

## Bringing Education to the Wilderness: Teachers and Schools in the Rural Communities of British Columbia, 1936–1945

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### ABSTRACT

Prior to the consolidation of British Columbia's rural districts into larger administrative units in 1946, teachers in country schools faced numerous challenges, including inadequate living quarters and school resources, loneliness, danger within the community, and isolation from other professionals. How did teachers manage these conditions on the eve of consolidation? What prompted some to remain teaching in remote schools whereas others fled the communities—and in some cases, the profession? To address these questions, I examined interviews with twenty-four teachers who taught in BC from 1936 to 1945. I concluded that there were multiple factors influencing teachers' decisions to stay or go, including their willingness and ability to manage multi-level classes, to fundraise for resources, and to actively engage with community members and activities. Indeed, teachers who survived their experiences in rural schools embraced their roles as agents of the state bringing the perceived advantages of education to remote regions of the province.

### RÉSUMÉ

Avant le regroupement des districts ruraux de la Colombie-Britannique en de plus grandes unités administratives en 1946, les enseignantes dans les écoles de campagne étaient confrontées à de nombreux défis tels que des logements et des ressources scolaires inadéquats, la solitude, le danger au sein de la communauté et l'isolement par rapport aux autres professionnels. Comment les enseignantes ont-elles géré ces conditions à la veille du regroupement? Qu'est-ce qui a encouragé certaines enseignantes à rester dans des écoles éloignées alors que d'autres ont fui ces communautés, et même dans certains cas la profession? Pour répondre à ces questions, j'ai étudié des entretiens avec vingt-quatre enseignantes qui ont œuvré en Colombie-Britannique de 1936 à 1945. Je conclus que de nombreux facteurs ont influencé la décision des enseignantes de rester ou de partir, notamment leur volonté et leur capacité à gérer des classes à plusieurs niveaux, à collecter des fonds et à s'engager activement envers les membres et les activités de la communauté. En effet, les enseignantes qui ont survécu à leurs expériences dans les écoles rurales ont assumé leur rôle d'agents de l'État, apportant ainsi les avantages perçus de l'éducation aux régions éloignées de la province.

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From the inception of publicly funded schooling until well into the mid-twentieth century, rural districts throughout North America were plagued with the problem of drawing from too small a tax base to generate comprehensive school programs and resources.<sup>1</sup> As a result, rural schools provided only the barest educational essentials, putting rural children at a disadvantage with respect to their urban counterparts.<sup>2</sup> Historians have noted that not only schools—but also the communities in which they were located—were marked by poverty and hardship.<sup>3</sup> Schools *and* homes lacked fundamental sanitation, running water, heat, light, and basic transportation infrastructure, such as roads. These poor conditions were especially challenging for novice teachers who had grown up in comfortable urban settings but ventured out to teach in rural areas. Not all new teachers survived the harsh conditions.

In light of well-documented rural hardships, important questions arise: How did teachers who survived their rural school experiences navigate the conditions? What seems to have enhanced or inhibited their willingness to remain in rural communities and in the profession? I examined these questions through interviews about the experiences of teachers who began their careers in rural areas of British Columbia from 1936 to 1945. The teachers' stories constitute part of a larger project on the effects of the Second World War on teaching in British Columbia (BC). I recruited twenty-four former teachers who had worked in forty schools in all geographical regions of the province by advertising in the *PostScript*, the official magazine of the British Columbia Retired Teachers' Association (BCRTA).<sup>4</sup> Fifteen former teachers contacted me directly; the remaining nine contacts were generated through word-of-mouth. Only four of the teachers were men; the rest were women, reflecting the gender imbalance in BC's teaching profession in the late 1930s to the mid-1940s. Nineteen of the twenty-four participants permitted me to use their real names and details of their schools. Five preferred to remain anonymous.<sup>5</sup> I invited the teachers to share with me any photographs or documents—such as letters and day books—that they had kept from their teaching experiences, and several did so. I also supplemented these sources of information with inspectors' teaching reports that are on file at the BC Archives. During the interviews about the teachers' wartime experiences, I was struck by their resourcefulness and I began to wonder what factors led novice teachers to stay in rural communities and to remain in the profession long-term or to flee at the earliest opportunity.

In this paper, I briefly discuss some of the literature on rural schooling in British Columbia, culminating with the government's 1946 implementation of the Cameron Commission's recommendation to consolidate the province's 649 school districts into 74 larger units. I then present the themes that arose from the former teachers' interviews about teaching in rural areas. Themes included: the multi-age learning environment; community relations; teaching resources; isolation from other professionals; and the influence of their normal school preparation. From these themes, I conclude that during the late 1930s and into the mid-1940s, teachers who survived their first years and remained in the profession—often for decades—had found themselves in communities with which they felt compatible. In addition, they made conscious efforts to “find the right fit” and were determined to succeed in their teaching roles.

Those who remained in rural areas were more inclined towards social service than those who fled early, and they embraced their roles as agents of the state bringing “education to the wilderness.” Teachers who persisted also sought—and found—support from others. Finally, they spoke fondly of the education that they had received at normal school, crediting their instructors for preparing them well for the realities of rural schools. On the other hand, teachers who departed soon after starting found themselves to be incompatible with the communities in which they taught. They did not make conscious efforts to fit in to the rural settings, did not involve themselves in social service either while teaching or later in their lives, felt uncomfortable with the tasks of the profession, and spoke less fondly about their normal school experiences.

### **Background: Rural Schooling**

Much of the historiography on rural education has illuminated the effects of mass schooling on rural areas as a phenomenon of state formation. Historians have argued that the spread of public schooling was often met with resistance by country folk who resented state incursions into their local affairs.<sup>6</sup> However, much of what we know about rural education in BC stems from sources from the 1920s and focuses on the perceived limitations of teachers and schools and less on teachers’ roles as agents—or employees—of the state.<sup>7</sup> The growth of public education reflected, in part, bourgeois reformers’ goal of stability during Canada’s nation-building enterprise. As a result, reformers preferred to appoint teachers who championed the nation-building agenda and “could be agents who could guide social change.”<sup>8</sup> To paraphrase Terry Wotherspoon, school authorities expected teachers to support the nation-building project and comply with state-imposed tasks that would increase peoples’ desire for school services.<sup>9</sup> This paper, exploring the character of teachers who embraced their roles as agents of change, adds another dimension to the historiography of rural schooling in BC.

BC’s initiatives to address rural schooling began in 1914, after the federal government passed the Agricultural Instruction Act and allocated \$10 million over ten years to the provinces to enhance rural education. The provincial government appointed Ontarian John Wesley Gibson to the directorship of the Elementary Agricultural Education Branch, and he promoted courses in nature study and rural science, including school gardening. That year, Victoria’s Summer School for Teachers offered its first rural science course, enrolling 171 people.<sup>10</sup> According to Michael Corbett, the goal of Canada’s agricultural instruction movement was to “valorize rural experience in the eyes of country children and to purify the lives of urban children who lived in the dirty, unnatural bustle of the industrial landscape.”<sup>11</sup>

As David Jones has noted, however, education officials soon recognized that the “rural school problem” consisted of multiple deficiencies.<sup>12</sup> School structures themselves were in poor condition, lacking electricity, heating, and indoor plumbing. Mona Gleason has argued that “school buildings [across Canada] could be very unhealthy places for children.”<sup>13</sup> Country schools were equally problematic for novice teachers who—by the late nineteenth century—were most frequently young

women.<sup>14</sup> By 1930, 83.5 per cent of British Columbia's teachers in 903 rural and assisted schools were women.<sup>15</sup> Rural schools were financed by the provincial government and enrolled at least twenty students aged from six to sixteen. Assisted schools enrolled a minimum of ten children between the ages of six and sixteen. In the latter case, the provincial government paid teachers' salaries, but the community financed the construction of the school building and operating expenses, including repairs and school equipment.<sup>16</sup> Although the government distinguished between rural and assisted schools for funding purposes, both types were found in rural areas of BC; therefore, I use the term "rural" to encompass both.

