Kiwanis to restore one-room Hill schoolhouse

By William Marley Leight
KNOX — Will the footsteps of children once again echo in a long-deserted one-room schoolhouse? They will if Dan Driscoll and the Helderberg Kiwanis Club are successful in their plans to restore Knox School Number Five.

The decaying wooden structure is located next to the entrance of the Emma Treadwell Thatcher Nature Center on Thompson's Lake.

It has been over 60 years since students studied inside the schoolhouse.

Today, the school is hidden in a tangle of brush and thick groundcover. Daylight shines through the woodshed's roof and the fieldstone foundation of the school is crumbling.

Driscoll, a member of the Kiwanis Club, is asking for volunteers to help club members begin the restoration of the site.

The club has received a $750 grant from Selkirk Cogen Partners, the company which owns an electric plant in Selkirk.

The funding will help pay for the initial cost of restoring the roof on the woodshed and early work on the schoolhouse.

The club hopes to repair the roof and tear up the flooring of the school this year, Driscoll said.

The restoration of the school foundation, floor and siding is slated for 2004.

The mid-20th century metal roof should be replaced in 2005, he said.

Since the schoolhouse is located on state land, Driscoll will be enlisting the support and expertise of the state's park administration.

As part of the research into the school, Driscoll has learned of three local residents who attended the school. He videotaped one of them, Bill Salbury, this week.

Salbury replayed the tape in theviewfinder of his camcorder on Tuesday as he stood in the overgrown schoolyard.

Salbury reminisced about a doctor who used to visit the school. "He would tell us how bad it was to eat candy," Salbury said. Then he would give the children candy as he departed.

Salbury showed Driscoll the original site of the boys' and girls' outhouses. When the brush is cleared, Driscoll is hoping to discover evidence of their placement. Leo Reith, a local engineer and club member, will help map out the area if any artifacts are uncovered, Driscoll said.

When work is complete, the state will determine what the schoolhouse will be used for.

"We didn't propose any specific use," said Driscoll.

Since it is linked to the nature center by a trail, it may be used for school programs, he said.

The state has found that the building qualifies for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, Driscoll said. This may help the schoolhouse qualify for future grants, he said.

Dan Driscoll is asking for people with memories of the old schoolhouse to come forward. He is also collecting furniture, books, and any other items that were connected to the school.