1845 deed in favour of Benjamin Lawrence makes specific reference to a school on the present site of the stone schoolhouse. The 1865 Lincoln and Welland Directory indicated that the Village of Virgil had a population of about 50 inhabitants with a post office, a store a hotel and "a common school with an average attendance of 35 pupils. The teacher at that time was George Elliot.

The site was originally owned by Bernard Frey, a captain in Butler's Rangers, who received Lot 113 in 1804. This lot and others were acquired by George Lawrence, also a Butler's Ranger, from Frey's daughter, Margaret Ball. George Lawrence deeded the land on which the school sits to his son Benjamin in 1839. An 1845 deed in favour of Benjamin Lawrence makes specific reference to a schoolhouse located where Virgil Public School now stands. The land on which the school sits was finally purchased by the Public School Trustees of School Section No. 8 from Major General Percy Hill in 1874, although the school was constructed two years earlier, in 1872, as the date over

the former entrance indicates. The School Board for Section No. 8 purchased additional lands from the Niven family in 1922, 1943 and 1947 in order to expand the existing school building. As the date marker over the original entrance indicates, however, the school was constructed 2 years earlier, in 1872.

In response to the needs of this growing rural community, the school's expansions coincided with an influx of immigrants, particularly Mennonites and Baptists, from Russia, Europe, South America, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. An additional classroom was added in 1922 and the schoolyard was enlarged. In 1939, a new classroom, teacher's room, assembly hall and kitchen were built. Six classrooms were added in 1947. In 1967 a double kindergarten was added and finally the gymnasium, kitchen and front entranceway opened in April of 1983.

The original one room stone school reflects the development of similar schools in Ontario under government run school policy. The idea of state-run education began in Canada West during the 1840's, spearheaded by Egerton Ryerson, an advocate of compulsory primary level education. Ryerson was appointed Ontario's first Chief Superintendent of Education and held the post from 1844 to 1876. In 1850 the School Act was passed creating a central educational bureaucracy and providing funding for schools through property taxes. By 1871, Ryerson and his assistant, J. George Hodgins had established minimum standards for the quality of school buildings and equipment. In 1857 Ryerson and Hodgins published the province's first manual of school design titled *The School House: Its Architecture, External and Internal Arrangements*. The book became a construction manual for school boards. The design and configuration of Virgil Public School reflects the design principles expounded in Hodgins' book making it a significant early example of Ryerson and Hodgins' Ontario school and educational system.

The earliest portion of Virgil Public School is a simple rubble stone structure with a coating of lime rendering incised to resemble ashlar. This type of surface finish was perceived at the time to improve the ascetics of the building and to weatherproof the walls, which were constructed of inferior stone interspersed with large amounts of relatively soft, porous mortar and parging. The school is surmounted by a small louvred wooden cupola with a simple weathervane. Until recently the cupola contained the original school bell. This small bell has since been removed and will be displayed in the entrance foyer of the new Virgil school. A date marker reading "S.S. No.8, 1872" is located above what was once the original entrance. Close examination indicates that this marker is an integral part of the wall, not a separate date stone.

The original entrance facing Four Mile Creek Road was filled in at some point, probably when one of the additions to the school was constructed. Traces of the entrance are still visible under the lime rendering. This entrance led directly into a small anti-chamber which still contains early wainscoting and metal clothing hooks.

As examined in 2011, the main classroom is a large open space. The existing drop ceiling covers the original tin ceiling which was painted white at some point. Wooden

wainscoting, which is still affixed to the classroom walls below the blackboards, appears to be original. It is capped by a projecting moulding or narrow shelf supported by simple brackets.

### **5.1 HERITAGE ATTRIBUTES**

- The exterior form and massing of the original 1872 stone school
- The stone walls with lime roughcast, incised to give the appearance of ashlar
- The wooden cupola bellcote
- The date marker (moulded 1872 'datestone')
- The jerkinhead roof profile
- Remnant 19<sup>th</sup> century tin ceiling in stone one-room schoolhouse
- Remnant 19<sup>th</sup> century wainscoting, shelf, and brackets in stone one-room schoolhouse
- Remnant 19<sup>th</sup> century coat hooks in stone one-room schoolhouse

### **6. CONCLUSION**

O. Reg. 9/06 as amended by 569/22 of the OHA requires that to be designated, a property must meet at least two of the criteria. The property located at 1665 Four Mile Creek Road meets five of the nine criteria for determining CHVI as outlined in O. Reg. 9/06, therefore it is worthy of designation under O. Reg. 9/06 of the Ontario Heritage Act.