Portrayals of rural teachers who taught in BC during the early part of the twentieth century have tended to frame them as oppressed by hardships such as loneliness, danger within the community, inadequate living quarters and school resources, as well as isolation from other professionals.<sup>17</sup> These hardships were particularly difficult for city-raised teachers toiling in rural communities, where their median length of stay in the 1920s was 1.62 years.<sup>18</sup> In the words of BC school inspector H. H. MacKenzie, inexperienced city-born teachers were "a sort of migratory species... for in soft September days they come and in balmy June days they flit away."<sup>19</sup> Indeed, transiency presented educational administrators with one of the greatest challenges as they sought to secure teachers for remote areas.

During the mid-1920s, education officials began to realize that the "rural school problem" required more than advocacy and techniques in agricultural education.<sup>20</sup> In particular, two alarming developments caught the attention of policy-makers. In 1926 in Port Essington, a small town in northwestern BC, twenty-one-year-old Loretta Chisholm was murdered while out for a Sunday morning walk she took before attending church.<sup>21</sup> The following year, nineteen-year-old Mabel Jones began teaching in a one-room school at Nixon Creek, a logging settlement in the Cowichan Lake area of south-central Vancouver Island.<sup>22</sup> A few months into her second year at Nixon Creek, Mabel took her own life. The notes she left explained that she was distressed over criticisms she had received from a couple of local school trustees who, it was later revealed, hoped to secure Mabel's job for a friend. As Australian historian Marjorie Theobald has noted, "young teachers walked unsuspecting into mine fields of local feuds and ancient enmities."<sup>23</sup>

In 1928, the BC government took a different approach to addressing perceived rural school challenges and appointed Lottie Bowron as the Rural Teachers' Welfare Officer.<sup>24</sup> Bowron's job was to travel the province offering "pastoral care to the troubled female teachers in... isolated areas."<sup>25</sup> Her main tasks included chatting with rural teachers, resolving conflicts between them and trustees as well as parents, and reporting back to government on the state of schools and districts. In some cases, solutions were as simple as installing telephones or electric lighting in schools and teacherages. In situations where resolutions to dilemmas were elusive, Bowron designated the school or district as best staffed by men and recommended that education officials not fill positions with young, inexperienced women teachers.<sup>26</sup>

The stories of Loretta Chisholm, Mabel Jones, and Lottie Bowron portray the grim realities of BC's rural teaching contexts in the early twentieth century.

Nevertheless, some historians have challenged depictions of teachers as helpless victims of their communities.<sup>27</sup> Penelope Stephenson's research on schooling in BC's Okanagan region illustrated that, even during the 1920s, teachers' rural experiences were more diverse than prior research would suggest.<sup>28</sup> For some of the participants in Stephenson's study, teaching provided a sense of autonomy and job satisfaction.<sup>29</sup> In the words of Dianne Hallman, who studied her mother's experiences teaching in rural Nova Scotia from 1936 to 1941, country schools had their "own subtle gradations of satisfaction and of frustration."<sup>30</sup> Mary Anne Poutanen makes a similar point. She studied the lives of teachers who taught in rural Quebec from 1863 to 1945. In 1923, when the trustees of Silver Creek School refused to make repairs to the school, the teacher simply left Silver Creek.<sup>31</sup> Historians have noted that rural teachers' experiences often varied by community, "depending upon local 'prosperity and attitudes.' In some places the school teacher was treated as 'a hired hand,' in others 'life was pleasant.'"<sup>32</sup>

Despite the variability of teaching experiences, there is no doubt that rural communities lagged behind their more materially-advanced urban counterparts until well after the Second World War. A nationwide survey jointly administered by the Canadian Education Association and the Canadian Public Health Association revealed that as late as 1945, "80% of rural schools had no artificial lighting; 71% had toilet facilities only outside the school buildings; and 73% did not have running water."<sup>33</sup> These figures are hardly surprising, given that a 1941 Dominion Bureau of Statistics survey had found that over 79 per cent of farm homes lacked electricity, 82 per cent cooked on a wood stove, 89 per cent had no indoor washing facilities, and 67 per cent drew water from wells.<sup>34</sup> Under such meagre conditions, it's clear that rural ratepayers were either unable or unwilling to devote sparse resources to school facilities.<sup>35</sup>

Material conditions in rural schools would not improve in BC until the government opted in 1946 to implement Commissioner Maxwell Cameron's recommendations to consolidate the province's 649 school districts into 74 larger units, creating larger tax bases that allowed for better funding, expanded programming, and—reformers argued—greater equality for rural children.<sup>36</sup> Although BC-wide reform took shape in 1946, initial forays into consolidation took place much earlier. The provincial government authorized the implementation of consolidated schools in 1905, following the limited initiatives of Prince Edward Island (1900) and Nova Scotia (1903) that had been financed by Sir William Macdonald, a former Maritimer who made his fortune in the tobacco industry in Montreal.<sup>37</sup> BC's first school amalgamation pilot experiment took place in the Peace River region in 1933. At the height of the Depression, government authorities were vexed by the problem of how to reduce educational expenses—their largest budget item—without diminishing the quality of schooling.<sup>38</sup> Through amalgamation, policy-makers could essentially double rural class sizes and, in turn, hire fewer teachers, thereby reducing costs. Until the implementation of province-wide school district consolidation, rural teachers often contended with multi-age classrooms, limited resources, isolation, and the whims of small lay boards embroiled, at times, in petty wrangling.

## Rural BC Teachers' Experiences, 1936–1945

At the end of the Depression and throughout the Second World War, why did some BC teachers persist in rural communities whereas others fled? Likewise, what prompted some to leave the profession entirely? One of the most common challenges facing rural teachers was how to provide for the learning needs of all students in a multigrade, one-room setting.<sup>39</sup> As Helen Harper has noted, “teaching in the hinterlands proved demanding. The responsibilities were immense.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, one of the most important questions I asked participants in this study was how they managed the learning needs for the range of pupils that they oversaw. To my surprise, *they* were surprised by my question. As if it were completely obvious, many of them replied that their normal school instructors had trained them very well to manage multi-level classes. As Margaret Long (née Seely) explained, the first priority was to teach the grade 1 children to read, while those in the other grades worked independently on arithmetic and language arts exercises from their textbooks.<sup>41</sup> Margaret, who began teaching in 1940 at Palling, a farming community twenty kilometres northwest of Burns Lake, learned from her normal school instructors to “combine grades for some subjects, such as social studies and science.” For example, pupils in grades 3 and 4 would both cover the same year’s curriculum (grade 4) in one year and then switch to the other year’s work (grade 3) in the following year. She relied on the older children who worked quickly to help the little ones with their work, thereby fostering self-reliance in the older learners. Margaret also stressed the importance of being well organized, saying that “if you didn’t keep good records... it was very confusing for the next teacher coming in.” A similar scenario was recounted by Gwen Miller (née Baker) when she began teaching in Lytton in 1936:

A typical day would start with the Lord’s Prayer. And then we would have some sort of exercise or reading to get the group all together before going on to the lessons. I would take the grade ones first and the other grades would do seat work, such as answer questions in math. After lunch I’d read a story before the children began their independent work.<sup>42</sup>

Likewise, Joan Monteith (née Lawrence), who began teaching in 1939 at Vinsulla, a farming community twenty kilometres northeast of Kamloops, noted that the key to managing multiple grades in one room was to teach thematically and level activities to each grade.<sup>43</sup> For example, if the students were studying a unit on England, they would all sing “There Will Always Be an England” for their music lesson. For art, younger students drew and painted a giant flag that the older kids would cut into several pieces. (See figure 1.)

