

## Stories from The Beach and East Toronto Historical Society

### Local History Index

The Local History Index takes documents and sources of information and indexes the subjects and keywords found within them. It is not a story, or history, itself--it points to people, events and places that make up the history of The Beach and East Toronto. When first created, at a time when original sources were difficult for most people to access, many Index entries included a summary or sometimes an exact transcription of articles. These are all included in the online Index. Now, because of the work done by many organizations to digitize older material, it is possible to read directly from numerous sources and even see replicas of the originals. We link to many of those where possible.

There are over 2300 Subject headings, with a little more than half being personal names. In creating the online Index, we added birth and death dates for as many individuals as possible. We also added full names for women, including maiden and married names.

Enough statistics and generalities. What kind of information; what stories will you find there?

Let's start with a person, one of the illustrious of this area. One of the very few people and the only woman from East Toronto to merit an entry in the [Dictionary of Canadian Biography](#).

### **Ada Brown Courtice** **Founder of Balmy Beach College** **Educator, Advocate, Activist**

*By Katherine Vice, January 2024*



*Portrait of Mrs. Courtice, painted 1956*

Ada Mary Brown was born in 1860 in Bloomfield, Upper Canada (now Prince Edward County, Ontario), the only daughter of devout Quakers. Her family lived in Pickering, then moved to East Toronto around 1886. She married Reverend Andrew Courtice, a Methodist minister who was for many years the editor of *The Christian Guardian*, a Methodist church publication and one of the first religious publications in Canada. Reverend Courtice did not have good health, and he and his wife made plans to open a school, both because of their moral and progressive educational convictions, but also to help secure the family's finances. That school was The Balmy Beach College and School of Music and Art, which opened in 1907. For most of its existence, the school was located in a building at what is now 109 Beech Avenue. (Note: Beech/Beach Avenue spelling and street numbers changed over time--the location remained the same.)

## **BALMY BEACH COLLEGE AND SCHOOL OF MUSIC AND ART**

A. C. COURTICE, B.A., B.D. } Directors  
MRS. A. M. COURTICE }

A Residence for Girls and a Day School for Boys  
and Girls

**59 Beach Ave., East Toronto**

**Fall Term Opens September 10th, 1908**

The work to be taken up is from Kindergarten  
to High School Entrance. Write for Prospectus.

Source: *Canadian Churchman* 35, no. 32 (August 20, 1908): 542.

Another ad from 1908: "Attention is called to the School's location as very quiet and healthy and free from city distractions."

**EDUCATIONAL.**

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**Balmy Beach College and School of Music & Art**

Residential School for Girls. Day School for Boys and Girls. Attention is called to the School's location as very quiet and healthy and free from city distractions. Pupils prepared for regular and special work. Calendar mailed on application. Mrs. A. M. Courtice, Directress, 50 Beach avenue, East Toronto. Founded in 1907 by Dr. and Mrs. Courtice.

Beach 43. b

Source: *Globe* December 10, 1908:8.

Reverend Courtice did not see out that second school year. He died on November 10, 1908. His death notice in the Toronto World tells us something about the standards and conventions of the time regarding women:

*"Rev. Andrew Cory Courtice, for eight years editor of The Christian Guardian, and one of the best known clergymen of the Methodist Church, died yesterday afternoon at 2 o'clock at his residence in East Toronto. He had been in ill health for a great many years, and on that account retired about six years ago from the editorship of The Guardian .... The deceased is survived by a widow, a daughter of S. K. Brown, deputy reeve of East Toronto; one son, Roy, 14 years, and one daughter, Ada Belle, 17 years. His mother lives at Port Perry."*

Source: *Toronto World* November 11, 1908:1.

No name for his wife. No name for his mother. However, Ada Courtice went on to become far more illustrious than either her husband, the clergyman and editor, or her father, the deputy reeve.

Balmy Beach College operated from 1907 to 1918. Entries in the Index have descriptions of the College's Christmas and year end ceremonies, prizes, receptions, musicales and Courtice's many activities in the community--and she was a powerhouse.

In this ad from 1915, Balmy Beach College is in the company of prestigious schools such as Queen's University and Bishop Strachan. You'll also see that its ad is the only one to list a phone number.

