

CULTURAL MOMENT

Two Photographs, Two Interpretations

Photographic Collection, Mount Forest Museum and Archives

In 2013, these two photos were rescued from deep under the stage of the Victoria Cross Public School and brought into the Archives for safe keeping and restoration. The photos were probably stored when the building originally became the High School and forgotten for years. Still in their original frames, but carefully remounted and cleaned, these photographs beautifully illuminate school days of the past and demonstrate the very different aspects of the challenge and fun that volunteers have in interpreting historical photographs.

The larger photo is formal, staged, studio picture of High School Literary Executive in 1925. Much time and effort went into the context of this photograph. The photographer, G.S. LeWarne, was well known in the day. A Literary Executive club obviously held a more prominent place in a 1925 high school than today. We know when and why the picture was taken and who is in the photograph. The names and positions are carefully recorded. McEachern, Johnston, Corley and Ellis are all family names that still resound in Mount Forest today. Using archival skills of observation, reflection and questioning, the Archives can quite accurately capture a moment in our past through this elegant gathering of well-dressed, serious-minded students.

And yet, the smaller photograph, with no historical details, grabs even more of our attention. The informal more spontaneous gathering of students and possibly some teachers on the steps outside the high school (possibly the 'Girls Entrance') creates a very different picture. School books dropped on the steps suggest that they assembled quickly, between classes perhaps, but we may never find out why. What is their relationship to each other? Having no answers forces the historian to ask different questions. The shirt collars, longer skirts and hair styles date this photo earlier than the other, but it is hard to be exact. There are many physical clues to start the investigation, but it is what is missing that makes the story so compelling.

The Mount Forest Museum & Archives

102 Main St. N. Mount Forest

Open Wednesdays from 1pm – 5pm