Younger students would “march into class” holding the pieces and “put the flag together while the rest [of the class] sang.” While the younger pupils painted the flag, the older students would do more complex exercises pertaining to the geography of England in their textbooks, or construct a relief map. As illustrated by figure 2, the construction of relief maps constituted a common technique in her class. That Joan



was confident with multi-level teaching is illustrated by the local inspector's report, in which he noted: "Miss Lawrence has a pleasant manner with her pupils and has won their active cooperation in the work of the class-room."<sup>44</sup>

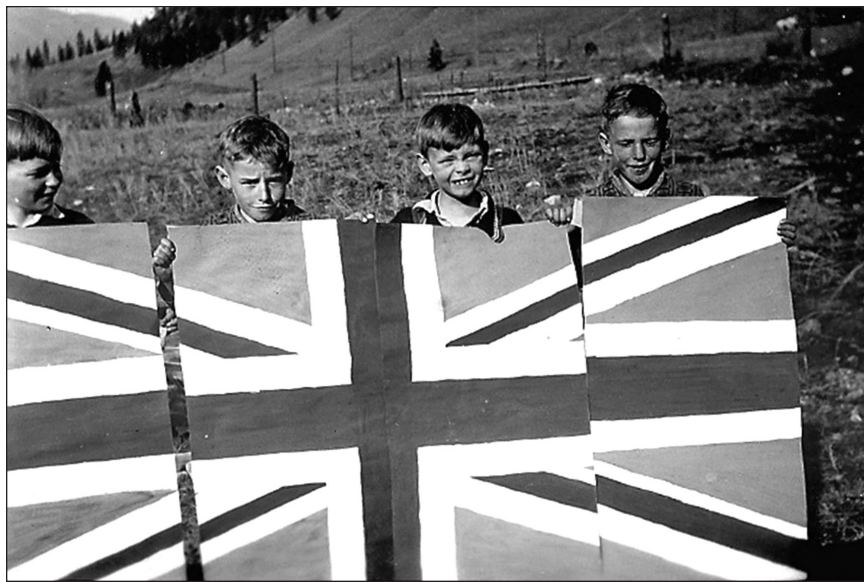


Figure 1. *Joan Monteith's students construct a flag. Courtesy of Joan Monteith.*



Figure 2. *Joan Monteith's students' relief map. Courtesy of Joan Monteith.*

Mary Patenaude (née Johnson), who taught until 1986, began her career in 1941 at 134 Mile House, six kilometres northwest of Lac LaHache.<sup>45</sup> Like Margaret, Gwen, and Joan, Mary felt the secret to working in one-room schools lay primarily in integrating lessons. Not only was this promoted by her normal school instructors, but also by regional inspectors and principals. For example, Joe Phillipson, the principal at Williams Lake School, organized a regional contest to see whose students could submit the best integrated unit. In May 1942, Mary submitted her pupils' artifacts for a unit of study about Mexico for which some students produced information booklets on animal and food production. Others painted pictures and paper

plates using traditional Mexican designs. Still others constructed clay pots or cacti, palm trees, or relief maps illustrating the nation's geography. For their efforts, Mary's class took first prize.



Figure 3. *Mary Patenaude and her pupils at Enterprise School, 134 Mile House. Courtesy of Mary Patenaude.*

In the early twentieth century, education officials blamed rural teachers for allegedly “archaic” teaching practices that did not reflect principles of progressive education, such as “correlating” — or “integrating” — subjects and grade levels.<sup>46</sup> Though scholars have acknowledged the difficulty of fulfilling all the tenets of progressive education, such as undertaking field trips, it is clear from the recollections of the participants in this study that they did the best they could to adapt the pedagogical techniques that their normal school instructors had modeled. This finding aligns with the research of Amy von Heyking, who found that Alberta’s “rural teachers made significant attempts” to adopt and adapt principles of progressive education into their classroom practices.<sup>47</sup>

Teachers who taught in ethnically diverse communities faced additional challenges associated with unknown cultural norms. From a review of BC teaching surveys from the 1920s, J. D. Wilson and Paul Stortz discovered that teachers tended to rate Doukhobor parents and children as problematic, with irregular attendance being a chief impediment to effective schooling.<sup>48</sup> Doreen Guillaume (née Curran) found this to be the case during her first teaching assignment in 1940 at Park Siding, a farming community roughly twenty-five kilometres east of Trail.<sup>49</sup> Since many of her pupils’ Doukhobor and Italian parents spoke limited English, communicating was difficult. Attendance was spotty because the children often stayed home to help with chores on the farm. Though she adapted to a number of aspects of farm life,



Doreen never got used to the rustic conditions of the community. Longing for family and friends, she would return to her home in Trail every weekend. When the weather was poor and the roads too “rutty” for buses to run, she would walk roughly eight kilometres to the nearby town of Fruitvale from where she could catch a bus into Trail. By 1944, she had married and left the profession.

Similar discomfort was felt by Reta McGovern (née Colleti),<sup>50</sup> who left normal school early in the spring of 1943 to take up a position in Ootischenie, a Doukhobor community near Castlegar. Her assignment was to teach the twenty-nine children in grades 1 to 3 how to speak English. Recognizing how tiring it was to learn a new language, Reta frequently took the children on outings such as picnics. On one occasion,

we get down to the creek and these kids start running around with no clothes on! And they wanted us to come swimming! Well, I wouldn't have known if they drowned or not, because you know we sat behind a tree watching the mountains!

Feeling like a “duck out of water” in unfamiliar cultural surroundings, Reta was eager to teach in a more mainstream setting and left Ootischenie at the end of June.

Very few of the participants in this study mentioned discipline, despite the fact that effective management is critical for the functioning of any learning situation.<sup>51</sup> One of the few to mention it was Margaret. Despite feeling “at ease” with the children of Palling, she still believed it necessary to establish her authority with regard to classroom management. Without a principal on site, she periodically used the strap for discipline.

One time, they did something at noon hour... It wasn't very naughty. I think they went off somewhere and didn't get back in time for one o'clock. So every child got a little whack. I think you have to do these things judiciously if you're on your own, you know. You can't be too easy on the kids, because then they take advantage of you. And then pretty soon the school's a madhouse!

Reta was one of the participants who experienced challenges with classroom management and student behaviour. In 1944, she accepted a position at Michel-Natal, which was located in the province's southeast corner a few miles from the Alberta border.<sup>52</sup> At the Michel-Natal school, she enjoyed teaching her intact grade 7 class and leading the entire school each morning as they sang *God Save the King* and saluted the flag. Nevertheless, she struggled with her additional assignment of teaching music to grades 6 to 10. Logistically, acting as both a classroom teacher and music specialist meant that Reta often taught during lunch hour and after school, often until 5:00 pm. Exhausted, she also found some of the older children to be challenging. In a letter to her parents, she explained:

I surely have trouble with the older girls here in Music Classes. Yesterday one girl, sixteen years old, sassied me back as much as she could which really made

me boil... so I got the strap and threatened to strap her. She was bigger than me so I couldn't do much. However, I brought her to the principal who just gave her a talking to and said she was too big to strap. If she is sassy again he will expel her. I won't take any more from these students!<sup>53</sup>

When the inspector visited in May, that "awful High School Music class just wouldn't sing!"<sup>54</sup>

The older children's resistance might have been due in part to their age or to the tension that permeated the community due to working conditions in the mining industry. Many of the miners had moved to the area from nearby Corbin, where a bitter and violent strike had shut down operations at the Corbin Coal and Coke Company in 1935.<sup>55</sup> Judging from Reta's letters home to her parents, working conditions at Michel-Natal may not have been much better.

