

Student Memories of Pat (Nelson) Costain

TH&VS Graduate 1943

Growing up in Timmins was a happy time. Although I was born just before the 1929 depression, the financial hardship did not detract from the good times we had with family and friends.

There were eight children in our family – three boys and 5 girls. Mother was the main provider for most of our lives. She was an excellent dressmaker and midwife who helped the doctor when babies were born at home. Many times she would be called during any hour of the day or night to come to the pregnant mother's house as the baby was due. Off Mother would go and the older children at home would look after the younger ones. I was the oldest of the youngest four and didn't have any of the chores to do. We could be a handful at times and would argue and have spats but we dearly loved one another. If anyone taunted a brother or sister, that was handled by a sibling.

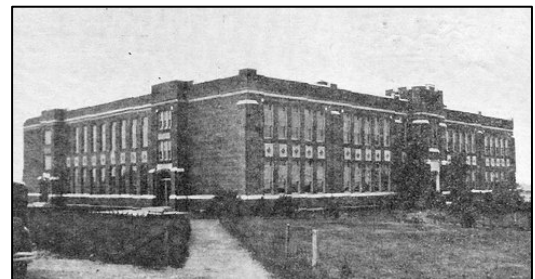


We went to the Mattagami School and there were no snow days as there are today. We trudged through the snow with our slacks and boots on. We would usually walk down the side of the road as they were cleared for the people who had to go to work in the morning. At each end of the sidewalk was a box full of sand. The town workers would take a shovel of sand from the box and with their hand spray sand on the sidewalk so the children would not slip and fall when walking to school.

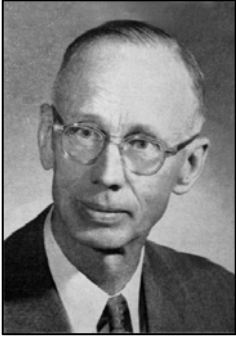
Each school had a skating rink in the playground. Hockey was a big part of its use. Competition was held among the schools and we would faithfully follow our school's team and cheer them on. In the evenings, after supper we would put on our skates and skate to the school for time on the ice. That was our general playtime in winter.

The Mountjoy United Church was an important part of our lives. Reverend Gilmour Smith and his wife Ruth were so devoted to the church's youth. The teenagers had "Young People" to attend every week. It was held in the evening. We met had a short service and then proceeded to play games, put on plays, go on treasure hunts, and just generally had good companionship.

Timmins High and Vocational School was our next step in education. Mr. Alex Rose was the principal at the time. He was so concerned about the welfare of the students. There were many activities available at the school. We had wagon rides in the summer and a horse pulling sleigh in the winter which would take us to the outskirts of town. It was fun throwing snowballs at each other and pushing on another into the snow banks.



World War II was being fought in Europe. Being part of the British Empire, Canadians were feeling very patriotic. Many of the boys from high school who did not go on to college joined the service. The students at the high school, with permission, decided to put on a program in the auditorium to raise money for the servicemen. We charged ten cents per person and it was quite successful.



After graduation from high school in 1943, I took the Special Commercial course that was available, and on completion, was offered the job as secretary at the high school. Mr. Rose (left) was a pleasure to work for. Our work week was five and a half days. There were no sophisticated office machines then. Computers weren't heard of. Everything was done on a manual typewriter. Everything was typed on stencils and run off on a mimeograph machine. These were then placed on a large table in the office for teachers to pick up. During the summer months, Mr. Rose would arrive early on Saturday morning and work on the schedules for the beginning of school in September.

There was always something to do in Timmins. The city was surrounded with lakes and the Mattagami River. There were many playgrounds with activities. We would play volleyball, softball and also do gymnastics at the playgrounds. Third Avenue had four theatres. Going to the movies was a Saturday must for young and old.

The different ethnic groups had their halls (as they were usually called). Bingos, dances, parties, weddings showers, family birthdays and gatherings were held in most of them. I particularly liked to go to the Ukrainian Hall to see the dancers in their colorful dresses, with their arms folded, and marvel at how they would bend their knees and kick their legs out in front of them as you would see in the movies.

When George Costain and I married and had children, church was even more important. My sisters, friends and members of the church joined the Mother's Club. Our children came with us and they had a caretaker to look after them. We did things together with the children. At Mother's Club we made play blocks and painted them red, yellow blue and green. The fathers sawed two-by-fours into half-sized, three quarters sized and regular sized blocks. The children were able to create many large objects with them.

My friends and I spent many happy hours at school and church in Timmins. We still keep in touch by phone. I now live in Bound Brook New Jersey with my family. We are very happy here, but Timmins will always be in my heart. Timmins roots run deep and I enjoy watching my great grandchildren cheer for the local NHL hockey teams. They are also learning to skate and play hockey.