Old Durham Rd School
Built 1882 - SS7 est. 1853
113491 Grey Rd 14, nr Priceville
Map Link: http://goo.gl/maps/SJpUd
(private residence)

History: The meandering route of Old Durham Rd likely was an aboriginal hunting trail. Some twenty years before Priceville was surveyed for settlement, properties along the western end of Old Durham Rd were settled by Black pioneers, some of whom were United Empire Loyalists like James Handy who reputedly received a land grant in 1826. It is likely that many other Black pioneers were refugees from slavery. A log school (c.1856) further west on lot 11 served the children of Black farmers as well as village children until a school was built in Priceville, 1865. At that time a new log schoolhouse was built on this site closer to the Black farms; replaced in 1882 with the present brick building. When Grey Highlands Secondary opened fall of 1968, SS 7 was closed along with all other one-room rural schools and students were bussed to McPhail School in Flesherton. Old Durham Rd School, now a private home, still has original blackboards.

Architecture: Built of locally made yellow brick in a common bond pattern with same-color raised quoins, the school house has a simple gable roof. Double-hung 6x6 windows (now modernized) had a modestly arched top. Two sturdy wooden entry doors (one each for girls and boys) fit a true arch opening on both sides of the porch. Being located at right angles to the interior class entry door is intended to reduce cold drafts blowing directly into the classroom. An interesting feature are three iron tie-rods that cross the building below the roofline between the windows. Now bolted into exterior wood stanchions, the rods were installed shortly after construction to remedy a structural problem – likely a tendency of the brick to bulge outwards due to the absence of external buttresses. A fourth iron rod running lengthwise ends in a large iron X on the exterior. Doing pull-ups or hand-over-hand traverses of the rods was a popular (if dangerous) student activity.
Cultural Significance: Old Durham Road School and the Black Pioneer Cemetery across from it are among the few remnants of a vibrant Black settlement that existed near Priceville from perhaps as early as mid-1820’s. By the 1870’s many of the original Black settlers were gone. Some who were skilled tradesmen took jobs in Collingwood or Owen Sound where their descendants still live. Some intermarried and over time, dropped their Black heritage. Some may have lost their land through failure to register title, or their title may have been contested by other settlers. In addition to its significance to Ontario’s Black History, many later graduates of Old Durham Rd School went on to become prominent citizens. Farquhar Oliver was MP for more than forty years (1926-67). The most famous SS7 graduate of all was Agnes McPhail - the first woman to sit in federal parliament as well as a tireless fighter for the rights of farmers and of women.

Top: pen sketch of rear (east)  
Close-ups: exterior view of tie-rods (X north, bolts/buttress east)  
Below left: raised quoins  
Below right: outer entry door