What a town! Now the miners are having a fight about the price of coal. Since they got there [*sic*] raise in wages, the company raised the price of coal to \$1 a ton more.... Whether there is a strike or not most of the men won't go to work. Last night there was a miners' meeting here and a fellow from Alberta came to discourage their bad feeling towards the company (or government) but I heard the miners just got so mad that they howled their disapproval so that the fellow couldn't speak!<sup>56</sup>

As Reta's story indicates, she felt like an outsider, unable to relate to the hardships of the miners and their families. At the end of the 1944 school year, she left Michel-Natal and never returned. Reta moved back to Nelson, where she helped her father in his grocery store, worked in the local theatre, and taught as a substitute teacher from time to time. By 1946, she had left the profession. Unlike Reta, Nancy Constable (née Lemeshuk) was happy in her position at Michel-Natal from 1944 to 1946, given that she had spent her teenage years there and already knew the community context well.<sup>57</sup>

Rural schools have also been criticized for lacking resources that were allegedly more abundant in urban settings.<sup>58</sup> Although all of the participants in this study mentioned the topic of resources, not all of the former teachers found them to be lacking. In instances where resources were scarce, some of the teachers pitched in with fundraising in order to purchase what was needed. When Margaret arrived in Palling, she learned that not only had the local school board been dissolved and replaced by an official trustee, but the school had burned down just days earlier. The family with whom she boarded allowed their home to serve as a schoolhouse until a new one could be built. When a school was built later that year, it lacked non-academic resources, such as musical instruments, so Margaret bought herself a forty-eight-base piano accordion and not only accompanied her students during music study, but also played at the community dances which were held in the schoolhouse.<sup>59</sup>

The teachers I interviewed seldom felt that there was a shortage of resources for core subjects. Gwen recalled working from the government-issued (blue paperback) *Course of Study*, which outlined subject requirements for each grade level. Students

who could read used textbooks as well as *Dick and Jane* readers, which were abundant. Nevertheless, Lytton's school lacked a piano, hampering the study of music and the production of school plays. Like Margaret, Gwen engaged in fundraising by offering a ladies' exercise class on weekends and hosting "card parties," for which she charged participants twenty-five cents to play whist and bridge. In a short time, she had collected enough money to combine it with resources generated by the student council and buy the school a piano. Gwen also initiated a Girl Guide company. Throughout her forty-four-year teaching career, she continued voluntary service, first as a Girl Guide leader and later becoming the Thompson district commissioner. Her willingness to organize extracurricular activities for students and other community members illustrates another important theme which arose during the interviews with the former teachers: their strategies for managing relations with children and families, and their efforts to "fit in" to their new communities.



Figure 4. Gwen Miller and her students at Lytton, 1937. Courtesy of Gwen Miller.

The teachers in this study who persisted in rural settings made efforts to integrate themselves into community life. For example, Margaret joined several other women at Palling in establishing a Women's Institute.<sup>60</sup> Because the war permeated life in the community, the women of the institute knitted and sewed articles of clothing for servicemen overseas. In addition, they prepared boxes of baked goods that were sent abroad. Margaret further endeared herself to the community by learning to ride horseback. Within her first few months in the community, she financed the purchase of her own horse for which she paid five dollars monthly. She credits Joe and Marion Spratt, with whom she boarded, for enabling her to make the purchase: "They were very nice; they didn't charge me very much; so I never suffered."

Mary Patenaude boarded at 132 Mile House with prominent ranchers Enid and Ernie Wright, who helped her become an integral part of the community by blending school and community activities. Both Mary and Enid played the piano, so the two of them arranged concerts and plays with the students in order to raise money for the Red Cross Society. Mary also gained the appreciation of the children's families by circulating library books that she had ordered from the Victoria Public Library.<sup>61</sup> These books were a welcome supplement to her government-supplied readers, atlases, and art supplies. Mary also paid regular visits to her pupils' families: "It was a matter of pride for families to have the teacher over to their house."

Edna Nash (née McDermid) began teaching in 1941 at Pioneer Mine, 180 kilometres northwest of Lytton.<sup>62</sup> In order to get to know her students and their families better, in her first year she directed a school play, *The Pirates of Penzance*. The school janitor provided Edna with both skates and skis, so she could take up these activities with the community's adults and children, whose response to her was allegedly "spirited."<sup>63</sup> That her year at Pioneer Mine Elementary was successful is evidenced by the inspector's comment that Edna's "first year as a teacher" was "very successful. She is outstandingly enthusiastic and energetic."<sup>64</sup>



Figure 5. Edna Nash and community members on a ski trip. Courtesy of Edna Nash.

Not all the teachers that I interviewed were eager to integrate themselves into the rural communities where they taught. One such teacher was Ralph Burton, who began teaching in 1939 at Kettle Valley Elementary, fifty-six kilometres east of Osoyoos.<sup>65</sup> To cope with the isolation he felt, he would ride his motorbike to Osoyoos twice a week to play on the town's basketball team. In 1941, Ralph left teaching to enlist in the Royal Canadian Air Force and eventually retrained as a

dentist, a profession he practised until 1984. Likewise, Reta McGovern found the demands of the community at Michel-Natal to be stressful. She wrote to her parents that some parents complained about her alleged failure to visit their homes: “I meet them on the street, they invite me to their homes and I have only visited half of them so far. I have only five weeks to visit the others so I am going to be very busy in the next few weeks.” Feeling the home visits to be a burden, it is not surprising that Reta left the profession within a few years of entering it.

On the other hand, some former teachers welcomed the home visits. Faye Eccleston (née Burnham), who taught at Creighton Valley’s elementary school from 1940–41, attempted to foster connections by visiting her pupils’ families:<sup>66</sup>

I’d walk up and have tea with the mother. It was important to keep relationships with them. They felt it was quite an honour for the teacher to come and have tea. It was also nice for me too to go and speak to an adult again.