**ST. MARGARET'S COLLEGE**  
TORONTO  
A RESIDENTIAL AND DAY SCHOOL FOR GIRLS  
(Founded by the late George Dickson, M.A., Former Principal of Upper Canada College, and Mrs. Dickson.)  
ACADEMIC COURSE, from Preparatory to University Matriculation and First Year Work.  
MUSIC, ART, DOMESTIC SCIENCE, PHYSICAL EDUCATION — Cricket, Tennis, Basket Ball, Hockey, Swimming Bath.  
**School Reopens September 8th, 1915**  
Write for Prospectus.  
MRS. GEORGE DICKSON, President. MISS J. E. MACDONALD, B.A., Principal.

**HOME STUDY**  
Arts Courses only.  
**SUMMER SCHOOL**  
JULY and AUGUST  
**QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY**  
KINGSTON, ONTARIO  
ARTS EDUCATION MEDICINE  
**SCHOOL OF MINING**  
CHEMICAL MINING MECHANICAL  
CIVIL ENGINEERING ELECTRICAL  
GEO. Y. CHOWN, Registrar

**The Bishop Strachan School**  
College Heights, Toronto.  
FORTY-NINTH YEAR.  
A Church Residential and Day School For Girls.  
New Buildings—Beautiful holiday situation with acres of playing fields.  
Primary Department to Matriculation Course.  
Household Science Music Painting  
President, The Right Revd. The Lord Bishop of Toronto.  
Principal, Miss Walsh, M.A. (Dublin).  
Vice-Principal, Miss Nutton, M.A. (Trinity College).  
Head Mistress, Primary Dept., Miss A. M. V. Roster (Higher Certificate National Froebel Union), late of Cheltenham Ladies' College.  
For Calendar Apply to the Bureau.

**BISHOP METHUNE COLLEGE**  
GENAWA ONTARIO  
Under the Lord Bishop of Toronto.  
**A Residential School for Girls.**  
Young Children also received.  
Preparation for the University, Art Department, including drawing, painting, wood carving and art studios; Toronto Conservatory Degree of A.T.C.M. may be taken at the school. Fine health-facilities, Tennis, basketball, skating, snowshoeing, and other outdoor games.  
For terms and particulars apply to the Sister-in-Charge, or to the Sisters, at 75, John the Divine, Major Street, Toronto.  
**COLLEGE RE-OPENS SEPTEMBER 14.**

**ST. ANDREW'S COLLEGE**  
TORONTO - ONT.  
A Residential and Day School for Boys, Upper and Lower Schools. Boys prepared for Matriculation into the Universities, for entrance into the Royal Military College, and for Business. Calendar containing particulars sent on application.  
Rev. D. Bruce Macdonald, M.A., LL.D., Headmaster.  
Autumn Term Commences Sept. 13th, 1915.

**BALMY BEACH COLLEGE**  
Mrs. A. C. Courtice, Principal  
109 BEACH AVE., TORONTO  
PHONE BEACH 43

Source: *Canadian Courier* 18, no. 5 (July 3, 1915): 19.

Ada Courtice was what we now call an early adopter of new technology. On January 16, 1909, the *Globe* reported that Mrs Ada M. Courtice of Balmy Beach College was the first applicant to the City of Toronto for electric light in the newly annexed East Toronto.

She was forward looking in many things. She promoted and practised educational reform--the use of schools as social centres, better playgrounds and physical education, emphasis on vocational education and ways to prevent boys from smoking and drinking. She believed in cooperation between schools and parents. Balmy Beach College, among other things, sponsored a culture club for parents--the beginning of the establishment of Home and School Associations in Toronto. She was president of the Local Council of Women and a member of the educational committee of Toronto Council. On her motion in 1916, the Toronto Home and School Association was formed. Much more than a social or cultural club, it took aim at educational reform and local government responsibility.

in 1914, Courtice led a deputation of the Local Council of Women and visited the Toronto Jail and Jail Farm, and presented their report to the Board of Control. On October 31 the *Toronto World* publishes her letter, chastizing the paper for misrepresenting the delegation and its report. Her letter reads in part: *"The report of Thursday indicates that our main purpose was to declare the jail clean and healthy. As a matter of fact, the Toronto Jail can never be a proper place for the various purposes for which it is used at present."*

Source: "Jail Can Never Be Clean and Healthy," *Toronto World* October 31, 1914:7.