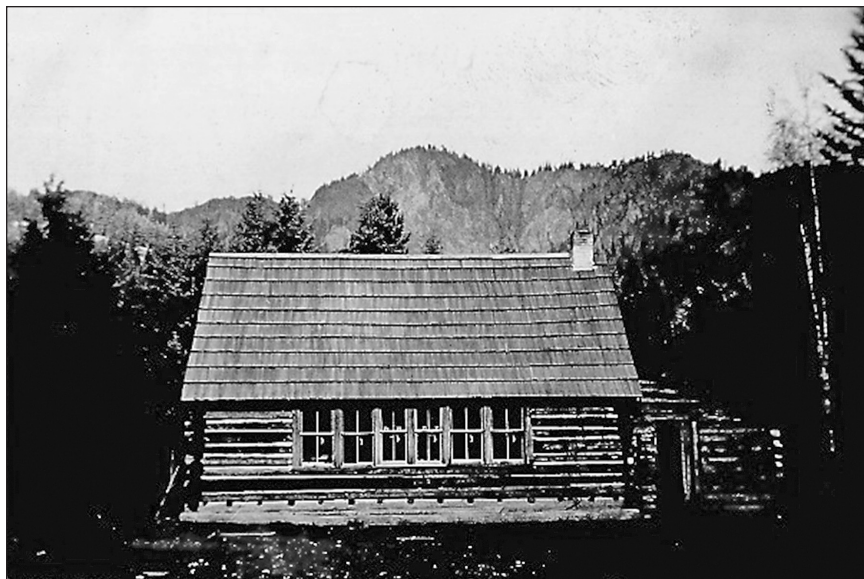


Figure 6. *Creighton Valley School, 1941. Courtesy of Faye Eccleston.*

Nevertheless, having been raised in Vancouver, she found Creighton Valley to be too isolated and had no recollections of social events in the community, aside from a Christmas concert and party that she organized. She put on a brave face, but found it hard to return to Creighton Valley after spending Christmas vacation with her family in Vancouver:

When I went to go back after the holidays, I came downstairs and my father was going to take me down to the train. But I burst into tears. And he said, “Well, you don’t have to go, Faye.” And I said, “Oh, I’m going, I’m going.”

The thought of going back there for four months! I knew we'd have too much snow and I wouldn't get out of the valley. It was a lovely valley, but sometimes you can't live on scenery alone, can you?

The following year, Faye left Creighton Valley for a position in Burnaby, near Vancouver, but remained in the profession for another twelve years.

Historians have also noted that in the early part of the twentieth century, rural teachers could suffer not only from social isolation but also from lack of connection to other professionals. This was all the more problematic given that few teachers engaged in professional development opportunities offered at the Victoria summer schools. Only 15 per cent of rural teachers took advantage of these sessions between 1925 and 1930.<sup>67</sup> Unlike teachers in the 1920s, many of the teachers that I interviewed made efforts to connect with other professionals. Margaret and the teachers from six neighbouring communities organized the "Summit Six School Sports Day" at the community of Topley, thirty kilometres northwest of Palling. This well-received activity included such events as races, high jump, broad jump, and relays. As illustrated by the "integrated unit" contest organized by principal Joe Phillipson of Burns Lake, some school administrators and inspectors made efforts to connect teachers in remote areas to each other.

Teachers in this study also considered school inspectors to be a source of professional support. Celia Stickney (née Dowding) began teaching at Tate Creek, home to 518 Czech refugees who had fled "through the back door as Hitler was coming in through the front."<sup>68</sup> Celia's assignment was to teach thirty-seven pupils in grades 1 through 8, with two completing grade 9 by correspondence. She found the regional inspector to be an invaluable resource:

Sometimes there was a book or some material that would have the answers in the back and they weren't right and I knew they weren't right... yet, how can you prove it? And the inspector was right there [to confirm]. Nothing but helpful.

Celia's favourable comments about the role of the inspector offer a perspective that runs contrary to the negative characterization of rural inspectors that pervades the historical literature.<sup>69</sup> She was also helped by Father Goetz, a Catholic priest who spoke German and taught catechism to the children once a week. Goetz helped Celia to prepare the sports fields and arrange community activities such as bingo games and dances.

By far the most memorable part of Celia's year at Tate Creek was the Christmas concert. It is worth describing here, because it not only illustrates the lengths to which Celia went to provide service to the children and community but also how she was supported by others. She chose the story of Hansel and Gretel, since the families would know and understand the German tale even if they didn't speak English well. Celia ordered records to help students learn the tunes necessary for each of their parts and the school janitor assisted her in building scenery. One weekend, Celia took the



pupils playing Hansel and Gretel to her family home in Beaverlodge, Alberta, “to practice with a neighbour who gave piano lessons.” They walked over six kilometres through the bush to catch a train to Beaverlodge and returned late Sunday with an RCMP officer who was driving north of Tate Creek to Dawson Creek. Though considered bold by today’s standards, Celia’s trip home with two students illustrates the tight teacher-student bonds that could develop in small communities in the early twentieth century.

Reta reached out to others for help when—upon arriving at Michel-Natal school—she found that there were no resources with which to teach music. In a letter to her sister dated September 12, 1943, she lamented:

I can’t get enough material for my music classes. I really don’t know where to begin. Please phone Miss Etter [piano instructor in Nelson, Reta’s home town] and tell her to send me some information on teaching music.... I just filled in time last week playing them records and singing a few songs. I’m really worried because there isn’t a book in the school that I can get information from.<sup>70</sup>

The support she received from both her sister and Miss Etter helped her to survive the year at Michel-Natal.

One of the participants who had no one to turn to for assistance was Marion Acedo (née Gunn) who began teaching thirty-two children ranging from grades 1 to 8 in 1941 at Penny, roughly a hundred kilometres southeast of Prince George.<sup>71</sup> Examples of integrated lessons from normal school seemed useless in a community with no firehall or newspaper producer to visit as “real-world” experiences for culminating a thematic unit. She had hoped to seek help from the local inspector, but was disappointed when he fell ill and failed to visit. Given the large number of children and her difficulty procuring supplies, Marion mostly assigned the children to do seat-work, such as controlled reading and arithmetic worksheets. Marion also felt isolated, given that her landlords spoke Norwegian around the house. To manage her loneliness, she read a lot. Reflecting on her first years of teaching, Marion felt that young people ventured out to remote areas of BC because they were “young and foolish.” She left Penny in December of her first year. She taught briefly in New Westminster and then in the rural community of Cumberland near Nanaimo, after which she uprooted and moved to California, where she taught until 1950.

Many of the participants in this study commented on their normal school experiences. Those who left the profession soon after beginning spoke less favourably about the instruction they received as pre-service teachers. For example, Ralph found that his instructors emphasized theory too heavily, leaving less time for practical applications. He recalled one of his instructors promoting the idea of “getting discussions going” with future pupils. But according to Ralph, “it’s a little difficult to have an exchange of ideas” among students ranging from grades 1 to 8. On the other hand, those who stayed in the profession spoke fondly about their normal school education. Some recounted that their instructors emphasized the value of teaching in rural settings, knowing that most teachers would not find jobs in urban settings. According

to Margaret, “at normal school, we were quite brainwashed to want to go to a small country school.... We were taught that teaching in a country school was a great thing.” Marion recalled that Alex Lord, Vancouver’s normal school principal who had first-hand experience teaching in rural areas, stressed the importance of teachers’ work to remote communities. According to Marion, teachers in rural BC were “bringing education to the wilderness... a little bit like missionaries.” When Mary was assigned to teach at Enterprise, Lord gave her the names of previous Enterprise teachers from whom she could seek advice. One teacher advised Mary “you’re in a different world now.” Reflecting on her career, Mary agreed: “The experience [of teaching in a rural community] changed you. You saw the world differently afterwards.” Although not all of the twenty-four former teachers who participated in this study “saw the world differently” or even complied with the demands of rural schools and communities, for the majority, teaching was their only profession. Six remained in teaching for five years or less; four spent six to ten years in the classroom; three spent ten to thirty years as teachers, and eleven taught for over thirty years.

## Conclusion

In November 1944, the BC government appointed Maxwell Cameron to examine and make recommendations pertaining to school financing and resources. Cameron’s appointment was prompted by long-standing concerns about the inequality of funding and educational opportunity plaguing small, rural districts.<sup>72</sup> Cameron revealed that the number of official trustees appointed to oversee rural school districts had risen from 45 in 1929–30 to 204 in 1944–45. He concluded that the “small district, administered by a three-man [*sic*] Board elected at an annual school meeting, usually very poorly attended, is less and less compatible with present ways of doing things.”<sup>73</sup> Cameron’s solution was to consolidate and thereby enlarge school districts to increase “efficiency and economy.” It is important to note that the report scarcely mentioned teachers and teaching, although since government officials expressed concern about unequal resources they were—by corollary—troubled about instructors and instruction. Given the report’s omission of pedagogical information, this study has begun to fill a gap on the ways that teachers managed in rural schools on the eve of significant educational reform.