Ada Courtice first ran for the School Board in 1914--the highest political office a woman could hold at that time. She lost. She ran again and was elected in January 1917 along with another woman, Dr. Caroline Sophia Brown. The first women elected to the Toronto School Board.

Her time on the School Board was definitely a challenge to the old male guard. She worked to add French, agriculture, household science, and manual training to the curriculum. She advocated for physical changes to schools, with an emphasis on more play and athletics. She pushed for special educational facilities for slow learners and the handicapped. In 1917 she challenged the School Board chairman when he defended a principal who had allegedly kissed a female student . #MeToo in 1917.

Influenced by her Quaker heritage, Courtice was a pacifist, and opposed conscription during World War I. As a school trustee, she championed a teacher who was harassed due to her German parentage. She wrote to the papers, explaining her opposition to a

Board of Education resolution that all school boys should salute returning soldiers. It seems that government bodies practised virtue signaling at the expense of real change a century ago too.

**Mrs. Courtice Opposed Salutes.**

Editor World: To say that "the resolution to make all boys of school age salute all returned soldiers was passed unanimously at the last meeting of the board" was a mistake. At least I am very sure that I neither spoke for it nor did I vote for it, but rather voted against it and said: "While the intention was no doubt to implant a spirit of respect in the minds of children, I feared that such a means would defeat the very purpose that was sought, and that anyway it could not be enforced."

One may inspire reverence, but it cannot be compelled. The school board would have a beautiful time trying to enforce such a regulation, and the returned men would wish they had never returned. One has visions of distracted principals of schools, pupils and parents, an enlarged police force, and another juvenile court—in short a general strike against Prussian idolatry. Returned men have had their full share of saluting to do already, and one would not be surprised if they are hoping that such a regulation as proposed by the board of education will never be enforced. And it never can be enforced either.

Ada Courtice.

Source: *Toronto World* July 12, 1918:6.

In 1919, at a meeting of the Toronto Home and School Council, Courtice proposed a provincial body, which eventually became the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations. A year later she resigned as President of the Toronto Home and School Council to become secretary for the Federation, serving as the only Canadian delegate to the American Home and School Conference in October 1920. She lost her School Board seat in 1921 in a "wave of reaction" and afterwards focused her energy on promoting local home and school associations. There were over 270 chapters by the time of her death in 1923.

Toronto papers marked her passing and celebrated her achievements. The *Globe* lauded her as a "*benefactress of youth...who had devoted a generous part of her life to the advancement of education....She organized the Home and School Club, which has grown to be such an important element of community life....She worked for the welfare of both children and teachers, emphasizing the need of training boys and girls for citizenship.*" The *Star* praised "*her excellent judgement and infectious enthusiasm,*" which was devoted to the Home and School cause, and which "*she always declared is doing the work that no other organization can do.*"



Source: *Toronto Star* August 24, 1923:26.

Her daughter Adabel Courtice Campbell would later follow her mother as president of the Home and School Association of Ontario. You'll find some things about her life in the Local History Index too.

**Searching the Index for this subject:**

The full subject heading for Ada Courtice is:

Brown, Ada Mary (Mrs. A. C. (Andrew Cory) Courtice), 1860-1923 34 matches

This is somewhat unwieldy, but includes her maiden, married and husband's full names, plus her birth and death dates.

Courtice 87 hits (includes husband and daughter)

Balmy Beach College (Toronto, Ont.) 23 hits

Balmy Beach College 53 hits

The discrepancy is because the second search will include the words appearing in the text, not just assigned Subject Headings. This means that some hits may be for a single record that includes both the Subject Heading and the same words in the Description field.

The addition of place in the Subject Heading is important mainly for Search Engine Optimization, that is, to identify the specific location in the world for people doing a general search through Google, etc. For internal searching, the keyword/s are usually enough.

An interesting history research problem comes up in this story of Ada Courtice. The March 29, 1919 issue of the Toronto World reports on page 10:

*"Mrs. A. C. Courtice and Miss Courtice have moved from Balmy Beach College Building, Beech avenue, to the Manhattan, Church and Charles streets."*

However, both the Globe and the Star report that Mrs. Courtice died at her residence, 109 Beech Avenue, in 1923. Did she move back; was there an error in reporting? Additional research in documentary sources would be needed to resolve this question, if indeed it can be resolved. An example of why history can tell us about the past, but never reproduce it.