How did teachers who survived their rural school experiences navigate the conditions? What seemed to enhance and/or inhibit their willingness to remain in a rural community and in the profession? Teachers who thrived in rural school settings indicated that they managed the challenges in several ways. First among these was to integrate their lessons thematically in a way that made working with students at multiple grade levels more manageable. Recollections of former teachers such as Joan and Mary indicate that they did the best they could to implement pedagogy, such as the “project method,” as advocated by progressives, including America’s William Kilpatrick and John Dewey, BC’s H. B. King, and Alberta’s Donalda Dickie.<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, participants reported that they had learned these approaches from their normal school instructors. In their 1925 *Survey of the School System*, Putman and Weir had

reproached normal school instructors for not being “closely enough in touch with the actual problems” of children and teachers in schools.<sup>75</sup> By the mid-1930s and into the 1940s, this situation appears to have changed. The teachers who embraced rural life spoke fondly of their normal school instructors, whom they credited for modeling effective approaches for teaching in rural schools. Teachers who left the profession early tended to speak less fondly about their normal school experiences.

Despite sparse resources and isolation from other professionals, teachers who survived—and thrived—in rural settings consciously made connections to others from whom they sought assistance, such as inspectors, other educators, and professionals within the community. This was due in part to the fact that, by the 1940s, remote rural communities were somewhat better connected than they had been in the 1920s. For example, Margaret and her students were able to attend the “Summit Six School Sports Day” at the community of Topley because members of the community could drive them. Likewise, it was not a problem for Mary to submit her pupils’ artifacts to the principal in Burns Lake who hosted the “integrated unit” contest, even though the distance between them was approximately five hundred kilometres. Improved communication and transportation are important factors in the evolution of rural schooling in BC, considering that much of what we know stems from sources from the 1920s, an era when BC lacked large-scale infrastructure. By the end of that decade, transportation initiatives had “opened up” the province,<sup>76</sup> paving the way for consolidation of rural school districts that would lessen the magnitude of “the rural school problem.”

Perhaps most importantly, the teachers who survived their first years in rural schools and remained in the profession—often for decades—found themselves in communities with which they felt compatible. They also made conscious efforts to fit in by connecting to the children and families and contributing in positive ways to the communities in which they taught. Their many contributions included organizing and participating in outings such as ski trips and picnics, directing plays, leading Girl Guide troops, teaching exercise classes, and hosting card parties. Those who succeeded in their first years and tended to remain in teaching for many years also contributed in other ways to society, for example, Gwen, who served as the Thompson district Girl Guide commissioner. This suggests that such teachers were willing to embrace the tasks—and the mission—of the profession that their normal school instructors had bestowed upon them. As Margaret noted, their instructors had instilled in them the notion that “teaching in a country school was a great thing.” In Marion’s view, teachers in rural BC were “like missionaries,” allegedly fostering enlightenment. In short, teachers who survived and embraced their rural surroundings welcomed their roles as agents of the state, bringing the perceived advantages of education to undeveloped regions of the province. Like school promoters from the 1800s, teachers who embraced their roles in rural communities saw themselves as part of a larger initiative for “remaking of popular culture and character” through the creation of educated and engaged citizens,<sup>77</sup> for which they themselves served as models. As pointed out by Terry Wotherspoon, for schooling to provide the link between state and community, teachers needed to be “sympathetic” to the nation-building

“project.”<sup>78</sup> This study on the character of teachers who flourished in rural settings illustrates that rural communities have indeed “been more complex than previously believed,” as were the teachers who taught in them.<sup>79</sup>

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## Notes

- 1 Robert D. Gidney, *From Hope to Harris: The Reshaping of Ontario’s Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 48.
- 2 See George S. Tomkins, *A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1986), 163–166, and Mona Gleason, “Families Without Schools: Rurality, Correspondence Education, and the Promise of Schooling in Interwar Western Canada,” *History of Education Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2017): 313. For administrative purposes, rural schools in BC fell into two categories: assisted and rural. Assisted schools were located in communities that were so poor that the provincial government paid the costs of supplies, equipment, and the teachers’ salaries. Rural schools were able to cover these costs from local taxes. Since both types were located in remote areas, I have used the term “rural” to apply to both in this article. See J. Donald Wilson and Paul Stortz, “‘May the Lord Have Mercy on You’: The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920s,” *BC Studies* 79 (Autumn 1988): 210.
- 3 Robert D. Gidney and Wyn P. J. Millar, *How Schools Worked: Public Education in English Canada, 1900–1940* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2012), 107; John Calam, ed., *Alex Lord’s British Columbia: Recollections of a Rural School Inspector, 1915–36* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1991), 17.
- 4 Incorporated in 1955, the BCRTA’s main goal is to safeguard “the interests and to protect the welfare of its members,” [http://www.bcrta.ca/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=225&Itemid=491](http://www.bcrta.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=225&Itemid=491).
- 5 On the ethical challenges of consent in oral history, see Nancy Janovicek, “Oral History and Ethical Practice after TSPS2,” in *The Canadian Oral History Reader*, ed. Kristina R. Llewellyn, Alexander Freund, and Nolan Reilly (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2015), 73–97.
- 6 Michael Corbett, “A Protracted Struggle: Rural Resistance and Normalization in Canadian Educational History,” *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d’histoire de l’éducation* 13, no. 1 (2001): 23. See also Bruce Curtis, “Patterns of Resistance to Public Education: England, Ireland, and Canada West, 1830–1890,” *Comparative Education Review* 32, no. 3 (1988): 318–33. It’s important to note that in remote areas that lacked school facilities, parents often clamoured for educational services. See, for example, Gleason, “Families Without Schools,” 305–30.
- 7 For rural schooling in BC, see Alastair Glegg, “Anatomy of a Tragedy: The Assisted Schools of British Columbia and the Death of Mabel Jones,” *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d’histoire de l’éducation* 17, no. 1 (2005): 145–64; Thomas Fleming

- and Carolyn Smyly, "The Diary of Mary Williams: A Cameo of Rural Schooling in British Columbia, 1922–1924," in *Children, Teachers & Schools in the History of British Columbia*, ed. Jean Barman, Neil Sutherland, and J. Donald Wilson (Calgary: Detselig, 1995), 259–84; Robert Patterson, "Voices From the Past: The Personal and Professional Struggle of Rural School Teachers," in *Schools in the West: Essays in Canadian Educational History*, ed. Nancy Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson, and David Jones (Calgary: Detselig, 1986), 99–111; J. Harold Putman and George Weir, *Survey of the School System* (Victoria, BC: King's Printer, 1925), 187; Penelope Stephenson, "Mrs. Gibson Looked as if She Was Ready for the End of Term': The Professional Trials and Tribulations of Rural Teachers in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley in the 1920s," in *Children, Teachers & Schools in the History of British Columbia*, ed. Jean Barman, Neil Sutherland, and J. Donald Wilson (Calgary: Detselig, 1995), 235–57; Paul Stortz and J. Donald Wilson, "Education on the Frontier: Schools, Teachers and Community Influence in North-Central British Columbia," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 26, no. 52 (November 1993): 265–90; Wilson and Stortz, "May the Lord Have Mercy on You," 24–57; Robert Wright, "The Plight of Rural Women Teachers in the 1920s," *BC Historical News* (Winter 1994–95): 26–29.
- 8 Terry Wotherspoon, "From Subordinate Partners to Dependent Employees: State Regulation of Public School Teachers in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia," *Labour/Le Travail* 31 (1993): 83.
  - 9 Wotherspoon, "From Subordinate Partners to Dependent Employees," 93–99.
  - 10 Between 1915 and 1924, Gibson hired a dozen agricultural supervisors and specialists to help promote agriculture in rural areas. Course work included such topics as soils, drainage, poultry, farming techniques, beekeeping, rural economics, orchards, and dairy farming—to name but a few. David C. Jones, "The Strategy of Rural Enlightenment: Consolidation in Chilliwack, B.C., 1919–1920," in *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West*, ed. David C. Jones, Nancy M. Sheehan, and Robert M. Stamp (Calgary: Detselig, 1979), 138.
  - 11 Corbett, "A Protracted Struggle," 30. For details of the Agricultural Instruction Act and its development, see Linda M. Ambrose, "'Better and Happier Men and Women': The Agricultural Instruction Act, 1913–1924," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 16, no. 2 (2004): 257–84.
  - 12 Jones, "The Strategy of Rural Enlightenment," 137; David C. Jones, "Creating Rural-Minded Teachers: The British Columbian Experience, 1914–1924," in *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West*, ed. David Jones, Nancy Sheehan, and Robert Stamp (Calgary: Detselig, 1979), 17; Calam, *Alex Lord's British Columbia*, 15.
  - 13 Mona Gleason, *Small Matters: Canadian Children in Sickness & Health, 1900–1940* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2013), 94–95.
  - 14 Marta Danylewycz and Alison Prentice, "Teachers, Gender, and Bureaucratizing School Systems in Nineteenth-century Montreal and Toronto," *History of Education Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 75–100; Gidney and Millar, *How Schools Worked*, 142–50.
  - 15 J. Donald Wilson, "I Am Ready to Be of Assistance When I Can': Lottie Bowron and Rural Women Teachers in British Columbia," in *Children, Teachers & Schools in the History of British Columbia*, ed. Jean Barman, Neil Sutherland, and J. Donald Wilson (Calgary: Detselig, 1995), 293.
  - 16 In 1926, BC counted 671 rural and assisted schools. See Wilson and Stortz, "May the Lord Have Mercy on You," 210. By the end of 1943, this number had grown to 691. Calculations are based on figures reported in the *Annual Report of the Public Schools of British Columbia, 1942–43*.
  - 17 Glegg, "Anatomy of a Tragedy"; Fleming and Smyly, "The Diary of Mary Williams"; Patterson, "Voices from the Past."
  - 18 Putman and Weir, *Survey of the School System*, 187.

- 19 Cited in Jones, “Creating Rural-Minded Teachers,” 167.
- 20 Jones, “Creating Rural-Minded Teachers,” 172.
- 21 Wilson, “I Am Ready to Be of Assistance When I Can,” 294.
- 22 Glegg, “Anatomy of a Tragedy,” 145–64.
- 23 Marjorie Theobald, “And Gladly Teach? The Making of a Woman’s Profession,” in *Women Teaching, Women Learning: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Elizabeth M. Smyth and Paula Bourne (Toronto: Inanna Publications & Education, 2006), 70.
- 24 Wilson, “I Am Ready to Be of Assistance When I Can,” 285–306. The following year, the Department of Education dissolved the Agricultural Education Branch and transferred Gibson to a new branch. See also Calam, *Alex Lord’s British Columbia*, 17; and Thomas Fleming, Carolyn Smyly, and Julie White, “Beyond Hope and Past Redemption: Lottie Bowron and the Rural School Teachers of British Columbia, 1928–1934,” in *School Leadership: Essays on the British Columbia Experience, 1872–1995*, ed. Thomas Fleming (Mill Bay, BC: Bendall Books, 2001), 101–32.
- 25 Wilson, “I Am Ready to Be of Assistance When I Can,” 286.
- 26 Wilson, “I Am Ready to Be of Assistance When I Can,” 293.
- 27 See, for example, Alison Prentice and Marjorie Theobald, *Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).
- 28 Stephenson, “Mrs. Gibson,” 235. See also Richard Altenbaugh “Oral History, American Teachers and a Social History of Schooling: An Emerging Agenda,” *Cambridge Journal of Education* 27, no. 3 (1997), <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764970270302>.
- 29 Stephenson, “Mrs. Gibson,” 252–53. Similarly, American historian Kathleen Weiler has indicated that teachers in rural California found teaching to be “a source of power... respect, autonomy, and money.” Kathleen Weiler, *Country Schoolwomen: Teaching in Rural California, 1850–1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 4. The teachers that Rebecca Coulter interviewed “received a great deal of satisfaction from their work, both in the moment of doing it and in seeing what became of their pupils.” Rebecca Priegert Coulter, “‘Girls Just Want to Have Fun’: Women Teachers and the Pleasures of the Profession,” in *History Is Hers: Women Educators in Twentieth Century Ontario*, ed. Rebecca Priegert Coulter and Helen Harper (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 2005), 214.
- 30 Dianne M. Hallman, “‘A Thing of the Past’: Teaching in One-Room Schools in Rural Nova Scotia, 1936–1941,” *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d’histoire de l’éducation* 4, no. 1 (1992): 113–32.
- 31 Mary Anne Poutanen, “‘Unless She Gives Better Satisfaction’: Teachers, Protestant Education, and Community in Rural Quebec, Lochaber and Gore District, 1863–1945,” *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d’histoire de l’éducation* 15, no. 2 (2003): 237–72.
- 32 Paul W. Bennett, *Vanishing Schools, Threatened Communities: The Contested Schoolhouse in Maritime Canada, 1850–2010* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood, 2011), 47; See also Wilson and Stortz, “May the Lord Have Mercy on You,” 211. Jean Barman’s analysis of late nineteenth-century retention patterns in BC revealed that teachers often remained in the profession, despite frequently leaving individual schools. Jean Barman, “Birds of Passage or Early Professionals? Teachers in Late Nineteenth-Century British Columbia,” *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d’histoire de l’éducation* 2, no. 1 (1990): 24.
- 33 Gidney and Millar, *How Schools Worked*, 106–07.
- 34 Gidney and Millar, *How Schools Worked*, 108.
- 35 Wilson and Stortz, “May the Lord Have Mercy on You,” 221.
- 36 F. H. Johnson, *A Brief History of Canadian Education* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 112–13; F. H. Johnson, *A History of Public Education in British Columbia* (Vancouver:



- University of British Columbia, 1964), 125; Thomas Fleming, "Provincial Initiatives to Restructure Canadian School Governance in the 1990s," *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy* 11 (November 28, 1997): 4.
- 37 Johnson, *A Brief History of Canadian Education*, 111; Bennett, *Vanishing Schools*, 48.
- 38 Johnson, *A History of Public Education in British Columbia*, 115. As early as 1931, approximately 10 per cent of Vancouverites were receiving government relief. The following year, Vancouver's school board cut salaries below \$1200 by 5 per cent and those over \$1200 by 10 per cent. In 1933, a 10 per cent reduction was applied to salaries below \$1200 and a 20 per cent cut was made to salaries over \$1200.
- 39 Gidney, *From Hope to Harris*, 11–12; Wilson and Stortz, "May the Lord Have Mercy on You," 216.
- 40 Helen Harper, "Personal and Professional Freedom in the Hinterlands: Women Teachers in Northern Ontario," in *History Is Hers: Women Educators in Twentieth Century Ontario*, ed. Rebecca Priegert Coulter and Helen Harper (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 2005), 64.
- 41 Unless otherwise indicated, information about Margaret has been compiled from interviews held on February 27 and March 5, 2008.
- 42 Unless otherwise indicated, information about Gwen is taken from an interview conducted on January 14, 2008.
- 43 Unless otherwise noted, information about Joan is taken from an interview with Joan held on February 29, 2008.
- 44 BC Department of Education, School inspectors' reports, 1940–41, GR-0122, Reel B06683, BC Archives.
- 45 Unless otherwise indicated, information about Mary is taken from interviews held on December 12 and 13, 2007.
- 46 Wilson and Stortz, "May the Lord Have Mercy on You," 216, 225; Calam, *Alex Lord's British Columbia*, 22–23.
- 47 Amy von Heyking, "Implementing Progressive Education in Alberta's Rural Schools," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 24, no. 1 (2012): 107.
- 48 Wilson and Stortz, "May the Lord Have Mercy on You," 222. See also J. Donald Wilson, "The Visions of Ordinary Participants: Teachers' Views of Rural Schooling in British Columbia in the 1920s," in *A History of British Columbia: Selected Readings*, ed. Patricia E. Roy (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1989), 245; and Fleming and Smyly, "The Diary of Mary Williams," 259–84. The Doukhobors settled on the Canadian prairies in 1899, after fleeing persecution in their homeland of Russia. Pacifists, they lived communally and shunned authority, in particular government intervention. By 1908, many had settled in southeastern British Columbia seeking more arable land to cultivate. See Margaret Hill, "Detention of the Freedomite Children, 1953–1959," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 18, no. 3 (1986): 47–60.
- 49 Unless otherwise noted, information about Doreen has been taken from an interview held on March 3, 2008.
- 50 Unless otherwise indicated, information about Reta was taken from interviews conducted on February 13, 16, and 18, 2009.
- 51 Interestingly, Gidney and Millar note that there are few sources that refer to teachers disciplining students, aside from the "use of the strap and law cases involving assault." See *How Schools Worked*, 467, note 90.
- 52 Michel and Natal were actually separate communities connected by Middletown. The three, commonly referred to as Michel-Natal, were mining communities. In 1970, the provincial government relocated residents to neighbouring Sparwood, allegedly for health concerns due to soot. The Michel Country Inn, built in 1929, is all that remains today of Michel-Natal. See Reno Fabbro, "Memories of Middletown," 133–38, and Michael Saad, "Mining Disasters and Rescue Operations at Michel Before World War

- Two,” 127–32, both in *The Forgotten Side of the Border*, ed. Wayne Norton and Naomi Miller (Kamloops: Plateau Press, 1998).
- 53 Letter from Reta to her parents, January 26, 1944.
- 54 Letter from Reta to her parents, May 20, 1944.
- 55 Corbin was less of a town than a mining camp. See Michael Saad, “Corbin: A Short and Bitter Existence” in *The Forgotten Side of the Border*, ed. Wayne Norton and Naomi Miller (Kamloops: Plateau Press, 1998), 108–16, and Sean Griffin, ed., *Fighting Heritage: Highlights of the 1930s Struggle for Jobs and Militant Unionism in British Columbia* (Vancouver, BC: Tribune Publishing, 1985), 75–84.
- 56 Letter from Reta to her parents, January 5, 1944. See also Michael Saad, “Mining Disasters and Rescue Operations,” 127–32.
- 57 Unless otherwise noted, information about Nancy and quotations from her are taken from interviews conducted with her on February 13 and 20, 2008, and June 11, 2008.
- 58 See, for example, Gidney and Millar, *How Schools Worked*, 104–05; Wilson and Stortz, “May the Lord Have Mercy on You,” 210.
- 59 Inspector Stafford noted “the place of music in the school” as a “feature of special merit” in his report when he visited in 1941. BC Department of Education, School inspectors’ reports, 1940–41, GR-0122, Reel B06682, BC Archives.
- 60 The British Columbia Women’s Institute has been active since 1909. Originally established for the betterment of rural living through the education of housewives, its mandate broadened to encompass the war effort during the first and second world wars. See Carol Joy Dennison, “The Women’s Institutes in British Columbia, 1909–1946: Housewives ‘For Home and Country’ (master’s thesis, University of Victoria, 1983), 80, and Carol J. Dennison, “They Also Served: The British Columbia Women’s Institutes in Two World Wars,” in *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women’s Work in British Columbia*, ed. Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro (Victoria: Camosun College, 1984), 211–19.
- 61 Mary likely ordered books from Victoria through the Travelling Libraries program that had been established by BC’s Library Commission in 1898. This initiative provided up to sixty books at a time to communities, schools, lighthouses, and ships. Often, the crates of books included images with which teachers could decorate their classrooms. In 1935, the Library Commission began sending books to students enrolled in the Elementary Correspondence School through a similar program called the Open Shelf Library. Marjorie C. Holmes, *Library Service in British Columbia: A Brief History of Its Development* (Victoria: Public Library Commission of British Columbia, 1959), 19–22.
- 62 Unless otherwise noted, information about Edna comes from an interview held on January 30, 2008.
- 63 BC Department of Education, School inspectors’ reports, 1943–44, GR-0122, Reel B06686, BC Archives.
- 64 BC Department of Education, School inspectors’ reports, 1943–44, BC Archives.
- 65 Unless noted, information about Ralph has been derived from interviews held on February 25 and 28, 2008.
- 66 Unless otherwise noted, information about Faye comes from an interview conducted on March 3, 2008.
- 67 Wilson and Stortz, “May the Lord Have Mercy on You,” 224–25.
- 68 Information about Celia was taken from two interviews held on January 11, 2008, and February 11, 2008.
- 69 See, for example, Wilson and Stortz, “May the Lord Have Mercy on You,” 227. Gidney and Millar make that point that although the main task of inspectors was to help teachers improve their instruction, “this was one part of the job most inspectors were *not* doing,” due to excessive clerical work and the high number of schools for which they were responsible, as well as the difficulties of travel across vast and rough terrain.

See Gidney and Millar, *How Schools Worked*, 302–11. Putman and Weir alleged that inspections of rural and assisted schools seldom exceeded an hour or two “due to the fact that the inspectors [had] so many classrooms to visit.” Putman and Weir, *Survey of the School System*, 238.

- 70 Letter from Reta to her sister, September 12, 1943.
- 71 Unless otherwise noted, information comes from an interview with Marion Acedo conducted on February 29, 2008.
- 72 Maxwell A. Cameron, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Educational Finance* (Victoria: Charles F. Banfield, 1945), 35.
- 73 Cameron, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Educational Finance*, 84.
- 74 See Johnson, *A History of Public Education in British Columbia*, 166, and von Heyking, “Implementing Progressive Education in Alberta’s Rural Schools,” 93–111.
- 75 Putman and Weir, *Survey of the School System*, 204.
- 76 Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 243.
- 77 Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836–1871* (London, ON: Falmer Press/Althouse Press, 1988), 14. See also Paul Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling: Education in Canada, 1800–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977); and Bruce Curtis, *Ruling by Schooling Quebec: Conquest to Liberal Governmentality—A Historical Sociology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).
- 78 Wotherspoon, “From Subordinate Partners to Dependent Employees,” 85, 87.
- 79 Ruth Sandwell, *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 6.